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GE-14 IN JOHOR:
THE FALL OF THE FORTRESS?

FRANCIS E. HUTCHINSON

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

Trends in Southeast Asia



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FOREWORD

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

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

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GE-14 in Johor: The Fall of the Fortress?

By Francis E. Hutchinson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Johor is a key battleground in Malaysia's 14th General Elections. The state is economically vital to the country: it is the birthplace of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO); and it has a large number of parliamentary seats.
- Johor-specific dynamics that have worked to the advantage of the ruling coalition include: UMNO's unique links with the state; the tight control over religion; and the phenomenal scale and success of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) scheme.
- Despite these advantages, support for the ruling coalition has been slipping across the state. Furthermore, the emergence of new parties such as Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) will challenge Barisan Nasional's control over Johor's rural and Malay heartland.
- The redelineation of parliamentary and state constituencies now underway is however likely to benefit BN, and recent survey data indicate that Johoreans are yet to be attracted to the reconfigured opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan.
- Thus, while BN may suffer a drop in support, it is likely to retain power in Johor.

GE-14 in Johor: The Fall of the Fortress?

By Francis E. Hutchinson¹

INTRODUCTION

The run-up to the 14th General Elections in Malaysia has been captivating and unpredictable. Beyond the machinations within and between the coalitions of the incumbent Barisan Nasional (BN), the Opposition Pakatan Harapan, and the dark horse Gagasan Sejahtera, attention is centring on key states that can deliver large numbers of parliamentary seats to the victor.

Selangor has captured the most attention, as it is the country's largest and wealthiest state and has been run by the Opposition for a decade. However, other states are no less strategic. Johor, Sabah and Sarawak have traditionally been seen as BN's "safe deposits", consistently delivering substantial numbers of parliamentarians and solid state-level majorities to the ruling coalition. Should one or more of these fall, BN's hold on power can be seriously compromised.

Due to its unique culture and political significance, Johor merits special analysis. With some 3.7 million citizens and residents, it is Malaysia's third largest state and has the second largest number of parliamentarians. Johor is also one of the country's main economic "motors". Its vast swathes of flat, fertile land generate an important proportion of the country's palm oil output. The state also has a large

¹ Francis E. Hutchinson is Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Malaysia and Regional Economic Studies Programmes at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore. He would like to thank Lee Hwok Aun and Wan Saiful Wan Jan for their comments and suggestions, and Pearlyn Pang for the maps developed for this piece.

and diversified manufacturing sector, consisting of important clusters of furniture makers, textile producers, and electrical and electronics firms.

Recent policy initiatives look to further cement Johor's economic status. The high-profile Iskandar Malaysia initiative has sought to catalyse the higher education, healthcare, entertainment, and logistics sectors. Some of these efforts have borne fruit, as seen in the number of international university campuses and hospital facilities being established. In addition, the state houses the Pengerang Integrated Petroleum Complex, a sprawling 20,000-acre project with oil refining, petrochemical plants, and liquefied natural gas import and regasification facilities. And, much of the High-Speed Rail between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore will run through Johor, with three stations and large-scale transit-oriented development projects planned.

Besides being a vital part of the nation's economy, a number of attributes make Johor's electoral outcome assume even greater importance. The state is ethnically mixed. In addition to its *bumiputera* majority of 60 per cent, it has substantial numbers of Chinese and Indian voters, comprising 33 and 7 per cent of the population, respectively (DOS 2017).² Johor's level of urbanization of 72 per cent also closely mirrors the national average. Consequently, many look to the state as a bell-wether for national voting trends.

Johor is also very important for historical reasons. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) — Barisan Nasional's *primus inter pares* component party — is deeply and inextricably linked to the state. It was founded in Johor in 1946, and the state has produced a disproportionate number of senior political figures and cabinet ministers over the years.

Indeed, more than any other state, Johor has exemplified BN's consociational model of politics. Through the parcelling out of constituencies among component parties, effective mobilization of candidates, and persuading members of different communities to vote

² This is calculated on the basis of the 3.3 million Malaysian citizens living in Johor. There are an additional 650,000 foreign residents in the state.

across communal lines for their local BN representative, the ruling coalition has enjoyed an unbroken hold on power in the state.

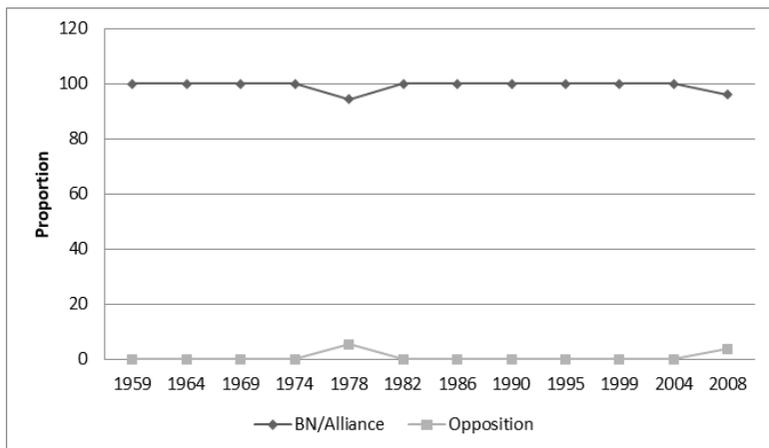
Up until 2013, BN never yielded more than one parliamentary seat or a handful of state seats to the Opposition. However, a rather less stellar performance in that year's election — along with unprecedented changes in the country's political context — mean that this may be about to change. Five parliamentary seats were lost to the Opposition in 2013, as were eighteen state seats. Following one state assembly-person crossing the floor in 2016, BN lost its two-thirds majority in the state legislature — for the first time.

This *Trends* will study Johor's political context to understand the reasons for BN's long-standing success, and glean insights regarding its political trajectory going forward. The next section will look at historical voting trends in Johor up to 2008 to establish BN's success in relative and absolute terms. The third section will examine specific aspects of Johor's political context that explain BN's uncommon level of success in the state. The subsequent section will analyse the results of the 13th General Elections in Johor to understand the localized manifestation of Malaysia's changing political dynamics. The fifth section will scrutinize recent survey data on voting preferences to examine their implications for the impending elections, and the sixth section will conclude.

BARISAN NASIONAL'S TRACK RECORD IN JOHOR

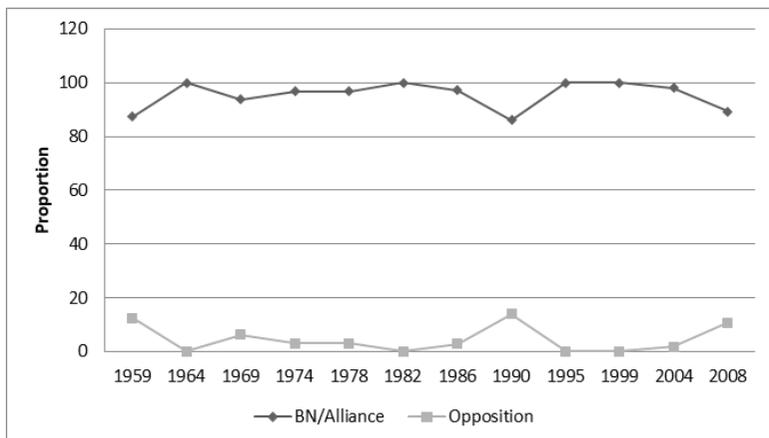
Barisan Nasional's track record in Johor has been outstanding. Figures 1 and 2 set out BN's share of parliamentary and state assembly seats in Johor from 1959 to 2008. With regard to parliamentary seats, the ruling coalition secured a clean sweep in 10 out of the 12 elections during this period. In the other two elections, it lost one seat, Kluang, to the Democratic Action Party (DAP) in 1978 and another, Bakri, to the same party in 2008. This performance by Barisan Nasional is unmatched in other large peninsular states such as Selangor and Perak, which witnessed significant Opposition inroads as early as 1969. Other elections which saw large national reversals for BN, such as 1990, 1999, and 2008, also had a muted effect in Johor.

Figure 1: Johor Parliamentary Seats



Source: NSTP (1990); Election Commission Malaysia, various years.

Figure 2: Johor State Seats



Source: NSTP (1990); Election Commission Malaysia, various years.

This performance is mirrored — albeit to a lesser degree — at the state level. In nine elections, BN secured more than 90 per cent of state seats in Johor. In the remaining three elections, namely those of 1959, 1990, and 2008, the ruling coalition secured no less than 85 per cent of the total, conceding only four to six seats to the Opposition. In 1969, Johor was a rare exception to the large swing against the ruling coalition, as it yielded a mere two seats to the Opposition that year. In contrast, the coalition lost fourteen state seats in Selangor, twenty in Penang, and twenty-one in Perak. In 2008, another bad year for BN nationally, the Opposition gained state-level majorities in Kelantan, Kedah, Penang, Perak, and Selangor. In contrast, in Johor, this downturn constituted an increase from one to six state seats — out of a total of fifty-six seats in the legislative assembly.

At one level, BN has performed so well in Johor because of its effective embodiment of the “consociational model” of politics. This term, according to Lijphart (1977), refers to a framework for governing plural societies — those characterized by cleavages due to language, religion or ethnicity. Under this mechanism, societies with substantial internal divisions are able to avoid conflict and maintain stability through the representation of the main interest groups in government as well as effective negotiation between their leaders. Thus, even though the various communities remain divided, peace and stability are maintained.

This “grand coalition”, comprising the elite of each of the communities, can effectively mediate if three additional requirements are met. First, there is a mutual veto in decision-making, meaning that the majority is unable to unilaterally impose its will on all groups. Second, important positions such as public office or the civil service are allocated proportionally. Third, the various groups possess a significant degree of autonomy to manage their own affairs (1977, p. 25).

A number of academics have argued that Malaysia has largely, if not completely, met these conditions (Milne and Mauzy 1999, pp. 17–18; Crouch 1996, pp. 152–53). The grand coalition can be seen in the Alliance, founded in 1954 and comprising UMNO, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) — each representing a numerically significant community. This coalition was motivated by electoral incentives, as it allowed the three parties to

pool and then field candidates in all seats. The component parties and candidates usually — but not always — matched the largest community in each constituency. Negotiations between the parties were held at the elite level prior to elections, with agreements on the sharing out of candidatures for parliamentary and state seats, ministerial positions, and quotas in the civil service. This same dynamics also privileged moderate and consensual policies, which then enabled voters from different communities to vote across ethnic lines for the local representative of the Alliance, as they knew that their interests were represented within the grouping (Horowitz 1993, p. 33).

This logic was retained in the post-1969 period, albeit in a more limited sense. Following the ethnic unrest in 1969 and the ensuing declaration of emergency, the compact between the component parties was reformulated. On one hand, the Alliance was expanded to incorporate a larger number of parties and renamed BN. On the other, within the coalition, UMNO's share of power and cabinet positions increased significantly. Thus, while the other component parties lost relative power, UMNO's unfettered access to resources constituted the main incentive for other coalition members to cooperate (Mauzy 1993, p. 110). In addition, the coalition mechanism continued to act as a "guarantee" against total exclusion (Horowitz 1993, p. 33).

In Johor, the "grand coalition" model was put in place in the run-up to the 1959 general elections. UMNO, MCA, and MIC leaders agreed on the allocation of seats between the parties, and this formula has been used — with very minor variations — in every election since then. Under this formula, UMNO candidates contest in roughly two-thirds of parliamentary and 60–65 per cent of state seats. The other BN component parties compete in the remainder.

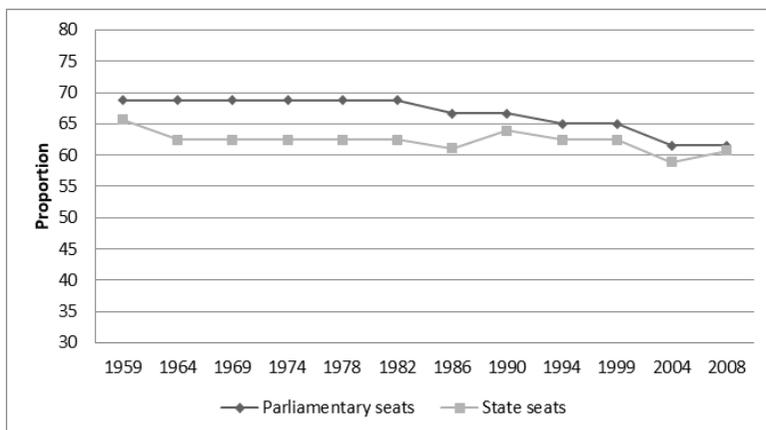
With the exception of minor modifications made following the four electoral redelineation exercises, these seat allocations have remained unchanged. In particular, the proportion of candidatures for UMNO and non-UMNO component parties has rarely been altered, although changes have occurred between non-UMNO BN component parties more frequently. And, relative to parliamentary seats, modifications in the allocation of state seats also occur more often. For example, the 2004 and 2008 allocation of parliamentary seats between the coalition members

was identical, but at the state level, one constituency — Bukit Batu — was contested by Gerakan in 2004 but passed to an MCA candidate in 2008 (Figure 3).

In Johor, under the grand coalition model, UMNO has contested in two types of parliamentary seats. Following the 2002–03 redelineation exercise (which increased the number of parliamentary seats from twenty to twenty-six), UMNO fielded sixteen candidates in the 2004 and 2008 elections. The first and numerically most important type of constituency consisted of thirteen Malay-majority and predominantly rural seats along the eastern coast such as Pengerang, Kota Tinggi, and Mersing, and in the state’s interior such as Sembrong, Pagoh, and Sri Gading. The second group consists of three mixed seats in urban and semi-urban areas near the state capital, such as Johor Bahru, Pulai, and Pasir Gudang (Figure 4).

In turn, the non-UMNO component parties active in Johor — MCA, MIC, and Gerakan — shared the remaining ten seats. These parties contested in mixed seats in semi-urban areas such as Kluang, Batu Pahat,

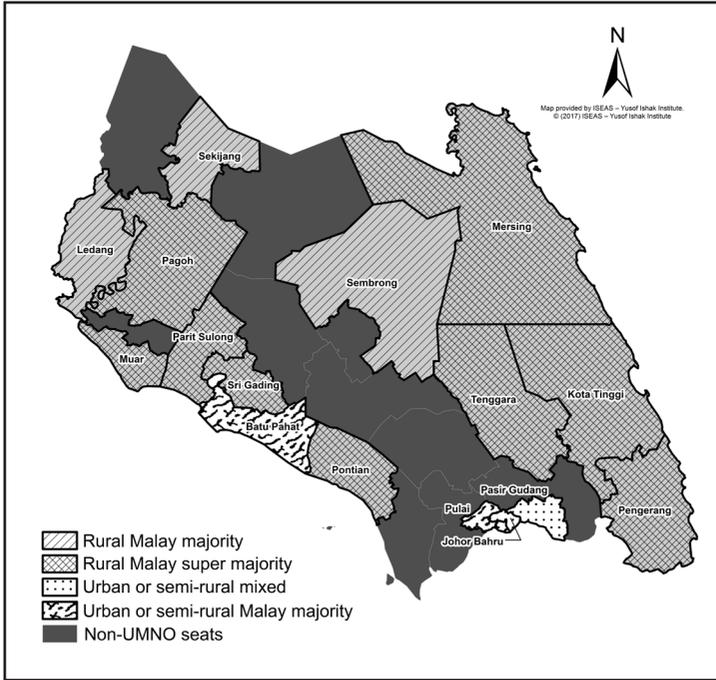
Figure 3: UMNO Share of BN’s Candidatures in Johor



Note: In 2004, one state seat, Senggarang, was not contested by BN. In 2008, it was contested by an UMNO candidate.

Source: NSTP (1990); Election Commission Malaysia, various years.

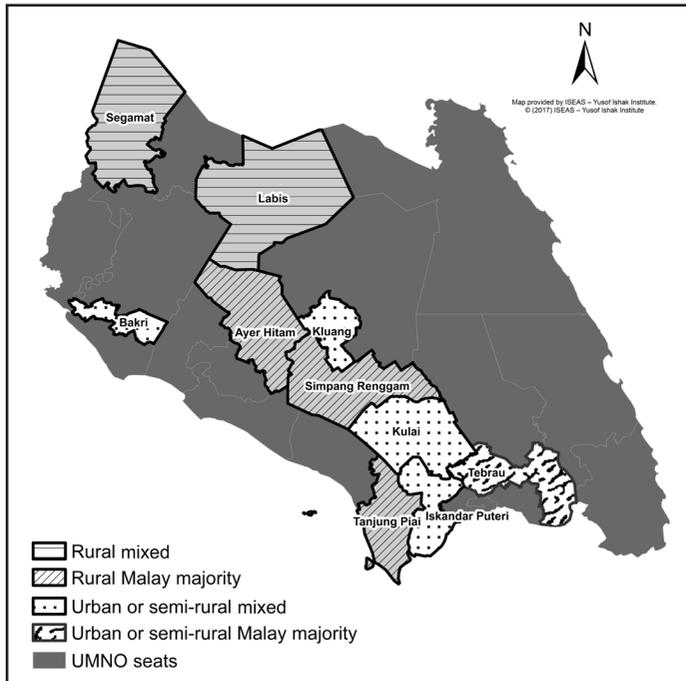
Figure 4: UMNO Seats across Johor (Current Boundaries)



Gelang Patah, and Segamat. There are two notable exceptions to this pattern. Gerakan has fielded candidates in Simpang Renggam and MCA has done the same in Ayer Hitam. Unlike the other seats, which are mixed, these are Malay-majority constituencies (Figure 5).

It is therefore by focussing on these seats that the workings of the “grand coalition” are made manifest. The number of candidates from the different component parties enables BN to field Malay candidates in Malay-majority seats and non-Malay candidates in mixed seats. However, because of its unified front, the coalition is also able to attract votes across communal lines. Thus, candidates from non-UMNO BN parties have been able to win solid majorities in Malay-majority areas. This is seen, for example, in Segamat, where Barisan Nasional has traditionally fielded candidates from MIC — despite ethnic Indians only comprising 13 per cent of its voters. Conversely, this mechanism has

Figure 5: Non-UMNO Seats across Johor (Current Boundaries)



allowed UMNO candidates to carry the day in mixed seats such as Johor Bahru, Pulai, and Pasir Gudang (Table 1).

This mechanism is mirrored at the state level, with UMNO contesting 60–65 per cent of seats and the other coalition partners the remainder. As with the parliamentary model, the candidates are usually — but not always — matched with the dominant ethnic community in each constituency. And, in constituencies where this is not the case, BN is still able to garner sufficient votes across the various communities to form a majority.

The effect of BN’s majorities is then magnified by Malaysia’s first-past-the-post (FPTP) parliamentary system. Thus, in 2004, the coalition’s 79.6 per cent of the popular vote in Johor translated into 100 per cent of parliamentary seats. And, its significantly lower share of 65.3 per cent in

Table 1: BN Component Parties, Majorities, and Ethnic Breakdown by Constituency, 2004

Constituency	BN Component Party	Majority Per cent	Voters		
			Malay	Chinese	Indian
Simpan Renggam	Gerakan	59.4	54.2	34.8	10.6
Ayer Hitam	MCA	64.7	55.5	40	4.3
Segamat	MIC	63.9	40.5	47.5	11.8
Pasir Gudang	UMNO	69	47	40.1	11.9
Johor Bahru	UMNO	76.3	49.9	43.9	5.3
Pulai	UMNO	70	52.5	38	8.8

Source: Election Commission Malaysia 2004; additional elections data obtained from Dr Ong Kian Ming, Member of Parliament for Serdang.

the 2008 elections still resulted in it getting 96 per cent of parliamentary seats.

This electoral performance has been further supported by significant malapportionment across the various parliamentary and state constituencies. The Reid Commission, which designed Malaysia's parliamentary system and drafted the Constitution, sought to ensure a degree of proportionality across seats, arguing that there should be no more than a 15 per cent discrepancy in size. However, these strictures were bypassed through a series of measures that reduced the power and independence of the Electoral Commission and transferred decisions regarding electoral delimitation issues to Parliament. Furthermore, the Electoral Commission has had a very flexible and liberal definition of what constitutes undue weightage (Saravanamuttu 2016, pp. 36–41).

Looking at the voting population across the various constituencies in Johor in 2004, it can be seen that there is indeed a significant variation in their size. The smallest constituency, Tenggara, had 29,800 voters and the largest, Johor Bahru, 91,100 — yielding a factor of three. Allowing for a difference of 15 per cent from the average number of voters (48,000), there are actually only six seats out of twenty-six that were not over-

under-represented. In contrast, eleven were over-represented and nine under-represented. The over-represented constituencies are all rural. Conversely, of the state’s nine urban or semi-urban constituencies, only one is of average size, and eight are under-represented (Table 2).

Looking at the split between UMNO and non-UMNO component parties, the former has the bulk of the under-size and over-represented constituencies — eight out of the total. UMNO and the other component parties split the average-size seats. Regarding the over-size seats, UMNO has five and the other parties have four. Thus, while UMNO clearly benefits from having a substantial number of over-represented seats, it also fields candidates in the two largest and, consequently, under-represented parliamentary constituencies of Pulai and Johor Bahru.

Redelineation exercises have taken place in 1974, 1984, 1994, and 2002–03 (Saravanamuttu 2016, p. 41). However, as will be seen in the penultimate section, these exercises have not directly tackled the most glaring cases of malapportionment, and often exacerbate them — in many cases creating new constituencies that cut across natural barriers or ignore natural conglomerations of voters (Ostwald 2017, p. 9).

Consequently, BN has been able to dominate in Johor at the parliamentary and state legislative assembly levels due to: its effective use of the consociational “grand coalition” model; Malaysia’s first-past-the-post electoral system; and significant malapportionment that favours a disproportionate number of Malay-majority and smaller, rural seats.

Table 2: Parliamentary Constituencies in Johor, 2004

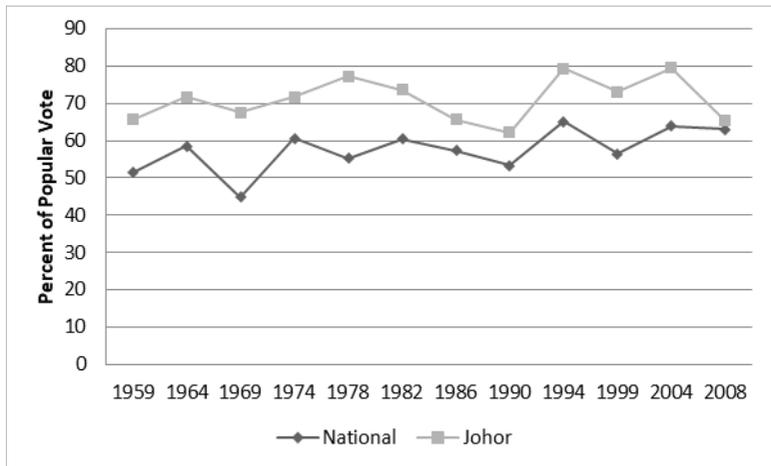
Constituencies	Number	UMNO	Non-UMNO	Rural	Urban, Semi-Urban
Over-represented	11	8	3	11	0
Average size	6	3	3	5	1
Under-represented	9	5	4	1	8

Source: Election Commission Malaysia 2004; Categorization of rural and urban parliamentary constituencies follows Politweet <<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1avEv-WaeZwcYsq48GtieTrlh5fdsIVUliBeFGR18-C0/edit#gid=0>> (accessed 24 November 2017).

Notwithstanding these mechanisms, BN's dominance of the Johorean political scene is exceptional. Unlike other parts of the country such as Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah, the opposition Islamist party Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), has not been able to make significant electoral inroads in Johor. And opposition parties such as Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) have been less able to establish a presence in Johor the way they have done in states such as Selangor and Perak. Furthermore, component BN parties such as MCA and Gerakan have been able to retain their parliamentary and state seats to a greater extent there than elsewhere.

Figure 6 sets out the level of popular support for UMNO at the national level as well as for Johor from 1959 to 2008. While broadly following the national trend, with significant dips in 1969, 1990, 1999, and 2008, popular support for BN in Johor is consistently some 10 per cent higher than at the national level — at an average 70 per cent as opposed to the national level of 60 per cent.

Figure 6: BN Share of the Popular Vote, 1959–2008



Source: NSTP (1990); Election Commission Malaysia, various years.

JOHOR'S EXCEPTIONALISM

This section will advance three reasons for the exceptionally high level of support that BN has enjoyed in Johor. The first two are directly linked to the state's pattern of development during the pre-independence period, and the third is the localized outcome of the national policy implemented following independence.

UMNO's Legacy

More than any other state in Malaysia, Johor has a deep relationship with UMNO. The party was founded in Johor Bahru by a Johorean and the state has produced a disproportionate number of the organization's leaders. The positive association of UMNO with nation-building at the local level has enabled the party to build up an uncommonly large membership base and extensive grassroots network in the state. The resulting higher level of competition for elected posts, coupled with an effective mechanism for grooming and deploying leaders at both state and federal levels, has enabled Johor to produce both effective local-level leaders as well as national-level party cadres and politicians.

The roots of this relationship lie in Malaysia's pre-independence period and Johor's unique model of development under its traditional rulers. In order to maximize their autonomy and pre-empt British intervention, Johor's sultans were committed to state-building, good governance and providing high levels of public services. Of key importance was the Johor government's Malay Officers' Scheme, an initiative which sought to train local cadres for top-level civil service positions. Consequently, prior to the Second World War, a full 90 per cent of administrative positions in the sultanate were occupied by local Malays — a much higher figure than elsewhere in Malaya, where the process of grooming locals for leadership positions was only in its infancy. Much of this cohort of senior civil servants remained in the Johor government during the Japanese Occupation (Hutchinson 2015).

When the British returned to Malaya, the relaxation of controls on political activity and the subsequent ill-fated attempt to establish the Malayan Union led to the profusion of local political organizations. The declaration of the Malayan Union led to the first visible manifestation

of Malay ethno-nationalism. Fearing the loss of their status as the indigenous inhabitants of the country, the Union was stridently opposed by the Malays. During the first period of opposition to the Malayan Union, a large number of Malay political organizations were established or revived. Beyond their opposition to the Malayan Union, these groups had very diverse political aims, ranging from associations led by the state-based Malay elite to pan-Malayan movements that were more anti-colonial and ethno-nationalist (Amoroso 2014).

Johor's well-developed education system and high level of literacy, central position between Singapore and the Federated Malay States, and sheer mass of civil servants with senior-level experience made it fertile ground for grassroots organizations. For example, Onn Jaafar, a District Officer in the Johor Government, founded the Peninsular Malay Movement of Johor. Abdul Rahman Yassin, the State Commissioner, established the Johor Malay Union, and Sardon Jubir, who worked in the Public Prosecutor's Bureau, set up the Singapore Malay Union. All of these became feeder parties for UMNO upon its founding.

Due to these factors, members of the Johor government dominated UMNO's national leadership and membership base in its formative period. During the party's first ten years, Johor contributed fifteen out of sixty-one Supreme Council members — one-quarter of the total and more than any other state. Other first generation leaders from Johor include: Hussein Onn, third Prime Minister; Abdul Rahman Yassin, first President of the Senate; Mohamad Noah Bin Omar, first Speaker of the Lower House; Suleiman Abdul Rahman, first Local Government, Housing, and Town Planning Minister; Awang Hassan, Deputy Speaker of the House; and Sardon Jubir, first Public Works Minister. All of these leaders had their professional debut in the Johor government in the pre-war period or during the Japanese Occupation (Hutchinson 2015, p. 127).³

³ Ismail Abdul Rahman, the influential Home Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, had a slightly different trajectory. He was studying medicine in Australia during the Second World War and began his political career in the Johor State Legislative Assembly following his return to Malaya in 1946 (Ooi 2006).

Beyond UMNO's central leadership, people from Johor dominated the Youth and Women's sections of the party. The first and third Presidents of the Youth Wing as well as the second, third, and fourth Presidents of the Women's section were from the state (Funston 1980, pp. 298–303; Arifful 2000). Despite leadership of UMNO passing to Tunku Abdul Rahman, a prince from Kedah, in 1951, the party headquarters remained in Johor Bahru until 1955. In addition, Johoreans remained at the head of the Youth and Women's wings until the mid-1960s and early 1970s, respectively (Hutchinson 2015, p. 128).

Johor's connection with UMNO is thus exceptionally strong, and the party is associated with the protection of Malay rights, the royalty, nation-building, and a tradition of public service.⁴ The state's estimated party membership of 400,000 is the largest in the country and UMNO-Johor has an extensive grassroots network — particularly in the Women's wing.⁵ Furthermore, in Johor, there are a considerable number of *ulama* who are UMNO members, which is unusual in Malaysia and further attests to the party's ability to attract community leaders.⁶ This positive association and large membership base, in turn, result in high levels of competition for leadership positions.⁷

This leadership base has been effectively deployed at both the state and national levels. During the 1970s, under the second Mentri Besar, Othman Saat, the state-level party machinery established a dual track

⁴ Interview with an UMNO party member from Kelantan working in Johor, Johor Bahru, 21 April 2010. For an interesting account of the contributions of one prominent family of Johorean civil servants to nation-building, consult *Legacy of Honour* by Zainah Anwar (2011).

⁵ Interview with Nur Jazlan, UMNO party member and Member of Parliament for Pulau, Johor Bahru, 18 May 2010; Wan Saiful Wan Jan (2018).

⁶ Interview with an UMNO party member from Kelantan resident in Johor, Singapore, 3 March 2010.

⁷ Interview with an UMNO party member from Kelantan resident in Johor, Johor Bahru, 21 April 2010; Guyot also found high levels of internal competition within UMNO Johor in the 1960s (1971, p. 381).

for promising leaders. Those with more grassroots and community liaison ability were encouraged to run in state seats, develop community outreach activities, and build social capital with voters. In contrast, those who had more developed strategic skills were fielded for parliamentary seats, and even placed in safe constituencies to allow full concentration on national matters. This ensured that UMNO had good representation at the national level, so that the state could push for federal investment.⁸

Consequently, Johor has been able to maintain its high membership numbers in the state and has produced an important number of senior UMNO figures through the years. Beyond the independence leaders mentioned above, this includes the following senior-level politicians and cabinet members with their current or former positions: Musa Hitam, Deputy Prime Minister; Mohamed Rahmat, Information Minister; Shahrir Samad, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs Minister; Muhyiddin Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister; Syed Hamid, Minister for Foreign Affairs; Abdul Ghani Othman, Minister for Sports, Youth, and Culture; Hishamuddin Hussein, Minister for Defence; Azalina Othman, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department; and Nur Jazlan, Deputy Home Minister.

Control of Islam

The second reason that BN, and more particularly UMNO, has done well in Johor is that the party's main rival for Malay voters, PAS, has had relatively little traction. This is due to the tight control over religious issues exercised by the Sultan of Johor, which then entails a less hospitable environment for the religious outlook favoured by PAS.

As with UMNO's local-level legacy, the reasons for this lie in Johor's development during the colonial period. Prior to independence, Malaysia's traditional rulers, or sultans, were the unquestioned authorities on religious matters. Despite pervasive British involvement in many areas

⁸ Interviews with: Shahrir Samad, UMNO party member and Member of Parliament for Johor Bahru, 18 June 2010; and Tawfik Ismail, former UMNO Member of Parliament for Sungai Benut, Kuala Lumpur, 8 September 2011.

of governance, Malaya's colonizers were reluctant to interfere in matters pertaining to religion. This sphere of influence was clearly established in treaties signed between the British and the sultans, where the latter had authority over this matter as well as Malay customs (Winstedt 1931, p. 9).

In the case of Johor, this prerogative was zealously guarded. Prior to British control being established, Abu Bakar, the traditional ruler who laid the foundations for Johor's development, had a Constitution drafted in 1895. While never explicitly recognized by the British, this document established the institutional foundations of the Johor government and specified the role and prerogatives of the Sultan, including over religious matters. Besides stating that Islam was the religion of the sultanate, the Constitution also stipulated that the Sultan was the head of religion and had the authority to appoint the Mufti and members of the Johor Islamic Council (Milner 1995, pp. 220–21).

This authority over religious affairs allowed Johor's sultans to promote their variant of Islam, which is traditionalist in orientation, more suffused with local customs and traditions as well as more amenable to a prominent role for the royalty (Norshahril 2017, p. 3). Johor's rulers hand-picked promising local scholars and sent them overseas to specific institutions possessing a compatible religious outlook. Upon their return, they were charged with setting up Islamic schools in the state (Milner 1995, p. 198).

Following the establishment of British control in Johor in 1914, the Sultan and the British Advisers based in Johor engaged in a protracted battle over control of key government departments. While the British were able to secure control over finance, lands and mines, and public works, this did not extend to religion, which remained a royal prerogative throughout the colonial period (Gray 1978, pp. 142–43).

In the early twentieth century, the rubber industry was established in Johor with great success. Through taxing exports of the commodity, the Johor government was able to expand the education system considerably — including religious instruction. By the end of the 1930s, Johor's government-funded religious education system was the largest among the Unfederated Malaysian States, comprising a network of 88 schools and almost 10,000 students. In comparison, Kelantan's religious school

system comprised 13 schools and 910 students, and Terengganu's 9 schools and 815 students (Malayan Yearbook 1939, pp. 143–44).

The legacy of royal control over religion continues today, as does Johor's emphasis on traditionalist Islam. Under the Federal Constitution, sultans are the heads of religion and Malay customs in their respective states. This entails the prerogative to: appoint key positions in the Islamic bureaucracy, notably the Islamic Religious Council, as well as the Mufti — the prime religious authority; and oversee the religious police. These authorities also issue *fatwas*, or religious rulings, that influence the everyday conduct of Muslims in the state (Norshahril 2017, p. 5).

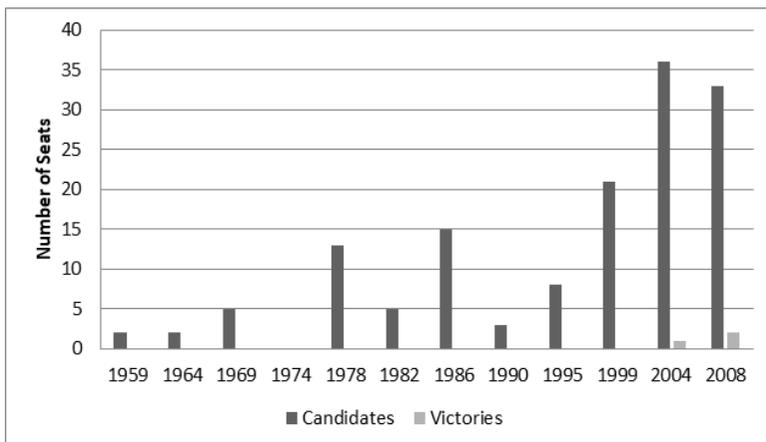
Even after independence, Johor's sultans have continued to promote a traditionalist Islamic outlook through: the religious bureaucracy; the rulings of the Mufti and other notables; and the licensing of preachers active in the state. The state has a network of boarding schools (*pondoks*) that provide traditionalist religious education and, as in the past, aspiring religious scholars are sent to centres of higher learning which are amenable to traditionalist Islam such as Al-Azhar University. Furthermore, visiting religious scholars who wish to preach in the state need to obtain permission from the state Islamic authority (Norshahril 2017, pp. 5,10).

Conversely, although there are some boarding schools run by PAS in Johor, that party has been unable to establish an extensive network of boarding schools in the state.⁹ Consequently, the traditionalist variant of Islam practised in Johor and its close identification with local level identity, as well as the limited network of religious schools compatible with PAS's outlook, have been directly linked to the party's limited inroads in the state.

Figure 7 sets out the electoral fortunes of PAS in Johor since the 1959 elections. Indeed, the party has a long history in opposition campaigning in the state, running two candidates for state seats in the first election.

⁹ Interviews with: a Johor PAS member, Johor Bahru, 29 April 2010; and Shahrir Samad, Johor Bahru, 18 June 2010.

Figure 7: PAS Candidates Contesting in Johor



Source: NSTP (1990); Election Commission Malaysia, various years.

Despite fielding candidates in every election —1974 excepted — PAS only won its first state seat, Senggarang, in 2004 — on a technicality. Indeed, in that year, PAS fielded a total of thirty-six candidates. Only in 2008 did the party win two contested seats — out of a total of thirty-three candidatures.

While PAS has traditionally targeted UMNO-held seats, on the rare occasions it has chosen to contest against non-UMNO component parties in Malay-majority seats, it has also fared badly. For example, in 2004, the Malay-majority seats of Gambir, Kahang, and Tenggaroh were won with large majorities by MIC candidates. Pemanis and Pulai Sebatang, also with substantial Malay majorities, were won by Gerakan and MCA, respectively. This again attests to the strength of BN’s grand coalition model.

FELDA Seats

The third reason that UMNO and, by extension, BN have done so well in Johor is the phenomenal scale and success of the Federal Land

Development Authority (FELDA) programme in the state. Established in 1956, FELDA was established to deal with high levels of poverty and pent-up demand for land in rural areas in Malaysia. Through populating largely uninhabited frontier areas, the initiative sought to create livelihoods for settler families with few or no assets from agricultural areas. The selected participants, the vast majority of whom were Malays, were allocated plots of cleared land, a house, technical training to produce oil palm and rubber, as well as credit to begin planting. The settlers were also paid an allowance until harvesting could begin, after which they were charged with repaying their loans (McAndrews 1977, p. 2; Henley 2015, pp. 131–32).

Eager to spearhead development, foster social change, and reduce poverty, the newly independent Malaysian state invested high levels of economic and political capital in the initiative, creating a new ministry of Rural Development, helmed by the Deputy Prime Minister (Henley 2015, pp. 131–34). Due to its efficient administration and consistent follow-through, FELDA has been labelled as “the most successful resettlement programme of its kind in the world” (Sutton 1989 in Henley 2015, p. 118).

Over the 1959–90 period, the initiative settled 120,000 families, largely from peninsular Malaysia, on some 471,000 hectares of smallholding land. This population has grown, with estimates that there are now some 1.2 million voters who live in FELDA settlements or work for the agency (Khor 2015, pp. 91–92).

The programme was launched by a senior UMNO leader and geared towards the Malay population, and this has intertwined the party and FELDA at an operational level. During the selection process, successful candidates needed to be recommended by local UMNO officials (Khor 2015, p. 96). In addition, the party has a branch within every plantation, enabling it to maintain a high-profile presence and monitor local-level developments. UMNO is also interwoven into the governing structures of the plantations. For many FELDA settlers, the party has become “interchangeably recognized as the government”. Furthermore, due to high levels of indebtedness, settlers are vulnerable to changes in government policy — making them a captive vote bank. Consequently, FELDA members have voted overwhelmingly for BN over the years. In

2013, this translated into secure majorities in 85 per cent of the fifty-four parliamentary seats that have settler populations (Maznah 2015, pp. 135, 148–50).

Due to the extent of available frontier land, as well as the willingness and technical capacity of state governments to work with the federal government, FELDA was implemented to differing degrees in different parts of the country. Due to its large size, available land, and substantial numbers of rural poor, Johor was, bar Pahang, the state that implemented the programme on the largest scale.

Thus, over the 1960–74 period, some 38,000 people moved onto FELDA plantations in Johor. This was second only to Pahang and constituted one-quarter of the total population of FELDA settlers. However, unlike Pahang, which sought to increase its population by inviting settlers from other states, in Johor a full 96 per cent of settlers were local (McAndrews 1977, p. 71). By 1987, Johor had eighty FELDA schemes that housed 25,300 families — about one-quarter of the national settler population (Bahrin and Lee 1988, p. 83).

An additional element of the initiative’s success at the local level was the Johor state government. The local administration’s processing of land claims were done more quickly than elsewhere, with Johor being one of only two states to completely allocate all targeted settlers on schedule (Guyot 1971, p. 385; Bahrin and Lee 1988, p. 83). This efficiency was further enabled by good access between the state government and FELDA, due to the agency’s second and third Chairmen, Taib Andak and Musa Hitam — who were Johoreans who collectively ran the agency from 1958 to 1972 (Bahrin and Lee 1988, App IV).

As elsewhere, FELDA came to be closely intertwined with UMNO in Johor. State legislative assemblymen and UMNO officials approved settler applications and land claims, with specific cases even being referred directly to the Menteri Besar. In turn, these position-holders let their choices be “strongly guided by political considerations” (Guyot 1971, p. 385).

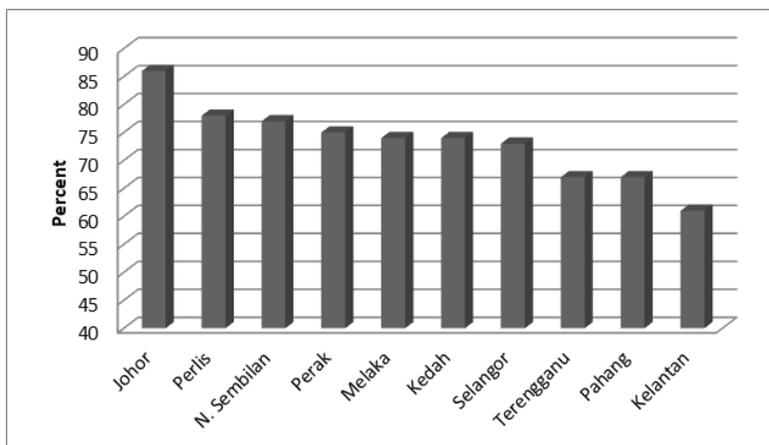
The success of the programme and its association with BN has translated into exceptionally high levels of support among FELDA areas in Johor. In 2013, 86 per cent of voters in FELDA districts in the

state voted for BN, versus 73–78 per cent in Selangor, Kedah, Melaka, Perak and Negri Sembilan; and 61–67 per cent in Kelantan, Pahang, and Terengganu (Figure 8).

Given the number of people and their concentration in central and eastern Johor, this has resulted in an important voting block of eleven parliamentary and fifteen state constituencies (Figure 9). The first group of seats heavily overlaps with rural, Malay-majority constituencies. These seats are held by UMNO, and in some cases are not even contested by the opposition candidates, as in the cases of Pengerang and Kota Tinggi in 2004 and Pengerang again in 2008. The second group of seats are mixed, and are contested by non-UMNO BN component parties. Up until 2008, these seats were also won with relative ease.

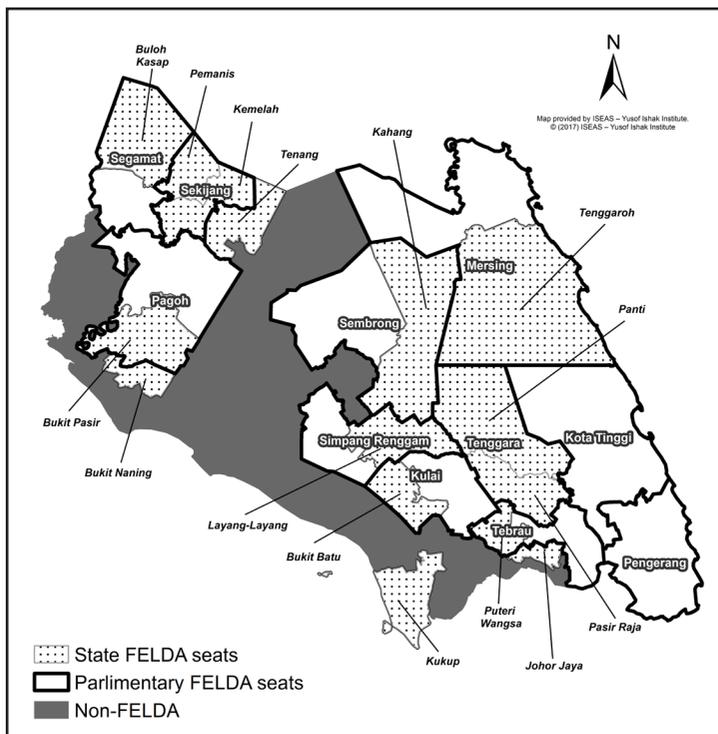
While FELDA has had an illustrious past in Johor, recent events have dented its prestige somewhat. In mid-2017, the initiative's subsidiary FELDA Global Ventures Holdings (FGV) had a much-publicized management crisis, with its CEO, CFO, and senior managers being replaced amidst a backdrop of rising debt, failed business ventures, and allegations of mismanagement. The fallout from this has been

Figure 8: Support for BN in FELDA Districts, 2013



Source: Merdeka Centre in Khor (2015), p. 106.

Figure 9: FELDA Status of Parliamentary and State Seats in Johor (Current Boundaries)



compounded by a drop in FGV share prices, which has affected FELDA settlers, many of whom have stocks in the operation (Khor 2017).¹⁰ However, while this may reduce support for BN in Johor somewhat, given the exceptionally high levels of backing for UMNO, this is unlikely to translate into the loss of a significant number of seats.

¹⁰ It is noteworthy that the person chosen to restructure FELDA and its corporate holdings was Shahrir Samad, MP for Johor Bahru and former Chairman of both the Malaysian Palm Oil Board and Public Accounts Committee, who was named as the organization’s Chairman in January 2017.

THE 2013 ELECTIONS

Despite BN's exceptional record in Johor, 2013 was not a good year for the coalition. Its level of popular support fell from 65 per cent in 2008 to 54.9 per cent in 2013. As in the past, Malaysia's FPTP electoral system and malapportionment translated BN's slim majority into twenty-one parliamentary seats or 80.8 per cent of the total.

In comparative terms, BN's performance in Johor was substantially better than the national average of 47.4 per cent and, indeed, the outcomes in Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Selangor, where opposition candidates garnered 64, 66.8, and 58.4 per cent of the vote, respectively (Saravanamuttu 2016, p. 227). Notwithstanding this, GE-13 showed some important — and worrying trends — for BN's dominance in Johor.

At the parliamentary level, Pakatan Rakyat retained the seat of Bakri, and won four more. Kluang, Gelang Patah, Kulai, and Batu Pahat are all semi-urban and — with the exception of Batu Pahat which has a very small Malay majority — are mixed seats. The DAP increased its holdings from one seat to four, and PKR won in Batu Pahat. These seats came largely at the expense of MCA, which has traditionally contested in four of these constituencies.¹¹ UMNO, for its part, lost Batu Pahat.

Relative to 2008, the coalition registered lower levels of support in every single parliamentary seat. Beyond the five seats lost, BN retained a further nine seats with slim margins (defined as less than a 55 per cent majority). Of these seats, three are held by MCA, one by MIC, and five by UMNO. Five are mixed seats, with three in urban/semi-urban areas (Tebrau, Pasir Gudang and Pulau),¹² and two (Labis and Segamat) in rural areas. The other four (Ledang, Muar, Tanjong Piai and Sekijang) are Malay-majority and rural constituencies.

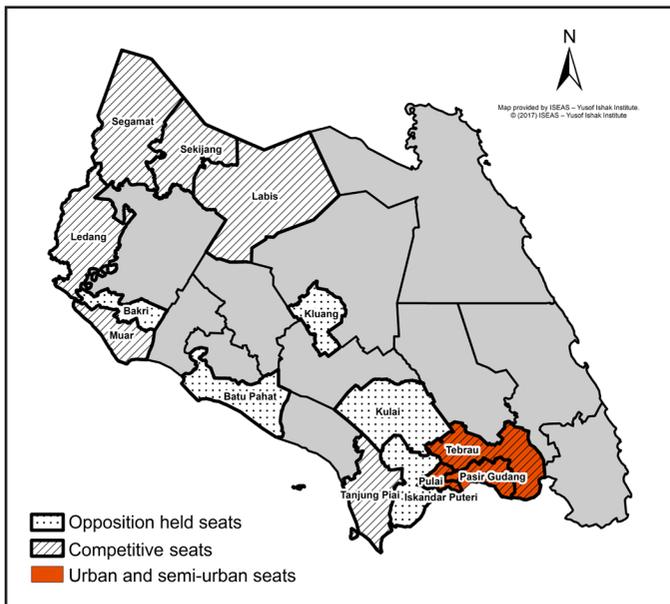
¹¹ Gelang Patah has traditionally been contested by MCA, but in 2013 the party yielded the seat to UMNO candidate and former Menteri Besar of Johor, Abdul Ghani Othman, who ran against DAP leader Lim Kit Siang and lost.

¹² Johor Bahru could conceivably be included in this category. It is a large, urban seat with a slim Malay majority (51 per cent) that was retained with 55.8 per cent of the vote.

In other words, BN is in danger of losing the urban vote, as the nine urban or semi-urban constituencies in Johor are either in Opposition hands or have been retained with narrow majorities. Barisan Nasional’s key voter base resides in the state’s seventeen rural constituencies, most of which have Malay majorities. While none have been lost, it is notable that six of them have been retained with narrow majorities. Barisan Nasional is now reliant on the smaller rural seats with extra-large Malay majorities which are found in the central and eastern parts of the state (Figure 10).

This pattern was repeated at the state level. In 2013, BN carried thirty-eight seats, with UMNO winning thirty-two, MIC three, MCA two, and Gerakan one seat. Pakatan Rakyat, for its part, won eighteen seats — up from six in 2008. The DAP took thirteen, PAS four, and PKR one seat. These victories largely came at the cost of MCA, which lost eleven seats.

Figure 10: Opposition-held and Competitive Seats in Johor (Current Boundaries)



The pattern of a generalized drop in support for BN is also visible at the state level, as BN only retained one seat, Tenggara, with a higher majority than in 2008. A total of eleven seats were won with a slim majority. Of these, eight are Malay-majority seats currently held by UMNO — indicating some vulnerability in traditional supporter areas.

However, while Pakatan Harapan (PH)¹³ and PAS have room to grow further, it will be difficult for either to win the state outright. First, a significant proportion of their seats were also won with slim majorities. Thus, of PH's current five seats, three are competitive, with one, Batu Pahat, held by a majority of 1,500 votes. At the state level, nine of the nineteen non-BN held seats are competitive, of which one is held by PAS and the other eight by PH members.

Second, while PH can increase their takings in urban and semi-urban areas as well as mixed seats, these will not deliver majorities. Assuming that they are able to retain their current constituencies and take all urban and semi-urban areas, this would yield an additional four seats at the parliamentary level. And, should they take the remaining two competitive mixed and rural seats of Tebrau and Segamat, this would yield eleven out of a total twenty-six seats.

At the state level, a swing to PH is conceivable, but exceptionally difficult. Of the thirty-seven seats currently in BN hands, eleven are competitive. Of these, eight are held by UMNO, and one each by Gerakan, MCA and MIC. The remaining twenty-six largely rural and Malay-majority seats were retained with very solid margins. Indeed, BN won seats such as Senili and Penawar with more than 85 per cent of the vote. While some smaller heartland seats such as Parit Raja, Tanjong Puteri, and Buloh Kasap registered falls of more than 10 per cent for the ruling coalition in 2013, their support levels were still above 60 per cent.

This means that for BN to retain Johor, it only needs to retain its core of twenty-six seats and then win three additional constituencies.

¹³ Pakatan Harapan is the successor to Pakatan Rakyat, and was formed in September 2015 following the departure of PAS from the grouping.

Furthermore, PH's chances have been made more difficult by the split with PAS. While the Islamist party only has three state seats in Johor, the potential for any protest vote being split constitutes an additional complication for PH.

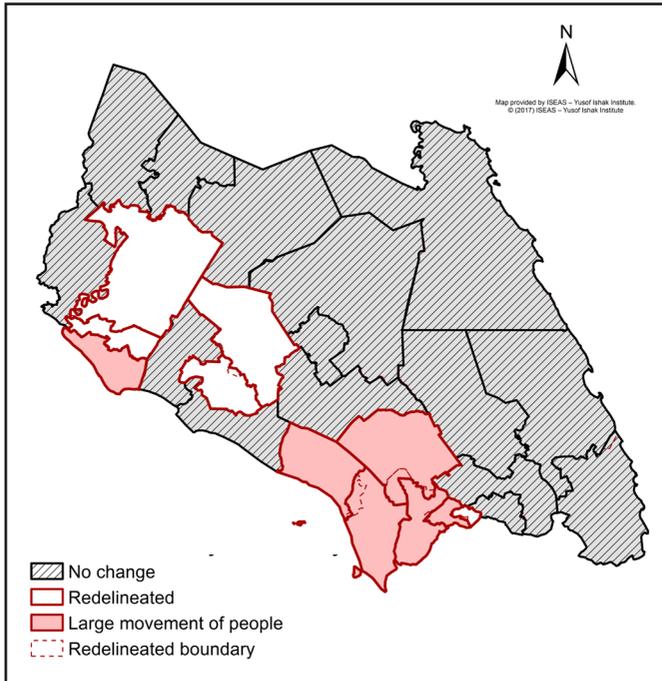
Lastly, parliamentary and state seats are being redelineated and it is likely that the changes will be in place before GE-14. At a cosmetic level, the changes in Johor seem minor as only two parliamentary and eight state seats are to have their names changed. However, an analysis of the proposed boundary changes reveal that many small-scale changes are envisaged which, collectively, will have far-reaching implications for PH in Johor.

At the parliamentary level, the Electoral Commission proposes to redraw the boundaries of eleven constituencies, leaving fifteen untouched (Wong, Yeong and Ooi 2017*a* and 2017*b*). Overall, the redelineations are small and do not involve substantial numbers of people, with only six involving movements of more than 2,000 voters. These small quantities of people mean that the outstanding issue of malapportionment is not addressed. Thus, the smallest and most over-represented seats such as Labis, Pengerang, Simpang Rengam, Sembrong and Sekijang are not touched. And, the large constituencies of Pasir Gudang, Tebrau, Batu Pahat, and Kluang also remain unaltered. Furthermore, several of the proposed alterations will aggravate the problem. Thus, Iskandar Puteri (formerly Gelang Patah) and Johor Baru, two large and under-represented constituencies, will actually get even bigger as a result of the changes.

Of the unaltered constituencies, thirteen are held by BN (nine UMNO; two MCA; one MIC; one Gerakan), and two by PH (1 PKR; 1 DAP). BN's unaltered constituencies can be divided into two groups. The first, comprised of six UMNO and one Gerakan seat, were won handily in GE-13, are in rural areas, and have Malay majorities. The other six seats, comprising three UMNO (Ledang, Pasir Gudang and Sekijang), two MCA (Tebrau and Labis), and one MIC seat (Segamat) are mixed seats that were won with very low margins.

The eleven parliamentary seats that are to be redrawn include four PH seats — including Pagoh held by Muhyiddin Yassin, President of PBBM — and three DAP constituencies. The other seven seats are held by BN, with five represented by UMNO and two by MCA (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Proposed Parliamentary Constituencies in Johor

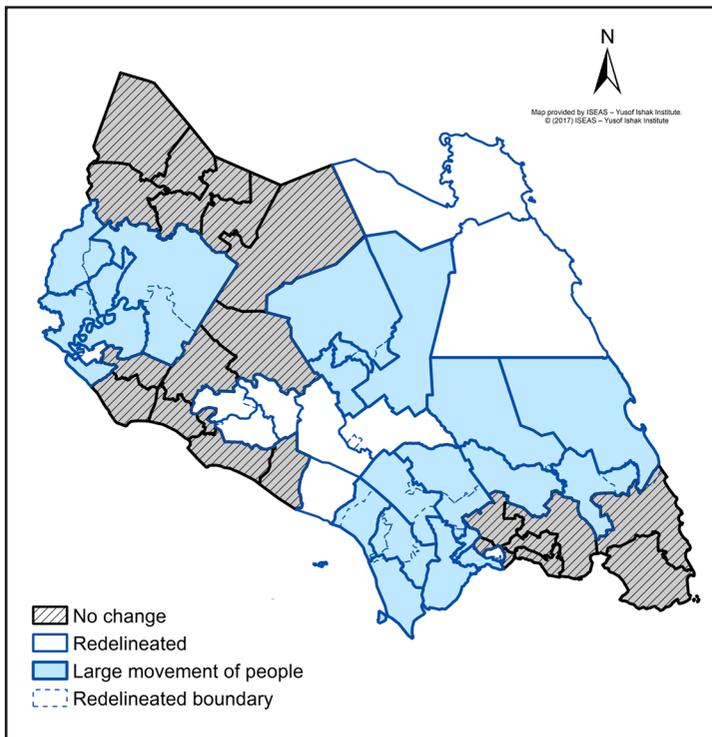


There may be overtly political calculations behind these amendments. Quite important changes are tabled for Pulai, currently held by UMNO member and Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, Nur Jazlan. The seat, held by a 3,200-seat majority, will yield 6,800 voters to Iskandar Puteri and a further 1,500 voters to Johor Bahru — constituting a total of 8,300 voters. Iskandar Puteri is a DAP-held seat with a 14,700 majority, and Johor Bahru is held by UMNO with a 10,500 margin. Consequently, these two movements are unlikely to alter the outcome in either Johor Bahru or Gelang Patah, but could prove decisive in Pulai. Muar will also lose 2,000 voters, which could tilt the balance further in favour of UMNO, who retained that seat with a mere 1,600 votes. Pagoh had initially been slated to lose some 10,500 seats to Ledang, an UMNO seat held by a slim majority, but under the current plans, will only absorb 1,000 voters from Bakri, a DAP seat.

In sum, the proposed delineations look to boost the chances of UMNO candidates in a select number of seats and, conversely do not look to be overly helpful for non-UMNO BN component parties. Three competitive seats held by MCA and MIC are left untouched, and the movement between two pairs of seats (Tanjung Piai and Pontian; Ayer Hitam and Sri Gading) entail movements of voters from MCA to UMNO-held seats. Unless these are solid opposition voting blocs, it is not clear how this change will be beneficial to MCA.

The proposed movements at the state level appear to be guided by a similar logic, but there are more redelineations tabled involving proportionately greater movements of people than at the parliamentary level (Figure 12). Thus, thirty-four out of fifty-six state seats are tabled

Figure 12: Proposed State Constituencies in Johor



for redelineation, and more than twenty alterations will involve the movement of more than 2,000 voters.

As with the parliamentary amendments, these changes do little to reduce malapportionment. Large under-represented seats such as Johor Jaya, Permas, Tiram, Puteri Wangsa and Penggaram remain untouched, as do smaller over-represented ones such as Bekok, Rengit, Buloh Kasap, Tenang, Bukit Naning, and Tanjung Surat. A number of proposed changes also look to aggravate malapportionment. Thus, Skudai, Johor's most populous seat will receive more people; and Gambir, Pasir Raja, and Endau, the state's least populous seats will lose even more voters.

Of the twenty-two unaltered seats, fourteen are held by UMNO, six by DAP, and one each by Gerakan and PAS. Nine of the unaltered UMNO seats in this category were won with comfortable majorities, with the remaining five seats (Bukit Naning, Senggarang, Sungai Balang, Semerah and Tengang) holding relatively slim margins. Many of these seats are also rather remote, bordering on other states such as Buloh Kasap, Kemelah, and Tenang, or the sea, such as Penawar, Tanjung Surat, or Sungai Balang — limiting their potential for re-delineation. Of the non-UMNO seats, only one (Penggaram) was won with a large majority. The remaining seven — including one held by Gerakan — are all competitive.

Of the thirty-four state seats to be altered, seventeen are held by UMNO. The remaining seventeen seats are broken down as follows: seven DAP; three MIC; two MCA; two PAS; and one each for Amanah, PPBM and Gerakan.

Of the UMNO constituencies, three are competitive and fourteen are safe seats. The three competitive seats look to benefit from the amendments. Thus, Mahkota, held by UMNO by a 1,100 majority will yield 2,600 voters to Mengkibol, a safe DAP seat. Kota Iskandar, another UMNO constituency with a 2,200 majority, will yield 2,250 voters to neighbouring districts. And, Serom's 2,260 majority may benefit from an additional 2,270 voters.

The remaining fourteen UMNO seats were won with majorities of more than 55 per cent. These seats, located in the eastern and central parts of Johor, abut other constituencies and have large margins to yield

friendly voters or gain undecided ones.¹⁴ Thus, seats such as Panti, Pasir Raja, Sedili and Johor Lama are slated to yield or receive more than 5,000 voters each.

The proposed changes could reduce the number of seats held by PH. Perling, currently held by the DAP with a margin of 2,000 votes, is slated to lose 6,800 votes to Skudai and 1,500 to Larkin — safe seats held by the DAP and UMNO respectively. While these changes are unlikely to affect the outcomes in either of these seats, they could swing Perling. Similar changes are in store for Pekan Nanas and Tangkak, competitive DAP seats, which are set to lose 7,300 and gain 5,600 voters, respectively.

In addition, as with the parliamentary alterations, specific constituencies seem to be targeted. Parit Yaani, won by Aminolhuda Hassan¹⁵ of Parti Amanah Negara with a margin of 1,200 votes in 2013, is slated to receive 300 voters from Semarang and yield 1,900 to Parit Raja — a very safe UMNO seat. Bukit Pasir, held by Shahrudin Md Salleh of PPBM¹⁶ with a 3,700 majority, will receive 1,000 people from Bentayam and yield 5,900 to Bukit Kepong — an UMNO seat held by a super-majority.

Thus, the proposed redelineations look to be beneficial to BN. Malapportionment, which broadly favours the ruling coalition, will persist, a significant number of opposition-held seats are likely to be swung by the proposed movement of people, and key opposition leaders could be toppled. At a broader level, these changes are likely to entail larger — but fewer — opposition-led constituencies in mixed seats in urban and semi-urban areas, and proportionately more UMNO seats in rural areas. It is also possible that non-UMNO BN component parties will have fewer seats.

¹⁴ Two of MIC-held seats also fit this pattern. Tenggaroh and Kahang are Malay-majority constituencies with more than 60 per cent support for BN.

¹⁵ He contested as a PAS member in 2013, and subsequently left the party to join Parti Amanah.

¹⁶ Currently known as Jorak, the seat's name is slated to be changed to Bukit Pasir. Shahrudin ran and won as a member of UMNO but subsequently joined PPBM.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

However, while the opposition has made a number of important inroads, Malaysia's and — by extension, Johor's — political context has changed in important ways. Most notably, since 2015 the Opposition has fractured, with PAS leaving the PR coalition. In addition, two new political parties and PH members have come on the scene. Given their potential to appeal to Muslim and Malay voters, respectively, they have the potential to make inroads in UMNO's traditional support base.

The first party, Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah), was founded in late 2015. Following PAS leaving Pakatan Rakyat, the Islamist party also purged a faction of its leaders. The clique of ejectees had been known for its progressive outlook, advocating a more inclusive and tolerant approach and militating against a split from Pakatan Rakyat. This group then went on to form Amanah which, in turn, joined Pakatan Rakyat. A sizeable proportion of Amanah's leadership is from Johor, including its Deputy President, Organizing Secretary, and three Central Committee members, and the party holds one state seat, Parit Yaani. The party has made Johor a key state in its campaign, and interviews indicate that it has had some success in attracting PAS members (Wan Saiful 2017).

The second party, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM) was established in 2016 by a group of prominent UMNO members who left the party in the wake of the 1MDB scandal. This included former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his son, former Menteri Besar of Kedah, Mukhriz, as well as former Deputy Prime Minister and Menteri Besar of Johor, Muhyiddin Yassin. PPBM, like UMNO, is a Malay-based political party. Given his long political trajectory in Johor, PPBM's President, Muhyiddin Yassin, is leading the campaign in the state (Wan Saiful 2018). At this point in time, PPBM has Muhyiddin's parliamentary seat of Pagoh, as well as the state seat of Jorak. When the assemblyman for Jorak crossed the floor, BN lost its two-thirds majority in the state parliament for the first time.

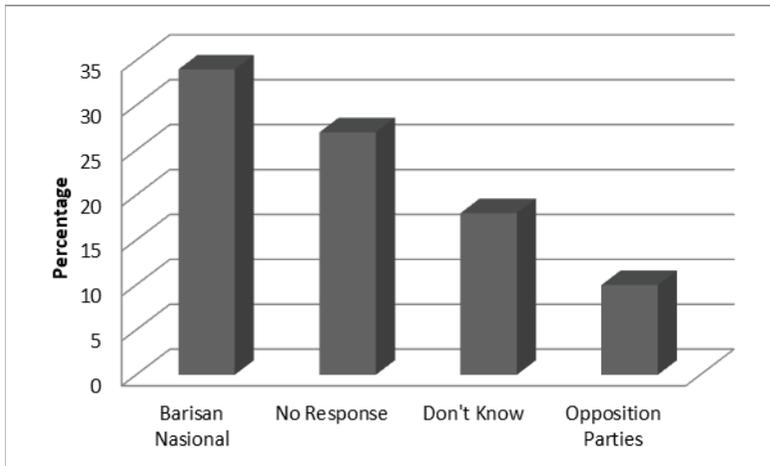
The ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute commissioned a survey of some 2,000 Johor voters on a variety of questions in May–June 2017 — including their voting preferences and how they perceived the various political parties. The sample included roughly 1,000 correspondents

from across the state, and then another 1,000 voters from three groups of constituencies in the south, east, and northwest.

At the most general level, the results indicate that while BN commands a sizeable and consistent following of voters, the majority of voters have yet to make up their minds (Figure 13). When voters were asked to indicate which party would get their vote for Parliament, 34 per cent indicated they would vote for BN, 27 per cent did not respond or said that it was a secret, 18 per cent said that they had yet to reach a decision, and 10 indicated a preference for an opposition party or Pakatan Harapan. Support for BN is highest in the eastern part of the state, and lowest in the Iskandar region, which shows slightly more hospitable terrain for Pakatan Harapan.

At first blush, then, the picture looks reasonably positive for Pakatan Harapan, based on the Opposition's respectable performance in 2013 and the lack of overwhelming support for BN. However, the survey included questions on how voters perceived the various coalitions as well as individual parties — including Amanah and PPBM. The findings are less

Figure 13: Parliamentary Voting Preferences in Johor



Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

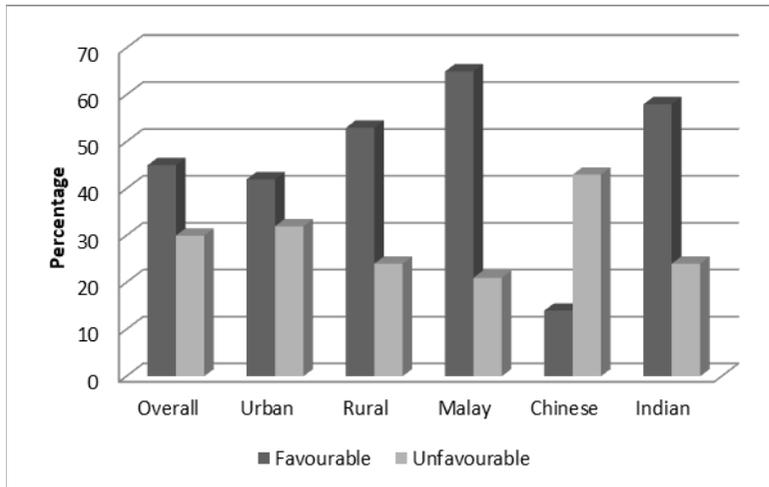
positive for the Opposition in general and the new political parties in particular.

Demonstrating very similar ratings across the state and among ethnic group, BN and UMNO receive the highest positive ratings (45 and 43 per cent) and the lowest negative ratings (-30 and -33 per cent). Approval for the ruling coalition is highest in the eastern part of the state (60 approvals and 24 disapprovals), which is predominantly Malay and rural. Support is significantly lower in Iskandar, where BN receives fewer positive and more negative ratings (34 positive, 36 negative).

Overall support for BN is lower in urban areas than rural areas (42 per cent versus 53 per cent positive). Looking at specific ethnic groups, Malays and Indians are the most favourable to the ruling coalition, with 65 and 58 per cent positive ratings. Chinese voters are much less likely to support BN, with only 14 per cent expressing support and 43 per cent rating the ruling coalition negatively (Figure 14).

When asked about specific opposition parties, surprisingly, PAS received the second highest level of support, with 28 per cent of voters

Figure 14: Opinions towards Barisan Nasional



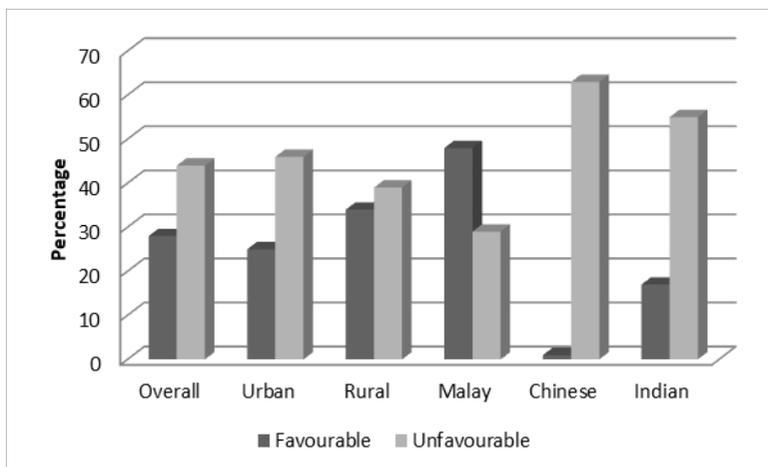
Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

expressing a favourable opinion. That said, the party’s overall negative ratings were also quite high (44 per cent), with significant levels of hostility among urban voters, as well as Chinese and Indian voters (46, 63, and 55 per cent, respectively). Interestingly, the Islamic party did enjoy a respectable level of support among Malay voters, as 48 per cent expressed a favourable opinion (Figure 15).

The Opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan, comes third in terms of positive ratings, garnering the support of 19 per cent of voters. However, with the exception of the Chinese community, PH generates much higher levels of hostility, with almost 50 per cent of all voters expressing an unfavourable opinion of the grouping. This level of opposition is particularly high among Malays and rural voters, with almost 70 per cent expressing an unfavourable opinion. The grouping does somewhat better in urban areas and among Indian voters, but negative ratings still outweigh by a considerable margin (Figure 16).

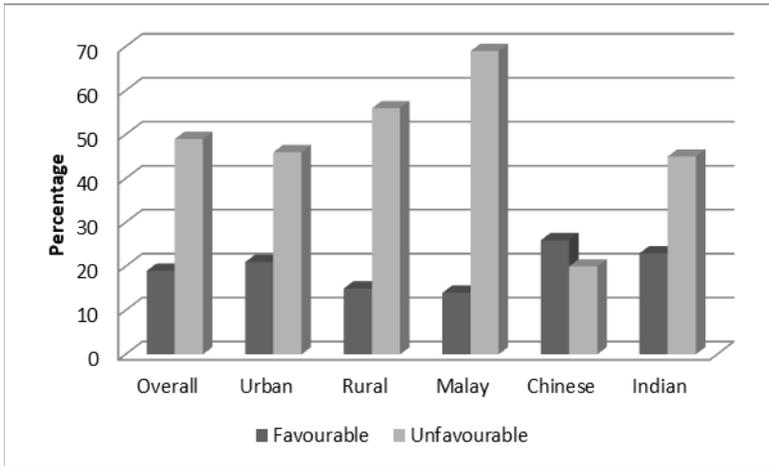
Have Amanah and PPBM have been able to make inroads among Muslim and Malay voters? Figure 17 sets out the level of support for these two parties among the different voter blocs. Neither of the parties

Figure 15: Opinions towards PAS



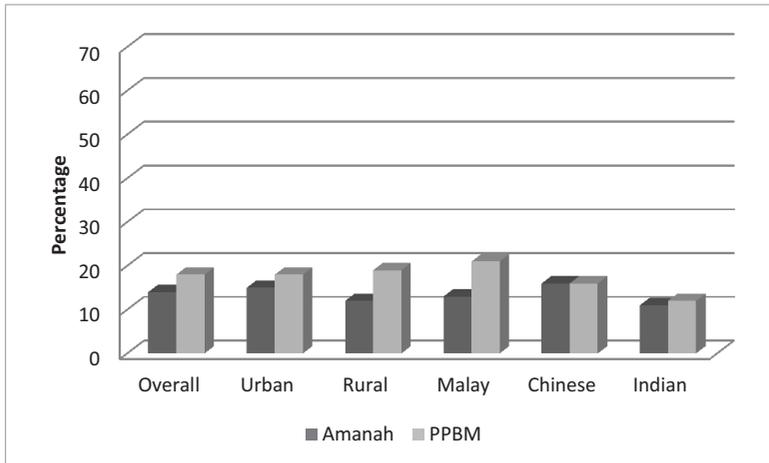
Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

Figure 16: Opinions towards Pakatan Harapan



Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

Figure 17: Support for New Parties

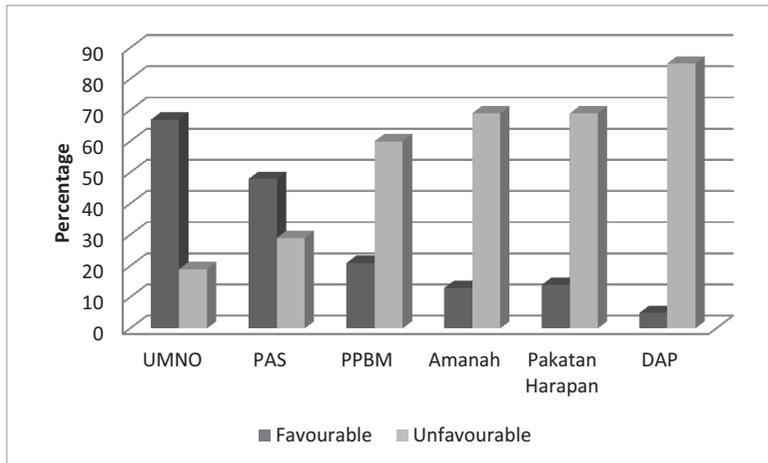


Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

appears to have made significant inroads with any specific voter group. Ironically for the target groups that these parties seek to appeal to, their level of support among Chinese voters is among the highest, and support among rural and Malay voters is under 20 per cent. Of the two, PPBM does somewhat better across all voter groups, with the exception of Chinese voters, where their level of support for PPBM and Amanah is about the same. The progressive Islamist party, for its part, enjoys its highest levels of support among urbanites and Chinese voters.

Given the importance of the Malay vote for the political outcome in Johor, it is worth comparing the levels of support and opposition for the various coalitions and parties (Figure 18). UMNO enjoys a high level of support of 67 per cent and a relatively low level of opposition (-19) among Malay voters. PAS comes next with 48 per cent positive and 29 per cent negative, and is the only other party to enjoy net positive ratings. PPBM comes third, with 21 positive and 60 per cent negative ratings. Amanah and Pakatan Harapan come out roughly equal, and the DAP receives the lowest positive and highest negative results.

Figure 18: Opinions among Malay Voters in Johor



Source: Johore Opinion Survey, May 2017. N=1003.

On aggregate, the survey findings suggest that the 2013 outcome was a protest vote rather than an expression of support for Pakatan Rakyat per se. First, of all coalitions and parties, BN enjoys the most consistent support and the lowest negatives of all. While there are a considerable number of people who have yet to decide or who do not want to reveal their voting preferences, specific questions regarding the popularity of the various parties do not indicate favourable opinions towards a specific alternative.

Given its long history in Johor and its meagre electoral success, PAS enjoys substantial support among Malay voters. However, substantial opposition to the Islamist party among other voting blocs indicates that it will struggle to garner significant support outside Malay constituencies. And, given the greater popularity enjoyed by BN among Malay voters, it is likely that PAS will lose to the ruling coalition in seats where it contests directly against it.

PR's successor Pakatan Harapan has not been successful at garnering a solid support base. While the grouping enjoys higher levels of support in urban areas and with Chinese voters, these levels are modest and there are also significant levels of neutral voters. Support for this coalition is very low among Malay voters and rural-dwellers and levels of opposition are very high. The advent of Amanah and PPBM has done little to boost PH's chances, as the two parties have the same limited appeal in urban areas and among Chinese voters, and have yet to make inroads among Malay voters and those in rural constituencies.

CONCLUSION

This *Trends* has looked at a variety of data to gain insight into Johor's political context. Looking at historical voting patterns, it has argued that the state exemplifies Barisan Nasional's consociational approach to politics. The BN operates as a coalition of different ethnic groups, which allows it to match candidates with the demographic profile of many constituencies. In addition, the grouping's effective internal bargaining mechanisms are able to convince a substantial number of voters to vote across ethnic lines for their local BN representative. The effectiveness

of this mechanism is magnified by Malaysia's FPTP electoral system, malapportionment, and favourable redelineation lines.

Beyond these structural features which operate in other parts of the country, BN has done even better in Johor for three reasons. First, UMNO is closely identified with Johor and at the local level is associated with public service and nation-building. The sheer size of the party's grassroots machinery also means a higher level of competition for positions, which has been boosted by the effective grooming of both state and federal-level leaders. Second, the unique development pattern of the state has meant a particularly well-developed and controlled religious education system that is traditionalist in outlook, translating into a difficult environment for PAS to make headway. Last, in spite of recent scandals, the extraordinary success and large scale of the FELDA scheme translates into very high levels of support for BN in a key number of state and parliamentary seats.

Despite the above, in 2013, BN yielded significant ground to the Opposition, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. This disproportionately affected MCA, which lost a significant proportion of its parliamentary and state seats to the DAP. PAS was able to expand its holding somewhat, but was checked by solid support for UMNO in Malay-majority seats.

Looking forward, it is difficult to see Pakatan Harapan taking the state. Further gains, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas, and specifically in the traditional UMNO urban strongholds of Johor Bahru, Pulai and Pasir Gudang are certainly possible. However, the number of rural and over-represented seats in UMNO's fold makes an Opposition majority in the state parliament an unlikely scenario. The redelineation exercise will, in all likelihood, reduce — but not eliminate — the number of seats favourable to Pakatan Harapan and increase those favourable to BN and UMNO in particular.

The advent of Amanah and PPBM had the potential to upend this scenario by appealing directly to Muslims and Malays. However, survey responses indicate that, while a significant proportion of the electorate is open to a change, Pakatan Harapan, Amanah and PPBM have yet to convincingly fill that space. For much of the state, particularly its Malay

electorate and rural-dwellers, BN appears to be the known quantity. Thus, while BN's fortress in Johor has shown signs of vulnerability, it is likely to hold — for now.

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