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Islamist Government in Malaysia under PAS: Ideology, Policies, and Competition

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ABSTRACT

Dominant approaches to understanding Islamist politics tend to assume a uniform polity. Most notably, inclusion–moderation hypotheses presume Islamist parties are simply in or out: that the lure of office persuades radical Islamist groups to moderate their behaviour and ideologies to participate in elections. We suggest a different dynamic, in which an Islamist party adapts its mien and messaging to appeal simultaneously to heterogeneous audiences, without compromising its core positions. We find an exemplary case in Malaysia, where Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, PAS) contests both nationally and at the state level. At the federal level, PAS seeks support within a multi-ethnic, multi-religious polity, working in coalition with either secular, noncommunal parties, for whom an adamantly Islamist stance would be verboten, or Malay-ethnonationalist parties, for whom Islam is salient, but secondary. Meanwhile, PAS competes subnationally in its northeastern stronghold, where its confirmed Islamism confers strong advantage – but also in other states, with different approaches. Yet, across these stages, PAS sustains its underlying ideological consistency, especially on fraught social issues. We explore the extent to which electoral participation amid differing incentives reveals more a moderating effect on Islamist-party behaviour and ideology, or a capacity for strategic posturing.

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Political Islam has been a fixture on the Malaysian political landscape since independence in 1957, but nowhere has it manifested more prominently than in the northeastern state of Kelantan. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS) has governed the state from 1959 to 1977 and again since 1990. PAS has held government in other states, but Kelantan is the party's stronghold and laboratory in which to develop and implement its Islamist ideology. PAS' deeply entrenched roots in the state, the near-homogeneous Malay-Muslim population there, and Kelantan's proud Islamic tradition have allowed the party to stay mostly true to its ideology, even against stiff challenges from its competitors. In this respect, PAS' experience in governing Kelantan differs from that of Islamist parties that operate in more culturally, religiously, and ideologically diverse milieux – including PAS' own experience beyond Kelantan.

Examining PAS allows us to assess dimensions of religious versus ethnic orientation, and how an Islamist party governs within a heterogeneous polity. We suggest that an

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Islamist party may tailor its image for different audiences to garner support just as other parties do. However, the ideology that defines these parties limits the extent to which they can adapt, so 'moderation' will likely be selective. We draw on an array of primary and secondary sources, and especially in-depth interviews with PAS politicians and officials. We start with Kelantan's history and demographics, which are central in understanding PAS' success there but differ from what is found elsewhere in Malaysia. We turn next to political Islam and the conflation of Islamism and communalism among Malaysian parties, before delving into PAS' history, evolution, and priorities at the national and state levels. We conclude by proposing a pattern of contingent, partial mutation: superficial adaptation enables PAS to work with different partners or to court less homogeneous or already committed voters, while sustaining its conservative core.

Understanding PAS' Heartland

Situated along peninsular Malaysia's northeast border with Thailand, Kelantan was a kingdom under Siamese suzerainty until it became part of British Malaya through the signing of the 1909 Anglo–Siamese treaty. As British colonial rule penetrated under the 'Forward Movement' policy, the seeds of Islamist politics were first sown. The policy's defining aspect was the establishment of colonial bureaucracy, reaching to the village level. The new colonial apparatus disrupted the old feudal order by displacing or diminishing the authority of traditional local chieftains and religious leaders. Anodyne-sounding 'districts' replaced these leaders' fiefdoms, with 'district officers' assuming the functions of local leaders. The breakdown of the old socio-political order fostered strong resentment against the British and the sultan, who used the opportunity to consolidate his own dominance over hitherto-autonomous local chieftains and religious leaders.[1]

One way the sultan exerted authority more forcefully was through the new Majlis Agama Islam Kelantan (State Islamic Council of Kelantan, MAIK), which was established in 1915. MAIK and the British colonial bureaucracy assumed most of the functions *imam* had previously performed in their parishes (*mukim*), such as administering religious rituals, collecting poll taxes, mediating conflicts, and surveying land. Previously independent, *imam* now had to register with MAIK, which closely supervised their activities. MAIK also obligated *imam* to surrender three-fifths of the wealth tax (*zakat*) and seven-eighths of head taxes (*fitrah*) collected in their parishes, thus depriving them of their main sources of income. MAIK's overzealous assertion of its authority over the *imam* created an enduring backlash against the political establishment, which in time fostered the constituency from which PAS draws its staunchest support (Kessler, 1978, 195–207).

Malays constitute 95 per cent of Kelantan's 1.89 million people (Department of Statistics, 2020a), with the remaining being Chinese, Siamese, indigenous *Orang Asli*, and others. The state is largely rural: its economic mainstays are services, agriculture (farming, fishing, livestock, logging), and manufacturing. Kelantan is one of the poorest states in Malaysia, with a GDP per capita of MYR13,668 (US$2,916) in 2018, well below the national average of MYR44,682 (US$9,532) (Department of Statistics, 2020b). Well-paying jobs are scarce, leading many residents to seek work in other states. One estimate is that nearly 15 per cent of Kelantan's population, or 250,000 people, have moved to more prosperous parts of Malaysia (Chai, 2022). The federal government, through its company Petronas, also extracts oil and gas off Kelantan's coast. The state government

has long demanded royalty payments, but the federal government refused for decades, claiming that these resources fell beyond Kelantan's maritime border (Zailanni, 2017). Only with a change of government in May 2018 did Kelantan receive a windfall payment of MYR400 million for accumulated unpaid royalties stemming from its offshore oil. Meanwhile, neighbouring Terengganu, which has been governed near-consistently by the same coalition that holds power at the federal level, has received royalties for its resources. Rallying grievances against the federal government, stemming from a deep sense of injustice, has cemented PAS support.

Political Islam in Malaysia

PAS is the strongest, but not the only, Islamist party contending for power in Malaysia. The dominant political narrative sees Islam as inextricably intertwined with ethnic-Malay identity. An ethnic-based party such as the long-dominant United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), for instance, incorporates an Islamic agenda, resulting in a heady ethno-religious concoction of Malay-Islamic supremacy. Similarly, PAS conflates Malay and Islamist discourse, particularly when working in coalition with fellow Malay-Muslim partners (more on this below). Yet what distinguishes PAS, particularly in its most hegemonic form in Kelantan, is a totalising focus on the end goal of Islamising society, whatever the strategic compromises that objective requires.

Besides PAS, the other main Malay-Islamic parties today are UMNO, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (Malaysian United Indigenous Party, Bersatu), and Parti Amanah Negara (National Trust Party, Amanah). Established in 1946, UMNO presents a conservative Malay-nationalist orientation, rooted in claims to have brought about Malaysian independence. UMNO was initially somewhat secular and led by mostly English-educated Malay elites and had an overarching focus on maintaining Malay supremacy (*ketuanan Melayu*). It was not until the early 1980s that the party donned an Islamist cloak to insulate itself against partisan attacks and sustain its legitimacy to rule.

Bersatu formed as a splinter party from UMNO in September 2016. Erstwhile UMNO stalwarts, led by former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad and former deputy prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin, founded the new party to challenge the leadership of then-UMNO president and prime minister, Najib Razak. Ideologically, UMNO and Bersatu hardly differ: both prioritise Malay-Islamic supremacy. Their shared profile partly explains how Bersatu could leave a collapsed Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope, PH) government to join with UMNO and PAS to form a new federal government in February 2020. Mahathir's faction, in turn, exited Bersatu to launch another Malay party, which failed to thrive. Amanah, finally, was founded in 2015 when a group of PAS leaders known as the 'Erdogan faction' were voted out of party leadership positions (more on this below). This faction comprised mostly Western-educated professionals who were open to working with non-Muslims, while an ascendant, more exclusive 'ulama faction' remained intent on preserving PAS' ideological purity.

Undergirding these parties is the fusion of Islam and Malay in public discourse nationally, which forms the core of a potently malleable '3R' narrative (race, religion, and royalty). It is the first two of these prongs, however, that usually come most starkly into partisan play. The Malaysian constitution provides legal

ground, however shaky and disputed, for this narrative, which renders a perceived transgression against one component a transgression against the other two. Article 3 proclaims Islam the official religion of Malaysia and the sultans the heads of Islamic and Malay affairs in their respective states. Article 160 then defines a Malay person as one who professes Islam, speaks the Malay language, and practises Malay culture and traditions. The proponents of the 3R narrative primarily instrumentalise these two articles to buttress their argument and shape Malaysian public discourse on race and religion, which, in turn, influences the strategies that political parties adopt.

That narrative intensified from the late 1970s as an Islamist wave hit Malaysia (Chandra, 1987; Nagata, 1984; Zainah, 1987). UMNO began to coopt the Islamist agenda, seeing in it a means of competing with PAS among the increasingly devout Malay community. To that end, UMNO lured the hugely popular leader of Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, ABIM), Anwar Ibrahim, and other popular Islamist leaders into government, as UMNO and PAS sought to 'out-Islamise' each other (Barraclough, 1983; Jomo & Ahmad Shabery, 1988; Kamarulnizam, 2003; Mohamad, 1981). Often-acrimonious competition for the hearts, souls, and votes of the Malay electorate reinforced the 3R narrative, which opportunistic political actors have readily employed ever since.

The History of PAS

Since its inception in 1951, PAS has shifted its orientation, ideology, and interpretation of Islamism several times with changes in political opportunities and leadership. The party's Islamist political evolution falls into three broad ideological orientations: Malay nationalist, socialist, and ulama-led. As Walid Jumblatt Abdullah (2018, 408) explains, 'inclusion', or taking part in elections, is insufficient to explain PAS' shifts in strategy over time; rather, 'its professed pledges altered in view of changing circumstances', specifically shifts in political opportunities that recommend new foci. We agree with this assessment but aim to disentangle the depth and reach of PAS' recalibrations by comparing its more consistent presentation in its Kelantan stronghold with elsewhere.

PAS leaders were originally Malay nationalists from UMNO, and included professionals, leftists, and rural-based imam and ulama. Its first president, the UMNO-affiliated ulama Ahmad Fuad Hassan, helped to found PAS due to a belief that UMNO was not 'Islamic' enough (Farish, 2014, 36–46). Still closely tied then to UMNO, PAS allowed its members to maintain dual membership. But when Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmy, a Kelantanese, assumed the party presidency in 1956, PAS began to adopt a more distinct oppositional stance to UMNO, which it branded as Western-oriented and elite-dominated. A prominent Muslim thinker and socialist, Burhanuddin steered PAS through the first post-independence election in 1959: PAS surprisingly secured 13 parliamentary seats and the state governments of Kelantan and Terengganu.[2] PAS' campaign focused on rural areas, including – reflecting Burhanuddin's thinking – the establishment of an Islamic state and social welfare programmes. PAS named Ishak Lotfi Omar, a Mecca-trained ulama, chief minister of Kelantan. He was the first non-English-educated, non-elite Malay in the position, which he held until his uncle, Asri Muda, succeeded him in 1964 (Berita PAS, 2017).

The federal government imprisoned Burhanuddin for allegedly conspiring with Indonesia during the *Konfrontasi* conflict of the mid-1960s, and Asri took over PAS' leadership. Also Kelantanese, but a Malay nationalist and avowed anti-socialist, Asri reversed PAS' direction, rejecting Burhanuddin's emphasis on the inclusive and cosmopolitan aspects of Islam. Asri's ascendance marked the party's hard swing to ethnonationalism and the prelude to PAS' brief dalliance with UMNO in the 1970s.

Gross mismanagement plagued Asri's administration. He had to beg the UMNO-led federal government for loans several times to pay staff salaries (Farish, 2014, 73). PAS nonetheless fended off UMNO and retained the state in the (abrogated) 1969 election. But in January 1973, Asri announced that PAS would join the UMNO-led Barisan Nasional (National Front, BN) at the federal and state levels. The move aligned with his Malay-nationalist leanings, but many PAS leaders and members recoiled at this seemingly unilateral decision to ally with their nemesis. Many left the party in disgust and Asri purged others, leaving only those who shared his vision of a new PAS.

Marriage with UMNO was a near-immediate disaster. In 1974, UMNO won 62 parliamentary seats to PAS' 14; many PAS supporters cast non-BN protest votes. As a junior partner in the BN government, PAS was unable to make strong demands, especially ideologically driven ones that failed to appeal to the more secular UMNO and its non-Malay coalition partners (Farish, 2014, 88). PAS had previously governed Kelantan and Terengganu alone, but it now shared power with its coalition partners, primarily UMNO. The arrangement was not harmonious, as exemplified by a bitter tussle over the choice of Kelantan chief minister. Asri preferred his close associate, Wan Ismail Wan Ibrahim, but UMNO's candidate (whom PAS deputy president, Hasan Adli Arshad, also favoured) was Mohamad Nasir, the incumbent (and previous) deputy chief minister of Kelantan. Mohamad Nasir won out, and soon initiated an investigation into Asri's financial dealings. Enraged, Asri made an unsuccessful attempt to hold a vote of no confidence. The Kelantan state legislature was suspended, and the prime minister declared a state-wide emergency. Asri withdrew PAS from the BN in December 1977, but the party registered its worst-ever performance in 1978, winning only five parliamentary seats and, more calamitously, losing control of Kelantan (Crouch et al., 1980). By 1982, ascendant ulama leadership within PAS had marginalised Asri. Embattled, he resigned from his position, and then the party ignominiously expelled him.

From 1978 to 1990, as PAS wandered in the political wilderness, overseas-educated ulama gradually wrested control. By the 1980s, these leaders were solidly ensconced within PAS and injected the party with a renewed sense of purpose, returning it to its Islamist roots. PAS became more puritanical and dogmatic, opposing the UMNO-led BN government on Islamic grounds. In a 1981 speech, Abdul Hadi Awang, who later became president of PAS, branded UMNO–BN essentially a colonial stooge hell-bent on upholding the colonial constitution and un-Islamic laws.[3] Since the 1980s, Islamic discourse has mainly centred on whether PAS or UMNO best speaks for Islam in Malaysia.

PAS' political fortunes revived in 1990. In a loose coalition with smaller Islamic parties and UMNO splinter party Semangat '46 called Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah (Movement for Muslim Unity, APU), PAS swept the Kelantan legislature, ousting UMNO. (APU then disbanded in 1996, when Semangat '46 leaders opted to rejoin UMNO.) Nik Aziz Nik Mat, a popular Deobandi- and Al-Azhar-educated ulama, became chief minister and remained in the role until he retired in 2013. Nik Aziz was more

inclusive than hardliner Hadi Awang, although not in Burhanuddin's cosmopolitan mould. He promoted the universalism of a Muslim *ummah* (community) unencumbered by ethnic divisions. Islam, he insisted, united a humankind riven by *assobiyah* (tribalism) during the dark age of *jahilliyah* (pre-Islam). This framing of Malay-Muslim ethno-nationalism as un-Islamic *assobiyah* stands in stark contrast to Asri's earlier conflation of Islamic and Malay identities (Ismail, 2015).

Nik Aziz maintained a cordial, productive relationship with non-Muslims and their leaders, especially those in the opposition.[4] In 1998, as the *Reformasi* movement prised open a window for political liberalisation after the Asian Financial Crisis, he and PAS president Fadzil Noor were among the main strategists behind PAS' joining forces with the secular, predominantly non-Muslim Democratic Action Party (DAP) in the Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front, BA). Uniting the parties was a common denominator of 'justice', including specifically for Anwar Ibrahim, then-UMNO prime minister Mahathir Mohamad's sacked deputy. Anwar might then have joined PAS, given his early *dakwah*-activist days, but instead formed Parti Keadilan Nasional (later Parti Keadilan Rakyat, PKR); his wife stood in for him while Anwar was imprisoned.

Despite coordinating to minimise multi-cornered electoral contests against the BN, BA fared poorly overall in the 1999 election, mainly due to non-Muslim voters' distrust of PAS and its goal of an Islamic state, an agenda the BN exploited through fear-mongering campaigns (Weiss, 2000). But PAS made overtures to protest voters, including disaffected non-Muslims, by stressing a 'pluralist' vision of 'reform and democracy', and achieved its strongest parliamentary showing yet (Liow & Chan, 2014, 87). BA dissolved in 2001, as PAS' implementation of conservative social policies in Kelantan and Terengganu, and its dominant position within BA, induced the DAP to withdraw (Weiss, 2006, 155).

Nevertheless, PAS, PKR, and the DAP soon established the Pakatan Rakyat (People's Pact, PR) coalition after substantial informal coordination in 2008. For PAS on the east coast, that cooperation was primarily with PKR, which held one state seat (Guchil), appointed some local councillors, and was represented in the state executive. While acknowledging that key issues would eventually require difficult negotiations, Nik Aziz steered PAS from its perennial demands for Islamic statehood and *hudud* (Islamic criminal law) to bread-and-butter issues and inclusive social welfare initiatives. He emphasised the similarities between the PAS and DAP economic models, their common antipathy to 'money politics' and inequality, and their shared focus on democracy and human rights. The slogan 'PAS for All', moreover, invited non-Muslims to join the party's non-Muslim wing (Dewan Himpunan Penyokong PAS). The party's *Negara Berkebajikan PAS* (PAS Welfare State) agenda detailed 10 promises revolving around strengthening social safety nets and reforming key institutions. PAS tripled its number of parliamentary seats in 2008 and 2013, surging to national prominence and shedding its regressive, provincial, out-of-touch image, buoyed by vigorous support from non-Muslims and urban-based Malays.

Nevertheless, this inclusive approach was unpalatable to PAS' ideologically rigid and deeply conservative ulama leadership; despite his own ulama standing, Nik Aziz remained in the minority. Hadi Awang, party president since Fadzil Noor's death in 2002, had previously declared even UMNO leaders *kafir* (infidels) for their insufficient focus on Islamist struggle (Liew, 2015). By elections in two PAS strongholds in 2009 exposed deep divisions within the party. These ambiguous results suggested that voters

had categorically rejected PAS' gestures towards inclusivity, in favour of a retreat to Malay-Islamism (Liow & Chan, 2014, 98–99).

Four months after Nik Aziz – the party's proverbial bridge with its coalition partners, especially DAP – passed away in 2015, PAS underwent a radical transformation: the 'Erdogan' or 'professional' faction was purged at that year's annual congress. Tensions with the ulama faction, which had brewed for years, spiked after Nik Aziz's death. A month later, after the party introduced a bill to stiffen *syariah* penalties and extend them to criminal, rather than just civil, violations,[5] the PAS Ulama Council ended the official partnership with DAP, effectively breaking up Pakatan Rakyat. The party reverted to Malay-Islam-centrism, where it has remained.

The 2015 split also affected the constellation of power in the Kelantan state government, as the 2018 elections demonstrated. A new opposition alliance (PH) emerged along similar lines to Pakatan Rakyat, except with Amanah in place of PAS. But the purge of the Erdogan faction filtered to the state level: bucking a national trend that heavily favoured PH, PAS all but swept both parliamentary and state seats in Kelantan and Terengganu. (PAS helmed its own Gagasan Sejahtera, Ideas of Prosperity, coalition that year, but was sufficiently dominant within the alliance to essentially run solo.) None of the candidates Amanah fielded in either state won: even Husam Musa, widely considered Nik Aziz's protégé, lost the parliamentary and state seats he had previously won easily. At the federal level, PAS, UMNO, and smaller ethno-religious parties formed the Muafakat Nasional (National Concord) in 2019 as a Malay-Islam-centric opposition bloc for Islam and a Malay/Bumiputera agenda.[6] Muafakat Nasional morphed into Perikatan Nasional (PN) in March 2020 (and reconfigured again in August 2021), adding Bersatu and PKR MPs who defected from the PH government.

PAS was back in government at the federal level, for the first time since leaving the BN in 1977. Despite being dominated by a conservative ulama leadership with no qualms about working in coalition in the name of defending Malay-Muslim rights and privileges against supposed assault, PAS did little to push for an Islamist agenda (MalaysiaGazette, 2019). That lack of initiative was despite PAS leaders and supporters being effusive in their Islamist grandstanding before (and after) that period. In the November 2022 elections, having joined forces with Bersatu in PN, PAS became the largest party in parliament, although no coalition held an absolute majority. PH and BN formed a 'national unity' government without PN, given PAS' continuing refusal to collaborate again with DAP.

PAS at the Federal and State Levels

After being in power in Kelantan for more than 30 years, and more episodically in neighbouring Terengganu, PAS has been strongly institutionalised, with a clear image, identity (notwithstanding shifts in focus), and loyal followers. Structurally, PAS looks and functions rather like UMNO, with centralised leadership but a robust organisational network, filtering to the grassroots. Yet PAS' Islamist identity and image, plus its unique position as a near-perennial governing party at the state level that remains near-perennially in opposition at the federal level, result in a distinctive approach to governance. Moreover, PAS positions itself differently when it appeals to state versus national constituencies. These levels present simultaneous but distinct opportunity structures,

prompting PAS to tailor its posture and image over both time and space. To explore how PAS approaches policymaking and governance, and how much flexibility that strategic positioning really represents, we analyse first its administration in Kelantan, as its near-hegemonic control there allows it to govern with minimal compromise on priorities or praxis, and then its performance in other states and at the federal level.

PAS has been a key player in Malaysian politics since the 1950s. The party eschews anti-system strategies such as violence, it exercises (sometimes heatedly competitive) internal democracy, notwithstanding an overarching role for appointed ulama since 2002, and it competes regularly and 'vigorously' in elections (Case & Liew, 2006, 391). The party remains most firmly entrenched in Kelantan (Tayeb, 2022). As one PAS local councillor stressed, '*parti menguasai kerajaan*': the party controls the government. Since the party is Islamist, so is the state government: the consensus-oriented Majlis Syura Ulama (Ulama Consultative Council) vets candidates and ensures policies align with the *Qur'an* and other fundamental precepts.[7]

Malaysia abrogated local government elections in the 1960s. Whatever party or coalition controls the state appoints its local councils, so PAS also controls local government in Kelantan. The law intends state governments to select councillors for their professional expertise, community leadership, or similar qualifications, but in practice nearly all are party loyalists and are chosen as such (see Rodan, 2014). State governments also appoint a share of senators in the upper house of Malaysia's federal parliament, meaning PAS has representation there, supplementing its elected seats in the lower house. Indeed, east-coast PAS voters have been known to split their tickets, to choose PAS at the state level so the party retains the state government, but an UMNO candidate to represent them in the federal parliament (although until 2018, UMNO had formed every government since independence).[8]

PAS has explicitly made Islam, and hence the Malay-Muslim population, the centrepiece of its ideology and policies. While party activists and politicians stress that they tolerate non-Muslims and non-Malays – as evident, for instance, in the state government's allowing non-*halal* restaurants in capital Kota Bahru's Chinatown, granting permits for Buddhist temples, and permitting non-Muslims things other religions allow, such as alcohol (even if they proscribe presumed-universal 'bads' such as gambling for all)[9] – state policies and discourse primarily address the overwhelming Malay-Muslim majority. As a PAS senator insists, 'natives' (that is, Malays) deserve primary protection and must reconsolidate political control, given the headway Chinese Malaysians have made in recent years.[10] Yet as a state assemblymember explained, PAS has accepted its exclusion from federal power as Allah's allowing them more time to build experience in governing mixed populations – not just Kelantanese ethnic Siamese and Chinese, but also as part of state legislatures in less overwhelmingly Malay states.[11] Indeed, PAS contests nationally: it stood in more seats than ever before in 2018 (rumour had it, with financial backing from UMNO, which expected to benefit from a divided opposition; Malay Mail, 2018).

Just like those from other parties (Weiss, 2020, Chapter 5), PAS politicians stress the extent to which personal connections and a candidate's past record sway votes despite the party's discourse and policies revolving around Islam, and despite the extraordinarily firm loyalty of voters to PAS.[12] Voters in Kelantan, several respondents explained, are less interested in formal speeches and policies than in finding candidates in the local coffee

shop, chatting humbly with constituents, or engaging on-site with constituents' issues and needs.[13] Indeed, a poster extolling the virtues of late 'Tok Guru' (loosely, respected teacher) Nik Aziz at the Institut Pemikiran Tok Guru (Institute for Tok Guru Thought, IPTG) in Kota Bahru noted that the revered leader kept his cash in an envelope in his pocket instead of a wallet, so it was easier to dole out. (The poster, of course, implies Nik Aziz's generous charity, in line with Muslim *zakat*, but the practice resembles other politicians' areligious patronage.) Even so, our informants *also* stressed how digitally connected and generally savvy Kelantanese are, and how preoccupied with politics they are. On the one hand (and in the same interview), respondents noted, you 'cannot bullshit with these *kampung* [village] folks; they know politics'; on the other, if party leaders, especially ulama, give a candidate or coalition partner their mandate, the people will acquiesce and vote accordingly.[14]

Ideological premises

In interviewing PAS activists, one cannot miss the remarkable consistency of the themes they raise and the terms they use. That conformity suggests how effectively PAS communicates its messages, working in particular through mosques and *surau* (prayer rooms). PAS is distinct among Malaysian parties for its ideological cohesion and drive.[15] The IPTG captures a key aspect of PAS' current orientation, most clearly in Kelantan: Nik Aziz still occupies a central place in the party's iconography, ideology, and policymaking. For instance, he introduced the *Membangun Bersama Islam* (Develop with Islam) policy, which is framed as Islamic development goals to parallel the United Nations' Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals. Although they were never really codified in Nik Aziz's lifetime, party leaders have since 2017 worked through these objectives –e.g., in respect to land and agriculture, women, culture, and entertainment – to ensure later generations understand the party's orientation and direction. Rather than being merely a checklist, explained a long-time PAS politician, they ensure young people learn the history of why PAS has proposed or opposed certain policies. By 2020, the party had published 17 issue-specific books.[16]

To reinforce its ideological messaging, in the 1990s PAS established Dewan Halaqat, an agency tasked with socialising the people to understand the party's policies and positions. Premised on an idea of Nik Aziz, Dewan Halaqat serves as a *dakwah* organisation to deliver messages of Islam and from the state government (e.g., updates on its initiatives), reaching every kampung via units in each parliamentary constituency, all connected to a state office. All involved are party members: the 'political lessons' they deliver are partisan. Dewan Halaqat relays messages through mosques and *surau* every evening, presenting the 'aspirations of the state' (*aspirasi negeri*) and complementing the weekly lectures (*kuliah tafsir*) broadcast over social media.[17] Dewan Halaqat employs 540 staff state-wide (Harakah Daily, 2019), with the goal that even Kelantanese who do not accept PAS better understand Islam.

Especially fraught is the extent to which Islam overlaps with Malay ethnonationalism. As a generally thoughtful party ideologue explained, Nik Aziz stressed the underlying similarities across peoples but also insisted that Muslims are more tolerant than non-Muslims;[18] stereotypes about Chinese in particular frequently appeared in our interviews. More broadly, the imperative of competing in elections for decades against

a Malay-communal main challenger (UMNO) has pressed PAS to adapt its tone and focus. Its more 'purist' periods have 'cast PAS's Islamism into sharper relief against UMNO's comparative moderation' and raised tensions with 'pragmatists' who are more willing to moderate their approach in the interests of broadening their electoral appeal (Case & Liew, 2006, 390).

Social and welfare policies

Upon assuming power in 1959 (and then again in 1990), one of PAS' first steps was to assert its Islamist identity through social policies. The party has long stressed principles of moderation (*pertengahan*), simplicity (*kesederhanaan*), and non-compulsion, but it still enforces, for instance, dress codes for Muslims, especially women, far more aggressively (and with stricter guidelines for what is acceptable) than elsewhere in Malaysia. Especially iconic has been PAS' decision to shut down nightclubs and ban snooker, due to its alleged propensity to encourage gambling. People interviewed for this article made reference the Biarritz nightclub, which was shuttered in the 1970s, as though it had just closed yesterday, but several of them faulted the media for promoting an image of PAS as *keras* (harsh) or narrow minded.

The role and status of women within PAS is noteworthy. PAS forbade women from standing for elected office (Ting, 2007, 93) from 1978 to 2004, deeming the campaign process inappropriate for them, but the party still appointed women as senators. In fact, PAS is Malaysia's only party that has a quota for female senators (an initiative of the Dewan Ulama, Council of Ulama), which supplements a small number of elected female members of parliament. Rather than press for a quota for female candidates, explained a group of officers from the state-level office for women, the party focuses on support systems – childcare, 'women-friendly' budgets, and husbands' support – to encourage women to *want* to stand. Women serve in higher numbers, too, in appointed executive positions, including about 80 as *penghulu* (rural subdistrict officers). Indeed, informants noted, Kelantan was the first state in the region to have – twice – a *raja perempuan*, or female monarch (as opposed to a *permaisuri*, queen, who is married to a king).[19] From the outset, PAS' women's wing (Muslimat) has been central to the organisation, particularly in voter mobilisation and service delivery. Like UMNO's counterpart (Wanita), Muslimat focuses on outreach to women, especially rural housewives. It canvasses door-to-door, in the expectation that women will, in turn, influence their husbands and children, and provides critically important support.[20] Women have always played active economic roles, too, on Malaysia's east coast, modelling themselves on the Prophet Mohamad's entrepreneurial wife, Khadijah, the namesake of Kota Bahru's main market. And Kelantan alone has six academically rigorous *madrasah* for girls. That said, the party restricts women from working night shifts at the few establishments allowed to maintain late hours.[21]

Importantly for a distinctly underdeveloped state, PAS' policies emphasise both social welfare spending and self-help. The party offers cradle-to-grave support: for infants, schooling, healthcare, old age, and burial.[22] Particularly notable is a mandatory pay-cheque deduction for the approximately 1,300 Majlis Perbandaran Kota Bahru (Kota Bahru City Council, MPKB) employees, which is pegged to salary and ranges from 3 to 50 MYR monthly. These monies flow to the Tabung Amal dan Kebajikan, a welfare fund

under the MPKB's Jabatan Pembangunan Islam (Islamic Development Office), which distributes MYR150 worth of foodstuffs (e.g., eggs, rice, and tea) to poor and vulnerable residents.[23] Moreover, when debilitating, quick-onset flooding affected two-thirds of Kelantan in 2014, the state's rapid response and low death rate reflected how speedily the community mobilised to help victims.[24] Despite Kelantan being poor overall, Kelantanese are known to be resourceful. Women (who retain *harta sepencarian*, matrimonial assets, in the state) keep gold jewellery, including that purchased with their dowry (*mas kahwin*), as a 'moving bank': Kota Bahru alone has more than 50 goldsmiths (with more than 300 state-wide); women bring jewellery to an Islamic pawnshop (*ar-rahnu*) when they need cash.[25]

Administration and leadership

Under Nik Aziz's leadership, PAS moved to bring state administration more in line with Islamic principles. For instance, he moved state funds into the Islamic economy, in part to help institutionalise Islamic banking, and ensured all civil servants were well versed in the government's ethical code and Islamist ideology.[26] The party's chief priorities are to improve facilities for the people it serves – such as good schools and pathways to domestic and overseas universities – and to run a creditable administration.[27] PAS leaders and members are especially proud of the party's reputation for probity. Several respondents stressed that, unlike in other states, no public servant in Kelantan has been charged with corruption or misuse of funds. Some conceded that there may have been small-scale cases that passed under the radar, but they pointed out, fairly, that the Malaysian Anti-corruption Commission would have promptly laid charges had it found any malfeasance.[28] (That said, outside organisations *have* raised concerns, for instance, about environmentally devastating, *Orang Asli*-displacing illegal logging; C4, 2016.)

A shift seems to be underway (as we note below), but ulama leadership is central to PAS. Amanah, by contrast, has become more inclusive and less focused on ulama. As an IPTG staff member said disparagingly, how Amanah understands ulama leadership defines the party as 'post-Islamist'.[29] Core to that approach has been Amanah's emphasis on *maqasid syariah*, or the underlying principles of *syariah*, which entails the goals of human well-being broadly, rather than more superficial manifestations of devotion or precisely enumerated practices (Maszlee, 2017, 109–111).

Notwithstanding its generally top-down, ulama-led approach to policymaking, PAS praxis is to 'socialise' policies thoroughly before enacting them: policymakers consider the political impact of proposed legislation and how well the public will accept it, deferring or discarding policies that might be unpopular, even well into the policy-development process.[30] For example, in late 2022, Terengganu's PAS-dominated state assembly passed *syariah* enactments that criminalised acts including extramarital pregnancy, witchcraft and sorcery, women posing as men, and prefatory acts to same-sex intercourse (Sisters in Islam, 2022). The enactments drew heavy criticism nation-wide, but as the head of the Terengganu PAS Young Women's Wing (Ameerah) said, they needed to be socialised first to be fully accepted.[31] Socialisation notwithstanding, all policies the state executive committee (exco, the state-level cabinet) proposes also require the sultan's formal sign-off: his *kuningkan* ('yellowing'), which refers to the royal colour.

Local government

Local government in Kelantan is entirely a creature of PAS, as is the case for other Malaysian parties in other states. As noted, state governments appoint local councillors. The 24-member MPKB includes three non-Muslim Chinese and Indian members, but even they are affiliated with PAS. As a council member explained, the first criterion in selecting councillors is that they are party members, so they will share the state government's aspirations; second, they need the backing of the local party organisation; and third (still mandatory), relevant skills.[32] Reflecting its legacy as a colonial-era Unfederated Malay State, the civil service in Kelantan is state-specific (the Kelantan Civil Service) rather than federally assigned.[33] Signalling both its ambition and branding, PAS refers to Kelantan's state capital, Kota Bahru, as *bandar raya Islam*, even though the city is too small to meet the official minimum budget to qualify for *bandar raya* status and remains in the smaller *perbandaran* category.

PAS' resistance to reintroducing local government elections reveals the slippage between its pro-Islam and pro-Malay agendas. A common, though now factually inaccurate, refrain in Malaysia is that Chinese dominate cities demographically. In fact, in only six of 49 cities is that now the case: in Kota Bahru, ethnic Chinese comprise only 6.3 per cent, and 3.5 per cent in Terengganu's state capital (Ong, 2015). Yet PAS respondents in Kota Bahru have been adamant about rejecting local elections, specifically for fear that Chinese will sweep the polls.[34]

PAS in a Wider Frame

PAS ideologues and politicians with whom we spoke emphasised the party's readiness to cooperate with a wide range of parties, as operating beyond Kelantan requires. PAS has done so, but attempts at the federal level have collapsed in short order. Complicating cooperation have been not only the significant challenges of compromising on policy positions – such as revisions to *syariah* law, apostasy laws, or more symbolic manifestations of Islam's primacy (e.g., whether Christians may use the term 'Allah') – but also generational shifts and the relative ascendance of hard-line and moderate factions within PAS (Liew, 2007; 2015). PAS has also weighed the imperative to maintain its strength on the east coast against its desire not to be left behind nationally.[35]

Exclusion from the federal government carries costs: Malaysia's federation is fiscally centralised, including the oil and gas agency, Petronas. The BN's fiscal arm-twisting achieved results in Terengganu: UMNO retook control of the state in 2004, after PAS' win in 1999, but Kelantanese voters have stood by the party. PAS Kelantan's relationship with the PH federal government that assumed power in 2018 was more positive and open, at least at the government-to-government level.[36] Tellingly, with PAS in the federal government from 2020 to 2022, the administration earmarked 395 development projects for Kelantan, valued at MYR2.39 billion for 2022 (Astro Awani, 2022b); the then-PAS Minister of Environment and Water also approved a new water reservoir to resolve the state's perennial issues in securing supplies of clean water (Astro Awani, 2022a). Inasmuch as no single party has ever governed Malaysia alone, nor does it seem likely to do so, all parties have clear incentive to form or join coalitions with potential beyond one state. And other states command resource bases and wealth beyond Kelantan's, apart

from the affirmation for PAS that increasing vote share beyond the east coast conveys. PAS thus aims for a 'pragmatic' approach to coalitions, avoiding compromise on matters of 'fixed principle' but being flexible on others.[37]

More recent experience, both at the federal level and in other states, confirms the extent to which PAS adapts as and where opportunities arise (cf. Abdullah, 2018). PAS and UMNO formalised their opposition Muafakat Nasional pact in 2019. UMNO (which held about half a dozen seats in the Kelantan state legislature) joined the government in Kelantan, but PAS retained state-level dominance. Nationally, what facilitated cooperation was a practical approach to sharing power, at least for by elections. Initially, each party could simply allow the other to stand where they were stronger (or for UMNO, which continued to cede seats to non-Malay partners within the BN). The partnership was quite remarkable: PAS' depiction of UMNO as evil and unfair remained so fresh that our respondents reflexively used terms such as *kezaliman* (tyranny) to describe UMNO and the BN, but in the next breath said that PAS voters would follow their ulama leadership in embracing UMNO.

As a PAS legal adviser and recently elected state assemblyperson explained (in doing so casting a decidedly rosier glow than was common pre-Muafakat!), PAS and UMNO have ideological differences, but Islam fared well for 60 years under UMNO. Collaboration with the DAP, meanwhile, had left PAS anxious about safeguarding Malays and Islam: PAS now hoped to change the (formally secular) Malaysian constitution to foreground Islam.[38] But PAS recognised that it likely would not agree with the BN's Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) on certain issues, as seen in the tense debate over the teaching of Jawi script for Malay in schools. And our informants acknowledged that divvying up seats for the general election would be challenging, even allowing for common deference to which partner was strongest where.[39] As Muafakat evolved into Perikatan Nasional in February 2020, first under Bersatu leadership and then with an UMNO PM from August 2021, PAS' behaviour confirmed the trade-offs it would accept to access federal power.

At least while in office, corruption was one such trade-off. PAS has long sustained a robust focus on probity and anticorruption: the party takes pride in its own record, particularly given the extent to which the BN starved Kelantan (and Terengganu under PAS) of resources. Yet key UMNO leaders who faced serious charges of corruption, especially related to the 1MDB scheme, remained in office: even the convicted, imprisoned ex-prime minister Najib Razak seemed poised for a comeback. PAS was willing to cooperate with these officials from 2020 to 2022. Its alliances with secular parties, especially the Chinese-majority DAP, to advance social justice and political liberalisation tested PAS' ethnonationalism, whereas cooperation with UMNO tested its flexibility regarding clean governance and politicians' good character (and possibly its Islamist policy objectives) in exchange for sharing power. A PAS assemblymember and former federal senator told us that she had declined a deputy minister's post when UMNO offered it previously, since she could not have implemented Islamic principles within UMNO.[40] Presumably she and others expected a different balance when UMNO needed PAS' seats to secure a majority. That said, PAS ultimately rejected an alliance with UMNO in 2022 (and downplayed their just-ended partnership), when UMNO was sufficiently confident of a win to call elections early. PAS and Bersatu instead presented their PN coalition as a clean alternative to the BN, which contested solo.[41]

PAS across the states

PAS has gained ground beyond the federal level. State elections since 2018, and especially in 2022 and 2023, have spurred discourse of a 'green wave' across much of Malaysia. Much of that effect is clearly a protest vote against UMNO and for economic redirection. But support for political Islam clearly *is* increasing, especially among Malay-Muslim youth. More pessimistic than optimistic about the country's direction, albeit frustrated particularly by economic and employment concerns, these young people place far greater trust in the monarchy, military, and police than the elected parliament, and support 'democracy' more than specific indicators of political or cultural liberalism. Evidence of their commitment to Islam in public life can be found in a survey in 2021, which found that 82 per cent agreed that the *Qur'an* should replace Malaysia's constitution – a 10 per cent increase since 2010. Furthermore, the most religiously committed Muslim youth were the most politically aware (Merdeka Center, 2022, 9, 13–14, 32, 59–60).

A brief look at PAS' positions in states other than Kelantan, where (as at the federal level) it must work in coalition and to moderate accordingly, helps to highlight what defines the party and how it adapts. Its experience in Terengganu and Kedah is especially illustrative: now back in control in the former, PAS has tried to project a professional image especially in its choice of chief minister; in Kedah, its leadership mostly comprises technocrats and businesspeople. Overall, however, there is underlying ideological consistency in social policy in particular, which is transmitted through comparably effective channels as in Kelantan. What appears to be 'moderation', we suggest, can be correctly interpreted as strategic posturing, potentially including marginal policy innovation, to capture place-specific opportunities.

PN touts Terengganu as a model of technocratic governance, showcasing its willingness to gradually move away from ulama-centred leadership. Central to the effort was appointing Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, who holds a PhD in aerospace engineering from Leeds University in the UK, as chief minister when it wrested the state from BN in 2018. Ahmad Samsuri is the poster boy for PAS' non-ulama leadership, and Terengganu, the party's laboratory for bringing its promise to fuse rapid development with conservative ideals to fruition, but ulama still hold tremendous sway in the state government (Table 1). Efforts to lure out-of-state investments, especially in the tourism sector, are often stymied by state leaders' insistence on moral policing.[43] Technocratic-developmental and ulama-driven ideological aims are seemingly irreconcilable, given the state's heavy dependence on tourism to generate revenue and spur the local economy.

Kedah offers a different type of 'new' PAS leadership. Chief minister Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor is neither ulama nor professional. A social science graduate of Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang, he straddles both public and private sectors. Technocrats and

Table 1. Composition of State Executive Councils (Excos) in PN-governed States[42]

	Ulama	Professional	Technocrat	Business	Other	Total
Kedah	1	1	4	3	1	10
Kelantan	4	2	3	-	1	10
Terengganu	5	3	-	3	-	11
Perlis	1	2	-	2	2	7
Total	11	8	7	8	4	38

businesspeople constitute the bulk of state leaders. This perhaps reflects Kedah's advantage in abutting highly industrialised Penang, which facilitates economic spillover across state lines, such as in the Kulim Hitech Park in the south. Kedah's leadership is pragmatic, blending policymaking experience and business acumen to manage the state's economic activities. Kedah is more diverse than Kelantan and Terengganu: non-Malays comprise a quarter of its population. Even so, its PAS-led government is no softer on moral policing than its east-coast counterparts. For example, Sanusi issued a state-wide ban on gaming and lottery outlets that took effect in January 2023 (Ahmad Mukhsein, 2023).

The four states PAS-led governments currently administer – Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis – display different types of leadership, all embodying departures from the ulama-centred system that has guided the party for the past four decades. Non-ulama are now finding more opportunities to rise through the PAS ranks and hold powerful positions, within and outside the party. Nonetheless, these non-ulama leaders are as ideologically rigid as their ulama counterparts: they suggest that PAS is diversifying in its outreach and some policy strategies to reflect Malaysia's heterogeneous electoral landscape, but not that it is moderating. The present generation of professional, technocratic, and business leaders spent their formative years in PAS kindergartens (PASTI), schools, study circles (*usrah*), student organisations, and other social organisations. Participating in this extensive network ensured that they internalised PAS' ideology and agenda, even absent a strong Islamic-studies background. Hence, ulama are not concerned about passing the baton to the professionals and non-ulama: the new generation's ideological commitment is not in doubt. Referring to these leaders, one PAS activist in Terengganu quipped that 'they are well-indoctrinated professionals' (*profesional yang telah ditarbiyahkan*).[44] This tactical turn in leader selection holds the ideological line but offers further evidence for PAS' nuanced adaptation to context, which complicates a straightforward inclusion–moderation frame.

Conclusion

Inclusion–moderation hypotheses, whether focused on formal political processes (Schwedler, 2011) or the emergence of more varied political openings (Abdullah, 2018), suggest that radical Islamist groups tend to strategically adapt their behaviours and ideologies. Being part of mainstream politics accords heretofore marginalised groups legitimacy and access to resources, encouraging them to deradicalise their image and demands when engaging with other groups and appealing to the wider public. We conclude by asking whether the opportunity to expand beyond its heartland has had such a moderating effect on PAS.

The ascendancy of ulama leadership in the 1980s put PAS on a hard-line path as it pushed for an 'authentic' version of Islam, to differentiate itself from UMNO. Being a predominantly provincial opposition party enabled PAS to be relatively radical, as long as it did not seek to expand beyond its Malay-majority, north-eastern stronghold. The *Reformasi* movement in the late 1990s, however, presented PAS with an opportunity to branch out via collaboration with secular and multi-ethnic opposition parties such as the DAP and PKR. Until 2015's rupture, PAS moderated its ideological stance at the national level, but held the Islamist

line in Kelantan. Two versions of the party coexisted in the public imaginary: a nationally softer 'PAS for all' that vied for non-Muslims' support and an unreconstructed, ideologically rigid party that was firmly entrenched in Kelantan. Since that time, PAS' gains outside its heartland have revealed the contours of that differentiation.

The tension between these two versions was palpable as PAS grappled with being in multi-ethnic coalition at the national level. The late Nik Aziz, in particular, who favoured working across ideological and ethno-religious lines, offered essential ballast. Examining radical groups in Egypt, Omar Ashour stresses the importance of such charismatic leaders: 'only a leader/leadership that is perceived by the majority of the followers as credible, pious, theologically knowledgeable, and, preferably, with a history of "struggle" could cast legitimacy on the de-radicalization process' (cited in Schwedler, 2011, 360). Nik Aziz's embodiment of these criteria gave him the authority to guide PAS toward moderation until his death in 2015. Had he remained to steer PAS through more recent times, perhaps its strategic adaptation might have penetrated more deeply and made the party more competitive in ethnically mixed constituencies.

Instead, PAS' ascendance to power nationally in 2020 as part of the overtly ethno-religious PN sparked concern (or hopes) that the party would finally enact its radical agenda. To quote Schwedler (2011, 371, emphasis in original),

> the puzzle of how to know definitively whether Islamists really mean what they say *requires* the possibility that one's behaviour can go against one's 'true' ideological commitments. It thus also requires autonomous and rational actors who are capable of acting in ways that mask what they really believe.

PAS did *not* ultimately push for *hudud* law or other politically divisive measures during the right-wing, Malay-Islamic-oriented PN's 33 months in office. We contend that this reticence suggests not that PAS' need to appeal to segments of society who do not share its exclusivism had a genuinely moderating effect on the party, but rather that it lacked the political capacity to press its case nationally without risking its newfound access to power. PAS *did* act strategically when given a shot at national power, but it sustained its commitments. Indeed, its parting with UMNO in 2022 confirms that there are lines that the party was unwilling to cross.

It is at the state level, as PAS' fortunes rise, that we can better probe the extent to which the party can stay true to its ideological bearing. In a nutshell: PAS can shift its mien and priorities, to emphasise, for instance, 'justice', development, or ethnonationalism. Yet Islamism still defines the party: its increasingly coherent ideological apparatus such as the Dewan Halaqat, regular *usrah* sessions, and schools enable it to make adjustments at the margins without compromising that core. PAS has learned a valuable lesson from the ideological competition within the party pre-2015, which stoked disunity among the rank and file, many of whom felt betrayed by its political compromises and failure to preserve its core beliefs. The post-2015 PAS has maintained the solidity of its ideological core, even as it projects an image of a party with a modern outlook and conservative values. It is extremely difficult to reconcile these two ideals, however, as shown by the risk of *losing* federal power in a heterogeneous polity under PN, and its developmental dilemmas in Terengganu (Tayeb, 2024). PAS will continue to grapple with this conundrum, and the

challenge of 'moderating' in different guises, as it becomes an increasingly salient player on the national stage.

Notes

1. The resistance culminated in the failed To' Janggut rebellion in 1915, suppressed by the sultan's and British forces (Nik Mahmood, 1974, 67–73).
2. Just four years earlier, in the first federal election, PAS had only won one parliamentary seat and no state governments. In 1959, it won 9 of 10 parliamentary seats in Kelantan, 4 of 6 in Terengganu, and 28 of 30 seats in Kelantan's state legislature (Farish, 2014, 47–65).
3. The Malay text: 'Kita menentang dia [BN-UMNO] kerana dia mengekalkan perlembagaan penjajah, mengekalkan peraturan kafir, mengekalkan peraturan jahiliah'. See @apizglaxo88: https://x.com/apizglaxo88/status/1112520565569404929.
4. In 1999, he proposed even accepting a non-Muslim prime minister (Utusan Online, 1999). Three years later he clarified that only a *Muslim* non-Malay could assume the role (MStar, 2012).
5. PAS' coalition partners did not support the initiative, but even DAP's opposition was low-key, lest they appear anti-Islam (Rashaad, 2017; Ting, 2016).
6. See https://muafakatnasional.org.my/.
7. Interview, Azariza Alawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru; Case and Liew (2006, 399–400).
8. In Kelantan, such vote-splitting is known as *undi kangkang* ('leg-straddling votes'), evoking a voter with one leg in the PAS camp and the other in UMNO's. Interview, Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, 10 April 2019, Kota Bharu.
9. Interviews, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, Azariza Alawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
10. Interview, Asmak Husin, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
11. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
12. E.g., interview, Nik Abduh Nik Aziz, 27 April 2013, Pasir Mas.
13. For example, interview, state legislator and exco member Mumtaz Md. Nawi and Senator Asmak Husin, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
14. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi and colleagues, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
15. Only the small Parti Sosialis Malaysia rivals PAS in this regard, but it has never yet had an opportunity to put its ideas to the test by governing.
16. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
17. Interview, Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, 7 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
18. Interview, Johari Mat, 9 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
19. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi and colleagues, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
20. Interviews, Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi, 25 April 2013, Kuala Terengganu; Hadi Awang, 26 April 2013, Kuala Terengganu; Nik Abduh Nik Aziz, 27 April 2013, Pasir Mas.
21. Interview, Azariza Alawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
22. Interview, Azariza Alawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
23. Interview, Ropein Hasan, 8 April 2019, Kota Bahru.
24. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru. Critics especially fault rampant logging, which the long-impecunious PAS government has allowed, for the flooding.
25. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
26. Interviews, Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, 7 January 2020, and Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
27. Interview, Johari Mat, 9 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
28. E.g., interviews, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah and Azariza Alawi, both 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
29. Interview, Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, 7 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
30. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
31. Interview, Asma' Abdullah, 7 December 2023, Marang.
32. Interview, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.

33. In these states, until the first general elections in 1959, comparatively powerful sultans not only helmed their own bureaucracies – unlike in the Federated Malay States, which shared a common British-organised civil service – but also appointed the state *menteri besar* (chief minister). The sultan still retains greater authority in Kelantan than elsewhere, including to appoint ex-officio members of the state exco (Interview, Liew Chin Tong, 10 January 2020, Kuala Lumpur).
34. For instance, interview, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
35. Interview, Ahmad Fathi Yusoff, 7 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
36. Interview, Johari Mat, 9 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
37. Interview, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
38. Interview, Nik Baharum Nik Abdullah, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
39. E.g., interview, Johari Mat, 9 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
40. Interview, Mumtaz Md. Nawi, 8 January 2020, Kota Bahru.
41. Fracturing that image were near-immediate post-election corruption charges against several Bersatu leaders (New Straits Times, 2023).
42. These classifications are not all clear-cut. Many exco members worked for or ran state-owned companies before their election: we categorise them under 'business'. 'Technocrats' are those with previous state or federal government work experience. 'Professionals' have backgrounds in technical fields such as engineering, medicine/dentistry, or accountancy. 'Ulama' are Islamic-educated former teachers, lecturers, and/or owners of informal *madrasah* and *tahfiz* (Quranic memorisation) schools (Tayeb, 2023).
43. One local Chinese businessman and Malay-culture preservationist relates the difficulties of attracting investment to Terengganu after PAS took over in 2018. He recently lined up investors to spend RM12 million developing a beach resort on Pulau Kapas, a 30-minute boat ride from the Terengganu coast. State agencies overseeing tourism and local economy had already approved the plan when a PAS state exco member declared that tourist resorts in Terengganu must be '*syariah*-compliant', meaning, for instance, that visitors must comply with Islamic dress codes. The investors, rattled, ultimately pulled out of the project. Interview, Alex Lee, 7 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.
44. Interview, Abang Jeff (pseudonym), 8 December 2023, Kuala Terengganu.

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