

# Intellectual Discourse

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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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Volume 31

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ، اِ، اُ	a		آ، عَ، يَ	an
وُ	u		وُ	un
يَ	i		يَ	in
آ، اَ، اِ، عَ، يَ	ā		وُ	aw
وُ	ū		يَ	ay
يَ	ī		وُ	uww, ū (in final position)
			يَ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>



## Shifting Tides: Malaysia's 2023 State Assembly Elections

**Abdul Rashid Moten\***

**Abstract:** Six states in Malaysia concluded their elections on August 12, 2023, fiercely contested by major party coalitions. Major changes have taken place in seat composition for the respective state assemblies. How did the respective coalitions campaign and fare at the six state elections? The coalitions issued manifestos as part of the campaign but the content of the manifestos had not been adequately discussed during the campaign, and hence did not have much bearing on the voting public. Based on the documentary analysis backed by informal interviews with voters, this study analyses the state assembly elections that showed a status quo in all six states. Anwar Ibrahim-led progressive, multi-ethnic alliance, Pakatan Harapan and Barisan Nasional (PH-BN), had been re-elected in three of the states it had held prior to the election. Perikatan Nasional (PN), the opposition bloc led by former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and backed by a conservative Islamist party, also held the three states under its control but it managed to wrest several seats in the states held by PH-BN. PN took 60 percent of the 245 state assembly seats contested, relying on the contention that Anwar and his multi-ethnic coalition would not protect Malays and Islam. These elections have no direct impact on the political stability of the country. The unity government has four years to unite an increasingly polarised country as it appeared during the election, and needs to improve its social and economic performance.

**Keywords:** Malaysia, Pakatan Harapan, Barisan Nasional, Perikatan Nasional, State elections.

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\* Guest writer, Centre for Islamisation (CENTRIS), International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and former Professor, Department of Political Science, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, IIUM. Email: rashidm@iium.edu.my.

**Abstrak:** Enam buah negeri di Malaysia telah mengadakan pilihanraya Dewan Undangan Negeri masing-masing pada 12 Ogos 2023 yang menyaksikan pertandingan sengit antara gabungan-gabungan parti yang besar. Perubahan besar dapat disaksikan dari segi komposisi kerusi di negeri-negeri ini. Bagaimanakah gabungan-gabungan ini berkempen dan apakah keputusannya di enam negeri ini? Gabungan-gabungan ini melancarkan manifesto masing-masing, namun isi kandungannya tidak dibahaskan secara menyeluruh kepada para pengundi. Berdasarkan analisis dokumen dan temu bual tidak formal dengan para pengundi, kajian ini menyelidik pilihanraya negeri ini yang menunjukkan status quo di kesemua enam negeri. Gabungan Pakatan Harapan dan Barisan Nasional (PH-BN) yang dipimpin Anwar Ibrahim telah diundi semula untuk memimpin di tiga negeri yang dikuasainya sebelum ini. Perikatan Nasional (PN), blok pembangkang yang diketuai bekas Perdana Menteri Muhyiddin Yassin juga menang di tiga negeri yang dikuasai mereka sebelum ini di samping berjaya memenangi beberapa kerusi yang sebelum ini dimenangi PH-BN, termasuk negeri-negeri yang dipimpin PH-BN. PN memenangi 60 peratus dari 245 kerusi yang dipertandingkan, hasil kempen bahawa gabungan multietnik pimpinan Anwar tidak melindungi nasib orang Melayu dan Islam. Pilihanraya ini tidak memberi dampak langsung terhadap kestabilan politik negara amnya. Kerajaan perpaduan mempunyai empat tahun lagi untuk menyatukan sebuah negara yang semakin terpolarisasi seperti yang dapat disaksikan semasa pilihanraya ini, di samping memperbaiki prestasi sosial dan ekonomi.

**Kata kunci:** Malaysia, Pakatan Harapan, Barisan Nasional, Perikatan Nasional, Pilihanraya negeri.

## Introduction

Elections make a major contribution to democratic governance. State elections allow citizens to select their representatives, hold them accountable for their performance in office, and influence policies and overall development. Elections to the House of Representatives and the Legislative Assemblies of the States in Malaysia are conducted by an independent Election Commission using the “first-past-the-post” system in which the candidate securing the highest number of votes wins the seat contested. Article 113 (1) and 114 (1) of the Federal Constitution (2023) states that:

113. (1) There shall be an Election Commission, to be constituted in accordance with Article 114, which, subject



to the provisions of federal law, shall conduct elections to the House of Representatives and the Legislative Assemblies of the States and prepare and revise electoral rolls for such elections.

114. (1) The Election Commission shall be appointed by the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* after consultation with the Conference of Rulers and shall consist of a chairman, a deputy chairman, and five other members.

The Election Commission of Malaysia was established on 4 September 1957 according to Article 114 of the Federal Constitution. During its establishment, the Election Commission comprised only one Chairman and two (2) members. In 2002, the Federal Constitution was amended and the membership of the Election Commission was increased to seven including a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, and five members. The Election Commission aims to preserve, supervise, and maintain the process of democracy in this country through free and fair elections (Election Commission of Malaysia, 2023).

Elections are about selection, and candidates communicate with voters to provide information. Voters rely on two types of information before casting their votes: the candidates' performance in office and their campaign statements. The model of electoral competition by Downs and the probabilistic voting model introduced by Lindbeck and Weibull emphasise campaign premises (Downs, 1957; Lindbeck & Weibull, 1957). They argue that voters cast their votes on the basis of campaign promises. Voters generally use campaign promises in the form of policy platforms and vote for candidates whose policies they find most appealing (Ashworth & Mesquita, 2008). Campaign promises are found in a "manifesto," a publication containing a set of policies that the party stands for in an election. Candidates then contest elections rallying behind a manifesto. It is generally recognised that only a few voters read party manifestos, nevertheless manifestos "do constitute the major indirect influence on what parties are seen standing for" (Budge 1987, 18). This, according to Ian Budge (1987, 18), "is because they form the basis of comment in the mass media and provide the cues for questions raised with party candidates at all levels, as well as staple issues for their campaigns." Thus, manifestos aim, in different degrees, at direct and indirect effects on the voters. Laver and Garry (2000, 620) pointed out that manifestos are "strategic documents written by

politically sophisticated party elites with many different objectives in mind.”

This study analyses six state assembly elections, considered a “referendum” on the newly formed “unity government” at the federal level under the premiership of Anwar Ibrahim, held in Malaysia in August 2023, the electoral process, key political parties, and major issues. The study is based on available documents, participant observation, and informal interviews conducted with 37 randomly selected individuals who voted in four polling centres in Kuala Lumpur and Kelantan on 12 and 14 August 2023.

The Federation of Malaysia consists of three federal territories, and 11 states in Peninsular Malaysia (i.e., the former Federation of Malaya, which gained independence from the British in 1957), the states of Sabah (formerly British North Borneo), and Sarawak on the island of Borneo, which joined the Federation of Malaya to form the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. Besides being federal, the form of government is constitutional, monarchical, and parliamentary at both the state and federal levels. The federal parliamentary system has an elected lower house (*Dewan Rakyat*) based on single-member first-past-the-post constituencies and an appointed upper house (*Dewan Negara*). At the state level, legislative assemblies led by a Chief Minister or Menteri Besar are normally elected concurrently with the federal parliament, except in East Malaysia because of their later entry into the federation. State elections allow citizens to elect ADUNs (*Ahli Dewan Undangan Negeri*, or State Assembly Members) who formulate policies affecting the lives of their constituents.

Malaysia has a population of 32.5 million of whom about 65 percent are classified as Bumiputera (lit. Sons of the Soil), 23 percent ethnic Chinese, 7 percent ethnic Indians, and the rest are classified as Others (Ministry of Economy, 2022). The total number of eligible voters for the 15th General Election was recorded at 21.1 million (Anis & Joseph, 2022). *Pakatan Harapan* (the Alliance of Hope, PH) led by Anwar Ibrahim won the most seats but fell short of a majority. The *Perikatan Nasional* (The National Alliance, PN) alliance led by former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin received the second-largest number of seats. The election did not yield a clear mandate and Malaysia, for

the first time in its history, experienced a hung parliament (Moten, 2023). Subsequently, Anwar Ibrahim succeeded in getting the support of several parties to form the government. He got a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by coalitions and parties pledging their support to the “Unity Government” under his premiership. The agreement was signed by PH, BN (*Barisan Nasional*), GPS (*Gabungan Parti Sarawak*), GRS (*Gabungan Rakyat Sabah*), and Warisan (*Parti Warisan*). The MoU required all the signatories to support Anwar Ibrahim in all matters including those that could have a bearing on the legitimacy of the unity government. Members of Parliament (MPs) who do not comply with the MoU would be considered as having resigned from their party, triggering the anti-hopping law which came into effect on 5 October 2022, and enshrined in the Constitutional (Amendment) (No. 3) Act 2022. The agreement, according to Anwar Ibrahim, was a landmark in the country’s political history that will assure political stability (Mazwin & Ibrahim, 2022).

After several counting of the party positions in the parliament, the *Yang di Pertuan Agong*, Malaysia’s constitutional monarch, appointed Anwar Ibrahim as the Prime Minister leading the unity government composed of the PH, the BN, and other smaller parties. The King wanted to end the political impasse caused by the hung Parliament and create stability following a period of political unrest. Noticeably, Malaysia had three prime ministers in the past four years before the November polls as members of parliament switched sides for political gain. Since 2018, Malaysia has had five prime ministers, six elections at the state and federal levels, different coalition governments, and greater political uncertainty.

### State Elections

Traditionally, state governments, with the exception of Sabah and Sarawak, hold their elections concurrently with federal polls. The polling machinery is used once and voters indicate their choices for Parliament and their respective state assembly. During the 15<sup>th</sup> General Elections (GE15), only three states, Perlis, Perak, and Pahang held their state elections concurrently. Due to the ongoing political crisis, the States of Melaka, Johor, Sabah, and Sarawak held their state elections before the 15<sup>th</sup> General Elections. The remaining six states, Kelantan, Kedah,

Terengganu, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Penang decided not to dissolve their legislative assemblies as a form of protest against the federal government's decision to hold GE15 despite strong objections due to concerns over the annual monsoon floods.

Consequently, the elections to the six states were held in August 2023 with increased attention paid to the local issues and quality of state governments. Prior to the elections, three of these states, Penang, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan, were under the governance of Pakatan Harapan, PH. These are urbanised, ethnically diverse states on the peninsular west coast. The remaining three, Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu, were controlled by PAS (*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, the Malaysian Islamic Party), the dominant member of the *Perikatan Nasional* (PN). These states in the north, are more rural and ethnically homogenous.

Elections in six states were considered by many as a contest of national significance. *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) viewed the polls as an opportunity to strengthen its grip on the three states, Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan, as well as to potentially capture Selangor. "The upcoming state elections in Malaysia represent a referendum on the first eight months of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's 'Unity Government'" (Jamaluddin, 2023). However, the results of these state elections, according to Anwar Ibrahim, are not likely to affect the stability of the federal government (Leong, 2023).

As announced by the Election Commission, elections in the six states in Peninsular Malaysia were held on 12 August 2023. Nominations were held on 29 July 2023, while early voting took place on 8 August 2023 (Povera, 2023). A total of 9.7 million individuals were eligible to vote in the state polls. The elections were held to fill 36 state legislative assembly seats in Kedah; 45 in Kelantan; 32 in Terengganu; 40 in Penang; 56 in Selangor, and 36 in Negeri Sembilan. Kelantan was the first state to dissolve its state assembly on 22 June 2023, followed by Selangor on 23 June 2023. Penang, Kedah, and Terengganu state legislative assemblies were dissolved on 28 June 2023, while Negeri Sembilan was the last to dissolve its state assembly on 1 July 2023. Altogether 245 state assembly seats were contested in the 12 August 2023 polls.

## The Contesting Parties

The state election was participated by several coalitions of political parties including PH, BN, PN, MUDA (The Malaysian United Democratic Alliance), PSM (*Parti Sosialis Malaysia* or the Socialist Party of Malaysia), PRM (*Parti Rakyat Malaysia*, or Malaysian People's Party), and independents.

*Pakatan Harapan* (PH), led by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, has been the ruling coalition since the Malaysian general election held in November 2022. It is the largest coalition in the Dewan Rakyat with 82 seats, 30 seats short of a majority in the lower house, and hence formed a coalition government, called “unity government,” with several other parties and coalitions. In the state election, PH included *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (The People's Justice Party, PKR), founded by Anwar Ibrahim, Democratic Action Party (DAP), a centre-left social democratic political party, and the *Parti Amanah Negara* (National Trust Party, AMANAH) advocating a reformist strand of political Islam. PH is believed to enjoy broad-based support from diverse ethnic groups predominantly from the non-Malay community. To retain the support of the non-Malay community, PH relies on multi-ethnic political narrative, is committed to social justice, and emphasises good governance. In the aftermath of the 2022 general election, Anwar formed the coalition composed of PH, UMNO-dominated *Barisan Nasional* coalition, and three other parties from East Malaysia. The grand coalition assumed the name “unity government.”

The second largest coalition that took part in the election was the *Barisan Nasional* (the National Front, BN), a coalition of centre-right and right-wing political parties led by Ahmad Zahid Hamidi. Its largest component parties are the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), a Malay nationalist party that aims to prioritise the interests of the ethnic-Malay majority, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), representing the Malaysian Chinese ethnicity; Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), representing the Indian community in Malaysia. Only UMNO took part in the election. The other two component parties, MCA and MIC, decided not to contest the upcoming polls admittedly to focus on building a stronger party for the 16th general election. These two parties performed poorly in the 15<sup>th</sup> national election held in November 2022. MCA won two of the 44 seats it contested, while the MIC won

one out of 10 seats. The BN is part of the unity government. PH and BN were in an alliance to contest seats in the six-state election.

The third major competitor in the election was the *Perikatan Nasional*, PN, a coalition composed of the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (*Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia*, Bersatu), formed as a strong Malay-based opposition party to *Barisan Nasional*, the pro-Islamic and pro-Malay Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (*Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, PAS), a liberal political party, Malaysian People's Movement Party (*Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia*, Gerakan), and Sabah Progressive Party (*Parti Maju Sabah*, SAPP). The PN coalition, led by the former prime minister, Muhyiddin Yassin, was the second largest political coalition in the federal parliament with 74 seats after PH with 82 seats. The PN positioned itself as a defender of race and religion. In an informal discussion, the leader of the PN, Muhyiddin Yasin, told the author that the PN would be the choice for the Malays as it fights to protect their interests and Islam. However, he said that "we will not neglect the interests of the non-Malay citizens of Malaysia."

The youth-centric MUDA (The Malaysian United Democratic Alliance, MUDA), with one elected member of the parliament, "reluctantly decided to run solo" (Dermawan, 2023). MUDA volunteered to be the third component of the unity government. The party did not receive a positive response from PH and hence, according to MUDA President, Pakatan Harapan (PH) ignored its offer to cooperate in the upcoming state elections. "However, not only were we left hanging, but we were also ridiculed when PH chief secretary Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail stated that he did not have time to read the letters" (Alias, 2023). MUDA's president, Syed Saddiq, was critical of the leaders of the unity government for making little progress on campaign promises such as limiting the term of the office of the prime minister, anti-corruption, and reform of government-linked companies.

PSM (*Parti Sosialis Malaysia* or the Socialist Party of Malaysia) also contested the state assembly seats. The party embraces a socialist ideology aiming at ensuring a fair distribution of wealth in a democratic and equal society, free of exploitation. PSM and MUDA entered into an electoral understanding and focused on the Bottom-40 and Middle-40 socioeconomic demography during the election (Vethasalam, 2023).

Another party that took part in the state elections is PRM (*Parti Rakyat Malaysia*, Malaysian People's Party) which promotes the values of socio-economic development, democracy, and basic human rights. The party has been contesting elections without winning any federal or state legislative seats.

### Candidates

The nomination process began at 9 a.m., July 29, 2023, and officially closed an hour later at 10 a.m., with 173 candidate nomination centres witnessing a submission of 573 nomination papers. For all practical purposes, the election was a clash between the Unity Government pact comprising PH and BN and the opposition alliance, PN. There were 9,773,571 eligible voters made up of:

- 9,674,456 normal voters,
- 49,660 armed forces members and their spouses,
- 47,728 police force members and their spouses, and
- 1,727 absentee voters based overseas.

The state of Selangor showed the highest number of young voters between the ages of 18 and 20, totaling 274,194 people. This was followed by Kedah with 104,284 voters, Kelantan 96,513 voters; Penang 67,633 voters; Terengganu 64,264 voters, and Negeri Sembilan 55,017 voters. Of the 9,773,571 voters, those aged between 21-29 years old made up the biggest group at 2,169,120 voters or 22.2% followed by those aged between 30-39 years old making up 2,163,982 voters or 22.14%. The youngest group aged 18-20 constituted only 661,905 or 6.7 percent. There were 146,883 or 1.5% voters aged between 80-89, and a total of 28,991 voters aged above 90 years constituting 0.3 % (Election Commission of Malaysia, 2023a).

There was a total of 572 candidates vying for the 245 seats. *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) nominated 168 candidates followed by *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) with 138 candidates, *Barisan Nasional* (BN) 108; *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) 78; Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) 19; PRM (People's Party of Malaysia) 14; *Parti Sosialis Malaysia* (PSM) four, and independent candidates 41. It must be noted that while PAS is a member of PN, for the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, PN decided to contest under PAS's logo because of its familiarity with the voters there. One nomination paper belonging to



an independent candidate was rejected. Of the 245 seats, 180 or 73% are straight fights between the PH-BN pact and PN. The remaining 65 seats saw multi-cornered fights: 51 saw 3-cornered fights; and 13 seats saw a four-way contests (Election Commission of Malaysia, 2023a), and one (1) five-cornered fight. Among the candidates contesting, 501 candidates were male, and 71 candidates were female. The oldest candidate was an 80-year-old who contested in Pantai Jerejak, Penang, while the youngest was a 23-year-old contesting Bukit Antarabangsa, Selangor (Kasinathan, 2023). It was estimated that the six state elections would cost RM420 million (US \$122 million).

### Issues Raised

The 14 days of campaigning for Malaysia's six state polls kicked off on Saturday, 29 July 2023, and ended at 11:59 pm on Friday, 11 August 2023. The campaign period was considered, by 37 voters interviewed, sufficient to assess and elect qualified candidates as representatives of the people. The contesting parties were prepared with banners, billboards, and other materials put up in the very first days of the campaign. Parties organised public gatherings (*ceramah*) but these nightly political events did not attract much traction from the voters. *Ceramahs* organised by the PH and PN, the two major coalitions, were poorly attended. This was in contrast to the *ceramahs* held during the 15th general election (GE15) in November 2022, which were usually attended by many voters to get a closer view of the candidates or leaders on stage. *Ceramahs* organised by MUDA, promoting a "new politics" devoid of racial and religious fear, suffered the same fate.

This may have led the parties and candidates to focus more on posting on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and circulating videos in WhatsApp groups. TikTok was a particularly influential medium, especially among young voters. Social media, in general, played a positive role during the campaigning period. Noticeably, according to Malaysia's Election Commission, 44.16 percent of the 9.773,571 million voters, registered for six state elections were between the ages of 21 to 39, placing this demographic perfectly within the characterization of digital natives. They received their information through social media which shaped their views of prospective members of state assemblies. Politicians used Facebook, YouTube, and other devices to arouse the emotions and prejudices of the electorate.



As reported in *The Malay Mail*, the Islamist Party, PAS, under Perikatan Nasional, PN, has taken the lead in the use of the TikTok platform to capture the attention of young voters and fence-sitters. *Pakatan Harapan* (PH) and *Barisan Nasional* (BN), lagged behind PAS in terms of the use of this platform (Kasinathan, 2023a). The PAS youth wing account is well organised with followers amounting to 146.8 thousand. PAS, UMNO, PKR, and others in the coalition, through their Youth wing, have their own TikTok accounts. The Malaysian United Democratic Alliance, MUDA has also been actively posting TikTok contents by using the platform as a medium to broadcast their mission and vision to reach a wider audience. MUDA has a large base of followers who are from the age of 18 to 29, with 15.8 thousand followers on TikTok. PN, PH-BN, and MUDA have also been using other platforms, including Meta's Facebook and Google's YouTube. MUDA's president Syed Saddiq was very media-savvy with about 1.9 million followers on Instagram alone. The PH was more comfortable on Twitter and was backed up by the government media. In a Facebook video on August 11, 2023, Anwar Ibrahim urged Malaysians to vote wisely and choose PH-BN candidates for a stable future, a strong economy, and to save the country from racial and religious bigotry.

A rough content analysis of the messages on the platform shows that the PH and BN coalitions were campaigning along familiar narratives of the need for a clean and honest government. PH-BN leaders raised issues related to corruption, accusing the PN of misusing some RM93 billion in economic stimulus funds during the COVID-19 pandemic. Muhyiddin Yasin faced graft investigations since losing to Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in November 2022. Anwar Ibrahim promised as well to bring in more businesses to uplift the lives of Malaysians. The PN and its coalition partner, PAS, also promised a clean non-corrupt government emphasising that they would do their best to uplift the morality of Malaysians.

The health of Malaysia's economy was the major focus during the campaign period. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was heard saying that he has tried to tackle unemployment, address inflation, and move foreign investments since assuming office in November 2022. He informed the public that the ministry has undertaken programmes to develop entrepreneurs in agriculture, food, and services industries to upgrade

its economy. The government plans to position the energy sector as a catalyst for social and economic development.

PH-BN's campaign was poor and disorganised. The messaging was defensive and lacked traction on TikTok. They relied extensively on their leader rather than the substance of their leadership record. Anwar Ibrahim has gone to all six states praising his administration's economic success including attracting billions of dollars in foreign direct investment. He used the holidays to celebrate the feast of sacrifice (*Eid al-Adha*) to move around six states months before the state elections. Unlike the usual practice of hosting one grand Eid "open house" at the prime minister's official residence, Anwar Ibrahim took the party to the masses, with events spread across six states in the Malaysian peninsula over three weekends. These events were fully covered by all main broadcasting stations, viz. RTM 1, RTM 2, TV3, NTV7, 8TV and TV9. The unity government made full use of the Radio and Television of Malaysia (RTM), the broadcast arm of the Ministry of Information, to publicise its activities. In his capacity as the PH chairman, Anwar Ibrahim ended his campaigning by delivering a speech at the Madani Unity Tour Grand Finale programme.

The opposition PN leaders accused the government of its failure to tackle the cost of living and price hikes hurting the public. The PN focussed on corruption and integrity of the unity government and strongly criticised Anwar for forming an alliance with his coalition's former rival, the graft-tainted UMNO, in order to gain a majority in parliament. They accused Anwar Ibrahim of cooperating with corrupt politicians and appointing them as ministers in his Cabinet. In particular, the PN components criticised Anwar for choosing UMNO president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who faced several corruption charges in the courts, as the deputy prime minister. According to them, Anwar—to become the Prime Minister—accepted kleptocrats who expropriated the wealth of the people (Alhadjri, 2023). They tried vigorously and reached out to voters through TikTok and other social networks. Anwar's deputy, Zahid Hamidi, is on trial for corruption and money laundering making his position as the deputy prime minister all the more controversial. It is to be noted that Zahid Hamidi was discharged—not amounting to an acquittal (DNAA)—for his 47 graft charges by the high court of Malaysia a few weeks before the state elections (Ibrahim and Lee, 2023).

Both the coalitions, PH-BN and PN issued manifestos as part of the campaign for state elections. The two coalitions issued specific manifesto each for the six states. MUDA took the lead and announced its election manifesto on July 20, 2023, titled “New Politics Manifesto”, with four main pillars: to be pro-rakyat, to be a voice for the youth, to digitalise the economy and government services, and to preserve the environment (Tong 2023; Zahiid 2023). The Kelantan PN launched its state election manifesto termed “*Kelantan Maju Rakyat Sejahtera*” listing 18 plans and 96 programmes. It pledges, among others, to resolve water issues as well as to ensure socio-economic and agricultural productivity development (Yunus and Mahadhir 2023). In contrast, PH-BN issued their manifesto “Kelantan Madani Unity Manifesto” containing 34 offers and promising to redouble efforts to provide a clean water supply and waive outstanding water bills.

In Penang, the PH-BN’s “Penang Unity Manifesto 2023” comprised 16 main themes, 15 highlights, and 50 manifestoes. The 16 main themes include concern for the people’s welfare; advocating socioeconomic well-being; boosting high-skilled employment; rural development and housing for all. The PN countered by its “Umum Manifesto” containing 8 thrusts and 33 promises including a review of the Penang Transport Master Plan, an introduction of the Autonomous Rail Rapid Transit (ART), RM1,000 annually for e-hailing and taxi drivers, and free medical check-ups for all.

The two coalitions also prepared manifestos for the remaining four states (as shown in Table 1) with the aim of retaining their holds on the states under their governance, and to capture the states held by their opponents. The manifestos contained long-term development plans and immediate assistance to alleviate the suffering of the people. The manifestos offered monthly or annual assistance, increases in allowances paid by state agencies, and subsidies, or loans. They all promised cash handouts for first-time mothers, first-time married couples, and first-year university or training institute students. However, the manifestos issued by PH-BN and PN in Kedah did not include any direct cash handouts (Nation, 2023).

Noticeably, the manifestos were not debated or discussed in public, and the electoral promises did not form a core part of the campaign. A leading member of UMNO criticised PH-BN for the delayed

announcement of the manifesto for Kelantan. She said: “Our offers were great but not many voters knew about them. We couldn’t get to everyone in time. I don’t understand why we couldn’t announce it earlier.” The manifesto was revealed almost a week into the campaigning period. None of the 37 voters interviewed in Kuala Lumpur and Kelantan has seen the manifestos. They voted on the basis of information available on their handphones, on the front page of newspapers, and in the *ceramahs* they attended. Five of the interviewees were lucky to have been visited by the candidates in their houses. Among the voters interviewed, 25 of them were seriously concerned about economic issues such as rising prices, slowing growth, and the weakening ringgit currency.

Table 1: *Manifesto of the two coalitions in six states*

State	Coalition	Manifesto Title	Key Pledges
Penang	PH-BN	Unity Manifesto	16 main themes, 15 highlights, 50 promises
	PN	Better Penang, <i>Jom Kalih</i> (Let’s Change)	8 main thrusts, 33 promises
Negeri Sembilan	PH-BN	Negeri Sembilan Unity Aspiration	5 Targets, 10 Thrusts, 70 initiatives
	PN	Manifesto	8 main pillars
Kelantan	PH-BN	Kelantan Madani Unity Manifesto	34 offers
	PN	Kelantan Maju Rakyat Sejahtera	18 plans and programmes
Selangor	PH-BN	Kita Selangor	5 pledges, 53 programmes
	PN	Selangor Baharu, Kita Bangkit	7 pillars, 25 approaches, 112 offers
Kedah	PH-BN	Alor Star’s Great Aspiration	3 main frameworks
	PN	Manifesto	17 Offers

Terengganu	PH-BN	Unity for Stability and Prosperity	Cash Aids, several pledges
	PN	Manifesto	10 promises, loan facilities

Source: *Malaysiakini*, July20, 2023 and August 10, 2023; *The Star*, July 15, 2023 and July 28, 2023; *New Straits Times*, August 3, 2023.

Results

Voting began on Saturday, 12 August 2023 at 8 a.m. (0000 GMT) and ended at 6 p.m. (1000 GMT) the same day. The results were released gradually until the counting ended at 12 midnight. The Election Commission hoped for an 85% voter turnout, but the overall voter turnout across the six states fell short of this target. A total of 70.1% or 6.86 million of eligible voters cast valid ballots in Saturday’s poll as against 82.32 percent voter turnout in the 14th General Election held on 9 May 2018.

State elections did attract the attention of scholars, some of whom embarked upon projections a month before the election. A pre-election survey conducted in March and April 2023 showed a greater likelihood of BN Malay voters transferring their votes to PN candidates. The authors of the survey concluded that “winds of change are blowing in Selangor.” They are cautious, however, in declaring the success of PN winning in Selangor. It “depends on how much strength they gather leading up to polling day” (Mohamad and Khairul 2023). PN did gain some seats in Selangor but not enough to form the government.

Ong Kian Ming used the results from GE15 and projected that PN will control Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu and the remaining three states will be controlled by PH-BN component parties (Ming, 2023). Similarly, according to an independent pollster, Ilham Centre, the results of the six state elections will remain status quo: PH-BN will continue to govern Selangor, Penang Negeri Sembilan, while Kedah, Kelantan and Terengganu will remain under PN. The survey results showed that “PN has the opportunity to increase seats in the Malay-majority seats in Selangor, but it will not be sufficient to form the state government,” that it will be difficult for PN to challenge PH-BN in Negeri Sembilan, and that PH-BN will be in full control in Penang with PN’s potential for

victory concentrated in the Malay majority constituencies. The survey was conducted between July 28 and August 8, 2023, involving a total of 2,304 respondents (Bunyan, 2023). Another survey was conducted by the Merdeka Center in six states involving a total of 6,976 voters from July 3 to August 11, 2023. It found the results for the state elections to be as follows: “A status quo outcome in the six states” and predicted PN “to make further inroads in Malay seats in Kedah, Kelantan, and Terengganu at Barisan Nasional’s main party Umno’s expense, and may also pick up a few seats in Negeri Sembilan” (Lim 2023).

The credibility of the projections and survey results can be seen from the results of the state elections shown in Table 2. The results of the elections may be characterised as the status quo, as predicted by pollsters, the PH-led unity government and PN retained their respective strongholds of three states each. The PH-BN alliance retained the control of Penang, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor while the PN also held the three states--Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu—under its control while expanding its support among the country’s ethnic-Malay Muslim majority.

Table 2: Seats won by PN and PH-BN before and after the election

States	PN		PH-BN		% Votes	
	Before election	After election	Before election	After election	PH-BN	PN
Penang	1	11	35	29	66.6	32.7
Selangor	5	22	45	34	60.6	37.8
Negeri Sembilan	0	5	36	31	60.8	37.7
Terengganu	22	32	10	0	32.0	67.9
Kelantan	38	43	7	2	30.5	69.2
Kedah	20	33	12	3	30.1	68.9
Total	86	146	145	99		

Source: Election Commission, <https://dashboard.spr.gov.my/> (Accessed August 14, 2023); Razak Ahmad, Diyana Pfordten, Meikeng, Yuen And Jaayne Jeevita, Six-State Election Results Overview. *The Star*; Aug 13, 2023.

The PN coalition performed better in the three states it governed before the election. In Terengganu, PN won all 32 seats in the state assembly. In Kedah, PN won 33 of 36 seats, while PH-BN won the remaining three. The coalition previously held 20 seats before the state assembly was dissolved. PN also performed well in Kelantan by winning 43 of the 45 seats, leaving two seats for the PH-BN coalition. The credit must go to the conservative PAS, which has long positioned itself as a defender of Islam and Malays. Its emphasis on Islamic principles and governance is firmly anchored in the socio-cultural essence of the Malay heartland. PAS is currently the biggest political party in the 222-member *Dewan Rakyat*, or parliament, with 43 MPs. The party has now spread its wings throughout other rural areas and into the country's urban cores. PAS won a stunning 105 of the 127 seats (83 percent) it contested. PAS is apparently the stronger party in the PN alliance, even though it is led by former premier Muhyiddin Yassin from Bersatu. The seats it won in Penang, Selangor, and even Negeri Sembilan made PAS a mainstream national party. It has broken out of regional confines, claiming the largest number of seats in parliament for a single party at the expense of some of the most established pro-Malay stalwarts. The electoral success of PAS reflects the Malay community's desire to preserve and enhance the privileges it has been accorded in the Malaysian constitution.

Table 2 shows that the PN coalition won 146 seats across the six states, a 60 percent success rate. The coalition's success in defending the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah with bigger margins in the Malay heartland shows that PN has greatly improved its credentials, particularly among Malay voters. PN also succeeded in denying the two-thirds majority of the PH-BN coalition in Selangor.

Even though PH-BN succeeded in retaining the three states it controlled before the election, the coalition has performed rather poorly in this state election. PH-BN won a total of 99 seats against 146 won by PN. Some of the seats in Selangor, for example, were won with a small majority against PN. Among the coalition partners, the DAP performed best with a win rate of about 98 percent. Of the 47 candidates the party fielded across 245 constituencies, it won all but one seat in Derga, Kedah. The party won most of its seats in the state of Penang, which is traditionally regarded as the DAP's stronghold due to its high

percentage of ethnic Chinese residents. PKR won 26 seats and lost 33 seats across the six states.

BN/UMNO performed very poorly. UMNO contested 107 seats under the banner of the PH-BN unity coalition but won only 19 seats (i.e., 17 percent of the seats it contested). It failed to win a single seat in Kedah and Terengganu, and only one seat in Kelantan. This proves UMNO's diminished role as a national political force after its previous six decades of uninterrupted rule, from 1957 until its downfall in the 2018 general election amid anger over corruption by party leaders. Selangor UMNO treasurer, Tengku Zafrul Aziz, the International Trade and Industry Minister in the unity government, conceded that UMNO was rejected by Malay voters. He urged the UMNO leadership to regain the confidence of the people instead of chasing after "short-term power." To Zafrul, "If the results of this state election aren't a final warning of its survival as a party for the Malays, I don't know what warning should be given to make us realise that we have been rejected" (Staff Writers, 2023). According to James Chin, the six state elections at the weekend were an unmitigated disaster for UMNO. He is of the opinion that "the future of UMNO and that of party chief Zahid Hamidi, now hangs in the balance" (Chin, 2023). Quite predictably, PN Chairman Muhyiddin urged the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to resign (Parzi 2023). UMNO is viewed by 24 of the 37 interviewees as corrupt and deviating from its mission of safeguarding Malay interests. They appreciated PAS's commitment to Islamic tenets and Malay privileges.

MUDA, the party of young leaders, suffered the worst defeats in all the seats it contested with its candidates losing their deposits of about RM 95,000 (US\$ 20,323) in 19 constituencies as they failed to obtain a mandatory one-eighth or 12.5 percent of the total number of votes counted for the state constituency involved. One of the MUDA candidates collected 253 votes in the Perai constituency, the lowest in the election.

Election results have received a variety of interpretations from several quarters. Some analysts interpreted the results as a "huge blow" for PM Anwar Ibrahim despite the apparent status quo. The opposition led by PN made significant gains while the coalition led by Anwar Ibrahim has lost large tracts of Malay support. Others praised the Anwar-led coalition for retaining three states under its control but



argued that “its victories have come at a great cost” affecting political stability at the federal level (Malaysiakini Team 2023). These opinions may be considered as an overinterpretation of the particularities of state elections. The overall results of these state elections have no immediate effect on the stability of the federal government. The election results do portray that the country:

... is visibly resolving itself into three main zones: the East Malaysian zone, which is as ever *sui generis*; a Malay-dominant and Malay-Islamist nationalist zone covering much of the country north of Kuala Lumpur (with the exception of Penang Island); and an ever more closely contested southern peninsular zone, the residually cosmopolitan-pluralist zone in and south of Kuala Lumpur, where the PAS and PN forces driving the “Green Wave” will be seeking to make further advances and to become politically ever more competitive (Kessler 2023).

The Prime Minister has the daunting task of uniting an increasingly polarised country, strengthening his eight months old unity government, and improving the economy.

## Conclusion

Elections in Malaysia exist at the federal and state levels. State elections are usually held alongside federal parliamentary elections. However, six of the thirteen states of Malaysia decided not to hold elections concurrently with the federal parliamentary elections held in November 2022 citing the need to prepare for floods during the year-end annual monsoon season. Consequently, about nine months after GE15, the six state elections were held and the two contending coalitions campaigned vigorously to woo the voters. They came out with manifestos for the six states. The manifestos were of not much importance in attracting voter interest. Parties resorted to *ceramahs* and to social media to appeal to the voters. PH-BN campaign was disorganised and lacked traction, where it centred too much around the leaders, i.e., Anwar Ibrahim. PN ran a better campaign making it a national narrative, and focused on economic dissatisfaction. PN also extended its outreach to voters by focusing on economic dissatisfaction, reaching out to voters through TikTok and its social networks. The overall mood and interest in this election were relatively low as evidenced by a low voter turnout.

Elections in six states of Malaysia were held on 12 August 2023, following the dissolution of their state assemblies between 22 June and 1 July 2023. Polling proceeded in an orderly fashion, and there was no election-related violence. The results showed that the two coalitions retained control of their respective states. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's PH coalition and its unity government ally, BN, officially retained Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Penang but ceded many seats to the opposition. PN not only retained but performed better in Kelantan, Kedah, and Terengganu exceeding the two-thirds majority needed to bring about constitutional changes in these states. Parties in the PH-BN coalition were all but wiped out in the three PN-held states. This result reflects the trend of the so-called green wave – the party colour of PAS – from the November 2022 election that gave the PN all-Malay minority stake in parliament.

What is striking, however, is the extent to which PN managed to grow its footprint in the states of Selangor and Penang, the country's two richest and most developed states. The poor performance of PH-BN and the emergent dominance of PN are indicative of an electorate fragmented by evolving political loyalties and ethnic and racial priorities. The PN's electoral success may be attributed to increased Malay support. PN won 146 out of 245 seats, especially in Malay majority areas. UMNO faced a serious erosion in political support, winning less than a fifth of its seats and continuing a pattern of electoral decline since 2008. Deeply fragmented and weakened, UMNO cannot deliver the Malay vote in its current condition. UMNO is no longer seen as a party that represents the Malays that has now been taken over by PN and mainly its partner, PAS.

Finally, MUDA has been pushed into the corner and they are left fighting for survival. However, its prioritisation of young people and their concerns strengthened political dialogue and increased attention to the problems of the youth.

While the unity government's parliamentary majority was not at stake in this election, the polls were viewed as an early referendum on the Anwar-led government less than nine months after the November general election in 2022, which gave Malaysia its first ever hung Parliament. After an encouraging performance in the six state elections, PN chairman Muhyiddin Yassin asked the PH-BN leaders, the Prime Minister, and his deputy, to resign from their posts in Putrajaya (Kessler

2023). Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who enjoys a two-thirds majority in Parliament, however, asked: “Everyone across all parties, despite winning or losing, to unite and uphold peace.” In a post on his official Facebook page, the Prime Minister said he would remember the support for the unity government. He assured Malaysians that his coalition government “will work hard and continue to serve the people, in line with the aspirations of the Madani Economy” (Tan and Vethasalam, 2023). The unity government has four years to bring together the various zones resulting from the just concluded state elections and to create a positive track record in governance through dedication, collaboration, and adaptability.

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(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

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*The glorious Qur'ān*. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

## **Ḥadīth**

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(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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