

ISLAMIST CONSERVATISM IN POLITICS: APPROACH, POLITICAL STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE OF THE MALAYSIAN ISLAMIC PARTY IN THE 14TH GENERAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The performance of the Malaysian Islamic Party or *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) in the 14th General Election (GE-14) was unexpected. Despite contesting independently and in a three-cornered fight against Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH), PAS managed to maintain a significant number of seats at the parliamentary level. Apart from obtaining a more comfortable position in the state of Kelantan, PAS also managed to regain the Terengganu state government with a two-thirds majority. The performance of PAS in Kedah and Pahang also had recorded a significant increase. Using a qualitative research design, this paper attempts to provide an alternative perspective on the idealism and approach applied by PAS before GE-14 as well as the implications based on its performance. The study used observation methods, document analysis and interviews for data collection. The thematic analysis was conducted on the idealism, the political strategy used, and the party's performance during the election. The two conservative idealisms of PAS are the reintroduction of hudud implementation through Bill 355 as well as the preservation of the Malay-Islam politics continuity. These two ideas have then influenced PAS's political strategy and campaign ahead of GE-14. The study argues that the restoration of strong support in the East Coast and Northern states was not just due to the conservative approach adopted by PAS. Instead, it was also due to the people's simultaneous rejection of UMNO-Najib and PH-Mahathir, thus leading PAS to obtain a stronger majority, apart from displaying its improved performance in two other states, namely Pahang and Kedah. However, at the same time, the study also established that PAS

conservatism was the main factor that caused PAS to face total rejection in the West Coast and South Coast states of the Peninsula.

Keywords: Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), conservatism, general election, party performance, political strategy

Introduction and Background

The 'Green Tsunami' predicted by PAS was realised when the party emerged with an unexpected victory in GE-14. PAS' achievements in this election surprised many political analysts in the Malaysian election. Many parties expected PAS to lose badly in this clash. A survey released by Merdeka Centre predicted that PAS would only be able to win two parliamentary seats, while Invoke Malaysia expected PAS not to win any seats. However, the opposite happened. PAS managed to record a significant number of seats in parliament with 18 seats. Meanwhile, at the state level, PAS managed to maintain the administrative power of the Kelantan state government with a more comfortable position. PAS also managed to take over the Terengganu state government with a two-thirds majority victory. Moreover, the performance of PAS in the other two states, namely Kedah and Pahang, also recorded a significant increase.

This situation raises questions about the factors that drive the success of PAS in GE-14. Therefore, the factor highlighted in this article is the PAS conservative approach. It was a major factor that contributed to the performance of PAS in GE-14. This is because, first, PAS conservatism, along with other factors, had restored the party's strong support in the East Coast and Northern states, and at the same time, it also contributed to the decline in the West Coast states of the Peninsula. Second, the factor of voter rejection of UMNO-Najib and PH-Mahathir, which occurred simultaneously, also has contributed to the strengthening of the PAS majority in some areas. This subsequently contributed to the improvement of the party's performance in two other states, namely Pahang and Kedah. Based on the acceptance and rejection of Islamic parties that occurred simultaneously, the Islamic party PAS was seen to have still what Pandian (2004) termed as political legitimacy, despite contesting alone in this election. This article also provides a chronological analysis of the PAS conservative approach, especially from June 2015 until 9 May 2018, the day of the GE-14. Table 1.1 shows a comparison of PAS's performance in GE-13 and GE-14 according to states.

Table 1: Comparison of PAS performance in GE-13 and GE-14 by state

Constituencies	GE-13		GE-14	
	Parliament	States	Parliament	States
Perlis	0	1	0	2
Kedah	1	9	3	15
Kelantan	9	32	9	37
Terengganu	4	14	6	22
Pulau Pinang	0	1	0	1
Perak	2	5	0	3
Pahang	1	3	0	8
Selangor	4	15	0	1
Negeri Sembilan	0	0	0	0
Melaka	0	1	0	0
Johor	0	4	0	1
Sabah	0	0	0	0
Sarawak	0	0	0	0
Total	21	85	18	90

Source: Adapted from the Election Commission of Malaysia.

This article begins with the introduction and background section with reviews of several studies conducted by previous researchers on PAS and religious conservatism. Next, the article continues with the theoretical framework of conservatism as the “lens” used to explain PAS’s political approach in GE-14. The following section is the methodology used in conducting the study. The article then presents the overall findings of the study, analysis as well as related discussions. This section is organised into three different components: the conservative idealism of PAS, the political strategy and campaigns that the Islamic party had carried out before the GE-14 as well as the performance of PAS in the GE-14. Lastly, the paper closes with a section on conclusions and recommendations for further study.

Existing Works on PAS’s Religious Conservatism and GE-14 Performance

On 6 January 2021, the United States was shocked by a terror attack on the prestigious building of The Capitol triggered by pro-Trump supporters during a vote tallying process aimed at confirming the victory of President-elect Joe Biden. Trump’s claim that the presidential election results had been manipulated by the opposition had sparked the violence involving thousands of protesters. It resulted in five deaths while hundreds were injured, including members of the security forces (Mathews & Tay, 2021). The event sparked debates among scholars on the rise of religious conservatism and identity politics, which showed a fairly

significant upward trend around the world, including in the Southeast Asian region. The closest cases to Malaysia are as in Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, which had shown an increase in the use of identity and religious politics that indirectly influences the political trajectory in their respective countries (Brilantez Jr., Lorenzo, & Wang, 2021; Gunaratna, 2021; Peterson & Schäfer, 2021).

In the context of the Islamic world, the emergence of religious conservatism can be seen through Islamic Movements or Islamic parties that use religion as political capital to win elections. For example, there is a chain of Islamic parties such as The Welfare Party (currently banned) and its current successor The Felicity Party in Turkey, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria as well as Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh. In addition to fighting for Islamic goals by using a religious rhetorical approach, the Islamic Movement also managed to gain support from segments of the rural and less educated community (Islam, Bingöl, Nyadera, & Dagba, 2021; Ghanem, 2019; Yang & Guo, 2015; Knudsen, 2003). As for Malaysia, religious conservatism is represented by PAS.

The establishment of PAS in 1951 started from UMNO's initiative through the Malayan Ulama Congress in 1950 by the party's ulama wing. This Congress was originally UMNO's strategy to win the support of religious leaders and the rural Malay communities. However, it later evolved into the establishment of a religious party of religious scholars who were no longer aligned to any political party. The Islamic party was born starting from the second and third Congresses held on 23 August 1951 and 24 November 1951, respectively (Farish A. Noor, 2016; Funston, 1976). N. J. Funston (1976), through *The Origins of Parti Islam Se Malaysia*, stated that the grassroots support for PAS came from religious conservative groups such as the state Islamic bureaucrats and rural clerics. Hence, it is not surprising that the ideology of this party from the beginning of its establishment is more oriented towards Malays and Islam. According to him, PAS shares an ideology with UMNO, namely Malay supremacy, while its purpose is also revolved around the interests of the Malay community. However, PAS is more conservative on the question of religion (Funston, 1980). Before the 1980s era, PAS was more prominent as a Malay nationalist party. Ahmad Fuad and Abbas Alias led PAS as a party of right-wing nationalism, while Burhanuddin al-Helmy led PAS into the stream of left-wing nationalism. Under Mohd. Asri and after the events of 13 May 1969, PAS returned as a senior nationalist party along with UMNO (Farish A. Noor, 2016; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2011; Liow, 2004; Funston, 1980).

Nevertheless, PAS religious conservatism can be traced back to 1983, after Yusuf Rawa took over the party leadership as the president. This was also noted by Badlihisam Mohd. Nasir and Napisah Karimah Ismail (2011), Jan Stark (2014),

Norshahril Saat (2014), Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain (2014) and Farish A. Noor (2016) through a comprehensive study on PAS. It was the first success of the Islamist opposition group and “Young Turk” religiously educated from the Middle East, which led to the leadership of Mohd. Asri Muda, who was considered to have strayed from the path of Islamic fight. Apart from the factor of Mohd. Asri’s weak leadership, PAS, especially the ulama group, was also deeply inspired by the success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution led by Ruhollah Khomeini to remove the secular government of Shah Reza Pahlavi. Both of these factors then led to a massive restructuring of the party. The reforms implemented included two important aspects, both structural and ideological. From a structural aspect, the leadership of the ulama was introduced, with the *asatizah* group given a special and strategic position in the party. The Majlis Syura Ulama (MSU), led by a Mursyidul Am, was introduced as the highest body in the party hierarchy. Mursyidul Am played the role of a spiritual leader for the party (Badlihisham Mohd. Nasir & Napisah Karimah Ismail, 2011; Stark, 2014; Norshahril Saat, 2014; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014; Farish A. Noor, 2016).

Observed from an ideological aspect, PAS turned to the fight of Islamism by introducing the agenda of the Islamic state and the implementation of Shariah law (*hudud*) as the party’s goal. The approach used by PAS at the time was described as religious radicalism. PAS has declared the party the only party fighting for *daulah Islamiyyah* or the Islamic state. Through the controversial speech *Amanat Haji Hadi* delivered at Peradong Kuala Terengganu in 1981, Abdul Hadi Awang stated that those who are not in line with PAS are considered infidels and are enemies of Islam. PAS scholars also chanted the slogan of jihad against the UMNO-BN government, which is considered secular. In fact, PAS scholars also rejected the idea of Islamization introduced by Mahathir Mohamad, which it claimed resembles the West and capitalist. The nature of this radicalism resulted in a series of arrests made by the Mahathir administration to curb religious extremism, which culminated in the 1986 Memali incident. Subsequently, the party’s ideology began to move to a more moderate stream, especially after PAS received a mass influx of professionals into the party during the 1998 Reformation era (Farish A. Noor, 2004).

PAS also launched several attempts to implement the Islamic agenda that the party was fighting for. In 2003, PAS published two documents entitled “Memorandum of Islamic State: Islamic Government in the 21st Century” and “Islamic State Document” to introduce the form of an Islamic state that it conceived (Liew, 2007; Mohd. Syakir Mohd. Roshdi, 2011). This policy proposed by PAS was later opposed by the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and caused the party to withdraw from the Barisan Alternatif (BA) pact pioneered by former PAS

President, Fadzil Noor. Regarding the implementation of hudud, Norshahril Saat (2015) recorded that there were three attempts by PAS to implement Shariah law but faced various obstacles. Hudud can only be implemented (at least in the PAS governing states) after amendments to the Syariah Courts Act in the Federal Constitution are made and approved by Parliament. The beginning of the *hudud* polemic was identified after PAS recaptured the state of Kelantan in GE-8 1990. In 1993, the Kelantan State Legislative Assembly (DUN) passed the Kelantan Syariah Criminal Code Bill (RUU) to enable *hudud* to be enforced in the state. However, the bill was rejected by the Federal government because it was considered unconstitutional. PAS' efforts continued again in 2002 in Terengganu after it was captured in GE-10 1999 but were met with failure again. In 2015, PAS brought a different narrative to this polemic when all the DUN members from UMNO and PAS parties agreed and approved amendments to the Syariah Criminal Code Enactment II (1993) to enable *hudud* to be implemented in Kelantan (Norshahril Saat, 2015; Syahidulamri, 2016). On 26 May 2016, for the first time in history, the BN government allowed the proposal for the Private Bill Act 355 to be tabled in parliament by Abdul Hadi Awang (Chin, 2016).

UMNO's action to give way to PAS in the tabling of the *hudud* bill was a turning point for relations between the two parties except during 1973 and 1977, when PAS joined the BN coalition government, as these two largest Malay parties have been political enemies for a long time (Muhamad Helmy Sabtu, Amalin Sabiha Ismail, & Khairul Azman Mohamad Suhaimy, 2021; Mohammad Tawfik Yaakub, 2020). The competition for power between the two Malay-Muslim parties can be seen through the terms mentioned by Liow (2004) as the "Islamization race" beginning in the Mahathir era. The Islamization policy implemented by UMNO at that time was a counter-reaction to the Islamic conservatism introduced by PAS (Farish A. Noor, 2016; Chin, 2015; Azhar Ibrahim, 2013). Meanwhile, according to James Chin (2015, 2020, 2021), UMNO's reaction translates to strengthening the ideology of Malay Islam Supremacy in Malaysia. After the 1969 racial riots, the struggle for Malay supremacy became UMNO's priority. The New Economic Policy (NEP) and various other pro-Malay initiatives that were first introduced to upraise the economic position of the Bumiputeras had formed a political hegemony and patron democracy between the Malays and UMNO; as termed by Zaini Othman, Mohd. Mahadee Haji Ismail and Zaid Ahmad (2007). However, through the rise of the idea of Islamic Sovereignty by PAS in the 1980s, this ideology was later adapted to become Islamic Malay Sovereignty (Chin, 2015; 2020; 2021, Funston, 1980). Using the framework of modern Islamic principles in line with development, UMNO began to introduce various Islamic policies such as the establishment of various Islamic development institutions such as the

International Islamic University Malaysia, Islamic banking system, *Yayasan Dakwah* and the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (Chin, 2015; Hilley, 2008; Pandian, 2005). This Islamization race was later continued by Abdullah Badawi through Islam Hadhari, and later, Najib Razak through the Wasatiyyah Principles and the introduction of the Malaysian Syariah Index (Muhamad Helmy Sabtu et al., 2021).

As for PAS, on the other hand, conservatism Islam was later challenged by more moderate and progressive groups within the party, especially after PAS held political cooperation with PR (Muhamad Takiyuddin & Amalin Sabiha, 2016; Syahidulamri Khairuddin, 2016; Wan Saiful Wan Jan 2018). Conservative groups are those who adhere to the fight of the Islamic state and the implementation of *hudud*, while progressive groups are those who uphold the fight for democracy, social justice and good governance (Wan Ahmad Fahmi Wan Muda, 2017). Through the dominant role of progressive people active in PAS, especially from 2008 to 2015, several more moderate and multi-ethnic friendly Islamic policies such as the Islamic concept of democracy, Welfare State and "PAS for all" were introduced (Muhamad Helmy Sabtu et al., 2021; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2018; Abdullah, 2018, Farish A. Noor, 2016; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014). This group also tended to defend the *tahallufsiyasi* that was built together with PKR and DAP. The first opposition to the conservative idea occurred when Abdul Hadi and his deputy, Nasharuddin proposed the formation of a united government with UMNO shortly after GE-12. This idea, however, was opposed by progressive people within the party, including Mursyidul Am Nik Abdul Aziz himself, although he was not progressive. Post GE-13, the party's internal divisions became more pronounced when the Selangor Menteri Besar (MB) crisis occurred. PAS, through Abdul Hadi and Nik Abdul Aziz, did not agree with the actions of PKR and DAP, who wanted to change Abdul Khalid's leadership through the Kajang Move strategy. However, this strategy finally became a reality when two State Assemblymen (ADUN) from the PAS progressive group supported the nomination of Wan Azizah as the new MB (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail & Amalin Sabiha Ismail, 2016).

This crisis further highlighted the clash between the two ideological camps within the party. The failure of Abdul Hadi as the president to control the internal crisis eventually led to the division of the party becoming more significant until the culture of open-attack was carried out by both parties (Syahidulamri, 2016). The party split was also more pronounced when Persatuan Ummah Sejahtera (PASMA) was established as a platform for progressive groups that are pro to cooperation with PR. In contrast, pro-ulama groups defended the actions of Abdul Hadi's leadership to continue the *hudud* agenda and move towards a united

government with UMNO. In the 61st Muktamar election of PAS, which showed the power fight between the two camps, the progressive group was finally removed completely from the party, marking the rise and re-domination of PAS conservatism (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail & Amalin Sabiha Ismail, 2016; Syahidulamri, 2016; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018). These progressive people eventually left PAS en masse and established Parti Amanah Negara (AMANAH) as an alternative Islamic party that upheld the characteristics of moderation, openness, democracy, as well as inclusiveness for all races. AMANAH later along with PKR and DAP have formed a new collaboration in Pakatan Harapan (Muhamad Helmy Sabtu & Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, 2018; Maszlee Malik, 2017; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2017).

Wan Saiful Wan Jan (2018), however, claimed that the view of conservatism has long been ingrained in PAS, that is, since the era of the first president, Ahmad Fuad. In tracing the history of the party, any reformation ideas would be rejected by the party, and it ultimately failed to be implemented (Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018). The situation that occurred in PAS in June 2015 was at the same time a denial which assumed that the transition that took place against PAS after GE-12 was a democratisation process that the party was going through (Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014; Lukman Thaib, 2013). Perhaps, this situation was more in favour of the views of Farish A. Noor (2016) and Kikue Hamayotsu (2010), who tended to claim that the previous PAS transition was only aimed at gaining the support of the non-Muslim community as well as winning the election. PAS, from the very beginning, has been in a state of an ideological dilemma; whether to continue to fight for Islamic authority or to adapt to the new political environment (Liow, 2011).

Even so, PAS's cooperation with PKR and DAP for almost seven years still has a considerable impact on the party, especially in undermining the position of the UMNO-BN ruling regime. GE-12 saw UMNO-BN for the first time failed to defend a two-thirds majority victory in Parliament, apart from five states that were also successfully controlled by PR, namely Selangor, Penang, Perak, Kedah and Kelantan (Jamaie et al., 2014, Case, 2013; Hamayotsu, 2013; Nur Hairani Abd. Rahman, Khairiah Salwa Mokhtar, & Muhammad Asri Mohd. Ali, 2013; Saravanamuttu, 2012). Meanwhile, in GE-13, UMNO-BN continued to experience a deficit of trust when it won only 47.38% of the popular vote. On the other hand, the opposition had increased its dominance in parliament from 82 to 89 seats (Mohd. Hariszuan Jaharudin, 2014). Together with PKR and DAP, PAS not only emerged as a national party and introduced a friendly image to non-Muslims, but the Islamic parties also managed to expand their political influence to the states of

Selangor and Johor (Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018; Farish A. Noor, 2016; Mohd. Hasbie Muda, 2014).

In contrast, when PAS was not cooperating with other mainstream parties, it could only defend its position in its strongholds in the Malay heartland, namely in the North and East Coast of the Peninsula. This is evidence when PAS, before joining any political alliance with other parties, was able to gain power alone in two states, namely Kelantan (1959-1978, 1990-present) and Terengganu (1959-1964, 1999-2004, 2018-present) (Hamdan Aziz, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Farish A. Noor, 2016; Mohd. Hasbie Muda, 2014; Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2011). Traditionally, these two Malay-majority states were PAS strongholds due to the performance of Islamic parties in those states. PAS has some advantages in these states that may not be possessed in other states, as noted by previous researchers. Among them is the strength of powerful party machinery (Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar & Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2020; Wan Rohilla Ganti, 2019; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Liow, 2011, Farish A. Noor, 2004), effective campaigning and manifesto strategies (Junaidi Awang Besar, Nur Ellyanis Mohd. Basori, & Muhammad Hazim Abdul Ghani, 2020; Zaireeni Azmi, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Mohamad Shaukhi Mohd. Radzi, Shahrudin Awang Ahmad, & Nordin Sakke, 2018; Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman & Rashaad Ali, 2018; Mohd. Fuad Mat Jali, 2016; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014, Liow, 2011; Hamayotsu, 2010) as well as the Malay vote factor in favour of PAS and UMNO only (Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Farish A. Noor, 2016).

Ahead of GE-14, PAS reverted back to the party's *raison d'être*, which was the fight of the Islamic state and the implementation of hudud. The approach of PAS in facing GE-14 invited various perceptions and assumptions. Many parties thought that PAS would not be able to go far in the election. However, the GE-14 results displayed a relatively encouraging performance for the Islamic party. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (2018) thought that the conservative approach of PAS was accepted by the people based on the election results. Although the Islamic parties of PAS, UMNO and AMANAH highlighted different Islamic ideologies, all three parties received acceptance and mandates from the people.

PAS in GE-14 managed to get 18 seats at the parliamentary level and controlled two states on the East Coast, namely Kelantan and Terengganu. Azmil Tayeb (2018) and Mohamad Nawab & Rashaad Ali (2018) analysed the factors that contributed to PAS' victory in Kelantan and found that the victory in Kelantan was driven by two factors, namely the existence of oppositional politics that has long been entrenched in the state, as well as local issue factors (Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Mohamad Nawab & Rashaad Ali, 2018). Based on these two factors, it was argued that PAS had the advantage of voting in the state of Kelantan compared to its other

opponents. The results of this study also answered why PAS and not UMNO or PH received protest votes from voters on the East coast. Junaidi Awang Besar, Nur Ellyanis Mohd. Basori and Muhammad Hazim Abdul Ghani (2020) found that voters' rejection of PAS in the West Coast of the Peninsula which includes the states of Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Selangor, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya were due to voters' lack of confidence in PAS' ability to rule the country, PAS' Islamic fight were considered radical and extreme, as well as the use of religious issues as an excuse to escape.

Based on the highlights of this literature, several gaps have been found, namely gaps in theory, gaps in timeframe and gaps in perspective. Therefore, this article aims to analyse the approach, political strategy and performance of the Islamic party from the point of view of conservatism theory because there have been preliminary studies that used the theory of factionalism, political parties, old political culture, and Islamism (Syahidulamri, 2016; Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail & Amalin Sabiha Ismail, 2016; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018). Meanwhile, in terms of the gap in the timeframe, this study intends to study PAS until GE-14 on 9 May 2018 because previously conducted studies were limited to June 2016 and 2017. Finally, in terms of perspective, for the measurement of PAS performance in the election, this study intends to conduct macro analysis by making Peninsular Malaysia a regional scope, in addition to enabling the comprehensive analysis of PAS performance. This purpose is expected to fulfil the implications gap of previously conducted studies by Hamdan Aziz (2020), Junaidi Awang Besar, Nur Ellyanis Mohd. Basori, & Muhammad Hazim Abdul Ghani (2020), Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar & Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (2020), Wan Rohilla Ganti (2019), Azmil Tayeb (2018), Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman and Rashaad Ali (2018), and Mohamad Shaukhi Mohd. Radzi et al. (2018) who conducted micro-analysis by focusing on certain states only.

Theoretical Framework of Conservatism

Conservatism is an ideology that preserves something common or well-established in society, whether it is the status quo, institution or class (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2007). According to John Kekes (2004), the main goal of conservatism is to establish a good society by implementing certain political arrangements. This political order, according to conservatives, is determined according to the historical conventions of society. This means that traditions that contain values, beliefs, and good practices that society practised in the past must be maintained as a condition to create a good society. Therefore, most conservatives are also traditionalists due to their attachment to traditional, historical and local nature (Kekes, 2004). There are four types of conservatism: (i)

fundamental conservatism or traditionalism, (ii) liberal conservatism, (iii) conservative revolution, and (iv) left-wing conservatism or social conservatism (Dugin, 2012). Fundamental conservatism is the closest to this study as it is often associated with Islamist groups other than Christian Protestants.

According to Andrew Vincent (1995), there are four types of conservatism classification: human nature, reasoning and action, economics, and politics and government. There are four principles that he outlined for the conservatism of the political and governance categories. These principles are universal and can be adapted to view conservatism in the Asian context (Rodan, 1996).

Emphasis was placed on tradition, sustainability, institutions, conventions and the past (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2014). The question of tradition, according to conservatives, is an element that needs to be given priority because it always contains political truth (Mohamad Abu Bakar, 2000). Tradition is also considered the lifeblood of conservatism (Giddens, 2002). The second principle of conservatism is an action that gives priority to the interests of society over the interests of individuals. Thus, aspects such as hierarchy, law, authority, discipline and compliance as well as leadership are always given priority. The third principle of conservatism is the rejection of the pursuit of social equality. Fractions such as power and privilege will usually not be equal because traditional arrangements and conventions form a hierarchy and are less egalitarian. The last principle of the conservatives is that every change to be made must take place in stages and not in total. Radical and comprehensive change is believed to be met with opposition. The changes to be made should also not eliminate the previous interests (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail, 2014). These four conservatism principles were applied to analyse the political approaches and strategies implemented by PAS after the party split in June 2015 until GE-14.

Methodology

This article used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The source of information obtained consisted of primary and secondary sources. Three instruments were used for the data collection process, namely interviews, live observations and document analysis. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the Chairman of the PAS International Lajnah, the Honorable (YB) Ustaz Muhammad Khalil Abdul Hadi as an informant. The method of observation was adopted by the researcher by directly following the development of PAS during the study period starting June 2015 until GE-14, which took place on 9 May 2018, including following a series of talks and campaigns held by PAS. The documents obtained consisted of academic journals, scientific studies, dissertations, books as well as media sources such as news and videos of leaders' statements related to

the topic of conservatism and also GE-14. Thematic analysis was performed on sources obtained to uncover repeating themes on the approach, the political strategy used, and the party's performance during the election. According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is a method for encoding qualitative data to find recurring themes: topics, ideas, and patterns of significance. In addition, the findings were then discussed using historical, descriptive analysis in order to give a chronological picture of events. The theory of political conservatism was also used to guide the analysis of the study to achieve the set objectives.

Findings, Analysis and Discussions

PAS Conservative Idealism

The re-domination of the ulama in the PAS leadership brought certain changes to the party's idealism and political approach. The contest for posts in PAS during the 61st Muktamar turned to the fight of defending the status quo, namely the interests of race and religion. Two conservative idealisms were introduced to reposition PAS' position as a right-wing party in Malaysian politics. Those idealisms were the *hudud* implementation agenda through Bill 355 and the preservation of the Malay-Muslim political survival.

These two idealisms were reintroduced due to the existence of three important driving factors. The first factor was the decline in the performance of PAS in GE-13. Although PR, as a whole, obtained the best results in the history of the opposition party's involvement in the election, PAS nevertheless recorded a decline in votes from its supporters. In GE-13, the total number of parliamentary seats won by PAS was 21 seats. This number is reduced by two from the 23 seats it had won in GE-12. Apart from that, PAS also failed to maintain the governance mandate for Kedah, which was previously ruled by the party since 2008. Besides failing to recapture Terengganu, PAS' performance also declined in its own stronghold state of Kelantan (Norshahril Saat, 2015). The performance of PAS did not only reduce the size of the party in coalition with PKR and DAP, which had a much larger cumulative victory, but it was also a clear indication at the same time that the party began to lose the support of the majority Malay conservatives who felt marginalised by the democratisation which was previously fought by PAS (Muhamad Takiyuddin Ismail & Amalin Sabiha Ismail, 2016).

Second, PAS felt that the political position of the Malay was increasingly threatened by a number of developments and the current political situation. This concern was expressed by President Abdul Hadi through his statement which described the position of Islamic members of parliament (MPs) in the opposition pact as unbalanced. Out of 85 PR MPs, the number of non-Muslim members was 50, namely from DAP and PKR, while the remaining Islamic MPs were only 35

people. This situation will result in the Malay-Muslims becoming a minority in a government that will be formed by the PR should it win the election (“PAS mahu Islam memerintah”, 2017). PAS is of the opinion that Malays must remain in control of politics and government segments and not be left to other races.

One of the above elements (the elements of the political system in Malaysia) is the socio-political element which includes racial diversity. It is natural in our country that the Malays become the backbone of other races in Malaysia. (Muhammad Khalil, personal communication, 2018, February 12)

According to Muhammad Khalil (2018), Malays are the cornerstone of the other races in the country. Historically, Malaysia began as Malaya, which belongs to the Malays, while the other races were only granted citizenship by *jus soli* by the colonial British. In addition, the *siyasah syar’iyyah* or Islamic politics also emphasises the aspect of race and nation. The development of a country must be supported by the dominant race. This refers to a piece of hadith of the Prophet SAW which means “the leader is from among (the people) of Quraish”. In the Malaysian context, the dominant ethnic is the majority race which is Malay (Muhammad Khalil, 2018). Starting from the understanding and the situation that occurred, PAS then conducted a *muraja’ah* or review of *tahaluf siyasi* held with DAP and PKR. PAS was responsible for defending Islam and needed to ensure that Islam continued to rule the country.

Third, the Islamic fight agenda will not be able to continue if PAS stays with PR. *Tahaluf siyasi* that was done with PR only harmed the party. Although PAS ruled the states of Kelantan and Kedah after GE-12, the party was still the smallest party in parliament (Farish A. Noor, 2016). This situation made PAS not dominant and felt its voice was marginalised in PR. Hudud and the Islamic state, which are the main agenda of the PAS ulama, will never be realised as long as PAS is together with PR. In fact, it was suggested that PAS should relax the Islamic ideology and fight if it merely wants to gain power and win the election (Muhammad Faiz Mukmin Abdul Mutalib & Wan Fariza Alyati Wan Zakaria, 2015). PAS was adamant that it should not put election victory as the main goal; in fact, it is more important to get the pleasure of Allah SWT (Ahmad Fadhli Shaari, 2015). PAS’ victory in the election will only be in vain if the party is not able to make significant social changes by implementing Islamic laws.

Starting from the stated motivational factors, PAS implemented three approaches to realise the party’s conservative idealism. The first was to reintroduce the fight to implement hudud in Malaysia. This effort was a double-edged sword for PAS. Apart from re-highlighting the Islamic agenda, PAS also

intended to test its friends and opponents in politics (Norshahril Saat, 2015). In March 2015, the Syariah Criminal Code Enactment II (1993) was tabled and passed in the Kelantan DUN with the support of all PAS and UMNO assemblymen. This action stunned the opposition parties in PR. In reaction, DAP later decided to sever ties with Abdul Hadi as a sign of disagreement with PAS' regressive actions that left the democratic fight and returned to the conservative Islamic fight. DAP, in this case, had unmistakably opposed the *hudud* agenda and the Islamic state of PAS. DAP instead wanted Malaysia to be maintained as a secular country (Norshahril Saat, 2015).

In contrast to DAP and PKR, which rejected hudud, UMNO had shown a willingness to work with PAS on this matter. Najib and Zahid openly stated that the government would table Bill 355 in Parliament. However, later it could not be implemented due to opposition from other BN component parties (Rahimah Abdullah, 2017). On 26 May 2016, for the first time in history, the government, through Najib gave way to Abdul Hadi to present the private motion of Bill 355 in Parliament. The amendment to the bill introduced by PAS is a motion to empower the Syariah court (Muhammad Khalil, 2018). If approved, the Syariah court will be given a wider jurisdiction and exceed the 3-5-6 allocation limit of the existing 3 years imprisonment, a fine of RM5,000 and six strokes of the cane. Traditionally, this was the first time the UMNO-BN government had agreed with the PAS proposal, which will give PAS space to implement hudud in the ruled state. However, Najib's agreement was considered a tactic to gain PAS support, reduce pressure from the opposition in the election, and enable UMNO-BN to win in GE-14 (Chin, 2016).

Following the rejection of PR in the hudud agenda introduced, PAS then severed the political cooperation held with DAP in the 61st PAS Muktamar, thus dissolving political *tahaluf* (*tahaluf siyasi*) with PR. Two years later, at the 63rd Muktamar, PAS officially severed ties with PKR. This decision was based on two arguments.

The main reason why PAS left PR is because DAP in particular does not respect PAS's policies and the conditions in the *tahaluf siyasi*. One of the conditions that PAS was required to follow is does not fight for the implementation of syariah in the country. (Muhammad Khalil, personal communication, 2018, February 12)

First, DAP and PKR have violated the conditions in holding a *tahaluf siyasi*, that is, each party must respect the policies and struggles of other parties. However, what happened was that DAP brashly questioned the policy and struggled for the

implementation of PAS law. DAP also stipulated that PAS cannot implement the Syariah if it wants to remain in PR. In contrast, the implementation of the Syariah is indeed the policy and purpose of PAS. In this context, DAP itself violated the principle of “agree to disagree” that was practised by PR. Secondly, DAP had also violated its morals in conducting *tahaluf siyasi* by interfering in PAS’ internal affairs, including when the party’s Muktamar election was held. DAP supported certain candidates to influence delegates to elect certain groups in the party. DAP also openly supported *Persatuan Ummah Sejahtera Malaysia (PASMA)*, which was not in line with the leadership of the ulama and Abdul Hadi. The action taken by the DAP violated the “red line” of political *tahaluf* leading to the decision of PAS to sever ties with DAP and then leave PR (Muhammad Khalil, 2018).

PAS’ tendency to have a cooperative relationship has shifted to UMNO. This was due to the positive reaction and acceptance shown by UMNO towards the Islamic agenda of PAS. Nik Abduh himself, in a statement, admitted that there was a cooperation between UMNO and PAS to make the presentation of Bill 355 in parliament a success. In November 2015, the Islamic Consultative Council (MPI) was established as a government effort to strengthen the role of Islam. PAS’ General Mursyidul, Haron Din was appointed as the Head of the Dakwah Cluster of the council (Alang Shukrimun, 2017). Among the issues raised in this ceremony included the improvement of the status of Syariah courts in Malaysia. In the General Assembly held in December that year, Najib Razak openly invited PAS to hold political cooperation in the interest of the Malays and Islam. This invitation was welcomed by PAS when the two prime leaders of the party, Najib Razak and Abdul Hadi, sat together and delivered a speech at the *Multaqa Ulama Serantau Alumni Al-Azhar Malaysia*. The main leaders of both parties were also seen together in the Solidarity Assembly for the Rohingya held in December 2016. Among the main leaders of UMNO and PAS who were present were Najib Razak, Zahid Hamidi, Abdul Hadi Awang, Tuan Ibrahim, Nik Abduh and Takiyuddin Hassan.

PAS conservatism had given some advantages to PAS, especially in the framework of the agenda of Islamism fought by the ulama and supported by the majority of party members. Through conservative idealism, PAS was able to return to the fighting for the implementation of sharia in Malaysia, something that PAS has been fighting for since its inception.

PAS’s Islamic crusade needs to be seen more comprehensively. Not only keeping Islam in the Constitution but also fighting for Muslim issues. An example is Bill 355, where the motion brought is to empower the Syariah

courts. It is also one of the struggles to put Islam first. (Muhammad Khalil, personal communication, 2018, February 12)

PAS, in this context, always puts the interests of Islam as more important than the democratic agenda or victory in elections (Muhammad Khalil, 2018). The most important goal for PAS is to defend Islam and ensure that Islam continues to rule. Through a number of approaches that were implemented, the continuity of Malay political position becomes more secure, and the Malay-Muslims are no longer threatened. According to Abdul Hadi, the things that should be the priorities are the strength and persistence of the Malay political unity through the cooperation formed with UMNO while improving the existing system of government (Suhana Suhana Saad et al., 2012).

Political Strategy and Campaign A head of GE-14

In facing GE-14 as the most intense clash between the two largest political blocs in Malaysia, namely BN and PH, PAS as an Islamic party positioned itself in a strategic position. PAS arranged several strategies to enable the party to remain dominant, relevant and competitive in the political competition despite being independent and no longer formally cooperating with any other major party.

PAS took a proactive step by forming a new coalition called Gagasan Sejahtera (Gagasan) as the third power of the political bloc. Gagasan was officially launched on March 16, 2016, with members of Barisan Jemaah Islamiyyah Se-Malaysia (BERJASA), Parti Cinta Malaysia and Parti Harapan Malaysia (Utusan Online, 2017). According to PAS, Gagasan is a *tahaluf siyasi* that is not only in the form of cooperation between parties, but also involves the cooperation of individuals and NGOs. The formation of Gagasan was an option and alternative that PAS wanted to bring to the people, thus differentiating the approach of the Islamic party with respect to PH and BN. According to PAS, the PH leadership was troubled due to the conflicts and power struggles, while the BN rule for 60 years brought political and economic problems to the country. Thus, Gagasan was introduced as healthy political cooperation rooted in Islam and also to safeguard the interests and rights of the non-Muslims and the non-Malays (Muhammad Khalil, 2018). In contrast to the position of PAS, which was relatively smaller when it was in PR, the position of this party was so dominant and influential compared to other political parties in Gagasan. Almost all Gagasan strategic positions were held by PAS, including Abdul Hadi as Gagasan Chairman and other positions such as secretary general, treasurer, youth chief, women chief, information chief, and election director. With this position, PAS was definitely able to determine the policy and direction of the coalition.

In addition, PAS also strategised to become a king maker or decisive power in GE-14. PAS predicted that no party would succeed in securing a simple majority of 112 parliamentary seats in GE-14, whether BN or PH, especially in a three-cornered fight situation between Gagasan-BN-PH in most parliamentary and state constituencies. Therefore, PAS intended to contest at least 130 parliamentary seats and expected to win as many as 40 seats. The three states targeted to be the largest contributors of seats were Kedah, Terengganu and Kelantan. With the situation of parliament uncertain without a majority party, PAS at that time would be the decisive power in determining support for BN or PH to form a new government after GE-14 (Muhammad Khalil, 2018).

The reality of democracy in Malaysia is that there is no party that can form its own government, even UMNO, but it is necessary for other parties. Therefore, PAS will contest as many parliamentary seats as possible and is confident that it will get (win) a good number of seats to be a consideration for the political situation after the GE if a government is to be formed. (Muhammad Khalil, personal communication, 2018, February 12)

As the king maker in Malaysian politics, PAS was not only powerful in determining the ruling party but also influential in determining the policies of the country that would be implemented. This idea was strategic as PAS was aware that political cooperation with other main parties still needed to be executed. However, PAS would choose its partners only after the election results were known. In other words, PAS would remain the government based on the number of parliamentary seats it won in GE-14 as well as its role as the third political power in the country's democratic system. In this way, PAS had more bargaining power during the negotiation process, and at the same time, the Islamic struggle agenda could be implemented.

Towards GE-14 and during the campaign period, PAS was aimed to implement four approaches that were religious fundamentalism. The first was the approach to religious exclusivity. PAS considered itself to be the only political party that fights for Islam, and the entire Muslim community must support and vote for them. Meanwhile, those who were not with PAS were considered to reject and oppose Islam. Such an understanding gave the impression that Islam is the exclusive property of PAS. Ahmad Dusuki Abd. Rani, a well-known PAS speaker and candidate in the Kota Anggerik DUN stated that only PAS is the party that brought Islam by raising the Al-Quran and Hadith as the party's policy.

The second approach was the rhetorical use of religion in campaigning. Among them was PAS' use of dreams as an argument and campaign material. In

a campaign held in Pengkalan Chepa, Nik Mohd. Amar Nik Abdullah (Vice President and Deputy Menteri Besar of Kelantan) narrated that Abdul Hadi (PAS President) had a dream of meeting Nik Abdul Aziz (Former Mursyidul Am and Menteri Besar of Kelantan), who was in a crippled condition before being pushed and almost collapsed. Abdul Hadi's dream was used as an argument by Nik Mohd. Amar to convince the community to continue voting for PAS and supporting the Islamic fights even though their opponent is a member of Tok Guru's (referring to Nik Abdul Aziz) own family. The argument of dreams was not a new thing for PAS scholars because PAS has used this argument several times, especially by scholars, to attract support and convince the community of the truth of the Islamic fights brought by PAS. Among others, PAS General Mursyidul Hashim Jasin also raised the same issue in which President Abdul Hadi often dreamed of meeting Rasulullah S.A.W who seemed to give an indication that PAS' Islamic fight was true. Apart from dreams, PAS also argued that Allah S.W.T would provide help and victory to the fight to uphold Islam. Nor Azariza Mohd. Alawi (Kelantan PAS Youth Chief) in the campaign talk, mentioned that assistance would be given in the form of "angel" voters, which is similar to what happened in the Battle of Badr during the time of Rasulullah S.A.W.

The third approach was religious extremism. Abdul Hadi, in a statement, banned the Muslim community from supporting DAP, which was considered to be blatantly against Islam. PAS considered DAP as the dominant party and quite powerful in PH, while the other parties in the coalition are considered to be submissive under DAP. In a campaign video, Zamri Zainuldin (Deputy Commissioner III of PAS Selangor), a famous celebrity, had called Mahathir, Anwar and Mohamad Sabu as submissive who followed Lim Kit Siang, who led PH ("2 kes", 2018). PAS Selangor also caused controversy when Ahmad Dusuki, in a prayer led by him prayed for the destruction of the "evil pact", referring to PH. He also considered that the GE-14 that PAS would face is a clash between Islam and *ahzab* (coalition and referring to the Ahzab War led by Rasulullah S.A.W) that needs to be destroyed. The content of the prayer, among others, also asked for the help of Allah S.W.T to give the Islamic party the opportunity to rule the state of Selangor because the state has long been ruled in a way that is contrary to Islam. He also asked Allah S.W.T to retaliate against MPs and DUNs who betrayed the party when they left and formed the AMANAH party.

Apart from that, PAS' harsh approach seen through several PAS leadership statements in the issue of Nik Omar Nik Abdul Aziz, who contested under PH tickets in the Chempaka DUN, surprised many parties, including PAS. Nik Mohamad Abduh (PAS Central Committee) described his brother's action as an accident that befell the family and the Islamic party and disappointed their

mother. Nik Omar was described as a disobedient child when he chose to leave the party fought for by his father, Nik Abdul Aziz. On the other hand, President Abdul Hadi equated Nik Omar's actions to the story of the son of the Prophet Noah A.S., who despised the ark built by his father and acted to defect from Islam. Takiyuddin Hassan (PAS Secretary-General), on the other hand, considered the actions of Nik Omar, who joined the coalition with DAP, as an unacceptable action contrary to Nik Aziz's fights and embarrassing his own family. Johari Mat (PAS MSU Member) also agreed with the majority of PAS leadership on the Nik Omar issue. He described Nik Omar's action as misguided as no other party could claim that they were fighting for Islam other than PAS. Johari also gave the analogy of the ban on holding a second congregation in congregational prayer and urged Nik Omar to return to the correct path and repent.

However, there were also PAS leaders who cast a more modest intonation on this issue. Tuan Ibrahim Tuan Man (PAS Deputy President) was of the view that every individual is free to choose whichever party of their choice. Tuan Ibrahim also considered the attack on Nik Omar to be an outrageous act ("Kenyataan melampau terhadap Nik Omar", 2018). He instead urged that every political party should not cultivate defamatory politics and carry out personal attacks on certain individuals with political motives because he believed that it did not sit well with the actual practice of democracy in Malaysia.

The fourth approach was the policy to make peace with UMNO which was done indirectly by PAS. Abdul Hadi, in this case, stated that he was no longer interested in the power struggle referring to PH's goal of overthrowing the UMNO-BN regime. Instead, PAS was more comfortable playing the role of an advisor and a king maker in the formation of the government after GE-14. PH, which aimed to bring down individuals, namely Najib Razak's leadership, also caused PAS to refuse to cooperate with the alliance ("Niat jatuhkan Najib sebab PAS", 2018). Abdul Hadi also stated that he did not want to be the Prime Minister if PAS won the election and would hand it over to someone more deserving (Kinitv, 2018: talk video). PAS also stated that the united government with UMNO after GE-14 was not impossible but must meet the conditions set by the party ("Kerjasama Pas dan BN tidak pelik", 2018). Apart from the statement of goodwill with UMNO, during the campaign period, PAS also did not raise issues and scandals involving the UMNO and Najib Razak administration such as 1MDB, FELDA, Tabung Haji and MARA, which were the campaign materials for PH leaders. The focus of PAS campaign materials was more towards attacks on DAP, PH and also Mahathir, who was the PH Prime Ministerial candidate. Mahathir was deemed too old to hold the number one position in the country, apart from his administration being the real cause of the rising cost of living. However, he

expanded his leadership and contributions to the development and modernisation of Malaysia during his first tenure with several national programmes, initiatives, and megaprojects launched to develop the country and its people (Khairul Azman Mohamad Suhaimy et al., 2021). Abdul Hadi also questioned the truth behind Anwar's bruised eye case while in custody during Mahathir's rule because the two leaders were now cooperating. In a forum organised by *Sinar Harian*, Mohd. Zuhdi Marzuki (Director of the PAS Research Center) described the participants who criticised Abdul Hadi's views on Mahathir as "an elderly uncle with a rusty and closed mind". PAS' tendency to make peace with UMNO-BN was beneficial for PAS because PAS was seen to be given more spaces to appear in the coverage of the mainstream media and government-owned print media, an irregularity that did not occur in previous elections.

Performance in GE-14

Despite contesting independently as the third bloc and facing a fierce three-cornered fight, PAS recorded its own success in GE-14. PAS managed to win 18 parliamentary seats out of the 160 seats it contested at the Federal level. Out of the 18 seats, three of them were won in the Kedah parliamentary constituency, nine in Kelantan and the remaining six in Terengganu. However, this number was reduced by three seats compared to GE-13, in which PAS won 21 seats. Even so, this achievement was the best performance of PAS when contesting independently. Traditionally, PAS' performance at the parliamentary level had never surpassed two figures when the party did not cooperate politically with any other major parties except during the era of Burhanuddin al-Helmy. Under Burhanuddin's leadership, PAS won 13 and 12 seats in the 1959 GE and 1969 GE, respectively (Mohd. Hasbie Muda, 2014). The last time PAS contested independently in the election was in GE-11, the first election led by Abdul Hadi as PAS President. GE-11 recorded the worst performance for the party when PAS only won seven from the 27 seats that it had won at the parliamentary level in GE-10. Even worse, Abdul Hadi lost in the Marang Parliament. Based on the comparison of these two elections, it can be seen that PAS's performance under the leadership of Abdul Hadi was better in GE-14.

Meanwhile, at the state level, PAS' performance also recorded an increase of 13 DUN seats making the total number of ADUNs represented by PAS throughout Malaysia 90 seats, which has increased by five seats compared to GE-13. PAS also managed to recapture Terengganu apart from maintaining its rule in Kelantan. These two states were successfully dominated by PAS with a two-thirds majority. In Kelantan, PAS won 37 DUN seats, while the remaining 8 seats were won by UMNO. This number increased by six seats from the 31 seats won by PAS

in GE-13. Most of the seats won by UMNO were in rural areas such as Gua Musang and Jeli. In Terengganu, PAS' position was strong with a significant increase of 8 DUN seats in GE-14, resulting in PAS obtaining a mandate of two-thirds majority with a total of 22 seats. Furthermore, two other states recorded encouraging performance for PAS, namely Kedah and Pahang. In Kedah, PAS managed to win 15 DUN seats compared to 18 seats won by PH. PAS in Pahang recorded an increase of 8 seats compared to GE-13. This number also equated to PR's performance in GE-13 in the state. Meanwhile, PAS in Pahang also recorded the best record of winning eight DUN seats compared to only two seats in the previous election. PAS in Pahang managed to deny the two-thirds majority of UMNO-BN besides forming a stronger opposition force in the state.

PAS' good performance in GE-14 can also be seen through the increase in the majority won by PAS in most DUNs and Parliaments in Kelantan and Terengganu. UMNO's achievement in Kelantan was relatively stronger in GE-13 when PAS only achieved a narrow victory in several DUNs, including the majority of votes in Jelawat DUN (102 votes), Gaal (302 votes), Gual Periok (615 votes), Pulau Chondong (919 votes) and Tendong (979 votes). However, the majority of votes received by PAS in the same constituency in GE-14 increased sharply to Jelawat (2,495 votes), Gaal (1,577 votes), Gual Periok (2,123 votes), Pulau Chondong (2,119 votes) and Tendong (2,251 votes). An increase in the majority also occurred in some areas that PAS had won with a comfortable majority in GE-13. For example, in the Marang Parliament, Terengganu, the majority won by Abdul Hadi increased from only 5,124 in GE-13 to 21,954 votes in GE-14. Similarly, in the Panchor DUN, Kelantan, which was contested by Nik Mohd. Amar, obtained 7,288 majority votes compared to only 5,036 in GE-13. In comparison, the majority vote in the parliamentary constituency, traditionally an UMNO stronghold like in Gua Musang, had declined from 8,413 votes in GE-13 to only 3,913 votes in GE-14. This achievement gives a clear picture of a massive vote shifted to PAS in two states, namely Kelantan and Terengganu.

Nonetheless, the improvement in PAS's performance in the Northern and East Coast regions of the Peninsula, involving Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, was not entirely driven by conservatism. Instead, it is due to current political factors (external) as well as the existing strength of PAS (internal) in the states. An external factor is the simultaneous rejection of both Mahathir-PH and Najib-UMNO by voters, which had led to a shift in votes to PAS. In contrast, the internal factors were driven by the existing strength of PAS itself.

Ironically, the protest vote against UMNO did not shift to PH in these two states but instead to PAS. Meanwhile, PH's performance in these two states was the worst recorded in this election. Kelantan and Terengganu were two states that

were not successfully penetrated by PH in GE-14. There were no seats won by the coalition party either at the DUN or parliamentary level. In the three-cornered clash in Kelantan and Terengganu, PH ranked third after PAS and BN, thus making the coalition party not a popular choice for the people of Kelantan and Terengganu. Several key leaders of AMANAH who contested in these two states also failed to achieve any victory. In the Salor DUN, which used to be the traditional seat of Husam Musa (Vice President of AMANAH), he finished third by obtaining only 3,617 votes compared to PAS (11,206 votes) in the first place and BN (6,540 votes) in second place. Nik Omar Nik Abdul Aziz also lost badly in the Chempaka DUN by only obtaining 2,418 votes compared to his challenger from PAS (10,549 votes) and BN (7,075 votes). Raja Kamarul Bahrin (Chairman of AMANAH Terengganu) also failed to defend the seat he won in GE-13 when he lost in third place with only 15,380 votes compared to 42,988 votes for PAS and 28,215 votes for BN.

The rejection of PH was due to two main factors. The first was the anti-Mahathir sentiment, who was the PH prime ministerial candidate. During the era of Mahathir's administration, less focus was given to the states on the East Coast, which were slightly left behind and marginalised by the development policy he had implemented. The issue of royalties also left a massive impact on the people of the state when the Federal government under Mahathir's leadership denied the state the right to receive royalties. Apart from that, PH's image was also tarnished due to the involvement of DAP in the alliance. PAS had consistently chanted anti-DAP sentiment and assumed the party had a hidden agenda and threatened the position of Islam and Malay. These two sentiments were consistently emphasized by PAS in every religious campaign and talk series to create a negative perception of PH. These two factors were also discussed by Azmil Tayeb (2018), Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman and Rashaad Ali (2018), as well as Muhammad Faiz Mukmin Abdul Mutalib and Wan Fariza Alyati Wan Zakaria (2015) as factors that drove the rejection of votes to PH. Traditionally, the political dichotomy in states such as Kelantan and Terengganu involved a clash between two parties, namely blue (UMNO) and green (PAS) (Muhamad Nadzri Mohamed Noor, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Farish A. Noor, 2016).

Generally, the two states that showed outstanding performance for PAS were the states with the highest ethnic mix of Malays: 94.86% in Kelantan and 96.3% in Terengganu. When PAS had collaborated with PR in GE-12 and GE-13, these seat had witnessed a two-cornered fight between PAS and UMNO. Therefore, the improvement in PAS' performance in Malay majority areas can also be linked to the voters' rejection of UMNO, which were then facing a number of critical issues. Among them was the failure of the UMNO-BN government to

address the cost of living due to the implementation of GST, which were also felt by the rural community, as well as several scandals involving the BN government such as 1MDB, FELDA, donations of RM2.6 billion, and the luxurious lifestyle of Najib Razak and his family. In addressing these issues, UMNO failed to provide a complete solution and explanation, instead they introduced various control policies. An example is the False News Act introduced to block any news that was incompatible with the regime on social media. The era of digital openness has made people, including the old and the young, have easier access to alternative news sources and no longer rely solely on government-controlled mainstream media. Following the failure to address these issues carefully, UMNO-BN lost the confidence of the majority of Malay voters. In these states, PAS was an alternative Malay party to UMNO, similar to what happened in GE-10 when there was a massive shift of Malay votes to PAS following the dissatisfaction of Malay voters towards UMNO (Zaireeni Azmi, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Junaidi Awang Besar, Mohd. Fuad Mat Jali, Mohd. Faidz Mohd. Zain, & Muhammad Hazim Abdul Ghani, 2016).

PAS, from another angle, also managed to capitalise on some advantages and strengths, especially in Kelantan and Terengganu. PAS had wider access to the community. In GE-14, not only did PAS receive coverage from the mainstream media, which was more accessible to the rural community and the elderly, but PAS also actively campaigned through lectures and religious talks, which were widely presented in mosques and *suraus* in Kelantan and Terengganu. *Surau* and mosques are activity centres for the local community and are also strategic, especially for PAS, which was fighting for an Islamic political agenda. The use of social media channels was also fully utilised by PAS to attract more support from the young and middle-aged group, especially voters abroad, to get the latest information on party developments. PAS' success in bringing Bill 355 to parliament has also boosted the confidence and trust of the people and voters in the Islamic fights brought by PAS. From an ideological point of view, PAS has indeed succeeded in inculcating Islamic ideology in addition to the sentiment of "hatred" towards UMNO since time immemorial (Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar & Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2020; Wan Rohilla Ganti, 2019; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Farish A. Noor, 2016). This indoctrination effort succeeded in producing loyal supporters of the Islamic party until the community institutions identified themselves with PAS (Junaidi et al., 2016). This mobilisation of strong grassroots support for PAS also made the party's machinery there very powerful (Wan Rohila Ganti Wan Abdul Ghapar & Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2020; Wan Rohilla Ganti, 2019; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Liow, 2011, Farish A. Noor, 2016). Apart from that, PAS was also wise to make use of a campaign strategy where Islamic

parties focused more on local issues that appealed to the voters, such as the issue of Nik Aziz's legacy. As the Menteri Besar of Kelantan for 23 years, he was a PAS figure who was well respected and admired by all walks of life and managed to attract the people's support for PAS (Junaidi et al., 2020; Zaireeni Azmi, 2020; Azmil Tayeb, 2018; Mohamad Shaukhi Mohd. Radzi et al., 2018; Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman & Rashaad Ali, 2018; Mohd. Fuad Mat Jali, 2016; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014, Liow, 2011; Hamayotsu, 2010).

Meanwhile, in other states, the performance of PAS in GE-14 was quite bleak. PAS faced rejection in development-focused states such as Selangor, Johor and Penang. This situation suggests that the change in approach and ideology of PAS had more impact on the party's votes and performance in the West and South Coast areas of the Peninsula. The rejection of PAS's conservative ideology in this area also had some effects, such as the Malay voters' rejection of PAS, which is more rational. As a result, PAS could only win one seat in these three states. These three states also have a relatively high mixed ethnic composition. In Selangor, the Malay ethnic represents 51.93%, Chinese 32.57% and Indians 13.80%. Whereas Johor has 58% Malays, 38% Chinese, and 7% Indians.

The severe decline of PAS could be seen in the state of Selangor, and as a comparison in GE-13, PAS won 15 DUN seats in the state. Three of the seats were Exco for the state government. This position of PAS reflected the strength of the party in the state of Selangor with a fairly strategic position. However, this number plummeted by 14 seats in GE-14, making only one seat remaining in the Sijangkang DUN. The strategy of placing popular figures and celebrities of PAS such as Ahmad Dusuki Abd Rani, Mohd. Zuhdi Marzuki, Iskandar Abdul Samad, Mohd. Zamri and Nushi Mahfodz was seen as not helping PAS to defend their constituencies. All the names mentioned lost in their respective contested area. Apart from that, some other PAS figures who also lost in the three-cornered clash in GE-14 were Hashim Jasin, Johari Mat and Mokhtar Senik.

PAS in the Selangor state also failed to retain the support of the Malays when they were defeated in areas with a high Malay ethnic composition. An example taken is in the Sungai Ramal DUN, which was previously known as the Bangi DUN. In GE-13, PAS won in this constituency with a large majority of 11,838 votes. This DUN seat could also be said to be a comfortable seat for PAS as this seat had been won by the party since GE-12. This DUN is one of the areas that has a high ethnic mix of Malays in Selangor by 69.2%, while the rest represent the Chinese (17.9%) and Indian (12.2%) ethnicities. This seat was contested by "celebrity Ustaz" Nushi Mahfodz representing PAS. However, this seat failed to be defended by PAS when it lost to AMANAH candidate Mazwan Johar with a

majority of 10,630 votes. AMANAH won with a total of 24,591 votes compared to PAS with 13,951 votes (Election Commission of Malaysia, 2018).

Based on the background aspect of the voters in the state constituency, Bangi is categorised as an area of middle-class elite, rich and well-educated Malays (Junaidi Awang Besar et al., 2016). Voters with high educational background and income in this area usually get the latest political developments from various sources. These people also tend to be open-minded in accepting the diversity of opinion on an issue compared to the Malay ethnic group who lives in suburban and rural areas. In Selangor, PAS obtained relatively significant (number of) votes in the suburbs and rural areas (Junaidi Awang Besar et al., 2020). This socio-economic background makes the middle-class Malay group in the city more critical and rational in considering the current political atmosphere, and they are not tied to any one particular creed or party. Their party identification is more flexible and changeable. Apart from that, this group is also believed to have received an overflow of voting patterns at the national level and has a closer understanding of current issues such as misappropriation of funds, corruption and poor governance, failure to establish political cooperation with opposition parties as well as the restoration of the image of conservative Islamism.

Based on historical factors, when PAS was with PR in GE-12 and GE-13, the support obtained by the Islamic party is also not based on the strength of its grassroots alone. Instead, the main factor that contributed to the performance of Islamic parties in these states was the political cooperation established by PAS with the main opposition parties, namely PKR and DAP. Through the previously held cooperation, PAS managed to penetrate the state of Selangor with a significant victory figure of up to 15 state seats in 2013 and the display of penetration in Negeri Sembilan, Melaka and Johor. In Johor, for example, PAS had previously collaborated closely with DAP to bolster the state, which was, in fact, UMNO's stronghold. As a result, PAS managed to win two state seats in 2008 and increased to four in 2013. Specifically, the votes received by PAS came from supporters of PAS's *tahalluf* partner parties, namely PKR and DAP (Zaireeni Azmi, 2020; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2017; Farish A. Noor, 2016; Thock & Tan, 2016).

Additionally, PAS also displayed a more modest ideology and approach when collaborating with PR. PAS at that time had introduced some more universal and non-Muslim friendly policies. For example, the concept of Welfare State and the approach of "PAS for all" have portrayed PAS as an Islamic party that is open, progressive, inclusive for all races, and not exclusive to the Muslim community only. The Welfare State concept also does not directly touch on the implementation of Hudud law but instead emphasises the question of trustworthy, fair, clean government governance and sustainable, balanced and equitable economic

development. The concept is also not the same as the idea of an Islamic State that PAS had fought for before. By raising more national issues that cover the economy, cost of living, and good governance, only then was PAS seen closer not only to Malay voters but also to voters of other races (Muhamad Helmy Sabtu et al., 2021; Junaidi et al., 2020; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2018; Abdullah, 2018, Farish A. Noor, 2016; Mohd. Izani Mohd. Zain, 2014). However, the ideology and approach displayed by PAS in the GE-14 instead showed a reversal to the old conservative Islamist image of PAS, before with PR and BA. The absence of these factors in GE-14 also ultimately contributed to PAS's rejection in the West and South Coast states.

PAS' strategy to become a king maker in GE-14 was also a failure. At the Federal level, the uncertain parliamentary situation expected by Abdul Hadi did not happen as PH surpassed the simple majority figure with a total of 121 parliamentary seats. However, the uncertain situation at the state assembly happened in Perak as PH did not succeed in surpassing the simple majority when it only obtained 29 DUN seats, while BN won 27 seats. PAS, which had 3 ADUNs, automatically acted as the decisive bloc. PAS then offered the formation of a coalition government to BN or PH in the state with some conditions put forward. Among them were the party needs to accept the motion of Bill 355, the three PAS assemblymen need to be appointed as the state executive councillor to be formed as well as the appointment of half of the JKKK posts, village heads and Perak state heads from among PAS members. PAS Perak, on the advice of Central PAS, then offered the formation of a coalition state government without opposition consisting of PAS, PH and BN with the post of Menteri Besar held by PAS. However, PAS's desire was buried when two of the BN state assemblymen later expressed support for PH, thus causing PH to obtain a simple majority and form a new Perak state government. PAS in Kedah also failed to form the state government when PH obtained the consent of the Sultan of Kedah to take an oath of office as the Menteri Besar of Kedah and form a new state government.

Based on the overall voting pattern shown through PAS's performance in GE-14, several things can be established. First, PAS's conservative approach in GE-14 was not the main factor that caused the party's unexpected performance on the East Coast, including Kedah and Pahang. Instead, it is mainly due to the existing strong foothold PAS already possessed, which had its own advantages from the beginning. The increase in votes for PAS at the same time was also supported by the people's rejection of UMNO and PH. UMNO was embroiled in several issues and scandals besides putting economic pressure on the people following the implementation of GST. Meanwhile, PH was far from the Malay-Muslim narrative when it collaborated with DAP, which was considered the Chinese political power

besides the previous administration of Mahathir. Therefore, in this case, the voters' alternative was PAS which they had exercised through the voting pattern. Secondly, PAS conservatism at the same time faced rejection in development-focused states, especially Selangor, which had built a strong base through the last two GEs. The rejection of PAS reflected that the support from the non-Malays for PAS had been withdrawn, causing PAS to have difficulty maintaining the position in a state that has a mixed ethnic composition. On the other hand, the rejection shown by Malays against PAS in this area was due to the exclusive nature of the party and other harsh approaches shown by the Islamist party. This has caused PAS to clearly lose the votes previously given by PKR and DAP supporters, causing the party to lag behind. In contrast to the situation on the East Coast, PAS was the third choice for voters in this area, which caused PH through PKR, DAP, AMANAH and PPBM to be closer to the voters' choice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has discussed the conservatism of PAS in GE-14 through three main frameworks, namely the idealism introduced, political strategies and campaigns that have been implemented as well as the unexpected achievements received by the Islamic party in the most historic GE for Malaysia. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that the position obtained by PAS in GE-14 is not a guarantee for PAS to remain comfortable. Although the strength of PAS, which emerged alone as the third bloc, can be considered to be the driving force behind the victory, it is actually also supported by the current political position that is not in favour of UMNO and PH. In reality, PAS had also lost support and influence in "valuable" seats during GE-14 such as in Selangor and Johor, whereas previously it had shown an encouraging upward trend over the past decade before GE-14. Based on this position, it is highly suggested for PAS to think about the party's *quo vadis*, especially in preparing for the upcoming GE-15. As an Islamic party with extensive experience, PAS should repeat its bold and pragmatic steps by restructuring the party's appearance and ideology that it would like to highlight. It should also re-think the selection of political partnership as well as expanding the support network, especially among the non-Muslim community. With PAS's current approach, the party is expected to remain as a provincial party and not a national-based party like how it was with PR or BA. Currently, the future of PAS with the National Alliance (PN) is still uncertain despite being in government. Some of the Islamic policies that have been brought forward before having not yet shown any progress. Even though the ruling government is Malay-Muslim, which is in line with PAS's aspiration, it still does not promise PAS a better GE-15 performance than before. Looking ahead, the next researcher can consider

investigating how the effects of the dominance of political conservatism and ethno-religion influence the course of democracy in Malaysia.

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