

# The Influence of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) Coalition Formation After the 14th Malaysian General Election

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## Abstract

Malaysia is a democratic country with a multi-party system; hence, a single party could not obtain most seats to form the government alone. As of now, PAS has established two alliances after Malaysia's Fourteenth General Elections (GE-14), which are Muafakat Nasional (MN) and Perikatan Nasional (PN). This article aimed to explain PAS's influences in forming political coalitions after GE-14. This article employs the content analysis technique. Data sources were analyzed qualitatively from books, newspapers, web content, texts of the Presidential Policy Speech delivered at the Annual Muktamar, and via in-depth interviews with prominent PAS leaders. Two main influences identified the ambitions held by parties that led to their political coalitions. First on the list is policy seeking which is to obtain the position of power that is evident by overthrowing the previous Pakatan Harapan government. The second influence is office seeking, which maintains Malay-Muslim political control for the nation's well-being. This article intends to contribute an explanation of a political party's effect and consideration during the act of forming a political coalition after the election. In conclusion, the findings in this paper contribute to the political knowledge reservoir by explaining the work of a party to form a political coalition.

**Keywords:** PAS, Political Parties, Coalition Formation, Influence, Malaysia's Fourteenth General Elections

## Introduction

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy under the Westminster parliamentary system and a representative democracy. A new Parliament is convened after each general election (Art. 55(4)). The newly assembled Parliament continues for five years from the date of its first meeting unless it is sooner dissolved (Art. 55(3)). Once a standing Parliament is dissolved, a general election must be held within 60 days, and the next Parliament must have its first sitting within 120 days from the date of dissolution (Art. 55(3) and (4)). The system used in Malaysia is the First-Past-The-Post-System, where a candidate who attains a majority is

declared the winner. The 222 elected members through General Election are held every five years.

The 14th General Election, 2018, took place on 9 May 2018; for the first time in the country's electoral political history, political change the Barisan Nasional (BN) lost its way to the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (PH). Pakatan Harapan is a coalition of four political parties; Parti Keadilan Rakyat or People's Justice Party (PKR), Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia or Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu), Parti Amanah Negara National Trust Party (Amanah), and Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Parti Warisan Sabah with 122 parliamentary seats. In comparison, 79 parliamentary seats won by the BN and PAS stand-alone won, only 18 parliamentary seats. A series of recent unexpected political realignments in Malaysia led to the decrease of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government just two years after a historic election had brought it to power. It is the first time in Malaysian history that a government was formed by its opposition party. As a result, the coalitions fall apart shortly after they have won elections for the first time in decades, even though they have the chance to implement far-achieving reforms. Moreover, this act inadvertently and automatically abolished all existing Minister and Deputy Minister posts. The situation resulted in a massive effect on the nation's political stability.

In the aftermath of the 14th Malaysian General Election, political stability was threatened due to the loss experienced by Barisan Nasional or The National Front (BN), which was previously the longest governing party. The pivotal crisis emerged when several political parties, including PAS, joined forces and attempted to form a new government by claiming majority seats and support in the House of Representatives with a new Perikatan Nasional coalition. As of now, PAS has established two alliances after Malaysia's Fourteenth General Elections (GE-14), which are Muafakat Nasional (MN) and Perikatan Nasional (PN). Therefore, this study aims to identify the influences that PAS has formed political coalitions after the 14th Malaysian General Election.

### **Literature Review**

Studies on the formation of political cooperation in the parliamentary system are becoming more widespread in the field of political science. The concept of coalition politics seems to have arrived at a settled meaning. The term refers to what Altman (2000) defines as a temporal combination of groups or individuals formed to pursue specific objectives through joint action. Specifically, it is a set of parliamentary political parties that agree to seek a common goal or a standard set of goals; pool their resources together in pursuit of this goal; communicate and form building commitments concerning their goals; agree on the distribution of payoffs to be received on obtaining their goal.

According to Noel (2013), a coalition is a group of political parties with a common interest who agree to work together toward a common goal. That goal could be as narrow as obtaining funding for a specific intervention. Although all coalitions tend to be temporary, dissolution after a goal has been achieved (or proven unattainable, given the circumstances), some may persevere longer than others. However, the degree of agreement of interests among coalition

members also affects duration. The seminal work of Riker (1962) is the first to study this kind of coalition behavior. Political Parties were interested in the spoils of the office.

Coalitions need support from most members of Parliament or parties in allying possible government posts. Negotiation processes often lead to political parties that eventually include the government deciding to share the government positions (ministers and the like) proportionally according to seats gained in the legislature (Gamson, 1961). Strom (1990) the rational choice tradition has generated three models of competitive political party behavior focused on three primary motivations of coalition formation: office-seeking, policy-seeking, and vote-seeking. Most of the models have similar motivating factors: the expense of party size (Osborne & Tourky, 2002), cost-sharing (Riviere, 1999) more remarkable ability to commit to and obtain good policy positions (Morelli, 2001). Indeed, coalitions may form between parties in ways that are unfavorable to the majority. However, most authors do not focus on the welfare aspects of party formation, which remains an open question in this newly emerging literature (Morelli, 2001).

At the same time, the study of Malaysian political cooperation is getting traction. The multi-ethnic and religious Malaysian people influenced the political party system in the country (Mansor, 2006). Kamsomo (1986) stated that the party would use issues to get gain people's attention for the party and political interests; UMNO was founded to fight for the Malay rights in the homeland under British rule, and MIC was formed to safeguard the ethnic Indian interests, and MCA is to take care of the Chinese ethnic interests. PAS uses Islamic issues to gain support and recruit people to its cause. Meanwhile, DAP is using economic issues to gain support from the Chinese ethnicity, and UMNO is focusing on the unity issue. Yaakop and Abd (2002) stated that political party still exploits problems close to the people. In contrast, UMNO highlights the issues about language, religion, Malay's special rights, and the sanity of the monarchies. In contrast, the Islamic State is still PAS's aim since its founding until the General Election in 1999, and the interests of the Chinese community, like education and economy fought by the DAP.

Sabri (2016) said that actions taken by the Malay political party to engage in political alliance with others are to fight for Malay rights, safeguard the religion, and the welfare of the race and nation. His study is about the battle of Malay political contesting on who is strengthening Islam, power, leadership, unity, and focused discussion on the involvement of UMNO and PAS parties. His study shows that long feuds between political parties cause schism involving Malays. For example, after the dissolved political alliance between UMNO and PAS, PAS accused anyone who joined UMNO is against the religious creed and, by itself, considered an apostate. The increasingly bitter battle between the two until the religious creed issues itself becomes a contention, accusing of apostasy or heresy, contending imams, boycotting of marriage ceremonies, non-communication between two sides, separate burial sites, and many more.

Yusoff (2013), in his studies about the PAS *ulama* leadership concept in handling a few elections issues, states administration, and problems with its partners in BA and PR. His analysis shows that PAS under the *ulama* leadership must balance its idealism and the reality

of Malaysian statehood that caused its relationship of political cooperation is not done with transparency, democratic and Islamic.

Izani (2016) researched the PAS's political cooperation from 1999 – 2015, which was their alliance with BA and PR. He found that four factors contribute to PAS political cooperation which. First, PAS recognizes the reality of Malaysian society, consisting of multi-ethnics that forced PAS to work together. The second factor is to win the elections. The third factor is that they want to establish a coalition of opposition that can be an alternative to the citizens. Finally, the fourth factor is polytheism (*dakwah*) intent. However, his scope of the study is limited to only 2 PAS political cooperation. Therefore, the discussion is very general without discussing cooperation in the context of candidacy, the election campaign, and the distribution of seats.

Meanwhile, a study of PAS principles by Miller (2006) investigates the influence of PAS on four critical aspects. First, it was found that only two are directly influenced, which are Islamic laws and administration, in addition to foreign policy and security. At the same time, two aspects are pragmatic, like democracy and local politics and economy. She felt that PAS is classified as a combination of fundamentalist and modernist. Fundamentalism is a government model based on Koran and Sunnah principles while rejecting the Western political model that is not in line with Islam. At the same time, the modernist combined the Islamic traditional and Western models. She also states that PAS is only intended to realize the Islamic government and laws. At the same time, it is pragmatic on democracy, local politics, foreign policies, security, and the economy. The study is based on secondary sources and popular reference books.

### **Method**

This article employs the content analysis technique to understand the intentions of the political parties. It is an ex post facto study where it is performed in the aftermath of PAS political cooperation. According to Creswell (2015), the case study is a phenomenon that can know and observe the relationship between a few objects and elements inside any case. In this study, there are two data gathering techniques used. First, it is a detailed interview to understand the question, processes, and situation under scrutiny. Secondly, this article uses the primary method, which focuses on generated content and the repository of information such as books, newspapers, magazines, historical documents, television content, social media post, and web content.

After the interview, the next step is to analyze and data interpretation. First, the data is analyzed using transcripts and PAS's formal documents. There are a few steps to analyze the data in the study: i) filtering and recording of the data, ii) Analysis of the document's content, iii) comparative analysis, and iv) manual analysis of data.

The data gained from the speech text by PAS leaders are in the form of words, sentences, stories, and reminders based on goals, basis, objectives, decisions, and actions related to the party. These data can shine a light on matters connected with the history of the PAS's founding, its core principles, the constitution of the party, and its evolution. The data is based on texts such as transcripts of PAS leaders' definitive speeches and interview transcripts

arranged systematically. Specific codes were used to arrange the texts for interpretation purposes. This step is called the data cleaning up process, which is reading the information repeatedly and understanding the information while considering a few ways to record based on specific themes related to the study's objective. After that, the data was organized again to answer certain specific questions.

### **Result and Discussion**

The most likely type of coalition to form is, therefore, a minimal winning coalition where parties try to gain support from as many politicians as possible while involving as few political parties as possible. The parties negotiate cabinet seats, portfolio allocation, and a standard policy program to ensure that most politicians support the government. The result of the study shows the influence of political cooperation by PAS genesis based on two primary considerations. Firstly, policy seeking when PAS cooperates politically to achieve its main party aim, realizing Islamic country and laws in the country's administration. Secondly, it is based on office seeking. It is proved with its primary goal of destroying the PH government, the contention of seats between PAS and other component parties, and a few benefits from the splintering of the rival party. Therefore, there are two main factors for forming a coalition might include:

#### **The formation of Muafakat Nasional influence by policy-seeking behaviors**

UMNO and PAS signed a Piagam Muafakat Nasional (National Consensus Charter) on 14 September 2019 and held a two-day mega-meeting called *Himpunan Penyatuan Ummah*, or the "Muslim Unity Rally." They signed a joint agreement and a memorandum of understanding (Malay Mail, 2019). The Charter was relatively moderate in an attempt not to provoke ethnic and religious minorities, but it restated Islam as the federal religion and the unique position of the Malays. PAS politicians have repeatedly promoted the creation of an Islamic state, and UMNO has always been known for its prominent Malay nationalism. In Malaysia, ethnic, religious, and regional divides produce a strongly fragmented party system. This agenda of *Ketuanan Melayu* or "Malay supremacy" has been accentuated in parallel with a general Islamization, comprising not only state institutions but also political discourse and civil society (Chin, 2020).

PAS was working with Muafakat Nasional (MN), which is between UMNO and PAS, for Malay/Islam interests and the survival of most of the country. PAS established cooperation with UMNO in MN to rebuild a solid Malay majority government in the old days before 2018 despite the party only controlling a few states on the East Coast, such as Kelantan and Terengganu, in the past and later, which is crucial in strengthening the UMNO government in Kedah.

The alliance in the form of political cooperation between MN and PN was caused by the party's main factor, respectively PAS, UMNO, and Bersatu differ little in their ideology which is the Malay-Muslim agenda. The political cooperation between the two largest Malay-Muslim-based parties was officialized with the signing of the *Piagam Muafakat Nasional* (National Cooperation Charter). PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang signed the five-point charter, and UMNO president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi in the *Himpunan Penyatuan Ummah* (Ummah Unity Rally) held at Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur, on 14 September 2019.

Its main aim is to unite the Muslim community or Ummah for electoral purposes. On the other hand, the cooperation in MN's mission is to maintain Malay-Muslim political power for the nation's well-being.

At that time, the MN played up the Malay-Islam sentiment to justify the political alliance by alleging the erosion of Malay-Islam rights under the PH government. This sentiment successfully influenced the Muslims that formed most of the Malaysian citizens. Therefore, the MN efforts can garner the attention of the Muslim Malaysians.

Before this, PAS was able to bring changes when they could work with non-Muslim parties. PAS is getting better at understanding its need to summarize its political stance with methods and language that is easy to be understood by the people. PAS is offering a manifesto of responsible, fair, and transparent government that is welfare friendly. It is well accepted by PAS's political allies and the citizens regardless of whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. The approach of political socialism improved and opened with a slogan such as 'PAS for all' and the emergence of a PAS fan club consisting of Chinese and Indian minorities that signal acceptance by non-Muslims. There is a possibility that the current PAS is different from the old one after a few leaders such as Asri Muda, Yusuf Rawa, Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat, and Fadzil Noor were gone. PAS is prioritizing working with UMNO and Bersatu for Malay/Islam interests and the survival of the nation's majority again.

Every political party has its core basis that forms the roots of its founding and becomes the party's central identity. This basis is essential in every political party because it is the driving force behind its decisions and actions. The party's leaders and members will work to realize the political aims agreed upon by all of them when making decisions and acting for the political party. Therefore, every action taken by the political party in the political alliance has this purpose in their objective.

This finding is also in line with De Swaan (2003), who states that the smaller the ideological distance between political parties, the more likely they will form a coalition government. It is because they are more likely to be able to agree on policy decisions, and their voters are more likely to accept the coalition. In addition, policy-oriented coalition theory typically assumes that parties pursue office at least instrumentally, as an elective office is considered a requirement for policy influence. Thus, the policy-seeking party is concerned about government portfolios and the ideological disposition of the coalition in which it participates (Budge & Laver, 1986).

Looking back to history, PAS is a splinter group from the UMNO, but since the separation, the group that founded PAS found it hard to stay with UMNO, as shown in Terengganu in the 70s. The competition between PAS and UMNO is not a new phenomenon. It lasts for an extended period and is full of bitter hatred for influence and power.

For the past 50 years, PAS contesting BN, especially UMNO, until there is a saying, "wherever there is a UMNO seat, the PAS will be there too." Almost all contested seats before this became a battle between PAS and UMNO. The cooperation between PAS and BN becomes more challenging regarding seat allocation and the ultimate number to be contested

compared to PAS working with PN. Now, UMNO controls 38 seats, whereas PAS only has 17 seats.

### **The formation of Perikatan Nasional influence by office-seeking behavior**

Office-seeking parties seek to increase their votes and political office control. The office-seeking party, as defined by such coalition theorists as Riker (1962); Leiserson (1968), aims to maximize its control of the elected office, often operationally defined in government portfolios. After the formation of the MN coalition, then, the National Alliance (Malay: Perikatan Nasional; abbrev: PN), which is a political coalition composed of the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM), Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), Homeland Solidarity Party (STAR Sabah), Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) and Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan). The formation of this party was induced by the Muhyiddin cabinet on 10 March 2020. As of 13 August 2021, Perikatan Nasional controls 50 seats, with the support of another 50 MPs (including confidence and supply). The coalition was the ruling government of Malaysia from March 2020 to August 2021.

On 17 May 2020, the leaders and chairpersons of BN, PPBM, PAS, GPS, PBS, and STAR Sabah officially announced a memorandum of understanding forming PN. Meanwhile, The United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), the largest party in Barisan Nasional, reasserted in July 2020 that it would not join PN but would continue to provide confidence and supply to PN and remain a part of the PN federal and state governments.

The cooperation between PAS and Parti Perikatan Nasional (PN) was registered on 7 August 2020, taking over the reins of government with no election or, in other words, without the citizen's mandate. The transfer of power enabled by-product of political cooperation between a few parties such as Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU), Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), and two local Sabahan parties, which Parti Solidarity Tanah Airku (STAR Sabah) and Parti Progresif Sabah (SAPP). A new coalition formation between PN wants to get the benefits of taking office from the then-ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition.

PAS chose to be with Perikatan Nasional (PN) in two state-level elections and fought Barisan Nasional in state elections (PRN) in Malacca and Johore. Despite only winning two seats in Malacca, PAS continued its alliance with PN in the Johore state election and won three seats at Bukit Kepong, Maharani, and Endau.

### **Conclusion**

Political leaders must prioritize their efforts to rebuild the economy, retrenchment, and national tourist sectors rather than debate political issues that could divide national unity during these unprecedented times. Besides that, leaders' priority should be unity in the face of such challenging times for the nation's interests. These leaders should place the people and national interest before their individual and their party's interests.

The current political situation is dynamic and therefore is constantly changing and even more difficult to predict. Within the alliance of this political coalition, a few elements should be considered to ensure and safeguard the stability of the coalition: a fair and balanced division, seat division, and all executive positions from the highest level to the lowest must be

emphasized. Political instability is now no longer decided by the people but by members of the Parliament that the people mandate. Naturally, the people of this nation want economic stability, harmony, and national progress to be maintained. The people do not need a sudden General Election (GE) to overcome the current strife and instability since the rapid spread of Covid-19 could transpire even faster.

The new norm of political coalition changes with the will of the people's representatives, whereby whichever support is given, the values of friendship and loyalty are redefined. Division of power, posts, and proportions are the main elements when bargaining to gauge the extent to which bargaining can guarantee constant loyalty to the government. Whether the support is sincere, solely to strive for the party, for oneself, or even to acquire power, cabinet minister posts are being questioned and seized. In short, the motivation to form coalitions may increase the power of a legislator's ideology.

After PN successfully takes over the government via political cooperation, many observers are watching what PAS will do in the coming GE-15, whether it is going back to work with UMNO in MN or staying with PN. It is crucial because it will settle two things at once: One is that PAS is confident of the resurgence of the blue wave, and working with MN will ensure its place with the ruling coalition if the revival is successful. Two, how far is PAS confident that PN will be a ruling party with just as many seats that enables it to be with the government again, ensuring PAS's position with the PN government? Both choices, which are MN and PN, are not accessible. Malaysian politics has changed considerably, with a big possibility that the coming GE-15 will have no winner with a clear majority. Therefore, the choice of alliance in the upcoming GE-15 is crucial. The wrong choice means PAS will be excluded from being in the future government. It can be said that PAS is precise. Compared to MCA or MIC, the choice of PAS is exceedingly tricky. The choice for MCA or MIC is simple because both parties have been partners of UMNO from the beginning since 1955. The MCA and MIC will sink or swim together with UMNO.

PAS must focus on a greater goal with other party parties in the political coalition to gain power and citizens' welfare. PAS must avoid discussing sensitive issues other component parties find hard to swallow. Communication, compromise, and tolerance must be prioritized so political cooperation prevails and minimizes ongoing conflicts. The strength of PAS is the devout and loyal (*wala'*) grass root that makes it unique from other parties. Everyone in the party will fully support any decision the top leadership makes.

In conclusion, PAS finds it untenable to leave both options, UMNO or Bersatu, when it has already tasted the power of being in the ruling government. They already enjoy positions and perks, so if these are gone, it is becoming a massive challenge for them to administer the country with its agenda.

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