



Research Article

Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) Versus Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah): A Contestation Over Interpretation of Islam in Malaysian Politics

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Abstract. This study analysed contending views over interpretation of Islam in politics between two major Malaysian Islamist political parties; *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS) and *Parti Amanah Negara* (AMANAH), and how the differing discourses taken were reflected electorally. It explored the historical dynamics of conservatism and progressivism within PAS, and by extension AMANAH as its splinter party. Primary and secondary documentation analysis was conducted on resources ranging

from writings and speeches of respective party figures, official documents and extensive literatures written on the subject. The research concluded firstly, a preference over Malay communalistic ideas in PAS was the main factor that led to the systematic elimination of AMANAH. Secondly, while PAS has a long historical root centred upon creation of Islamic state, implementation of *hudud*, and exclusivist attitude towards others, AMANAH views Islam from the higher objectives of *syariah* that emphasizes good governance, justice, and inclusivity regardless of religious and ethnic differences. Thirdly, a mutual contestation existed, *id est* not only AMANAH challenged the conservative Islamist narrative of PAS, PAS also challenged the progressive Islamist narrative of AMANAH. Finally, electoral contestation between PAS and AMANAH shown that AMANAH managed to edge over PAS in 14th General Election (GE14). However, PAS capitalized on ethnic sentiments to gain unprecedented electoral success in 15th General Election (GE15). While this research was limited to existing data in the field, future studies could utilize quantitative methods to explore how electorates on the ground grasp respective parties' ideas and contestation.

Keywords: PAS, AMANAH, Malaysian contemporary Islamic political thought, Islamism, progressivism

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to delve into the competition between PAS and AMANAH regarding their interpretations of Islam and progressiveness. Through an analysis of their ideological stances and political strategies, the research seeks to understand the factors contributing to the divergence in their interpretations. By examining the impacts of this ideological competition, including its implications for Malaysian politics and society, the study aims to shed light on the dynamics shaping contemporary political landscape in Malaysia.

Hence, this paper looks to answer the following questions:

1. How do PAS and AMANAH compete over the interpretation of Islam and progressiveness?
2. Why do PAS and AMANAH have different interpretations on Islam and progressiveness?
3. What are the electoral impacts of the ideological competition between PAS and AMANAH?

Based on the research questions, these objectives outlined were as the following:

1. To analyse the competition between PAS and AMANAH over the interpretation of Islam and progressiveness.
2. To identify the factors that led to different interpretations on Islam and progressiveness between PAS and AMANAH.
3. To investigate the electoral impact of the ideological competition between PAS and AMANAH.

Considering the wide array of existing literatures, this study benefits from those literatures by conducting a qualitative content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), qualitative content analysis is defined as a “research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data.” Krippendorff (2004) added that since the analysis is directed at making replicable and valid inferences, the sources is not confined to textual data, but may also include other meaningful data that were relevant to the contexts of their use. The content here hence not only relied on

secondary literatures, instead primary sources such as official party documents and books from major party leaders were also consulted for a more comprehensive reevaluation. Due to this reason, the findings may concur with, depart from, or add to the established knowledge in the field. In addition, relevant writings, reports of speeches, news articles, and official election data were referred to obtain necessary information. In some instances, the writings and reports were relatively outdated, but were taken nonetheless due to their importance in capturing essential context and ideological discourse that were transpiring at the moment.

METHOD

As one of the oldest political parties in Malaysia, extensive literatures have been written by and about PAS. Throughout his long stint as President, Abdul Hadi Awang produced a wide genre of literatures including those expounding on PAS's ideological and practical trajectory such as *Konsep Asas Negara Berkeadilan* (2011) and *Budaya Politik Matang dan Sejahtera Satu Penyelesaian* (2019). The party's pursued political outlook was also available for analysis in *Negara Islam* (2003) and *Dokumen Hijau* (2017). Apart from official party documents and books, major authors have produced secondary literatures about PAS. The literatures include a longitudinal history of PAS within Malaysian political discourse by Farish A. Noor (2014), a detailed account of PAS during Asri Muda's era by Kamaruzzaman Yusoff (2004), the Islamization Race by Mohammad Aguss Yusoff (2001), and its current ethnonationalist shift by Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (2018).

On the other hand, despite being a relatively young party, progressive leaders in AMANAH have been writing progressive ideas that allude to and would become the ideological foundations of AMANAH since late 2000's. This tradition later became more rigorous in 2010's due to the need to substantiate its ideology after the splinter with PAS (Yusof, 2009; Yusof, 2010; Yusof, 2012; Samad, 2016; Ahmad D., 2016). In addition, abundant secondary literatures commented on the development of AMANAH since 2015 such as during its formative period by Maszlee Malik (2017) and later development by Wan Saiful Wan Jan (2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideologies of PAS

As a major political party in Malaysia, PAS had a rich and diverse ideological dynamic that was impossible to be completely expounded in this study. However, the ideology that was strongly challenged by AMANAH was a strand of conservative Islamist tradition traced back to the global Islamic resurgence in 1980's. The 1979 Iranian Revolution changed the landscape of Islamist movements worldwide including PAS where a massive internal party reform was introduced. The Chairman, Mohd Asri Muda who has a nationalistic, BN-friendly character was pressured to resign and replaced by the Islamist Yusuf Rawa in what was regarded as the advent of *Kepimpinan Ulama*. A holistic structural transformation happened through establishment of a council of religious experts named *Majlis Shura Ulama* (Ulama Consultative Council) that consisted of 12 religious scholars and headed by a *Mursyid*

Al-'Am (General Guide). This was heavily inspired by Muslim Brotherhood, as it adopted frequent *halaqah* (study circles) (Noor, 2014).

The most prevalent idea was creation of an Islamic state; a desire to establish an Islamic polity and Islamize various aspects of life, including educational institutions, government agencies, and financial institutions (Saat & Alatas, 2022). These inclinations often put PAS at odds with United Malayan National Organization (UMNO) that actively ran their own top down Islamization projects and co-option of Islamist leaders into the party. In this period, termed by Noor (2004) as Islamization Race, UMNO and PAS tried to portray themselves as more Islamic than the other. The Islamic state agenda was used as the main criticism towards UMNO's top-down Islamization project, alleging it as insincere, hypocritical, and not Islam in the truest sense. This was because while projecting an Islamic image, UMNO propagated *asabiyyah* (ethnocentrism), and maintained a *kafir* (infidel), *mustakbir* (oppressive) regime (Müller, 2013).

Islamic state agenda however largely remained a loose, inconcrete, and reactionary set of ideas. It was only formalized much later in 2003 when PAS published a document entitled *Negara Islam* (Islamic State). The document outlined salient features of a juridical Islamic state PAS aimed to implement. Islam was regarded as having a prescription to temporal governance, highlighting values such as freedom, justice, and sovereignty as a central part of the Islamic state. The most controversial part was enactment of *hudud* punishment only upon Muslims, while non-Muslims were given a choice to either be judged according to *hudud* or existing law (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, 2003). Heavy criticisms were directed towards the book for being unconstitutional and creating an unequal duality of law. In addition, the values highlighted were argued as nothing less as what the current *Barisan Nasional* (BN) government already provided.

A central element of the Islamic state agenda was implementation of *hudud*; criminal offences in which punishments were divinely prescribed, namely on stealing, rebellion, adultery, false accusation of adultery, defamation, drinking intoxicant, and apostasy (Majlis Agama Islam Selangor, 2015). However, the major hurdle to implement *hudud* was a jurisdictional limitation in the Malaysian framework. Malaysian constitution explicitly divided federal and state jurisdictions, granting the federal government jurisdiction over criminal offences. Most of the *hudud* crimes are already listed in the Malaysian Penal Code, but with non-*hudud* manner of conviction and punishment. On the other hand, the states were only allowed to legislate Islamic criminal offences outside of the Penal Code, effectively rendering the aforementioned *syariah* enactments unimplementable, amounting to null and void (Ismail, 2014). Politically, it provided a point of contention between UMNO and PAS. While UMNO argued Malaysia is already Islamic, PAS highlighted this limitation as the evidence of secularity and infidelity of the regime, and hence the party that maintained it.

Regardless, PAS attempted to formalize *hudud* law by passing *Enakmen Kanun Jenayah Syariah II 1993* (1993 *Shariah* Criminal Offences Enactment II) in 1993 (Kamaruzaman, 2021). Recently in 2014, PAS tabled a private member's parliamentary bill to amend *Syariah Court Act 1965* (Act 355), a bill widely known as RUU 355. The proposed amendment that would increase the maximum punishment for religious

offences listed in state religious enactments from the existing limit of 3 years imprisonment, RM5,000 fine, and 6 lashes to 30 years imprisonment, RM 100,000 fine, and 30 lashes (Sabtu, Ismail, & Suhaimy, 2020).

PAS also had an exclusivist attitude with regards to those of different ideologies, particularly the nationalist UMNO and secularist Democratic Action Party (DAP). Contestation against UMNO was at its peak during the Islamization Race. In 1979, a Besut PAS leader Mustapha Abu Bakar made excommunicative remarks denouncing Muslim UMNO members as apostates. By implication, prayers led by UMNO imams were invalid, their slaughters were inedible, and their marriage solemnizations were void (Bakar, 1993). An excerpt of Abdul Hadi Awang's speech, infamously known as *Amanat Haji Hadi* (Edict of Haji Hadi) condemned UMNO for maintaining an allegedly imperial constitution, as well as infidel and *jahiliyyah* law. The speech also excommunicated those who separate religion with politics in the secular sense, which was widely understood as directed towards UMNO. The excerpt was exacerbated as a religious edict and *fatwa* (legal pronouncement), printed on a mass scale, then pasted and sold (Noor, 2014). In another occasion, Abdul Hadi Awang reportedly excommunicated UMNO members who supported the Federal Constitution, put the Federal Constitution above Al-Quran, and continuously oppress PAS members (Hamzah, 1992).

The remarks, regardless of whether intended or not created a major confusion and conflict in the Malay-Muslim community. It brought about a question in the definition of Muslim itself, as even a person commonly accepted as Muslim could be regarded as an apostate. This was aggravated by the fact that grassroots of UMNO and PAS lived together, and many of them were relatives. One such example would be Memali tragedy; a government crackdown on a suspected radical deviant group led by Ibrahim Libya. Reports shown that Ibrahim Libya internally disseminated excommunicative remarks towards UMNO members, waged a 'war by sword' against UMNO and prevented his followers from any engagement with UMNO members (Mutalib, Omar, & Ahmad, 2020). Resemblance of the remarks with *Amanat Hadi* and position of Ibrahim Libya as a PAS member prompted speculations PAS being the cause of the radical thought.

DAP was another party that presented a different, contrasting discourse in Malaysian politics; the secular discourse. PAS and DAP were consistently at loggerheads particularly when Islamic state and *hudud* agenda are mentioned. Nevertheless, series of political alliance were made with DAP. Informal cooperation between PAS and DAP started in 1990 when two parallel opposition coalitions were established; *Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah* (APU) and *Gagasan Rakyat* (GR). PAS became a member of APU while DAP led GR, then the two groups allied against BN. Subsequent formal political coalitions between PAS and DAP happened in 1999 through *Barisan Alternatif* (BA) and 2008 through *Pakatan Rakyat* (PR) (Hamid, 2018b).

Alliance with DAP brought new dynamics to PAS's political approach and perception of 'the others.' It was in this stage PAS demonstrated a progressive ideological shift away from conservative Islamism. PAS silenced the Islamic state agenda and moved towards a neutral narrative, embracing democratic principles.

They argued similarities between Islam and democracy, such as renouncing dictatorship, principle of *shura* (consultation), freedom of speech, and accountability encouraged participation in a parliamentary democratic system (Awang, 2011). A democratic, accommodative stance were also reflected in their electoral slogans such as *Negara Berkebajikan* (Welfare State) and PAS for All. Despite that, there was a constant prejudice and agitation among the conservatives in PAS towards DAP due to their contrasting ideologies. This was evident in the several setbacks that led to either party withdrawing the alliance occurred, usually due to DAP's criticism of PAS' Islamist stance.

A Progressive Influence within PAS

AMANAH started as a faction within PAS with a tendency to pursue a progressive approach with regard to implementation of Islam in politics, contrary to the mainstream conservative interpretation in PAS. Initially, their existence was diffused within the party and not regarded as a separate faction or entity. Some of them even held important positions, as senior as Deputy President. Some of the most influential in presenting this discourse included Mohammad Sabu, Mujahid Yusof Rawa, Dzulkefly Ahmad, and Khalid Samad. The progressives were pivotal in the 1999 decision to join *Barisan Alternatif* (BA). While Abdul Hadi Awang advised Fadzil Noor against the alliance, it was the progressives who convinced him to join. Figures such as Dr. Zulkefly Ahmad and Mujahid Yusof Rawa departed from the prevalent conservatism in PAS and preferred to be recognized as democrat Muslims, taking inspiration from Rachid Ghannouchi's Ennahda movement in Tunisia that was also gaining traction (Malik & Shukri, 2018).

Mujahid Yusof Rawa was one of the progressives who had genuine intention to reform the party, as has been proven by his extensive writing to prescribe transformational ideas for PAS. His key contribution to PAS was the inclusion of non-Muslims into the party. He proposed a constitutional amendment to open party membership to non-Muslims, establishment of a non-Muslim wing, appointment of non-Muslims representing PAS in elections, as senators, and into governmental positions (Yusof, 2009), into which it was accepted and implemented. On the grounds, his position as the Head of *Lajnah Perpaduan Nasional* (National Integration Committee) enabled him to initiate series of dialogue and discussion with United Chinese School Committees Association of Malaysia (*Dong Zong*). The engagements served to break the wall of relationship between PAS and the non-Muslim community (Mohd Zain, 2018) and paved way for eventual establishment of *Dewan Himpunan Penyokong PAS* (DHPP), a wing for non-Muslim supporters of the party (Yusof, 2010).

During the period of their affiliation with PAS, the progressives attempted to pursue their ideas within the confines of the party. Hence, there is no ideological contention as their efforts were seen as an endeavour for party improvement. Instead, they were more of pragmatism instead of ideological such as relations with non-Muslims and overall public image projection of PAS. PAS also benefited from the transformational ideas by having improved relations with non-Muslims, forged new political alliances, and made inroads electoral success. The progressives contested in *muktamar* and won as per the account of Wan Jan (2018), in addition to

being appointed into key party positions such as the case of Mujahid Yusof Rawa. This showed even though there was a rivalry, the progressives were accommodated in the party and the conflict has not spilled into the public sphere.

Establishment and Ideologies of AMANAH

Rift between the conservative and progressives in PAS was clearer following their differences in several events. In early 2014, *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR) initiated *Langkah Kajang*, an effort to instate Anwar Ibrahim, who was recently released from prison as Chief Minister of Selangor. The move involved resignation of Kajang State Legislative Assembly Member and supposed resignation of the current Chief Minister Abdul Khalid Ibrahim (Buang, 2016). However, Anwar Ibrahim was convicted of sodomy before nomination day, forcing his position to be taken by Wan Azizah. Feeling the move was unnecessary, Abdul Khalid Ibrahim refused to resign, in what transpired as an internal power struggle within PR over Selangor state government. Saifuddin Nasution then issued a 40-page note of alleged misconduct done by Abdul Khalid Ibrahim (Bernama, 2014).

Langkah Kajang was the starting point of factional identification of the progressives within PAS, hence a contestation in the public sphere. The progressives led by Mohamad Sabu were labelled pro-Mat Sabu, pro-Anwar and Anwarinas (Abdullah, 2014). Two PAS State Legislative Members from the progressive camp withdrew their support, against official party decision. Meanwhile, the conservatives protested by supporting Abdul Khalid Ibrahim and directing PAS EXCO members to continue serving the government. They viewed the move was baseless considering Abdul Khalid Ibrahim's excellent record, in addition to Saifuddin Nasution's document being a systematic smear campaign towards PKR's own government. A leaked message however revealed the conservatives were already in negotiations with UMNO not only to back Abdul Khalid, but also to support a *hudud* bill (Mohamed Osman, Sun, & Pasuni, 2014), possibly signalling a Malay-Muslim conservative political alliance.

Relations between the conservatives and progressives in PAS were further strained when PAS accepted UMNO's offer to support the tabulation of RUU 355 bill. There was a widespread allegation RUU 355 bill being a backdoor transition to *hudud* (Chin, 2020). RUU355, with *hudud* looming in the background became one of the defining discourse of PAS-AMANAH contestation over the Islamist narrative. This is because firstly, RUU355 strained PAS' relations with PR and openly forged a new one with UMNO. Secondly, RUU 355 bill put PR in an electorally difficult position. DAP who have always disagreed to *hudud*, cited the silence over matters disagreed by parties in PR was a prerequisite for continued alliance, in which RUU 355 bill has broken. Despite disagreeing to the bill, PR were forced to take a more reserved opposition as not to offend the Malay electorate.

The conflict culminated during the September 2015 *muktamar* which saw a fierce contest between the conservatives and progressives. The conservatives however prepared an unexpected surprise for the progressives. The election was not a straight up contest, instead preceded by a systematic dismantling of the progressives. A series of well planned, pre-arranged speeches that smeared the progressives as liberals and

traitors to the party preceded the election process. During the election, a list of conservative candidates was distributed to the representatives. All of the progressive candidates lost except Mazlan Aliman in the PAS Central Committee, but he later resigned, making the *muktamar* as a platform of total wipeout and systematic elimination of the progressives, hence the return of the Islamist (Kassim, 2017).

Establishment of AMANAH on 16 September 2015 as another Islamic political party added a new dimension to the discourse as they presented a unique balance of Islamic principles with democratic values. AMANAH introduced a departure from traditional Islamist rhetorics of PAS, advocating for a pragmatic and inclusive approach to politics. Central to their ideological framework was the concept of *Maqasid Al-Syariah* emphasizing the higher objectives of Islamic law, which include justice, rule of law, freedom, and good governance (Malik, 2017b). Unlike PAS's strict pursuit of Islamic state and *hudud*, AMANAH adopted a subtle stance, prioritizing issues such as fighting corruption and promoting social justice within an Islamic framework.

The aim for justice and good governance was a default position of opposition coalitions since 1999. This happened in light of *Reformasi* movement after the expulsion of Anwar Ibrahim from the government. The movement framed BN government as a corrupt, unjust, and oppressive government, in which a systemic governmental reformation was required. When Anwar Ibrahim was ousted by UMNO, it was PAS leaders such as Fadzil Noor and Nik Abdul Aziz that accommodated Anwar Ibrahim and provided him with a platform to rally upon. AMANAH therefore claimed to be the continuity of legacies of these figures who emphasized inclusiveness, good governance, and harmonious coalitional politics (Wan Jan, 2018).

The idea resonated even stronger during Najib Razak's administration. He was alleged to be a part of a major money embezzlement case involving 1 Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) funds, apart from rampant corruption by senior UMNO leaders and the unpopular Goods and Services Tax (GST). When several UMNO leaders attempted to advise against the practice, they were expelled leading them to form another party, *Parti Peribumi Bersatu Malaysia* (BERSATU). This painted his administration in the same corrupt, unjust, and oppressive tone, but at a higher level. Public rejection towards Najib Razak enabled PR to gain increasing electoral success, with possibility they could win the upcoming election. Hence for AMANAH, remaining committed to PR was morally and logically sound. The action of the conservatives to cooperate with UMNO was an electoral absurdity described by AMANAH as granting a 'walking stick' to prolong UMNO's life (Ahmad, 2022).

AMANAH's focus on pursuit of justice and good governance based on *Maqasid Al-Syariah* also presented an alternative discourse to the Islamic state and *hudud* agenda. *Syariah* was not viewed within the narrow confinement of *hudud* law, instead in the wider sense of ensuring a corruption-free government and the well-being of all, regardless of faith and ethnicity (Wan Jan, 2018). *Maqasid Al-Syariah* has filled two gaps in existing Malaysian Islamization discourse. Firstly, it provided substantive justification in contemporary implementation of *hudud*. Criticisms over *hudud* was not novel and has existed ever since PAS pursued the agenda. Mahathir Mohamad for

instance, in response to *Enakmen Kanun Jenayah Syariah II 1993* in Kelantan denounced it as 'hudud PAS' and not *hudud* in the truest Islamic sense (Yusoff, 2001). Despite following a similar line of argument, AMANAH added a substantive argument; it was the ends of morality from *hudud* that was intended, not the form of punishment (Zainal & Jani, 2017). Secondly, AMANAH filled the Islamization gap of UMNO in a different way from PAS. While PAS pursued a juridical alternative, AMANAH suggested a moral alternative through justice and anti-corruption reforms.

Dzulkefly Ahmad classified AMANAH as second generation Islamists emphasizing their inclination to employ persuasive arguments, even in a secular context, to succeed in democratic discourse. Essentially, they aim to demonstrate the practicality and significance of Islamic political principles through policy proposals. Their approach prioritizes strategic and rational deliberation as key factors in their decision-making process (Ahmad, 2016). This was translated in the structure of their *Majlis Penasihat Pakar* (Expert Advisory Council). The council represented transformation that was rejected by PAS towards their *Majlis Syura Ulama*; a consultative body with advisory role whose membership coming from diverse backgrounds. Only five out of the 15 were those with religious expertise, while others were from other professional fields (Wan Jan, 2018). This also demonstrated a democratization over interpretation of religion, contrary to the conservative centralization of religious truth.

AMANAH also featured commitment towards inclusiveness and tolerance. Despite being rooted in Islamic principles, AMANAH positions itself as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious party, welcoming members from diverse backgrounds. Their emphasis on *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* (mercy to the whole world) highlighted their aspiration to create a society based on compassion and justice, regardless of faith or ethnicity (Saidin, 2018). This stood in contrast to PAS's more exclusivist and conservative approach, particularly seen in their attitude towards UMNO in the 1980's and DAP recently. It could also be argued that AMANAH represented the progression of ideals that PAS did not fully embrace. While PAS rejected ethnocentrism, condemning it as *asabiyyah*, it ultimately chose to form an alliance with UMNO, a move perceived by some as contradicting its principles. Conversely, AMANAH opted to continue the path of multi-ethnic inclusivity by aligning with PH. This decision emphasized AMANAH's commitment to uphold a diverse and inclusive political agenda within the broader framework of PH, despite potential challenges and criticisms.

Another major feature of inclusivity in AMANAH was their categorical rejection of *takfiri* politics associated to PAS. *Takfiri* politics has proven to be a political baggage for PAS, as even though it has abandoned the rhetorics, the slightest exclusivist remarks would be met with an attribution to *takfiri* politics. For instance, in a call for enhancement of Islamic law, the mufti of Pahang remarked DAP as *kafir harbi* (warred infidels) for objecting RUU 355 bill (Abdul Hamid, 2018a). The remark sparked widespread outcry, as AMANAH leaders flocked to indirectly allude the *kafir harbi* attribution as rooted from PAS' Amanat Haji Hadi. Nevertheless, AMANAH also presented a rational argument on why *takfiri* politics should be rejected. The categorizations of non-Muslims into *zimmi* (protected) and *harbi* (warred) were

argued to be practiced in a different context where contemporary territorial borders and nation-states did not yet exist. Hence, the terminologies were no longer relevant with regards to non-Muslims today (Malik, 2017a).

AMANAH's willingness to engage with marginalized groups marks a departure from traditional political norms in Malaysia. For instance, during his tenure as Minister of Religious Affairs, Mujahid Yusof Rawa met with transgender activist Nisha Ayub and in transgender entrepreneur Nursajat (Musa, 2022). The meeting stirred significant debate as transgenderism was a public taboo in the Malaysian society. As the conservative sentiments among Malaysians did not approve of such engagements, it presented a perception that PH were endorsing LGBT lifestyle. This therefore was a bold move to challenge the prevailing taboos surrounding engagement with marginalized communities and include them within government policies.

PAS's response

While the PAS-AMANAH contestation over Islamist narrative was obvious, very few recognize that there was also a rivalry over the progressive Islam narrative. This started with the constant omission of a juridical Islamic state, *hudud* agenda, and *takfiri* politics in favour of other non-Islamic frameworks. The last time Islamic state appeared as the state framework for PAS can only be traced back *Negara Islam* document (Yusoff, 2004). In addition, the *hudud* agenda also has ceased to exist. Even though widespread allegations on RUU 355 bill being a backdoor transition to *hudud* (Chin, 2020), PAS never framed it as such. Instead, Mazida and Samudin (2022) argued based on their analysis of RUU355 bill, PAS' intention was primarily to enable state autonomy on legislation of Islamic law and as a means of education to offenders.

Since AMANAH argued that all the progressives have left PAS, PAS led its own systematic and rigorous transformation. *Jabatan Professional Muda* (JPro) was established under the Youth Wing to recruit members from a wide range of professional expertise to address and solve national issues. Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar, a distinguished aerospace engineer and lecturer that commented rigorously on MH370 tragedy was revealed as Abdul Hadi Awang's personal aide, and later became his replacement in Rhu Rendang seat and the party's Election Director (Ngah, 2018). Samsuri proceeded to win the seat and led an excellent first term as Chief Minister of Terengganu. When PAS filed a defamation lawsuit against Claire Rhewcastle Brown whom accused PAS had received RM90 million bribe from BN, it was PAS's own lawyers that represented the party on a pro-bono basis (Baharin, 2019). These showed within a short period of time, progressives that left PAS were already replaced, and in many cases surpassed by these newly emerging professionals.

Introduction of BPMS as a new political approach was important as strategic manoeuvre for the changing political landscape of 14th General Election. BPMS has two overarching ideas; firstly, a changing approach into *dakwah* (Islamic propagation) and *taawun siyasi* (political cooperation), and secondly, a nation-building vision based on technocratic Islamic democracy. Furthermore, WINS 2051 and *Dokumen Hijau* were two supplementary documents to BPMS. WINS2051 was PAS's nation-building vision in its 100th anniversary, envisioning Malaysia as a technocratic government centred around economic development and public welfare. The

document even out rightly denounced theocracy and anti-democracy (Awang, 2019). On the other hand, *Dokumen Hijau* highlighted alternative solutions for existing economic problems in Malaysia, namely implementation of GST, depreciating value of ringgit, and increasing cost of living. The proposed solutions such as introduction of corporate saving tax, capital gain tax, import substitution, and value engineering (Pusat Penyelidikan PAS, 2017) are clearly taken from macroeconomics theory, not Islamic jurisprudence.

As it turned out, an electoral alliance with UMNO never materialized. PAS went into the 14th General Election in 2018 as *Gagasan Sejahtera* (GS) alliance. Fielding their highest number of candidates, PAS flaunted the candidate list as the most professionally-studded in its history with the most diverse expertise and the highest number of educational and professional certification, as per required by its envisioned technocrat government. This proved the sheer membership depth the party had, and that those who left for AMANAH were just a tip of the iceberg of professionals in PAS.

Ideological differences between PAS and AMANAH would ultimately be brought to the polls. As an Islamic-based party of PH, AMANAH would challenge PAS in their traditional constituencies. This can be seen as most of the seats allocated to AMANAH were rural Malay-Muslim majority constituencies, with several sub-urban constituencies in Selangor. GE14 in 2018 was the first election AMANAH and PAS contested against each other where the major contesting alliances are BN, PH, and GS. The following table shows constituencies where AMANAH challenged PAS and their respective outcomes.

Electoral Contestation

Table 1: PAS-AMANAH contest in GE14

States	Seats contested by PAS and AMANAH	Seats won by PAS	Seats won by AMANAH	Seats won by Others
Kedah	2	1	1	0
Kelantan	5	5	0	0
Terengganu	3	3	0	0
Penang	1	0	0	1
Perak	4	0	2	2
Pahang	1	0	1	0
Selangor	5	0	5	0
Negeri Sembilan	2	0	1	1
Johor	2	0	1	1
Sabah	1	0	0	1
Sarawak	2	0	0	2
Total	28	9	11	8

In this election, PAS won a total of 13 constituencies; a commendable performance, while AMANAH as a new party won 11 constituencies. Based on the table, a total of 28 constituencies saw contest between PAS and AMANAH. AMANAH won slightly more at 11 while PAS only won nine. Eight seats were won by other

parties, mainly BN. A division by state showed a clear pattern, PAS won against AMANAH in all Kelantan and Terengganu constituencies. AMANAH's victory was shared evenly with BN, where they won in Perak, Pahang, Negeri Sembilan and Johor. Surprisingly, AMANAH also won all five constituencies it contested against PAS in Selangor. In general, AMANAH demonstrated a stellar performance as a new party in the 14th General Election. This was due to the fact that in a straight contest, it won more seats than PAS, all of its winning constituencies was against PAS, and it maintained incumbent seats in sub-urban Selangor. However, it has not managed to penetrate into PAS's stronghold in the East Coast, and even lost one incumbent seat in Kuala Terengganu.

Table 2: PAS-AMANAH contest in GE15

States	Seats contested by PAS and AMANAH	Seats won by PAS	Seats won by AMANAH	Seats won by Others
Perlis	1	1	0	0
Kedah	4	4	0	0
Kelantan	7	7	0	0
Terengganu	4	4	0	0
Perak	2	2	0	0
Pahang	4	3	0	1
Selangor	2	0	2	0
Kuala Lumpur	1	0	0	1
Negeri Sembilan	1	0	0	1
Melaka	1	1	0	0
Johor	2	0	1	1
Total	29	22	3	4

In the 15th General Election, PAS contested as a partner in *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) while AMANAH remained in PH. Another significant contesting alliance was BN. PAS won a total of 43 constituencies, 22 of them against AMANAH; the most in their history, and the highest achieved by a single party in the election. On the other hand, AMANAH only won eight constituencies. Three of them were against PAS; two in Selangor and one in Johor.

In the previous two General Elections, AMANAH became the main rival of PAS as they contested in constituencies with the same profile; the Malay dominated constituencies. Several trends can be seen from both parties' electoral performances. Firstly, AMANAH failed to challenge PAS' hegemony in the East Coast. Secondly, AMANAH maintained their victory over PAS in Selangor constituencies. Thirdly, PAS managed to make inroads victory into the Malay belt in Perlis, Kedah, Perak, and Pahang, and this happened at the expense of AMANAH.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

Previous studies have deliberated on the dynamics of Islamism propagated by PAS and AMANAH that highlighted their ideological departure. Studies on Islamist

ideologies of AMANAH particularly were often made in context of their historical roots from PAS, therefore indirectly provided a comparison between the two parties.

What many studies overlooked however was the fact that despite the ideological rivalry, the conservatives and progressives were in good terms; conflicts were only fought internally through party elections, there was no dissatisfaction over the election results, and the progressives were accommodated into senior party position enabling them to contribute to the party. *Langkah Kajang* and RUU 355 bill hence were watershed events that led to a change in this *status quo*. The conflicts were now fought publicly with distinct derogatory rhetorics aimed at each other's ideological position. In a national context, they set the preconditions for a major political realignment.

However, this study argues *Langkah Kajang* and RUU355 bill were merely political manoeuvres used to justify the main factor of ideological contention between PAS and AMANAH; the conservatives' Malay communalistic shift. Malay communalism was not a novel idea as PAS had a history of alliance with Malay based parties. Post-electoral coalition through PR presented a new obstacle; even though it was seen as a historic success, the conservatives were agitated due to the fact they installed the secular DAP into power (Samad, 2016). Abdul Hadi Awang proposed a unity government in 2009 between BN and PR (Mohamed, 2019) on the basis of "preventing non-Muslim domination of power" (Othman, 2021). The idea however received widespread disapproval including from PR partners and even Nik Abdul Aziz (Tong, 2017), leading him to retract it later.

This recent reference of prevention of non-Muslim influence alluded to Abdul Hadi Awang's vision of a Malay-Muslim political bloc that could single-handedly win elections without depending on DAP, in which previous researches have not mentioned. With the demise of Nik Abdul Aziz in 2015, one hurdle towards Malay communalism in PAS was removed. Another challenge was their alliance in PR. *Langkah Kajang* and RUU355 bill presented an opportunity to project a closer stance towards UMNO and further away from PR. The progressives who genuinely believed in justice and good governance fought by PR naturally wanted to remain, also considering that electoral victory might be close. This eventually led to the aforementioned contestation and their removal from the party.

The threat of DAP that led to these Malay communalistic tendencies could be argued as warranted, stemming from a difference in interpretation of 'agree to disagree' arrangement between the conservatives and progressives along with the rest of PR. This study agrees with description given by Wan Jan (2018) that Islamism and the desire to implement Islamic state and *hudud* has always persisted in PAS despite the apparent progressive attitudes. The conservatives believed 'agree to disagree' meant PAS reserved the right to advocate *hudud* without interference from other partners. On the other hand, the progressives believed the agenda should be sidelined in favour of PR agenda. This resulted in one party blaming the other for violating the alliance arrangement; the conservatives were convinced DAP interfered in PAS ideas, while the progressives were convinced PAS unnecessarily resurrected the *hudud* polemic.

The recent widely expounded ethnic polarization in Malaysia (Abdul Hamid, 2018b; Abdul Hamid & Zawawi, 2023; Chin, 2020) has benefited PAS electorally. Since 2015, PAS strategically capitalized on this trend by aligning themselves with Malay communalist sentiments which resonated strongly with rural conservative segments of the electorate. PAS were found to have galvanized their electoral base in Kelantan and Terengganu, and is making Perlis and Kedah their stronghold. However, this shift in political dynamics had adverse consequences for AMANAH. The party faced challenges in winning constituencies, experiencing an electoral thrashing, particularly in areas where PAS maintained a strong presence such as the East Coast. The polarization of the electorate along ethnic lines posed difficulties for AMANAH, as it struggled to compete with PAS' appeal to Malay communalist sentiments.

This situation raised a question; how did a same determinant brought contrasting effects towards two parties of the same electoral base. Two possible interrelated explanations may be given. Firstly, the ideological projection of PAS as a Malay-Muslim conservative party were more established and resonated with their major ally BERSATU, hence easily identifiable by the electorate. In contrast, AMANAH's progressive Islam was diluted and submerged in the myriad of ideologies within PH. Secondly, AMANAH did not have a specific electoral base, instead only relied on PH votes. AMANAH only leveraged the alliance's broader appeal based on national issues to attract support from various segments of society, which would also explain the geographic spread of constituencies they won.

Even though PAS attempted to contest the progressive narrative projected by AMANAH, it was only prevalent until GE14 and has not persisted since. It was replaced instead by more simplistic Malay communalist rhetorics. While liberal threats could be argued to exist, substantive criticisms towards government policies in order to provide a more viable oppositional politics as has been demonstrated by PAS pre-GE14 would benefit the country moving forward.

On the other hand, AMANAH should take serious deliberation on their ideological projection and electoral base. Considering the volatile nature of political alliances in Malaysian politics, the party could not only depend on PH votes, and need to think beyond the alliance. As a contender to PAS' hegemony in the East Coast, AMANAH could consider the explanation given by Osman and Ali (2018) that argued Kelantan as a maverick state in Malaysian electoral politics, influenced by local instead of national issues. Fresh faces should be introduced in place of the antiquated ones to present new local discourses to challenge PAS.

CONCLUSION:

This research explored the ideological contestation between two Malaysian Islamist political parties; PAS and AMANAH. AMANAH started as a progressive faction within PAS that was influential in transforming the party towards a moderate position. However, a preference over Malay communalism among the conservatives led to a public disagreement with the progressives during *Langkah Kajang* and tabulation of RUU 355 bill. The events resulted in a systematic elimination of the progressives who eventually formed AMANAH. AMANAH introduced an alternative discourse to PAS's conservative Islamism centred upon creation of Islamic state,

implementation of *hudud*, and exclusivist attitude towards others. AMANAH viewed Islam not in the strict juridical sense, but from the higher objectives of the *syariah* that emphasized good governance, justice, and inclusivity regardless of religious and ethnic differences.

The findings hence concurred to existing studies that presented PAS as a conservative Islamist party (Abdul Hamid A., 2018; Chin, 2020) and AMANAH as its progressive counterpart (Wan Jan, 2018; Malik, 2017). However, the paper brings positive implication to existing knowledge by arguing contestation between PAS and AMANAH were fought in both the Islamist and progressivist discourse; not only AMANAH attempted to be more 'Islamic' than PAS, PAS also tried to be more 'progressive' than AMANAH. This suggested Islamist movements can not be viewed as orthodox, conservative, liberal, or progressive per se, instead there are dynamic and intricate 'in-betweens' that need to be appreciated. The paper also contributed in relating respective parties' ideological divergence with their electoral performance. Bringing the ideological contestation to the polls, AMANAH managed to edge over PAS in GE14. However, PAS capitalized on ethnic sentiments to gain unprecedented electoral success in GE15. Future research may explore ideological dynamics and intricacies that existed within PAS and AMANAH, and how the parties were influenced by, and influenced the Malaysian discursive context. Researchers may also utilize quantitative methods to explore how electorates on the ground grasp respective parties' ideas and contestation.

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