

Educating the Masses for the Middle Path Strategy and the Political Action of the Islamic base Political Parties Post Malaysia 12th General Election, 2008

SHAHARUDDIN BADARUDDIN¹, MOHAMMAD REDZUAN OTHMAN²
AND AZAMI ZAHARIM³

¹The Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
University Technology MARA (UiTM),
40450 Shah Alam,
Selangor Darul Ehsan,
MALAYSIA

²Dean of History Department,
Faculty of Arts and Social Science,
Universiti Malaya,
50603 Kuala Lumpur,
MALAYSIA

³Head Centre for Engineering Education Research
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia,
43600 Bangi Selangor,
MALAYSIA

pmsahar@salam.uitm.edu.my, redz8182@gmail.com, azami.zaharim@gmail.com

Abstract:- The 12th Malaysian General Election (GE), 2008 has changed the political landscape of Malaysia. For the first time in Malaysian 50 year's political history, the ruling party the Front National (BN) has lost its two thirds majority in the Parliament and was defeated in several states. The reasons for the lost was due to the achievement of the opposition party to garner votes from the non Muslims and the capability to create a strong coalition to become an alternative to the existing government, besides the issues of governance that diminished the credibility of the ruling party. The Malaysian political history depends highly on how the political party can influence the majority of the Malay Muslim community, including the support from the non-Muslims. The supports from both communities became the essence of the achievement of the Front National (BN) since 1957. In the context of political Islam, the competition was between the United Malaysian Nationalist Organization (UMNO), the strongest coalition partner in the governing party and Pan Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). The achievements of UMNO is due to the image of toleration in defending Islam (the middle path) and manage to sideline PAS as an Islamic extremist and fundamentalist. Since the year 2004, the political competition took another route. The BN in trying to defend the Malay and Muslim rights loose the support from the non Muslims and the vote was transferred to the coalition of opposition party under the name of the Pakatan Rakyat (The People's Coalition PR). The changed happens especially to the open policy of PAS concerning the issues of women and the non-Muslims. The impact can be seen to the voting trend in which the non-Muslim can accept and votes for PAS candidates. These trends continue especially after the 12th General Election, 2008 in the series of by-elections.

Key-Words:- Malaysian General Election, politics, UMNO, PAS, BN

1 INTRODUCTION

Islamic political action after 2003 experienced a rapid change. The ruling party, UMNO has boldly declared Malaysia as an Islamic state to gain more votes from the Malay Muslim community. The transition of the leadership of Dr. Mahathir Mohammad to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has given provisional effect to the Malay Muslim electorate support to UMNO after losing it vote in the Malaysia 10th General Election (GE), 1999. With the strategy to introduce the concept of Islam Hadhari or civilization Islam, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has won the 11th GE with a landslide majority, successfully seized over the capability of PAS in the last GE.

Understanding the political fact of Malaysia, PAS had to make some readjustment in the strategies, particularly to the non-Muslim voters. Instead of highlighting the Islamic State concept, PAS manage to introduce the approach of PAS for All. In addition with the help of Anwar Ibrahim and Parti Keadilan Rakyat PKR (Peoples Justice Party), PAS has managed to win big in the 12th GE, 2008. This is due to the effectiveness of the campaign strategy in which PAS and the Peoples Coalition was not implying to be not only as an effective opposition, but try to be an alternative government. The experience in sharing power with the Democratic Action

Party (DAP), the Chinese base party and the PKR, has increase rapidly the changing of political action based on Islam.

2 THE BACKGROUND OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL COMPETITION

The issue of how the ruling party BN put the issue of Islam or to manage Islam depends on the developments taking place within the party itself. But we cannot deny that since the 1980s', from the result of the pressure and demand by the opposition parties and the Islamic Voluntary organization, UMNO had to adapt itself to the current needs of the Muslim society. Especially the pressure from the Islamic party PAS who want this country to be known as an Islamic state make UMNO try to legitimize itself as a party to fight and defend for Islam [1,2].¹

The process of Islamisation in the government machinery has developed a medium and trajectory for Islam to develop its own cause. In the early 1980's, its main target is to instill the Islamic values into the governance process and the structure of state institutions. The government has shown the commitment to promote the ideals and values of Islam with the implementation of a more universal context. The idea of Islamisation of the state from the perspective the Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad does not want to be too hasty in doing thing just to avoid the uneasiness from the non-Malay communities. The Islamisation process only starts with the government bureaucracy by the policy of the inculcation of the Islamic values before they can be implemented in all walks of life across the nation [3].²

But UMNO from the experience of ruling Malaysia since the independent has all the advantage of not only having its ability to adapt, but also the wisdom of putting Islam in a pluralistic society, which sometimes ended with a heated debate about the role of Islam itself. UMNO has the strength of consistent support system that serves to help ensure the survival of UMNO as a political party. According to a scholar, Hussain Mohamed the support system is based on value and the socio-culture of the Malay Muslims, the rule of law that they maintain, provisions in the Constitution that uphold the right of the Malay Muslim community and the structure of the system in a plural society [4].³

Political rivalry between UMNO and PAS has succeeded in changing the focus and orientation of UMNO. Even at the early stage, the focus is to provide encouragement to inculcate the Islamic values in the public life, but later it was changed to the restructuring of key institutions that are in line with Islam. The external forces produce by the PAS has a large impact on Islamic groups and it managed to change the cause of UMNO. From these competitions UMNO must show that they are more Islamic than PAS [5].⁴

The political action of PAS between 1981 to 2008 has shown a great change. From a party-like paralysis after internal conflicts at the end of the 1970s, PAS has come to influence Islam from outside the government periphery

with the more extreme in nature. But after understanding the reality of Malaysian politics and manage to create a coalition among the opposition party, PAS succeeded in capturing the state of Kelantan in the GE in 1990. Moving forward, PAS has to make some adjustments to make the Islamic political party more open to the concept of multi racial society.

The political crises and the reformation agenda in 1998 has been addressed by the PAS wisely to make the existing political environment in favor of PAS. PAS finally managed to expand the influence after winning the heart of the Malay Muslim community in the 1999 GE. PAS is no longer consider to be the opposition party at that time because they manage to control two Malay Muslim states that is Kelantan and Terengganu. The new phenomenon requires PAS to show more examples of how the Islamic party rule. Events occurring after that until 2003 requires PAS to re-evaluate their actions and strategy, especially in maneuvering politics. The 11th GE in 2004 has taught PAS to be more open and more strategic in action especially on how to involve the key groups in the society, namely the women and the non-Muslim community.

PAS achievement in terms of the election can be seen when PAS tries to be more open and more democratic. This can be demonstrated in the 10th GE 10, 1999 to the 12th GE in 2008. Beginning with only one parliamentary seats in 1982 and the change to the ulama (Islamic scholars) leadership, a more aggressive action of PAS and PAS extremism has tarnish the image of the party in leading the Malay Muslim community. However, the smart strategy of political alliances has increased the performance of the PAS especially in Kelantan and at the same time managed to successfully increase the number of seats in the Parliament. The openness of the party gave an impact in 1999 have further increased the popularity of PAS when PAS for the first time secured 27 parliamentary seats and it is repeated again in the 12th GE, 2008.

3 ISLAM AND DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL ACTION IN THE 12TH GE, 2008

The 12th GE is the election to garner the non-Muslim votes. The issues of Islam is no longer a major agenda of political parties. UMNO is no longer using Islam Hadhari (civilization Islam) as the primary campaign, while PAS has started to downplay the strategy of the Islamic state simply trying to deny BN two thirds majority. The political action that change this trend is due to the non-Muslim voters that has switched to the opposition. If the personality of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi become the inroads for UMNO to win the landslide majority in the 11th GE in 2004 [7],⁵ the character assassination of Abdullah also become a key issue in the 12th GE, 2008 [8].⁶

The result of the 12th GE on March 8, 2008 truly surprised a lot of parties. Although the BN won in the national level by winning 140 seats in the Parliament, but this achievement is without a two thirds majority. For

the first time in the history of election in Malaysian politics, the opposition coalition manage to deny the two-thirds majority by capturing 82 seats (PKR-31, DAP-28, PAS-23). In terms of the total votes obtained, the BN only manage to get 51 percent of the popular vote and 63 percent of the parliamentary seats [9].⁷ There is a shift of voting behavior along the line of ethnicity. In the parliament, the voting shift of the Malay votes are within 5.13 per cent, while the Chinese shift reaching to 56.26 percent, while the Indians trends are shifting even larger with the shift of 69.09 percent [10,11].⁸

Across the country, especially in the areas where voters comprise a mixture of 40-60 per cent of Malay voters, BN won 28 seats while the opposition People's Alliance manage to get 26 seats. This shows that the unity among the opposition has already becoming a very close competition and have successfully modeled the BN way and formulae in winning an election [12,13].⁹

Table 1: The seat that won Based on Political Party, General Election 2008

	Political Party	Parliament	State
Barisan Nasional	UMNO	79	248
	MCA	15	31
	PBB	14	
	MIC	3	7
	Gerakan	2	4
	SUPP	6	
	PRS	6	
	PPP	0	0
	UPKO	4	4
	SAPP	2	3
	LDP	1	1
	PBS	3	8
	PBRs	1	1
	SPDP	4	
Opposition	JUMLAH BN	140	307
	PAS	27	83
	DAP	23	73
	Keadilan	31	41
	Bebas	1	1
	JUMLAH	82	198

Many factors have been analyzed on why BN suffered a setback in the 12th GE. Among the existing view that the great factor concern with the approach of Islam Hadhari itself. Based on the results of the 12th GE, implementation of Islam Hadhari was faced with a dilemma, especially the state in which the BN lost in Selangor, Perak and Penang. Islam Hadhari create a problem when it is associated with the leadership of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Although there are studies showing that Islam Hadhari is not a conclusive factor to the defeat of the BN, but Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership become the significant contributing factors [14].¹⁰ As mentioned by

Farish A. Noor on the administration of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi;

"Half a decade on, it would appear that Badawi's days are drawing to an end, and with that Islam Hadhari as well. In the years and decades to come, future historians may be kinder to Badawi who may be remembered as the man who tried to reform Malaysia but failed, and whose failure was due to the rot and inertia that had settled in the very same corridors of power that he walked. But perhaps the biggest lost for Malaysia in the long run will be the demise of Islam Hadhari as a project that was never really understood, unfairly criticized, crassly instrumentalised and ultimately cast into the dustbin as just another item in the long train of baggage left behind in the wake of Badawi's exit from power."[17]¹¹

Surprising the opposition coalition manage to established a government in Kedah (PAS led government), Penang (DAP led government), Perak (mixed government) and Selangor (PKR led government) and at the same time managed to retain the state Kelantan and almost winning a clean sweep in the parliamentary seats in the Federal Territory. The political tsunami that struck the 12th GE is a matter of interest for analysis.

Before the election, the DAP has made a significant change in the policy struggle with the strategy to downplay the slogan of "Malaysia for Malaysian". Certainly the latest approach is to attract the support of the Malay voters as well as facilitate any alliance that going to be among the opposition. Easily the most effective slogans carried by the DAP themed Vote for Change (Jom Berubah) has attracted a multiracial society in Malaysia. Plus a large number of issues that the Chinese society has caused them to reject the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and GERAKAN giving the opportunity to the DAP to control Penang [19].¹²

While PAS featured the Manifesto of "Heading for a Welfare State" or "A Caring and Service Oriented Nation" in which the strategy is to give emphasis on the importance of economic and wealth management in the country so that it is managed wisely and be able to bring sustainable development to the people and country. PAS first objective is to deny two-thirds majority and does not highlight the creation of an Islamic state. Justifiably, if you are only trying to contest in the 60 parliamentary constituencies, how can you create and establish the Islamic state whereas to do that you need to capture a two third majority in the parliament [18, 20].¹³

The People Justice Party (PKR) with the supremo Anwar Ibrahim spearhead the slogan of "New Hope For Malaysia". The party machinery manage to circulate a leaflet which is to provide a better life to people and sensitive to their needs. In addition to the economic growth and ensure social justice, the nation need to be free from corruption and cronyism. In presenting the Malaysian Economic Agenda to replace the New Economic Policy, Anwar Ibrahim has said, "The principle of justice will be nurtured, the fate of the poor and marginalized society will be advocated, and injustice and

discrimination will be terminated. The features of social and economic depravity has damage and threaten the integrity of the system, especially corruption and the abuse of power, giving emphasize to only a small group of family, cronies and the rich and at the same time marginalize the majority of the people must be rejected [22].¹⁴ Anwar Ibrahim factor is itself the key factor in ensuring the success of the opposition partnership and unity in the 12th GE [23].¹⁵

The three parties agreed to submit a campaign based on the following issues. First, the increasing cost of living burden. Secondly, the safety and life of the people. Third, the responsibility to the neglected people. Fourth, the closing gap between rich and poor. Fifth, the commercialization of health and education services. Sixth, the abuse of power and corruption of the government increased. Seventh, the heritage and richness of the country continues to be dominated by the cronies. Eighth, the violation of the principles of democracy and human rights [24].¹⁶ Campaign using the issues mentioned above have been taken through the alternative media that are consider to be the most effective tool in the struggle against the mainstream media that is controlled by the government [26].¹⁷

One of the success of PAS in the 12th GE is how to get the vote from the non-Muslims. A number of strategies have been developed in the process of obtaining such support. Among them were the establishment of PAS supporters club, which has the access to issue demand across the nation. In the face of current challenges, Islam became the target of an allegation that impair the appearance among the non-Muslims. PAS has managed to make a paradigm shift as well as breaking the walls of separation within the opposition, when they successfully received direct support from among the non-Muslims, without arguing the approach of Islam as a solution to the problem of the nationhood [30].¹⁸

PAS has also brought a new chapter in national politics when manage to place a candidate from PAS committee of National Unity of Johor. Kumutha a/p Rahman holds a law degree from Britain competing for the State Assembly of Tiram in the state of Johore. Kumutha nomination is a prove of PAS providing a place for supporters of the non-Muslims representing the party. In the posters and banners, PAS has also promoted the slogan of PAS for All [31].¹⁹

Pakatan Rakyat victory to set up some state governments in Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor and also managed to deny BN two thirds majority in Parliament, has opened a new landscape of the Malaysian politics. The probable existence of the two party system in Malaysia cannot be denied when the two coalition parties combined can become a check and balance and can give the people choice, either to choose the BN or Pakatan Rakyat. Most interesting is the combination of these two parties must has the characteristics of Islam as the core, the Malay race as a base and the components of a plural society as a reality of the strength of the Malaysian society [22].²⁰

The relationship between the federal government and state governments cannot be made in the traditional way for simultaneous opposition victory in five states allow them to establish a secretariat to strengthen the position of the unity government [33].²¹ The new paradigm of politics is needed in view of Malaysian politics after the 12th GE, 2008 [34].²²

4 THE MIDDLE PATH OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL ACTION POST 12TH GE

The continuous by-election that occurs beginning with the by-election in the parliamentary seats of Permatang Pauh has its own theme and competition. The Permatang Pauh by-election shows the return of Anwar Ibrahim to the Malaysia political stage. With the idea to capture Putrajaya on the 16th September 2008, Anwar Ibrahim has been successful in strengthening the unity of the opposition to ensure that his mission was successful. Certainly it is not easy because the issues of the second sodomy charged and the curse of the oath during election campaign become a challenged to Anwar Ibrahim political comeback. Despite the many challenges and a campaign full of character assassination, Anwar Ibrahim managed to increase winning majority in Permatang Pauh.²³ The by-election of Kuala Terengganu raises up the issues of Islamic traditions such as the creation of an Islamic state and the implementation of hudud law, an attempt by the UMNO led BN to discredit the struggle of PAS.²⁴

Similarly, in Bukit Gantang by-election, PAS achievements in defending the rights of Muslims was questioned as too subservient to the DAP. But PAS has brought a new approach by championing the issues of democracy and consensus among the people. UMNO has no choice other than trying to return to the issue of Islam and the future leadership of the Malays. Similarly, in the by-election of the state constituency Manek Urai, Kelantan; Permatang Pasir in Penang and Bagan Pinang, Negeri Sembilan, PAS had to try to disperse the internal problems that occurred while at the same time trying to show the solution to the concept of PAS for All that being popularized since the last GE.

In view of the Islamic political action, especially trying to find the middle way, the analysis of this paper will be based on the issues the candidates, the use of Islamic symbols in the election campaign, the issues of hudud, the meaning of partnerships and alliances among the opposition, and the issue of unity between UMNO and PAS. The issue of hegemony of the ruling party BN is still a big issue, especially after the BN lost its strength after the 12th GE.²⁵

In a series of by-elections, PAS has made a full use of working in unity. It is shown clearly in Kuala Terengganu when during the election every program has been carried out jointly between the three opposition party. PKR and DAP leaders who have been to the grass roots since the nomination has shown a strong commitment to the consensus of the political parties. DAP leaders are no exception in the campaign and provide full support. DAP

concentration in Kuala Terengganu by-election is in the place of Chinese majority.²⁶

The trends of new politics and the middle way can be seen through large posters in every corner of Kuala Terengganu streets which include the picture of Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Abdul Hadi Awang, Anwar Ibrahim, Lim Kit Siang and the candidates put together. This is considered a new courage for PAS because to put a picture of Lim Kit Siang in a Malay majority areas was previously viewed as very sensitive. For the first time in the history of election, the picture of Lim Kit Siang was placed at the rank of the Malay Muslim leadership in the Malay majority constituency was considered to be a big change in the Malaysian political scene. However, PAS machinery put pictures of the candidates Abdul Wahid Endut alongside with Anwar Ibrahim at the majority of Chinese voters in the city centre is an effort to gain tactical stock of Chinese society.²⁷

In the by-election of Bukit Gantang, PAS also defended the action of DAP in using the Quranic verses on the grounds of Islamic preaching. This issue started when Nga Kor Ming, recite the Quran verse, Surah An-Nahl verse 90, concerning leadership during the by-election campaign of Bukit Gantang. The issue has become the polemics among religious and political figures. The PAS State Commissioner of Perak, Ahmad Awang defended the action on the grounds of preaching. The action and comment of PAS leadership will be different if it is occurred five years before.²⁸

However, the Mufti of Perak, Datuk Seri Harussani Zakaria does not allow the usage of Quranic verse by the non Muslim because it is read during the election campaign when he did not believe in Islam. The process of defending the action of a party in the coalition is considered to be a big risk because PAS is likely to lose support from the Malay Muslim community. But by thinking of the long-term political and close collaboration within the People's Alliance in the opposition, the issue should be downplay by the leadership of PAS.²⁹

Similarly, in the Permatang Pasir by-election, PAS had to defend the government position of DAP in Penang on the basis of consensus. Even at that time there was a debate over Islam has began to be marginalized by the government of Penang, and the voice of Islam in the government of Penang have been reduced. On this aspect, the main approaches in Permatang Pasir is that PAS was trying to get more than 75 percent of the Chinese voters by stating the success story of DAP and Lim Guan Eng in Penang [42].³⁰ While within the Malay community, PAS will highlight the issue of traitors while maintaining that since the DAP take over the state government, the provisions of budget to the Islamic institution have increased double fold, particularly the increase in the allowances of KAFA teachers in Penang and also the attempts of Lim Guan Eng to be the Caliphate Umar Abdul Aziz as an example and the model of administration [43].³¹

During the Bagan Pinang by-election, the PAS also celebrate the Lantern festival organized by the DAP of Negeri Sembilan. On the October 3, 2009 at the Teluk

Kemang DAP headquarters, PAS leaders were celebrating the Feast Day of the Moon. Taking into account the philosophy of the festival, Nizar Jamaluddin the ouster Chief Minister of Perak as the main guest at a time when it was mentioned that the BN government was worse than the time of Mongol Yuan Dynasty in China and ask the voters to act similarly like the Han Chinese fighter who finally gave birth to the celebration of the moon. A new approach arises when a candidate of PAS distribute moon cakes and distribute balloons to children as accordance to the Chinese tradition.³²

Clearly reflected in the competition for the middle path is when there is debate on the use of the word Allah, especially between UMNO and Pakatan Rakyat. It is the result of the decision made by Judge Datuk Lau Bee Lan on the December 31st when she allow Roman Catholic Titular Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur to use the word of Allah in the weekly publication, The Herald - The Catholic Weekly. The judgment is seen as eroding the privileges of Islam as the official religion of the Federation.³³

5 CONCLUSION

The competition to grab the influence of the non-Muslim communities have transformed the political action and behavior that is entrenched since the independence. Taking the middle path gave PAS a great benefit in terms of electoral politics when PAS first accepted as a beneficial component in the context of political reality in the society. The ruling party BN especially UMNO tries to maintain the image of tolerance that is lost through the submission of the concept of 1 (One) Malaysian. Islamic legal issues and the implementation process of Islamisation in terms of politics used to be the advantages to the political parties have begun to burden the Islamic Civil Society to fight for it.

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