Malaysia

Quick Facts

Population: 32,652,083 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 329,847 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Bumiputera 62% (Malays and indigenous peoples, including Orang Asli, Dayak, Anak Negeri), Chinese 20.6%, Indian 6.2%, other 0.9%, non-citizens 10.3% (2017 est.)

Government Type: Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy

GDP (official exchange rate): $312.4 billion (2017 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated November 2020)

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has long been viewed as a pro-Western, moderate Muslim-majority country. In recent years, however, it has experienced a shift toward Islamic conservatism, as evidenced by the increasing popularity of sharia law, the state-sanctioned suppression of civil rights and liberties, and moral policing by Islamic religious authorities. While a 2018 election victory for the country's then so-called Pakatan Harapan (PH) opposition coalition had initially raised hopes for a more inclusive, multicultural turn, political shifts since then, along with wider trends, have dampened such hopes.

Islam's increased visibility in Malaysian society and politics in recent years has been driven not only by the Islamist Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia, or PAS), but also by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), whose members were also the architects of Malaysia's brand of progressive, moderate Islam.[1] Likewise, alternative actors increasingly participate in Malaysia's politicization of Islam, at times eclipsing mainstream political parties. Islam in Malaysia is arguably fragmented and variegated in both substance and expression, with religious vocabulary and idioms being mobilized by the state, opposition forces, and a wide array of civil society groups. While Malaysian Islamists nominally operate within the boundaries of the country's mainstream political processes, they also work to define them. Moreover, even as the Muslim opposition attempts to shed its doctrine in pursuit of a reform agenda, the "moderate" UMNO-led government seeks to constrict the country's cultural and religious space. Many assumed that PH's recent electoral triumph signaled a greater willingness to promote a moderate, multicultural agenda. However, recent political upheavals have undermined the PH's efforts while promoting PAS to a position of power within a newly formed coalition.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Parti Se-Islam Malaysia (Pan Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS)

PAS was established as the Pan Malaysian Islamic Party in 1951 by dissidents from UMNO's Bureau of Religious Affairs, and has participated in every Malaysian parliamentary election since 1955.[2] PAS continuously advocates for Malay interests and Muslim rights. In its early days, PAS was particularly popular among rural, ethnic Arabs and religiously-educated Malays.[3]

By 1982, PAS's political stance was infused with Islamist aspirations. During this time, old-guard ethno-nationalists were voted out via party elections and replaced by *ulama* (religious scholars). This transformation coincided with burgeoning sentiments among Malay-Muslims that Islam is *addin* (a way of life) and thus should play a role in both personal and political spheres.[4]

The global resurgence of Islamic consciousness during the 1970s and early 1980s, coupled with the religious leadership epitomized by the likes of Fadzil Noor, Abdul Hadi Awang, and Nakhaie Ahmad, contributed to the party's pronounced Islamic agenda.[5] The result was a public rivalry between PAS and UMNO that hinges on discourse about morality, with PAS admonishing UMNO for marginalizing Islamic laws and the political leadership's failure to observe Islamic ethics and morals.

While PAS's commitment to its religious agenda prevented the party from cooperating with secular opposition allies,[6] a steady expansion of its support base in states such as Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis, and in universities throughout the country, in the 1990s indicated the party's rising popularity and the appeal of *sharia*-centered politics.[7] The party's outlook is buttressed by its unyielding belief that the creation of an Islamic state is both viable and necessary. Since 1990, PAS has presented draft proposals to parliament for the introduction of *hudud* (limiting) criminal law in Kelantan.[8] Similar efforts followed PAS's electoral triumph in Terengganu in 1999. However, as criminal law falls under the jurisdiction of the federal, rather than *sharia*, courts, the motions were withdrawn on both occasions.

A turning point in the party's Islamic-state agenda arose before the March 2008 elections. Given the party's dismal performance in the 2004 elections, PAS leaders promised to soften the party's stance on the Islamic-state issue.[9] Anwar Ibrahim, ex-deputy prime minister of Malaysia and current leader of the reformist People's Justice Party (PKR), echoed this shift, claiming that "PAS's intention to establish an Islamic state is no longer an issue."[10] In the 2008 election, PAS distanced itself from the Islamic-state objective and attempted to leverage the disenfranchisement of Malaysia's ethnic minorities.[11]

In an obvious effort to woo non-Muslim votes, PAS leaders emphasized that their national campaign would focus on the promise of a welfare state system, known as *negara kebajikan,* accessible to all Malaysians.[12] This agenda included populist initiatives such as free education, free and accessible water utilities, cheaper fuel, and health subsidies.[13] Furthermore, PAS would pursue wealth distribution through taxation policy that targeted large businesses in order to offset subsidies earmarked for the poor.[14] Not only was the welfare-state concept intended to make the Islamist agenda more palatable, PAS hoped it would enhance the appeal of the party across the electorate.[15] Indeed, these were all important developments in ensuring non-Muslim support for PAS in the 2008 elections, in which the party made considerable gains and raised its total number of seats in the National Parliament from seven to twenty-three,[16] PAS created a non-Muslim wing in 2010 in efforts to run non-Muslim candidates in mixed seats during future elections. They fielded non-Muslim candidates in 2013 and 2015.[17]

During the May 2013 election, the incumbent coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN), led by Prime Minister Najib Razak, maintained a majority in Parliament despite a resurgence of the opposition. In protest, Pakatan Rakyat (PR), then the minority coalition of which PAS was a part, demonstrated against the election results.[18] Although the PR coalition's other constituent parties –the secular Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the moderate PKR – agitated on the basis of electoral malfeasance, PAS advocated for an Islamic state and rumors of a possible "Malaysian Arab Spring" circulated among opposition leaders.[19]

Within PAS, rumblings of dissatisfaction over the party's less than stellar electoral performance began

to grow. Some PAS leaders noticed that the party was defeated in Malay-majority areas. The party has since lost two of its twenty-three seats. Some PAS leaders later attributed the decline in the party's popularity among its core Malay base to its support for the dismantling of longstanding, race-based affirmative action policies.[20]

At the PAS *muktamar* (annual congress) held at the end of 2013, the gulf between religious conservatives and the progressives who wished to continue building on inclusive political engagement widened considerably. Although several conservatives were voted into PAS's central committee at the 2013 *muktamar*, overall party make-up did not change. As such, the party remained with the PR coalition.[21]

However, by 2015, PAS conservatives actively renewed their *hudud* implementation agenda, with the PAS-dominated Kelantan state assembly unanimously passing amendments to the Syariah Criminal Code that would approve *hudud*.[22] Inevitably, this move was met with strong condemnation from PAS's coalition allies, DAP and PKR. After PAS leadership was firmly secured by the conservatives at the 2015 *muktamar*, PAS severed its ties with PR. Several months later, the progressive faction, which was sidelined within PAS, split to form a new political party, the Parti Amanah Negara.[23]

PAS failed to make electoral gains in 2013, which likely provided the impetus for conservatives within the party to re-establish their dominance. Since then, PAS has redoubled its efforts to implement *hudud*. In 2016, PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang passed legislation that would increase penalties meted out under the Syariah Courts (Criminal Jurisdiction) Act, but the legislation was tabled in Parliament. Meanwhile, at the behest of the party president, PAS has accommodated UMNO in the name of Malay-Muslim unity.

PH's shock win in Malaysia's May 2018 election boosted the case for an alliance between PAS and UMNO. In September of that year, the presidents of the two parties signed a five-point code of conduct which outlines how both parties plan to move toward the next general election.[24] It touched on several agenda items, including the preservation of Islam as the official religion in Malaysia. Despite PH's demise, questions have remained about the shape of shifting political dynamics and the relationship between the two parties.[25]

Former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Muhyiddin Yassin ascended to the position of Malaysia's 8th Prime Minister during what has been dubbed the "2020 Malaysian Political Crisis." The crisis began that February, after the resignation of 92 year-old Mathahir Mohammed, Yassin's predecessor and PH's President, and is ongoing as of writing. In the early days of the crisis as part of a series of backroom conversations among coalition party political elites, Yassin was chosen to head a new coalition government, which formed in an effort to block Mohammed's assumed successor, Anwar Ibrahim, from taking up the mantle.[26] Yassin's new coalition, Perikata Nasional (PN), encompassed former parties in the PH government (including the party of Yassin and Mohammed, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia, otherwise known as "Bersatu," or the Malaysian United Indigenous Party, as well as PAS, the Homeland Security Party, or STAR, and the Sabah Progressive Party, or SAPP). Because this new coalition had enough political support in Malaysia's lower house of parliament, Yassin was named Malaysia's new Prime Minister instead of Ibrahim. Notably, PAS holds the 18 parliamentary seats it won in the 2018 elections (the second-most among PN coalition parties, only behind Bersatu, which holds 31), and its president, Abdul Hadi Awang, is Malaysia's Special Envoy to the Middle East.[27]

Radical Salafist Groups

Malaysian Salafism has its roots in the 1920s Islamic reform movement known as Kaum Muda (Young Generation).[28] Inspired by the Islamic reform and intellectual ferment taking place in the Middle East, a segment of Malaysia's Muslim intelligentsia advocated a literalist interpretation of Islamic scripture. This movement experienced something of a revival in the 1980s on the back of Saudi, Jordanian, and Kuwaiti-funded scholarships for Malaysians to further their education in Salafi Islamic tertiary institutions in those respective countries.

The KMM (Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia/Kumpulan Militan Malaysia, or Malaysian Mujahidin

Group/Malaysian Militant Group), an alleged underground militant group, was uncovered when it attempted to bomb a shopping mall in Jakarta in August 2001. The group reportedly favors overthrowing the Malaysian government in favor of a regional Islamic state.[29] KMM differs from other militant organizations in Malaysia in terms of its reach. Though established in Malaysia, several sources indicate that KMM enjoys close links with *Jemaah Islamiyah* in Indonesia.[30] Nevertheless, the exact nature of this relationship remains murky.

Despite inconclusive evidence, Malaysian intelligence sources allege that KMM participated in religiously inspired riots in Maluku and Ambon in 2000 and supplied arms to radical Muslims.[31] Arrests of KMM leaders led to the discovery of "documents on guerrilla warfare and map reading, along with studies of militant groups in the Philippines, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Indonesia" in their possession.[32] In response, Malaysian security forces launched a nationwide operation to arrest the group's remaining members. Up to seventy KMM members were detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for allegedly trying to violently overthrow the government in the name of *jihad*.[33] Most of those detained have since been released, but the organization is now officially outlawed.[34]

Al-Maunah (Brotherhood of Inner Power) was a non-governmental organization involved in teaching martial arts, particularly the development of one's inner powers and the practice of Islamic traditional medicine. At its most prolific, the group may have had more than one thousand members in Malaysia and overseas, particularly in Tripoli, Libya.[35]

In June 2000, the al-Maunah movement successfully stole arms from two Malaysian Armed Forces military camps in Perak. Members of the group dressed up in military fatigues and drove jeeps painted in camouflage green, indicating the likelihood that the heist was an inside job.[36] According to police reports, the group had at least several hundred members led by a former army corporal, Mohammad Amin Razali. Several other sources revealed that civil servants, security services personnel, and even some UMNO members numbered among its ranks.[37] In response, Malaysian security forces targeted al-Maunah's base camp in Sauk, Perak, in July 2000.[38] Nineteen members were eventually captured, and those apprehended were charged with treason and plotting to overthrow the government, with the intention of establishing an Islamic state. Al-Maunah no longer exists today.

It is important to note that both KMM and al-Maunah cited local issues as the primary causes of their grievances, pursuing a predominantly domestic political agenda. For example, al-Maunah demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir and his cabinet, while in the case of the KMM, its three key objectives – "to seek religious purity among Malay-Muslims," "to ensure that PAS' political struggle was maintained and encouraged," and "to implement *sharia* within Malaysia" – all pertained to domestic political concerns, despite efforts on the part of the government to link them to a transnational terrorist agenda.[39]

Any evidence linking these militant movements with external organizations remains inconclusive. Although these domestic movements share some degree of ideological affinity, as well as rudimentary contacts with external organizations, they are purportedly not controlled by any outside group.[40] Therefore, despite attempts to associate KMM with external groups and regional objectives such as the grandiose vision of Darul Islam Nusantara in the region, formal charges leveled against the organization made no mention of links with either Jemaah Islamiyah or al-Qaeda.[41] KMM was charged under the ISA for its attempt to overthrow the government.[42]

There is a concern that the Islamic State's (IS) ideology has enveloped Malaysia. The Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) Special Branch Counterterrorism Unit has the lead CT law enforcement role in the country. This unit identifies terrorist threats and reported several arrests during the year to prevent planned terrorist attacks. In March 2020, RMP reported the arrests of nine suspects, including six Egyptians and two Tunisians, for suspicion of plans to launch large scale attacks in several countries. The RMP Special Branch Department made the arrests after receiving a tip from intelligence agencies about the presence of suspected terrorist

fighters in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Sarawak. From July to September, law enforcement reported the arrest of 16 suspects nationwide, which included 12 Indonesians, three Malaysians, and an Indian. The suspects were accused of attempting to establish an ISIS cell in Malaysia and plan attacks in Malaysia and Indonesia. In May, RMP Special Branch announced they foiled a wave of large-scale terror attacks and assassinations plotted by an ISIS-linked cell during the first week of Ramadan. Four suspects were arrested during a sting operation on suspicion of planning attacks against religious sites and entertainment venues, the leader of which was charged with terrorism-related offenses.[43] However, unlike in Indonesia and the Philippines, where pro-IS sentiments coalesced around existing extremist groups, in Malaysia the phenomenon mostly manifests as self-radicalization, and most of those individuals were not previously affiliated with any extremist groups.

Nevertheless, IS does demonstrate some nearby organizational links. In 2014, the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), a *jihadist* group that was created in 1989, pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State.[44] From that point forward, ASG also became known as the Islamic State – East Asia Province. The U.S. State Department estimates that ASG is comprised of hundreds of members. Moreover, "ASG has committed kidnappings-for-ransom, bombings, ambushes of security personnel, public beheadings, assassinations, and extortion."[45] ASG remains active as of December 2020,[46] and regularly clashes with the Malaysian military.[47]

While most notably active in Indonesia, elements of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operate in Malaysia as well.[48] Notably, JI has been linked to al-Qaeda[49] and has, according to the State Department, provided training for ASG – a sign that the ideological and tactical schism between the al-Qaeda and the Islamic State is not shared by their Southeast Asian factions.[50] JI is funded by the trade of palm oil, as well as donations and tuitions provided to its religious schools.[51] Some feared that JI could become resurgent after the 2019 arrest of its leader, Para Wijayanto, which revealed that he was "actively recruiting members and building up a clandestine paramilitary wing in an effort to regenerate and consolidate" the group.[52] However, so far no attacks have been carried out in Malaysia since Wijayanto's arrest.

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Despite Malaysia's reputation as a multicultural, moderate Muslim-majority country, there is tension between the religious freedom embedded in the country's constitution and the notion that Islam is the religion of the state. All Malays are required to be Muslim, there are constitutional restrictions that prevent Muslims from leaving the faith, and non-Muslims are required to convert and adopt Muslim beliefs in the event of interreligious marriage to a Muslim.[53] The Malaysian government also continues to regulate perceived anti-religious (particularly anti-Islamic) sentiment, judging it to be a threat to racial and religious sensitivities. Individuals can be fined and jailed for comments made in print or on social media.[54]

Discrimination against Shi'a groups remains an issue in the Sunni-dominated society. Those discriminatory actors include religious authorities, who raid places of worship, arrest individuals, and restrict freedom of worship and expression.[55] Today, debate continues about the extent of state regulations on interpretations of Islam.

Over the past few decades, Malaysian society experienced a shift toward Islamic conservatism. The concept of *sharia* is gaining popularity in public discourse, as are state-sanctioned curtailment of civil rights and liberties in the name of Islam, the incapacity of civil courts to challenge controversial *sharia* court decisions, increasing incidences of moral policing by Islamic religious authorities (including policing of non-Muslims in some instances), and the alarming regularity of references to an Islamic state. Though UMNO's unexpected defeat in the May 2018 elections and the rise of the PH government offered hope for some that this swing could be reversed, or at least slowed, that has yet to be seen.

Social consciousness and political discourse in Malaysia are now much more religious, and competition between UMNO and PAS is more intense. There is also a concurrent discourse rooted in an increasingly

vibrant civil society that encompasses NGOs as well as alternative expressions of Islamic consciousness (namely, alternative media sources beyond the mainstream government-controlled channels). Even as the heavily contested politics of UMNO and PAS began to converge, a parallel form of civic activism brought together professional, political, civil society, educational, and religious institutions.

NGO activism in Malaysia generally peaks during periods of major social upheaval in its comparatively peaceful environment. Recently, the issues of apostasy, religious freedom, and the sanctity of *sharia* have spurred NGO political activism that challenges both the hegemony of the state and opposition policies. These include the regulation of certain forms of literature, the boycott of non-Muslim *halal* products, regulation of monitory houses of worship, and infringement on the rights of Shia Muslims.[56] Muslim and non-Muslim groups that extend across the political spectrum have, in their own way, compelled UMNO and PAS to negotiate their politics and recalibrate their narratives.

At the same time, a potent combination of ethno-nationalism and radical Islamism gave rise to vocal Malay-Muslim NGOs like Perkasa and Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA, or Malaysian Muslim Solidarity). These groups advocate the primacy of Islam, publicly rallying – undisturbed by the government – in its name and fighting perceived encroachment by non-Muslims, especially Christians. This raised suspicion of complicity on the part of UMNO with these radical Islamist NGOs. These NGOs are useful as a means for the group to mobilize segments of the majority Malay-Muslim community in a climate where the ruling regime's share of the popular vote has eroded considerably since 2008. Scholars who study Malaysian election trends concluded that this informal alliance between the ruling regime and radical Malay-Muslim NGOs contributed to strategic electoral success in crucial Malay-Muslim constituencies.[57] This has, however, predictably polarized Malaysian society along religious and ethnic lines.

In this environment, we see frequent tit-for-tat struggles between more progressive and right-wing groups. For instance, Sisters in Islam (SIS), often characterized as a progressive Islamic group, had a *fatwa* (a religious edict) issued against it for allegedly deviant teachings related to various issues, including advancing LGBT rights. Several right-wing Islamist groups have called for SIS to undergo counseling sessions on the "right" path of Islam.

Considering the demographic realities of Malaysia, any debate on Islamism elicits responses from the non-Muslim community as well. In recent times, non-Muslims voiced concerns over their place in Malaysian society and their ability to hedge against the intensification of Islamist discourse and its increasingly hegemonic nature.

The Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHS) is an example of a non-Muslim interfaith organization that seeks to enhance dialogue and cooperation. Since 2001, MCCBCHS has worked to establish an Inter-Religious Council that would encourage dialogue across religious boundaries. The group believes that, aside from tension in intercommunal relations, there are "several gray areas in this matter, which has caused much emotional suffering and confusion for family members of converts."[58]

In Malaysia, civil society groups represent popular, mobilized, organized discourse. Conversely, cyberspace and various alternative media sources are new outlets and pathways of political expression, taking Islamist debates deeper into Malaysian society.[59] Controversies related to various judicial rulings on the matter of apostasy, declarations by Malay-Muslim political leaders that Malaysia is an Islamic state, and the government's apparent intolerance for open discussions on the "sensitive" issue of Malay-Muslim rights and primacy, highlight the increasingly vital role these new forms of expression play in Malaysian politics. They can both provide a forum for contrarian views, or for support of the government's policies couched as a defense of the faith.

It is important to note that some of the most intense debates spanning a range of issues at the heart Islamism in Malaysia – apostasy, Islamic governance, and the sanctity of the constitution and of *sharia* law – are taking place not in the sphere of mainstream partisan politics, but in cyberspace among ordinary

citizens. This situation underscores how Malaysian society is polarized over the question of Islam's role in law and politics.

There is a noticeable schism between the opinions and perspectives found on Malay-language blogs – monopolized by Malay-Muslims – and English-language blogs regarding Islamic state declarations and high-profile *murtad* (apostasy) cases.[60] Another discernible trend is that, regardless of ethnicity and religion, there is a consensus on English-language blogs that Malaysia is an Islamic state – an opinion not shared on Malay-language blogs. Similarly, reactions to recent, high-profile apostasy cases show that, regardless of language, sentiments are divided along religious lines. In general, Malay and English blogs contrast in opinions; the former exhibits more conservative and exclusionary views and the latter conveys more openness to the idea of conversion of leaving Islam and to the principle of religious freedom.

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Islamization in Malaysia is essentially a social-change phenomenon with significant political implications. It has been accelerated by the search for an Islamic ideal that translates into legitimacy, popularity, and electoral support.

When UMNO's leader, Mahathir Mohammad, assumed office in July 1981 and set about to Islamize the government, the global Islamic resurgence was at its peak. This campaign was made public during the UMNO general assembly in 1982, when Mahathir announced that the party would aim "to change the attitude of the Malays in line with the requirements of Islam in this modern age."[61]

The UMNO government not only restructured a range of Islamic institutions both in scale and in scope, it also expanded the state bureaucracy to accommodate both Malaysian students returning from overseas government-sponsored Islamic studies, as well as the graduates of local Islamic institutions. The government also transformed *sharia* court and mosque operations, and reorganized banking structures, foundation and charity work, *zakat* collection, and educational institutions. One of the Mahathir administration's most significant and controversial endeavors was making religious knowledge a regular subject in the mainstream school curriculum. The Islamic Teachers Training College was established in 1982 to accommodate this change in syllabi. Another notable high point of Mahathir's Islamic enterprise was the introduction of Islamic banking, which represented an effort to Islamize the economy and an expression of Mahathir's interpretation of *nilai-nilai Islam* (Islamic values).[62]

At the same time, Mahathir worked actively to suppress other, conflicting interpretations of political Islam. Events like Operation Lallang,[63] the banning of al-Arqam (a Muslim minority religious sect) in 1994, and the arrests of several prominent opposition political figures, all demonstrated the Mahathir administration's penchant for suppressive behavior. Despite the questionable threat posed by some of these actors, the administration was willing to use the Internal Security Act to remove all obstacles perceived to be standing in the way of its Islamization policies and broader political agenda.

There are unresolved structural and religious tensions tied to jurisdiction and enforcement powers over alleged wrongdoings. Essentially, states may have the power to formulate religious laws, but these formulations require ratification by the federal Parliament. In a 1988 constitutional amendment, Article 121 1(A) stipulated that federal high courts "shall have no jurisdiction in respect of any matter within the jurisdiction of the *sharia* courts."[64] Criminal law falls under federal jurisdiction, but the constitution ambiguously assigns the power to widely interpret, create, and punish offenses against the laws of Islam to state religious authorities.[65]

Muslim politics in Malaysia may seem straightforward; however, this is an illusion. As recent controversies over apostasy and the right of non-Muslims to use the word "Allah" show, differences between UMNO and PAS are not set in stone. While PAS has taken inclusive positions on issues relating to Islam, UMNO has become discernibly strident and fundamentalist in its defense of the primacy and

exclusive rights of Muslims. In other words, the track record of PAS is considerably more inconsistent than its rhetoric suggests, while the ostensible secularist UMNO party harbors many Islamist tendencies.[66]

Following the 2013 general elections, there was a notable convergence of interests, at least on the surface, between the two long-standing political rivals. For instance, all twelve UMNO state assemblymen in Kelantan chose to support the PAS amendment that approved *hudud*, which unanimously passed in the state assembly in 2015.[67] This was followed by the UMNO-led government's decision in 2016 to fast-track hearings in Parliament on PAS president's private member bill, which would increase penalties for crimes under the *sharia* Court.[68] Rising concerns cite a fear of a focus on identity politics and a competition between political parties to "out-Islam" each other as the country heads closer to its next general election.[69]

The PH government's rise to power sparked conversations about Islam's role in the new government's domestic and foreign policy. On domestic issues, the PH government is attempting balance between an inclusive, multicultural vision of Malaysia while also ensuring that it is not accused of inadequately defending the rights of Malay-Muslims. As details regarding the PH administration's foreign policy are released, officials are playing up the government's role in managing issues concerning the broader Muslim community: Israel-Palestine, the treatment of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and the Kashmir situation between India and Pakistan.[70] The role of Islam in the PH administration will likely continue to attract attention, especially given the expected transition to Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister. While there are doubts that the UMNO-PAS alliance is sustainable, the alliance has nonetheless raised questions about whether religious and racial sentiments will once again be stoked in exchange for political gain.

Endnotes

1. Consider, for example, how former UMNO president and Malaysian prime minister Abdullah Badawi regularly made references to Islam in his public speeches, or how *Mingguan Malaysia [Malaysia Weekly*], a best-selling government-linked daily, has weekend columns offering advice on various matters pertaining to religion in everyday life. Malaysia has also regularly hit the country-level limit set by the Saudi government for *Hajj* pilgrims, and there is now a three-year waiting list for Malaysians wanting to make the pilgrimage.
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