

## Patterns of Religious Behaviours among Political Parties in the Malaysian Media: Analysing the News Concerning Islamic Issues

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper studies the interpretation of Islam by three major political parties in Malaysia namely, Barisan Nasional (BN), Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) and Pakatan Harapan (PH) that competed in the previous 14th Malaysian general election (GE14) as reflected by the newspapers. Newspaper reports on matters concerning Islamic debates by the three political parties are selected. Religious interpretations are identified based on the types and levels of religious behaviours which operate as an instrument in this study and categorized as follows; i) religion as ritual, ii) religion as scripture, iii) religion as managing life challenges and iv) religion as nurturing life. The first and the second religious behaviours fall under the category of conservative, whereas the third and the fourth fall under the category of progressive. News on matters concerning Islamic debates by the selected political parties above reported by Utusan Malaysia (UM) and Malaysiakini (MK) during the GE14 are compiled for analysis. A total of 161 news articles were collected and analysed. Results indicated that the interpretation of Islam by these three political parties reflected by UM and MK is similar which is BN is seen as progressive before the GE14 and conservative after the GE14, meanwhile PAS is seen as consistently conservative and PH is consistently progressive.*

*Keywords: interpretation of Islam; media; political party; religious behaviours*

### INTRODUCTION

History does indicate that Islam has produced great civilizations and made massive contributions in various fields of life in terms of science and technology as well as in knowledge in transforming the world. During the golden age of Islamic civilization, Muslims have managed to achieve material advancement and societal well-being by believing in Islam as a comprehensively way of life without neglecting the spiritual foundation of the religion.

Spiritual and material development intertwine intimately with Islam. Material development should be a means for a Muslim to fulfill their spiritual development and achieve paradise. For instance, in fulfilling an obligation to perform a prayer, Muslims must have clean clothes to cover their *awrah* and clean water for *wudhu*. These processes require the Muslim to manage the matters concerning water usage and conservation as well as apparel suitability. Osman (2015) stated that whether in the pursuit of spiritual life or material development, Islamic civilization has largely succeeded in charting “a middle path”. This shows that the teaching of Islam reaches beyond merely a set of religious beliefs and practices and actually delves deep into nurturing life, prosperity and civilizational advances.

Based on this comprehensive interpretation of Islam by Muslim scholars, it is common to see numerous religious scholars today becoming polymaths as they master in many subjects. Davis (2017) exclaimed that in the late eight centuries, religious scholars who were experts in the field of theology were also conversant with and masters of other areas of knowledge such as astronomy, medicine, arts, logic, and rhetoric. It should be noted that Muslims in the past could never have produced the civilization if their understanding of worship was limited only to aspects of personal salvation and their knowledge and expertise limited towards theological aspects and Islamic law.

## COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE MODERNISATION AGENDA REINTERPRET ISLAM

When the colonials arrived in the Malay Archipelago, they brought the idea of separation between church and the state thus resulting in discourses of separation of politics from religion and the civil authority from the sacred. Consequently, this resulted in the transformation of understanding Islam as a way of life. The origins of secularism emerged when Orthodox Christian priests opposed scientific and rational ideas, as it was assumed to be an act of insulting the Christians (Quinlan, 1989). The Protestants regarded that this belief will retard businesses, trades, modernization and development. Hence, their insistence that religious affairs to only be handled by the church. This secular understanding eventually led to the exclusion of religion in managing life.

When the British brought secular ideas to the Malay World, they separated religion from the lives of Muslims. The Pangkor Treaty of 1874 and The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 were the precursors to the separation of religion in life. These treaties limited the powers of the Malay rulers to only on matters relating to religion and customs. Lapidus (2002) stated that when British residents were appointed, they deprived the Malay Sultans of their authority in all matters of state building and development. Consequently, Muslims in the Malay World interpreted and practiced Islam only within the realm of ritual and personal salvation.

After gaining independence from the British in 1957, the country began taking steps towards development. In the 21st century, through five-year plans such as the New Economic Policy, Malaysia has transformed from a rural to an urban, agricultural to industrial, and from a poor to a middle-class society (Mansor, 2012).

It cannot be denied that the developments that have taken place in the country have indirectly helped balance the rigid interpretation of Islam by the Muslims. Goldscheider (1999) agreed that religious value changes in response to the broad process of increase in education level, technological, industrial, migration and urbanization in the development of the country.

Besides the development process, when Tun Mahathir took the reign in 1981 as the fourth Prime Minister, he was particularly concerned with issues of rigidity in Islamic interpretation among the traditional Muslim scholars. Through his Islamisation policy of the country, Mahathir has brought about changes and realigned the new Islamic interpretation in the country to be mainstreamed with a rational-legal interpretation that suited a modernisation agenda. Abdul (2007) stressed that Tun Mahathir was also instrumental in making several changes to the Islamic administration as well as advocating reform in the mindset of Muslims so they could engage effectively with the modern world. Examples of these include the establishment of The Institute of Islamic Understanding, International Islamic University Malaysia and, among others, the strengthening *Tabung Haji (Malaysian Hajj pilgrims fund board)*, Islamic Banking and the Syariah Court to be on par with the civil court.

## ISLAM AND POLITICS

When Tun Mahathir came into power, he introduced ideas of Islamic intellectual and institutional development, this was then followed by Abdullah Badawi's Islam *Hadhari* and then eventually Datuk Seri Najib brought about ideas on *Wasatiyyah*. Already, the country was witnessing the transformation of Islamic practices from ritual and personal salvation to nurturing progress and societal well-being. However, not all segments of the society was agreeable with the perspective of Islam and modernity portrayed by the government. In their perspective, such modern interpretation and practices are synonymous with the rising of liberalism, secularism, pluralism, or atheism and therefore must be rejected (Ahmad, 2014). In the face of competing alternative interpretations of Islam, Islamic discourses become tools among the diverse religious scholars in their effort to strengthen their religious groups. Such is true also among the various political parties in getting electoral support and vying for political power. Hence, this study aims to investigate interpretations of Islam by the three political parties selected through their debates about issues relating to Islam in the news media. How political parties interpret Islam in their debates would inform the researchers about patterns of religious behaviours and political orientation, and whether rapid development and social changes in the country have had an impact on them. As it is currently, the country requires interpretation of Islam that would embrace the religion not just ritualistically but also as a source that nurtures life, progress, and civilization. Therefore, there is a need to ascertain whether their Islamic interpretations is in line with the social changes and transformations that are happening.

#### UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOLOGICAL RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

Considering the fact that the impact of Islamic religion in producing progress and civilization is the focal point of this study, it is important to understand the role of religion in the society. From sociological perspectives, the concept of religion is explained based on how society behaves in the name of religion. Religion needs to be defined in terms of behavioural actions rather than through the lens of religious belief (Hamilton, 2001).

In general, the concept of religion is continuously changing from time to time parallel with changes happening in the society. The concept of religion begins as a ritual when the non-literate traditional societies were unable to explain and were confused with natural events such as storms or drought that were endangering their daily routines. They believed that by performing rituals, they will gain supernatural powers to help them control threats and dangers. Human beings who lived in the past used magical powers to help them in life (Tischler, 2013). Based on the observation among the aboriginal societies, Durkheim observed that rituals also bind humans together by gathering them around a common set of symbols called the totem (Cameron et al., 2005). In due process, these ritual practices in the society will socially integrate them as if they were a family united by blood.

This social integration requires totem-mates the duty to preserve and assist each other. In this sense, when one of the members have to deal with an unavoidable life crisis that will affect and cause emotional upheaval, support will be given to them. At this phase of life, totem mates will perform rituals not to gain a sense of control, but as a collective gathering to assist their members during times of distress, such as death. For example, Haralambos and Holborn (1995) exclaimed that during a funeral ritual, other mourners support the bereaved by their presence at the ceremony. Garrod and Jones (2009) have also agreed that anxiety creating events are often managed by some form of religious ritual.

Besides performing ritual activities to alleviate mourners' distress, scripture is also needed to offer crucial explanations and make the crisis of life meaningful. The belief in immortality denies the fact of death and so comforts the bereaved (Hunt, 2005). When scripture functions to alleviate anxiety, it also functions to create anxiety and fear. Scriptures are used to prohibit

people from deviance that would cause social chaos. The prohibition is presented as a command from God rather than a moral principle. Fear of hell, anxiety over offending one's God, or fear of being bewitched by evil spirits tends to ensure social conformity (Roberts & Yamane, 2012). As scripture is a word from God, the human must always obey his commands. Brown (1839) and Elster (2003) stated that scripture contains a rule of duty that must be obeyed by its adherents. Scriptures can function to create as well as alleviate anxiety; scriptures can control the behavior of society.

It is undeniable that the power of scriptures can control society. Under such circumstances, religion is used and manipulated in the Industrial Revolution era by the wealthy capitalists to control the lower working-class individuals to always accept their misery and divert their attention away from the pain as an effect of oppression. Their acceptance towards their fate is assumed as a sign to be rewarded with heaven by God. The promise of heaven if they remain obedient is to stop the oppressed group from revolting against them and thus, Karl Marx described religion as the opium of the people (Omonijo et al., 2016).

This group of people who caused social misery must be opposed, and to do that, the oppressed people need the power. The power can be generated from the use of scriptures as scriptures can control people like what happened in the early industrialization era. Leopold and Jensen (2014) stated that the capacity of controlling the behavior of others refers to power. With power, specific outcomes can be achieved. As observed by Max Weber, power consists of the ability to get your way, even when others are opposed to your wishes (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995).

As religion can generate power due to its ability to control people, specific aims and goals in the name of religion have been emphasized to oppose the ruling class. Dillon (2003) expressed that participant in social movements often describe themselves as having no choice about their involvement in the actions of the movement and noted that they believed they are following God's will. Religion is used in arousing the desire of oppressed groups to participate in revolutionary movements. Philips (2001) stated that history showed how revolutionary movements originated from oppressed groups or classes. Participation in movements is important to strengthen the power because the more people have been controlled, the greater is the power. Droogers (2014) claimed that the greater the number of religious followers is influenced, the stronger the power that is generated. In this era, religion is not on the wane, but has persisted and functioned to manage challenges in the society.

As social misery increases due to the dominant class's hegemonic ideology, it can be said that heartless and inhuman beings exist. This proves that the quality of human beings needs to be improved to guarantee a peaceful life for everyone. Religion can be one of the elements to instill good morals and values in humans, such as the Protestants who believe in the concept of predestination. For the Protestants, the idea of being residents in heaven are manifested in the material and social prestige attained in this world (Moberg, 2013). Hence, all the Protestant adherents need to sow themselves with the seeds of integrity, hardwork, honesty, thriftiness and many more for personal betterment to ensure they succeed in this worldly life and a sign from god that they are predestined for heaven. These characteristics are embedded in the minds of the Protestants who originated the idea of modern capitalism. This elaboration shows that the concept of religion is nurturing life and will contribute to progress, prosperity and civilizational advancement of mankind.

In summary, sociologically there are four main types of religious behaviours which can be identified in the society, and they are religion as ritual, religion as scripture, religion as managing societal challenges and religion as nurturing life. These four types of religious behaviours can be divided into two main levels of religious behaviours where nurturing life and managing challenges in the society are grouped as the progressive religious behaviour while ritual and scripture are grouped in the conservative level. The level of religious behaviour

under the conservative focuses on the aspects of the hereafter, specifically religious and personal salvation. In contrast, the level of progressive religious behaviour concentrates on the aspects of managing the world as a calling by God and a passport to the hereafter. The interpretation of religion and religious behaviours discussed indicate that religion might be interpreted to foster social change, but, in some cases, it will hinder progress and even be dysfunctional to mankind and society through their acts of extremism and violence against state authority and humanity.

## DEVELOPMENT AND THE MODERNISATION AGENDA OF MALAYSIA

In order to understand the changes in interpretations of religion, one needs to take into account how development influences social change and social transformation in the society. Among the dominant sociological theory to identify and explain the development and social changes in society is the sociology of modernisation. Modernization refers to a model of progressive transition from 'traditional' society to 'modern' society. It is used to explain the process of modernization within societies. Modernization theory originated from the ideas of Max Weber (1930), which provided the basis for the modernization paradigm developed by Talcott Parsons (1964). Modernization theory are both attempts to identify the social progress and development of societies and to explain the process of social evolution.

Modernization theory attempts to explain the dynamics of development that occurred in the world where a once undeveloped country becomes developed and its traditional values are replaced with modern ones. Without these changes, the nation will remain undeveloped and poor. These developments will trigger social changes in the society where aspects of technological application in work and life, commercialization of agriculture, industrialization, and urbanization as a way of life increases. These changes have generated new values which are based on rationalization, scientific and legalistic management of institutions since the power of science and technology has enabled society to control social and natural forces of the world and diminish influences of supernatural beliefs. Further developments have accelerated changes in society with the rise of knowledge values in the post-industrial phase which brings other sets of values namely the self-expression value of individual human beings. The new shift of rational values indicated that people have greater choices in their daily lives that have liberated them from pressure and constraints by the authorities or structures. This then enables them to pursue personal gain, engage in a more socially cohesive ways in the society and democracy is more likely to flourish (Inglehart, 2013). In a nutshell, modernization plays a significant a role in the formation of rational, legalistic and self-expression values that will change the society and nation positively.

The categories of religious behaviours indicate that different interpretations of religion could bring about different outcomes in society and the world. In the context of political parties in Malaysia, even when their debate is on Islamic issues, the interpretations of Islam comes from different perspectives and its application in the political sphere are not uniformed or in agreement with one another. Earlier studies have shown that Malaysia's political parties, including *Barisan Nasional (BN)*, *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS)*, and *Pakatan Harapan (PN)*, have differing notions concerning Islam (Ahmad, 2014).

## METHODS

This study applies a qualitative content analysis technique to analyse the interpretation of Islam by political parties namely BN, PAS, and PH reflected by the news media of Malaysia which are *Utusan Malaysia (UM)* and *Malaysiakini (MK)*. UM and MK are chosen for this study because both newspapers have different target audience.

The targeted audience for UM is rural audience. Utusan Malaysia has focused heavily on readership among the rural Malay populations (Azlan, 2014). The targeted audience for MK is urban and middle class. Most middle-class Malaysian are found living in urban and sub urban in which indicates why Malaysiakini.com readership had increased in major cities in Malaysia (Chinnasamy, 2018).

The underlying question arose in this research is whether the newspapers, particularly UM and MK will maintain the political parties' interpretation of Islam when there exist differences in its targeted audiences' interpretation of Islam. It is noteworthy that the rural audience tend to have a conservative interpretation of Islam, whereas an urban and middle-class audience are inclined to have a progressive interpretation of Islam.

Apart from its targeted audience, UM and MK are chosen due to its format as an online newspaper which is preferable and easily accessible by the readers in line with the advancement of technology. Readers have abandoned many of Malaysian newspapers that have not gone digital (Wong, 2021).

Since this study focuses on the interpretation of Islam by political parties reflected by the newspaper, news articles reported by UM and MK on matters concerning Islamic debate by the political parties will be collected as the data to be analysed.

In the above process, two elements will be identified. Firstly, only news that contain Islamic terminology headline are selected from UM and MK. Secondly, only news in which the originating sources are from the political parties are selected. To this effect, a total of 161 news articles were collected within the period of four months before and four months after the 14th Malaysian general election (GE14). Table 1 shows the total amount of news on Islamic related matters debated by political party collected to be analyzed.

TABLE 1. Total amount of news articles on Islamic related matters debated by political party collected to be analysed

Newspaper/ Political Parties	BN		PAS		PH	
	PRE GE14	POST GE14	PRE GE14	POST GE14	PRE GE14	POST GE14
UTUSAN	47	16	20	14	2	19
	63		34		21	
	4	5	7	7	8	12
MALAYSIAKINI	9		14		20	
	72		48		41	
TOTAL	161					

The religious behavior of political parties reflected by UM and MK will be identified based on the types and levels of religious behaviors elaborated earlier in the literature review. The types and levels of religious behaviors which operate as an instrument in this study are categorized as follows; i) religion as ritual, ii) religion as scripture, iii) religion as managing life challenges and iv) religion as nurturing life. The first and the second religious behaviour falls under the category of conservative, whereas the third and the fourth falls under the category of progressive

The selected news articles will be read and thereafter coding process will be conducted for each news articles. Holsti's (1969) formula implemented to determine the reliability of the codes created. Two independent coders are employed to achieve simple agreement towards coding decision. Finally, these codes will be matched with the types and levels of religious behaviours.

## RESULTS

PATTERNS OF THE TYPES OF RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR BY BN, PAS, AND PH REFLECTED BY UM AND MK

The religious interpretation discussed in the conceptual framework above indicates that four types of religious behaviour are identified, and they are, ritual, scripture, managing life challenges and nurturing life (R, S, MLC, NL). The findings presented in Table 2 and Table 3 shows the types of religious behaviour observed among the political parties specifically BN, PAS, and PH reflected by the UM and MK. The findings indicate that interpretations of Islam under the types of religious behaviour as managing life challenges (MLC) is the most dominant type of religious behaviour by all the political parties reflected by the UM and MK compared to nurturing life (NL), scripture (S), and ritual (R).

TABLE 2. Types of religious behaviour observed among the political parties specifically BN, PAS, and PH reflected by the UM

NEWSPAPER/ POLITICAL PARTY	UTUSAN PRE GE14				UTUSAN POST GE14				TTL
	RITUAL	SCRIPTURE	MLC	N.LIFE	RITUAL	SCRIPTURE	MLC	N.LIFE	
BN			47				16		63
PAS		1	19				14		34
PH			2			1	15	3	21
		1	68			1	45	3	

TABLE 3. Types of religious behaviour observed among the political parties specifically BN, PAS, and PH reflected by the MK

NEWSPAPER/ POLITICAL PARTY	MALAYSIKINI PRE GE14				MALAYSIKINI POST GE14				TTL
	RITUAL	SCRIPTURE	MLC	N.LIFE	RITUAL	SCRIPTURE	MLC	N.LIFE	
BN			4				5		9
PAS			7				7		14
PH			8				10	2	20
		0	19			0	22	2	

Based on the analysis, it is found that the dominant type of religious behaviour by the political parties reflected by both newspaper is MLC and the level of religious behaviour is progressive.

It is further found that based on the lists of the initial codes matched with the MLC, some of these codes overlap with the types and level of religious namely ritual, and scripture.

In such circumstances, a second layer of analysis is needed by regrouping the initial codes obtained from the types of religious behaviour as MLC. This resulted to an emergence of two types of level of religious behaviour as MLC. Table 4.0 shows the two types of level of religious behaviour as MLC.

TABLE 4. Two types of level of religious behaviour as MLC

Managing life challenges	
CODES	Conservative
	Islamic leadership
	The implementation of Islamic law
	Unity of the Muslims
	Backward of the Islamic country
Progressive	Integrity in leadership
	A rigid interpretation of Islam
	Unity between Muslims and non-Muslims
	Backward of the country lives by the Muslims

## TWO TYPES OF LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR AS MLC

After conducting the above analysis that resulted to an emergence of two types of level of religious behaviour as MLC as presented in Table 4.0, it is found that there are two types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC instead of one level. Firstly, the level of the progressive religious behaviour focuses on the tasks of how to nurture life in the society. Secondly, the level of the conservative religious behaviour is observed to be related to managing the challenges of life within the scripture and ritual types of religious behaviour.

## TWO TYPES OF LEVELS OF RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR IDENTIFIED AS MLC BY POLITICAL PARTIES REFLECTED BY UM AND MK BY TIME FRAME

The types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC by BN, PAS and PH as reflected by UM and MK are similar. The types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC by BN reflected by UM and MK is progressive before the GE14 and conservative after the GE14. Meanwhile for PAS, regardless of the period studied, the types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC reflected by UM and MK is consistently conservative. For PH, the types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC reflected by UM and MK is consistently progressive. Table 5 and table 6 shoes the types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by BN, PAS, and PH reflected by UM and MK.

TABLE 5. Types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by BN, PAS and PH reflected by UM

UTUSAN MALAYSIA					
Newspaper / Political Party	PRE GE14		POST GE14		TOTAL
	MCL		MCL		
	CON	PRO	CON	PRO	
BN	18	29	16	0	63
PAS	11	8	12	2	33
PH		2	3	13	18

TABLE 6. Types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by BN, PAS and PH reflected by MK

MALAYSIAKINI					
Newspaper / Political Party	PRE GE14		POST GE14		TOTAL
	MCL		MCL		
	CON	PRO	CON	PRO	
BN	1	3	3	2	9
PAS	6	1	6	1	14
PH	1	7	1	9	18

## DISCUSSION

Findings indicated that the interpretation of Islam by these three political parties reflected by UM and MK are similar.

Based on the analysis, it is clear the types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by the political parties is not influenced by their targeted audiences. The types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by PH reflected by UM is progressive although their target audience is rural who have conservative interpretation of Islam. Similar to UM, the types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by PAS reflected by MK is conservative although the target audience is urban that have progressive interpretation of Islam.

On this note, it can be inferred that both newspapers have practiced professionalism in news reporting. Despite the difference in the targeted audience, UM and MK has not been biased



with the political parties' interpretation of Islam. Ideally, the media should be professional by presenting news objectively and abide by the journalism ethics (Muhammad, Faridah, & Chang, 2021).

The interpretation of Islam by political parties reflected by UM and MK are observed to skew away from the types of scripture and ritual religious behaviours. This type of religious behaviour as the most dominant can be explained with the modernization projects taken place in this country (Mansor, 1999).

Under modernization theory, development will change a society through two main phases which are the modernization of tradition and industrialization. The first phase begins with the adoption of modern science and technology that will transform the traditional society to a modern one with rational, legal and institutional cultures of modernity. Eventually, the second phase takes place through the advancement of technology as science grows, resulting in the increase of the demand for skilled manpower who can adopt, implement, and generate products from these new technologies. It may be seen that the growth of industrial development is closely linked with the growth of technical, professional skills and mass consumption in the society (Yadav, 1999).

As industrialization results in an increase in the demand for specific skills, Malaysia had reformed its educational system which nurtures science and technology in order to build a pipeline of graduates who can correspond with the advancement in technology. During the periods between 1991 and 2005, a total of 597,384 skilled workers were produced by training institution, including Polytechnics, Community Colleges, Technical University Colleges and Public Universities while 4.8 million training places for skills upgrading were provided in the entire country (Noor et al., 2018). In addition, changes in the education system had also played its role in the Malaysian religious educational system. This can be observed with the emergence of new Islamic educational institutions, including universities, colleges, and school, which started to depart from the old academic tradition by combining modern subjects with religious education. Islamic religious institutions controlled by the federal and state religious authorities, are not merely provide Islamic and Arabic studies, but also science, mathematics and technology as well as other social sciences and humanities related subjects to equip students with adequate knowledge to face the challenges in contemporary society while upholding Islamic values (Abdul, 2017). As such, the previously rigid and conservative religious education have evolved to become more versatile, increasing the potential to produce more Islamic scholars with modern knowledge.

Apart from that, the advancement of technology has drastically changed and impacted the life of the society, as it enables the information to be easily accessible at one's fingertips. The use of technology allows information to be accessed and obtained through different sources beyond traditional methods. Web technologies offer vital tools for collecting a great range of information from worldwide sources (Bickerton et al., 2000).

These educational changes have indirectly transformed the Islamic interpretation by modern Muslim society in Malaysia to accommodate the modern environment. The former interpretation of Islam, which has been separated from state-building by the colonial knowledge is now being successfully merged through development and modernization project implemented in Malaysia. As such, the modernization process which is occurring in Malaysia undoubtedly have realigned the ritualistic and scripture interpretations of religion to be parallel with the culture of modernity.

With the technological, educational and development changes taking place in the last four decades, Malaysia has undergone both the modernization phases as mentioned above. The fruits of the nation's venture into science and technology has transformed the Malaysian economy from agriculture into an industrial economy. The rapid and extensive structural changes in the economy and society have revolutionized Malaysia from being basically a

primary-producing agricultural economy to becoming a second tier newly industrialized economy (Goldscheider, 1999); (Abdul, 2002). These social changes have transformed the Malaysian society in the 1970s to be a modernised society embedded with a culture of modernity as we enter this millennium. Under such societal and values changes, religious interpretations of ritualistic and scripture behaviours are being dominated by the concern for the managing of life challenges.

Upon reanalysing the types of religious behaviour observed above, the findings further indicate that there are two types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC interpreted by these three political parties reflected by UM and MK. The types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC by BN reflected by UM and MK is seen as progressive before the GE14 and conservative after the GE14. Meanwhile, the types of levels of religious behaviour as MLC by PAS reflected by UM and MK is seen as consistently conservative and for PH, the types of level of religious behaviour as MLC by PH reflected by UM and MK is consistently progressive.

A pattern that has emerged under the level of progressive religious behaviour by PH reflected by UM and MK is observed to be more concerned with the larger society such as good leadership, unity in diversity and progress of the country. The interpretation of Islam by PH reflected by UM and MK undoubtedly has been espoused by today's modern society as the Muslims today have gradually reinterpreted their old ways of religious practices and infused it with modern values that enable them to live competitively in the superdiversity modern world. These findings indirectly provide an explanation towards the victory of Pakatan Harapan (PH) in the 2018 elections as the urban, generation Y and the middle classes voters are coloured by the culture of modernity and the acceptance of diversity.

Meanwhile, the interpretation of Islam for BN and PAS reflected by UM and MK - the patterns that emerged under their level of religious behaviour tend to have an in-group orientation and concern for personal salvation, thus, are not progressive enough to expound a comprehensive way of life that can ensure prosperity, progress and civilisational advancement. However, it is important to consider that the spokesmen of the political party may be progressive in terms of behaviour and may have been cultured with modernity yet are still mainly concerned with personal life challenges rather than having real concerns for societal transformation, prosperity, and progress (Mansor, 2012 & Leete, 2007).

These patterns of religious behaviour of the political parties reflected by UM and MK can also be explained under modernization theory. As elaborated earlier, modernization projects bring changes to the society. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that the existence of failures within this development who feel that they are not benefiting from the modernization projects. The problems faced by this group can be solved with religious explanation and justification (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995).

In the Malaysian context, modernization projects undeniably brought about changes in the society that generated many winners, yet at the same time, there also exists a pool of failures who are less educated, living in the rural areas and are left behind from the larger society. According to Mansor (2005), this poor group does not benefit from the development and the gap between their social status and that of the urban group still exists. As a result, these development losers return to God by giving greater significance to ritual since they fail to receive the fruits of development.

Such conservative religious behaviour will provide an opportunity for the Malaysian political parties such as PAS and BN to gain power and support from these voters. This support is achieved among others, by manipulating religion throughout their political ideology and actions. This explains why the political parties representing the Malays especially in the rural areas and those of the lower-income group tend to possess a conservative religious behaviour in comparison to political parties that are more Chinese based, mixed-ethnics, or middle class and urban-based. The variations observed might not be sufficiently explained by focussing on

the ethnic or religious dimensions as the political parties that are not dominated by Malays are more educated, professional, from middle classes, commercial-industrial, urbanized and coming from mixed ethno-religious origins (Spickard, 2017). Thus, the variation does not have anything to do with ethnic and religious origins. Conversely, it is the failures of good governance as well as a just and inclusive development in the larger society that provide reasons that eventually generate religious conservatism in the society. In conclusion, in an effort of modernising the society with a culture of modernity, the national agenda must be based on public and development policy to manage social inequality and eliminate poverty.

## CONCLUSION

Religion is a central characteristic of civilization as it can stimulate development. A society that is stuck in “conservative” religious worldviews could experience retardation and destruction of their progress and civilizational advancement. However, this conservative worldview can be managed with good governance as well as a just and inclusive development as expressed by the concepts of modernization theory in bringing development and social changes in the country.

Religious interpretation found in the society would influence the religious behaviours that would contribute to prosperity and progress of the society. Identifying the patterns of religious behaviours and their impactful intensity on human behaviour should be continuously researched. Religious behaviour and phenomenon are dynamic and fluid as development, urbanisation, migration and technological changes do play a great part in modernising religious interpretation or otherwise.

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