

ELECTORAL REPERCUSSIONS OF INFRASTRUCTURAL DEFICIENCY: ANALYSING THE WATER SUPPLY CRISIS AND VOTER BEHAVIOUR IN MALAYSIA'S 14TH GENERAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the extent to which the water supply crisis influenced shifts in political support during Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE14). Grounded in empirical analysis, the study proposes a Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment, positing that failures in basic welfare provision, particularly prolonged disruptions in water supply, can act as significant catalyst for changes in voter behaviour, especially when the state is perceived as ineffective in resolving the issue. The findings indicate that the water crisis was a salient determinant in the electoral fortunes of competing parties during GE14. Voters residing in constituencies affected by chronic water shortages were more inclined to transfer their support to opposition parties perceived as offering credible and pragmatic solutions. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how infrastructural governance intersects with democratic accountability, offering critical insights for electoral strategy and public service delivery in Malaysia and other democratising contexts.

Keywords: Water Supply Crisis, Voter Behaviour, Electoral Accountability, Infrastructure and Politics, Malaysia's 14th General Election

INTRODUCTION

The 14th General Election (GE14), held on 9 May 2018, represented a critical juncture in Malaysian political history. For the first time since independence, the long-standing ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional (BN), which has held power for over six decades, was unseated by the opposition coalition, Pakatan Harapan (PH). In this landmark election, PH secured 121 parliamentary seats, enabling it to form the federal government, while BN won 79 seats. Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) secured 18 seats, Parti Solidariti Tanah Airku won a single seat, and three seats were taken by independent candidates (Berita Harian, 2018). Beyond its federal victory, PH also succeeded in capturing control of several key states, including Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, and Kedah. This political upheaval reflected a significant transformation in electoral behaviour, shaped by both national and subnational dynamics. Among the factors contributing to the regime change were the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) corruption scandal, the unpopular implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), and a range of basic welfare issues, particularly those concerning access to water supply (Funston, 2018). In states such as Kedah, Kelantan, Pahang, Perlis, and Selangor, persistent and prolonged water supply disruptions had severely affected the daily lives of residents. The saliency of this issue elevated it into a central

concern during the electoral campaign, contributing significantly to the reshaping of voter preferences and the ultimate electoral outcomes (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2019).

Access to a reliable water supply constitutes one of the most fundamental human needs, and its disruption carries profound implications for the social, economic, and health security of affected populations (Abdullah, 2019). In Malaysia, particularly in states grappling with persistent water supply issues, the crisis has transcended its technical nature to become a deeply politicised concern (Abdullah, 2025). It has significantly disrupted the daily routines of residents and engendered widespread disillusionment with the incumbent government (Abdullah et al., 2024). The inability of both state and federal authorities to adequately address the crisis has fostered a sense of marginalisation among voters, many of whom perceive themselves as neglected by the political establishment. Crucially, this discontent is not confined to rural constituencies; urban populations, too have experienced protracted water disruptions, highlighting the systemic nature of the crisis across socio-geographic boundaries (Khalid, 2018).

In the context of the GE14, the water supply crisis emerged as a salient national issue that was strategically mobilised by various political parties in their electoral campaigns, particularly in states most severely affected by the disruptions. Opposition coalitions such as PH and PAS effectively incorporated the issue into their manifestos, pledging to address the water-related grievances of local populations (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2018; Abdullah & Zakarya, 2022). This strategy resonates with rational choice theory in political science, which posits that voters tend to make electoral decisions based on the tangible benefits they anticipate to receive from their chosen party or candidate. In this regard, the water supply issue became a pivotal factor influencing electoral realignments, as voters in crisis-affected regions reoriented their political support towards parties perceived as offering credible and actionable solutions to the ongoing problem (Kavianirad & Rasouli, 2014).

In the lead-up to the GE14, the water supply crisis had already emerged as a critical point of contention in several Malaysian states. In Kedah and Kelantan, residents endured prolonged disruptions, particularly during the dry season, while in Selangor, persistent failures in the maintenance of water infrastructure significantly disrupted the lives of urban dwellers (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2019). These disruptions generated widespread dissatisfaction with the incumbent government's perceived inefficiency and incapacity to address essential public service needs. For many voters, the state's failure to resolve a basic yet vital issue such as water supply signalled a broader crisis of leadership and governance legitimacy (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2018). This pattern is consistent with electoral behaviour observed in other democratic contexts, where deficiencies in basic welfare provision often shape political decision-making. Issues of water, sanitation, and infrastructure function not only indicate service delivery, but also as symbolic tests of the state's competence and responsiveness (Guntermann & Persson, 2023). As such, the water crisis in Malaysia prior to GE14 must be understood not merely as a technical or environmental issue, but as a deeply political one with electoral ramifications.

The water supply crisis constituted one of the most salient determinants of electoral outcomes during GE14, particularly in states most acutely affected by prolonged service disruptions (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2018). The failure of state authorities to effectively address this basic infrastructure issue generated widespread disillusionment among voters, undermining confidence in the performance and legitimacy of the incumbent state governments. In particular, the inability to propose or implement long-term, sustainable solutions contributed to a decline in voter support, prompting a perceptible shift towards opposition parties whose manifestos promised more credible and actionable responses to the crisis (Keech & Munger, 2015). This dynamic raises broader questions concerning the extent to which failures in essential service delivery, such as

water provision, influence voting behaviour and reshape political allegiances. It also underscores the increasing politicisation of public infrastructure issues in Malaysia's electoral landscape, where performance-based evaluations of governance are becoming more prominent in determining voter preferences.

The primary objective of this study is to examine and critically analyse the extent to which water supply issues influenced shifts in political support during GE14. Specifically, the research investigates how the water supply crisis shaped voter behaviour in states most severely affected by service disruptions and evaluates the extent to which political manifestos promising solutions to the crisis played a role in mobilising electoral support. Beyond empirical analysis, the study also seeks to develop a theoretical model that elucidates the interrelationship between water-related grievances, voter dissatisfaction, and political realignment within the context of general elections.

To address these objectives, the study poses several key research questions. First, how did the water supply crisis influence electoral outcomes in states most acutely affected by the problem? Second, to what extent did political manifestos offering remedial solutions to water supply challenges contribute to attracting voter support, particularly in constituencies grappling with chronic infrastructural deficiencies? Third, how did voters' perceptions of governmental efficiency in managing the crisis shape shifts in political allegiance? Finally, how did changes in political support materialise in states that had been experiencing prolonged water-related disruptions in the lead-up to GE14?

This study offers a significant contribution to the fields of political science and infrastructure governance by elucidating how basic welfare deficiencies, particularly in water supply, shape electoral outcomes and influence shifts in political support within the Malaysian context. Its significance lies in uncovering the nexus between infrastructural failure and voter behaviour, an area often underexplored in Southeast Asian electoral studies. By identifying the political consequences of service delivery breakdowns, the study enhances our understanding of performance-based voting in developing democracies. Moreover, the findings hold practical relevance for policymakers, political actors, and researchers seeking to craft more responsive political strategies and public policies. In highlighting the political salience of infrastructural grievances, the study provides empirical insights for states facing similar governance challenges, enabling them to identify critical points of vulnerability that may erode public trust and electoral legitimacy.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary Data Collection

a) Review of Government Documents and Reports

This research draws upon a range of primary sources, including official government documents, institutional reports, and data retrieved from the National Archives of Malaysia, the Election Commission (*Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya Malaysia*), political party manifestos, and other relevant materials. These sources offer critical insights into the state's responses to the water supply crisis, providing a broader understanding of policy measures implemented both prior to and following the GE14. The review of such documents enables a systematic assessment of governmental narratives, infrastructural strategies, and electoral commitments concerning water governance

Secondary Data Collection

In addition to primary data, this research also incorporates secondary sources to substantiate and deepen the analysis. A key component of this secondary material is mass media coverage, which offers extensive reporting on water supply issues in the states most affected by the crisis. Media reports are instrumental in examining how the crisis was publicly framed and perceived both by the media institutions themselves and by the general public, particularly voters in the impacted constituencies. Equally important is the academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly publications that address issues of basic welfare, governance, and political behaviour. These works provide a robust theoretical foundation and contextual depth to the analysis of water-related grievances and their electoral consequences. Furthermore, the study draws on prior research related to GE14, especially those that interrogate the intersection between public infrastructure and voting behaviour, thereby offering both comparative and historically grounded perspectives.

Sample Study

The sample for this study comprises several Malaysian states that have experienced acute and prolonged water supply crises. In Kedah, frequent disruptions, particularly in rural districts, have compelled residents to rely on alternative sources such as wells and harvested rainwater to meet their daily needs. This pattern underscores longstanding infrastructural deficiencies and the failure of successive administrations to implement sustainable and inclusive water management strategies.

In Kelantan, the water crisis has persisted for years, largely due to inadequate institutional management and chronic underinvestment in water treatment infrastructure. Consequently, many communities are forced to rely on unsafe sources such as rivers and roadside ditches, posing serious public health risks and exacerbating sociopolitical grievances. Selangor, despite being widely recognised as Malaysia's most developed state, is also afflicted by chronic water related problems. These stem predominantly from ageing infrastructure and systemic maintenance failures within the water distribution network, leading to frequent and unpredictable service disruptions affecting both urban and suburban populations. In Pahang, the crisis is closely linked to the failure of water treatment plant projects and poorly maintained facilities, particularly in rural areas such as Kuantan. The enduring nature of these infrastructural failures across all four states renders them critical case studies for examining the political ramifications of essential service breakdowns. Specifically, they offer valuable insight into how water related grievances can generate voter dissatisfaction and potentially realign political support during general elections.

Data Analysis

The data collected in this study will be analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative approach that facilitates the identification of patterns and underlying themes within the dataset. This method is particularly well suited to examining how individuals interpret and respond to complex social and political issues, such as prolonged water supply disruptions and their impact on electoral behaviour. Through this analytical lens, the study aims to uncover dominant narratives embedded within voters' experiences and perceptions across various affected states. The analysis will be structured around several key thematic domains. One prominent theme anticipated to emerge is

the perception among voters of governmental failure in managing and resolving water supply crises. This includes expressions of disillusionment, negative assessments of state performance, and widespread beliefs that political authorities are either incapable or unwilling to prioritise basic welfare provision. A second central theme concerns the role of political manifestos, particularly those advanced by opposition parties, which propose concrete and actionable responses to water-related challenges. The analysis will examine how such manifestos are received by voters, and the extent to which they shape political trust, expectations, and credibility. A third theme will focus on the lived experiences of voters in coping with water scarcity, including the tangible effects of daily disruptions on their livelihoods and how these shape their political orientations and decisions. These personal accounts are critical in understanding how infrastructural breakdowns at the local level can catalyse broader shifts in political allegiance. By systematically identifying and interrogating these themes, the study seeks to demonstrate that failures in water infrastructure are not merely technical or administrative concerns, but deeply political phenomena that influence public trust, democratic accountability, and electoral outcomes.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this study adopts a triangulation strategy by cross-verifying data from multiple sources, including interviews, government reports, and secondary literature. This methodological approach enhances the credibility of the research by allowing for the convergence of evidence across diverse forms of data. In addition, an audit trail will be maintained throughout the research process, ensuring that all stages of data collection, interpretation, and thematic analysis are systematically and transparently documented. This procedural rigour strengthens the trustworthiness of the study and facilitates external evaluation or replication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influence of Social Issues on Elections

According to rational choice theory (Scott, 2000), voters act in accordance with their self-interest, opting for the candidate or political party perceived to offer the greatest utility or material benefit. In the context of water supply, voters affected by chronic disruptions to clean water access are more likely to support candidates or parties they deem more competent in addressing such infrastructural deficiencies. Political decision making in these scenarios is often shaped by voters' assessments of candidates' or parties' capacity to resolve basic service delivery problems that directly impact their quality of life. This perspective is further developed by Fiorina (1983), who introduced the theory of retrospective responsibility, suggesting that voters evaluate incumbent governments based on their performance in managing essential welfare concerns.

Empirical evidence from other developing contexts reinforces this theoretical framing. Mwihi's (2018) study in Kenya found that water supply crises frequently emerge as decisive factors in electoral outcomes, particularly in rural constituencies where service disruptions are both acute and sustained. The study concluded that voters residing in affected areas tend to shift their political allegiance towards parties that articulate credible solutions to the crisis. Similar findings are reported by Biswas et al. (2014) in India, who demonstrate that basic welfare concerns such as

water provision, electricity, and public health are primary determinants of voting behaviour in regions where such services are unreliable.

In the Malaysian context, Abdullah et al. (2022) argue that infrastructural issues including water supply, flood management, and housing have become increasingly salient in electoral politics, especially in states such as Kelantan, Pahang, and Kedah. While macro level issues such as economic performance and political scandals dominate national political discourse, localised infrastructural grievances often serve as the principal drivers of electoral behaviour at the subnational level, particularly in rural and semi urban constituencies. These findings underscore the need to reconceptualise infrastructure not merely as a technical domain, but as a politically charged space where voter trust, dissatisfaction, and realignment are negotiated.

Political efficacy theory

Political efficacy theory posits that voters evaluate, and support candidates or political parties based on their perceptions of the incumbent government's effectiveness in addressing issues that directly affect their everyday lives. Baldi (2018), in his study of local politics in Italy, found that perceived governmental failure in managing basic welfare provision, such as the supply of clean water, heightens political dissatisfaction and prompts voters to seek alternative parties deemed more competent.

In the Malaysian context, Abdullah and Mohd Noor (2019) demonstrated that voters' perceptions of governmental inefficiency in managing basic welfare concerns, specifically water supply, played a decisive role in shaping political behaviour. Their research in Selangor and Kelantan revealed that voters dissatisfied with the state government's handling of water issues were more inclined to shift their support to opposition parties, particularly when those parties presented manifestos that appeared more credible and solution oriented.

Further support for this dynamic is offered by Hibbing and Theiss Morse (2002), whose study in the United States shows that issues related to basic needs, such as water and electricity, are central to voters' assessments of government performance. Their findings indicate that voters are often quick to assign blame to the government when such essential services are disrupted, even if the administration performs well in other policy domains. This underscores the critical importance of perceived governmental efficacy in managing core infrastructural services as a determinant of electoral behaviour.

Political Manifesto and Voter Expectations

Expectancy theory, as introduced by Vroom (1964), posits that voters are inclined to support candidates or political parties they believe can fulfil their expectations by offering tangible solutions to pressing societal problems. In the context of water supply crises, a political manifesto that articulates clear and practical solutions can exert significant influence over voters' electoral choices.

Empirical studies support this theoretical claim. For instance, Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995), in their research on voter behaviour in the United States, observed that voters are more likely to favour parties they perceive as capable of addressing fundamental welfare concerns. Petrella (2001) further argues that manifestos which explicitly engage with water issues often resonate with voters in affected constituencies, prompting electoral shifts towards parties that offer realistic and attainable commitments.

In Malaysia, during the GE14, opposition coalitions, particularly PH and Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS), strategically foregrounded the water supply crisis in their campaign manifestos to mobilise disenchanted voters in states severely affected by water disruptions. Rather than relying on generic policy pledges, these manifestos directly addressed public frustration with the ruling coalition's inability to resolve ongoing water scarcity.

PH's GE14 manifesto, *Buku Harapan*, for example, included explicit commitments to mitigate water supply disruptions in states such as Selangor and Kedah. These commitments encompassed institutional reforms, infrastructure investment, improved maintenance of treatment plants, and the restructuring of water management authorities to enhance transparency and reduce bureaucratic inefficiency. Additionally, PH pledged greater collaboration with federal agencies to secure long term funding and ensure service reliability, particularly in rural constituencies where access remained intermittent.

In Selangor, PH capitalised on growing discontent with delayed water restructuring initiatives by advocating for a more accountable and decentralised model of governance. In Kedah, where rural communities faced frequent water disruptions, PH promised to upgrade outdated pipelines and establish more robust funding mechanisms for infrastructure renewal. Meanwhile, PAS adopted a different framing, presenting access to clean water as both a moral obligation and an Islamic imperative. Its manifesto promised a fair and equitable redistribution of water resources, focusing on underserved rural communities in states such as Kelantan, where the crisis had reached critical proportions.

These manifestos were not mere rhetorical instruments, but tactically crafted political tools rooted in localised grievances. Their strength lay in translating voter discontent into structured policy alternatives that spoke directly to the electorate's lived experiences. As Abdullah and Mohd Noor (2019) observe, PH's ability to situate the water issue within a broader discourse of governance reform and institutional renewal granted the coalition's manifesto enhanced legitimacy, especially when contrasted with the defensive and technocratic stance of the incumbent government. Ultimately, these findings underscore the strategic function of political manifestos in contexts of infrastructural failure. When grounded in the concrete realities of chronic service disruption, such as water supply, manifestos can function as powerful instruments of political mobilisation, particularly in constituencies grappling with systemic neglect and service deficits.

Socio-Economic Influence on Political Behaviour

Several studies have shown that voters' socio-economic background significantly influences their political responses to basic welfare issues such as water supply. In their seminal study on political behaviour, Verba and Nie (1972) found that individuals from lower socio-economic strata are more susceptible to being influenced by basic welfare concerns, largely because their livelihoods depend more heavily on the state's capacity to deliver essential public services.

Further insights are offered by Sedu and Wan Mohd Ghazali (2015), whose research examined the political attitudes and behaviours of young Malay voters during Malaysia's 14th General Election (GE14), with a specific focus on the use of WhatsApp as a platform for political engagement. The study revealed that everyday issues such as water and electricity supply were recurring themes among student voters and were often discussed not in abstract policy terms, but as concrete indicators of government failure, especially in relation to local infrastructure and service delivery.

Their findings demonstrate that young voters, particularly those studying at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), actively utilised digital platforms to express dissatisfaction with the state government's inability to provide sustainable solutions to basic welfare concerns. Water supply disruptions, in particular, emerged as a common reference point in WhatsApp group discussions, often cited as evidence of political neglect and administrative inefficiency. This environment of peer based digital discourse contributed to a discernible shift in political orientation, with many young voters increasingly disenchanted with the ruling coalition and more receptive to the manifestos of opposition parties that proposed tangible solutions to these pressing issues.

The significance of this study lies in its illumination of how the politicisation of essential services, especially within digitally mediated and peer driven spaces, can catalyse broader electoral transformations. It challenges the notion that young Malay voters are passive consumers of political messaging and instead portrays them as active political agents who critically evaluate government performance through lived experience and digital communication. In the context of GE14, such forms of youth engagement played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of political change in Malaysia, particularly in constituencies affected by infrastructural decline and service disruption.

Previous studies clearly demonstrate that basic welfare concerns, including access to water supply, play a pivotal role in shaping voter behaviour, particularly in contexts where reliance on government provided infrastructure remains high. Theories such as rational choice, political efficacy, and expectancy offer compelling frameworks for understanding how voters make decisions in environments characterised by chronic infrastructural deficiencies. In Malaysia, the issue of water supply has been increasingly acknowledged as a contributing factor to political dissatisfaction and realignments in voter support, particularly during the 14th General Election (GE14), as documented in the works of Abdullah and Mohd Noor (2019) and others.

However, despite the growing body of literature, several critical research gaps remain. First, existing scholarship often treats water supply issues as peripheral or anecdotal within broader analyses of political change, rather than as a central and systematic determinant of electoral outcomes. Much of the academic focus on GE14 remains concentrated on high profile scandals such as 1MDB, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) backlash, and elite level political contestation, while micro level grievances such as prolonged water shortages—particularly in rural and semi urban constituencies—remain underexplored. There is a distinct lack of empirical studies that isolate water crises as an independent variable influencing political behaviour.

Second, there is limited integration between infrastructure related discontent and electoral geography. While national voter shifts have been widely analysed, few studies explicitly map the correlation between geographically defined water stress and localised voting patterns. In other words, there is a dearth of constituency level analysis that links water supply crises to changes in political allegiance, especially in politically significant swing states such as Kedah, Kelantan, and Selangor.

Third, although rational choice and political efficacy theories have been applied in Malaysian electoral research, there remains a paucity of theory building that specifically connects water infrastructure breakdown to political disillusionment and voter mobilisation. The long term consequences of infrastructural neglect on the erosion of political legitimacy, particularly within Malaysia's semi authoritarian democratic context, remain undertheorised. This study attempts to address this lacuna by proposing a context specific analytical model: the Theory of the Influence of Water Supply Issues on Changes in Political Support, which synthesises voter rationality, infrastructural decline, and political manifestos into a cohesive explanatory framework.

Finally, to the best of current knowledge, no existing study offers a comparative case study across multiple water affected states using a qualitatively rich, thematically consistent approach supported by triangulated sources. These include interviews, media discourse, electoral data, and archival records. This study thus addresses both methodological and theoretical voids by placing the issue of water supply at the centre of political analysis in Malaysia, thereby challenging dominant narratives that foreground elite dynamics or ideological polarisation while neglecting material realities. The research is both timely and significant: it not only contributes to the expanding literature on political behaviour and infrastructure politics in Southeast Asia, but also bridges the gap between public utility failure and the erosion of political trust. In doing so, it offers a nuanced account of how everyday crises, such as water shortages, can serve as catalysts for seismic shifts in electoral outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework

This study introduces a context specific theoretical model known as the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment. The theory posits that basic welfare concerns, particularly access to clean and reliable water, function as catalysts for shifts in political behaviour, especially when such problems are prolonged and the state demonstrates an inability or unwillingness to address them effectively. According to this model, voters are more likely to alter their political allegiance when essential needs remain unmet, particularly in electoral contexts where the incumbent government is perceived as failing to deliver on critical infrastructure and public services.

The theory is informed by several socio-political frameworks discussed in the literature. First, it draws upon social exchange theory, which suggests that individuals evaluate their relationship with governing institutions based on perceived reciprocity, namely, the benefits received in return for political support (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). When the state fails to deliver core benefits such as water supply solutions, the perceived imbalance in the exchange relationship prompts voters to transfer their support to parties that offer more credible and concrete commitments.

Second, political efficacy theory provides an additional lens. It posits that individuals assess their ability to influence political outcomes based on government performance, particularly in relation to the provision of basic welfare. When the government is seen to be ineffective in addressing pressing issues such as water supply, voters may experience a weakened sense of political efficacy, thereby increasing the likelihood of seeking leadership change (Caprara et al. 2009). The proposed theory reinforces the broader view that perceptions of government failure on core social concerns can lead to shifts in political loyalty.

Third, the model builds upon rational choice theory, in which voters are conceptualised as rational actors who engage in cost benefit analysis when making political decisions. In this context, voters assess competing parties and candidates based on their perceived capacity to address unresolved water supply crises (Scott 2000). When the ruling government fails to offer effective and credible solutions, rational voters are more inclined to support opposition parties that advance clearer and more responsive proposals through their political manifestos. This rational calculation becomes particularly salient in regions severely affected by service disruption, where lived experiences of infrastructural neglect are closely tied to political dissatisfaction and realignment. By synthesising these theoretical perspectives, namely social exchange, political efficacy, and

rational choice, the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment provides an integrated explanatory framework to understand the connection between infrastructural grievance, public perception, and electoral change within Malaysia's semi democratic political system.

Theoretical Model

The theoretical model developed in this study explains the relationship between water supply problems and changes in political support by identifying mediating factors that either reinforce or weaken this relationship. Central to the theory is the role of voters' perceptions of governmental efficiency and the credibility of opposition party manifestos in shaping electoral outcomes. It emphasises how public evaluations of service delivery, combined with alternative policy offerings, can recalibrate patterns of political loyalty in contexts marked by persistent infrastructural failure.

Independent Variable: Water Supply Problem

The persistent water supply crisis in states such as Kedah, Kelantan, Pahang, and Selangor generates widespread public dissatisfaction. This discontent arises when the government fails to fulfil a fundamental public expectation, namely the consistent and adequate provision of water, which is regarded as a basic welfare necessity.

Dependent Variable: Changes in Political Support

Shifts in political support occur when voters affected by chronic water supply issues withdraw their backing from the incumbent government and instead support opposition parties perceived to be more capable of addressing the crisis. This behavioural change reflects a broader political realignment driven by disillusionment with service delivery and unmet welfare needs.

Mediating Variables:

1. Political Manifesto

Opposition parties frequently employ political manifestos as strategic instruments to propose solutions to critical public issues, including water supply disruptions. These policy pledges can significantly influence voters who are directly affected by such crises, prompting them to reconsider their political loyalties. Drawing from expectancy theory, this study argues that voters make electoral decisions based on the expectation that the party they support will be capable of resolving the problems they encounter in their daily lives.

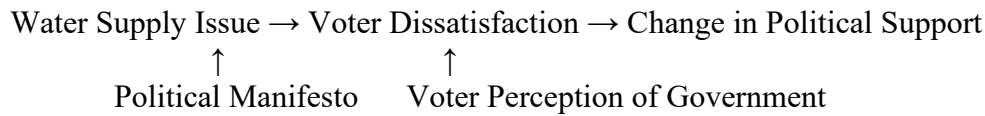
2. Voters' Perception of Government Efficiency

Voters' subjective evaluations of the incumbent government's efficiency in addressing essential public services, particularly water supply, play a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes. According to political perception theory, when voters perceive the government as incompetent or indifferent to basic welfare concerns, they are more likely to transfer their support to alternative political actors whom they view as more responsive and capable.

3. Socio-Economic Moderators

Structural socio-economic factors such as education level, household income, and occupational status may moderate the relationship between water supply grievances and political behaviour. Socio economic structural theory posits that individuals from different strata experience and respond to infrastructural failures in varied ways. Those from lower income or marginalised backgrounds, who are disproportionately affected by water crises, may exhibit a stronger propensity to withdraw support from the ruling coalition in favour of opposition parties that promise substantive change.

Relationship Model



This conceptual model illustrates the dynamic relationship between basic infrastructural failure, in this case the water supply crisis, and the transformation of political support during electoral cycles. It integrates several interrelated variables that shape voter behaviour, including voter dissatisfaction, political manifestos, and perceptions of government performance.

1. Water Supply Problems

The ongoing water supply crisis serves as the initial catalyst for political dissatisfaction, particularly in states such as Kedah, Kelantan, Pahang, and Selangor. These disruptions interfere with daily life and signify a deeper systemic failure of governance. When access to clean and reliable water becomes inconsistent, voters often interpret the problem not simply as a technical shortcoming but as a reflection of the state's inability to uphold its basic obligations under the social contract. In rural and semi urban constituencies, water becomes a tangible metric of government responsiveness. Continued failure reinforces the perception that the government is either indifferent or incapable of delivering essential services.

2. Voter Dissatisfaction

The public's frustration with persistent service disruption manifests as political disillusionment. Voters begin to question the legitimacy, competence, and priorities of the ruling coalition, particularly when earlier promises to resolve infrastructural challenges remain unmet. The burden of recurring inconveniences, such as relying on water tankers or fetching water from natural sources, erodes trust in the government. Over time, this dissatisfaction motivates voters to seek political alternatives, viewing elections as opportunities to penalise ineffective leadership and support parties that appear more attentive and responsive to public needs.

3. Political Manifestos

Political manifestos serve as strategic instruments for opposition parties to translate public grievances into electoral advantage. During the 14th General Election, parties such as Pakatan Harapan and Parti Islam Se Malaysia gave prominence to water issues in their manifestos. These documents outlined specific proposals, including institutional reforms, infrastructure upgrades, and improved equity in water distribution. Drawing from expectancy theory, voters are more inclined to support candidates who present clear and actionable plans to address their concerns. The manifesto thus functions as a psychological contract, signalling a party's commitment, credibility, and administrative capacity.

4. Voter Perception of Government

Perception plays a critical mediating role in this relationship. Even when some policy efforts are underway, the absence of visible progress or ineffective government communication contributes to voter scepticism. The longer the crisis persists without meaningful intervention, the more entrenched perceptions of inefficiency and neglect become. These perceptions are often intensified by media coverage, peer discourse, and opposition messaging. When voters come to view the

government as incompetent or unresponsive, they are more likely to shift their support to parties that appear more proactive and solution focused.

Theoretical Foundation

The proposed model is grounded in a synthesis of three major theoretical frameworks. First, rational choice theory explains that voters make decisions based on calculated self-interest (Scott 2000). When a government fails to meet fundamental needs, particularly in relation to essential services, voters are likely to seek political alternatives that offer more satisfactory outcomes. Second, political efficacy theory underscores the significance of perceived government competence (Caprara et al. 2009). The more voters perceive the political system as unresponsive or ineffective, the more likely they are to disengage from established loyalties or to support change through the ballot box.

Third, social exchange theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand the transactional dimension of political support (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). According to this perspective, voters evaluate their relationship with political actors in terms of mutual benefit. When the government fails to deliver essential services such as water, the perceived costs of continued political loyalty outweigh the anticipated benefits, prompting voters to withdraw their support and shift allegiance to candidates who promise greater returns.

This interpretation resonates strongly with the role of political manifestos during election campaigns. Voters often interpret manifestos as contractual propositions in a political exchange, where parties pledge to fulfil voter needs in return for electoral backing. When opposition parties articulate specific, locally grounded solutions to urgent issues such as water scarcity, these promises are perceived as more credible and equitable compared to the unfulfilled commitments of the incumbent. As such, shifts in political support are driven not only by rational calculation or dissatisfaction, but also by a sense of broken reciprocity between the state and its citizens.

Collectively, these three theoretical perspectives form the foundation of what this study conceptualises as the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment. This model posits that chronic infrastructural failures, particularly in relation to water supply, serve as catalysts for political re evaluation. When such failures are accompanied by negative public perceptions and the presence of compelling opposition manifestos, they can generate substantial shifts in political allegiance. Although the theory is developed within the Malaysian context of the 14th General Election, it offers broader analytical utility for examining how basic welfare crises can disrupt state citizen relations and reshape the dynamics of electoral politics in comparable settings.

The Importance of Deriving a Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment on Changes in Political Support

The development of the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment offers a meaningful contribution to both political science and sociological literature, particularly within the context of developing democracies such as Malaysia. In much of the existing political scholarship, basic welfare concerns such as water supply are frequently underestimated or treated as parochial issues with limited electoral consequences. This study challenges that assumption by proposing that basic welfare failures possess the capacity to catalyse substantial shifts in political support, especially when the state is perceived to be incapable of fulfilling its fundamental responsibilities.

The proposed theory advances our understanding of how voter dissatisfaction with unmet basic needs, particularly access to clean and reliable water, can translate into electoral realignment in favour of opposition parties. These parties often provide more concrete and credible policy alternatives through their political manifestos. In doing so, the theory extends the logic of retrospective responsibility, positing that voters evaluate incumbent governments based on their ability to manage crises that directly impact public well-being. While the empirical basis for this argument is grounded in the Malaysian case, the theoretical model has broader applicability to other developing countries grappling with similar infrastructural deficiencies.

Furthermore, this theory reinforces the assumptions of rational choice theory, which contends that voters make decisions through a cost benefit analysis. Within this framework, voters weigh competing parties based on their perceived capacity to deliver effective outcomes, particularly in relation to everyday material needs. Although ideological affiliation and religious sentiment continue to shape political behaviour in Malaysia, this theory asserts that practical concerns are becoming increasingly salient, especially among voters confronting chronic infrastructural failures.

The implications of this theory are significant. It suggests that governments operating in competitive electoral environments must take basic welfare provision seriously if they wish to retain political legitimacy. Responsiveness to infrastructural grievances is no longer optional but essential. The capacity to resolve basic service failures is becoming a key determinant of electoral survival, as citizens increasingly link lived experience with political accountability.

Evaluation of Results

The PH coalition succeeded in forming the state government in Kedah during the GE14 by securing 18 State Legislative Assembly (DUN) seats, compared to 13 seats won by the PAS and 3 seats by BN. The election outcome in Kedah was notably intense, as PAS also demonstrated significant electoral strength, capturing the support of voters in several key constituencies. Crucially, many constituencies facing chronic water supply issues were observed to have shifted their support either to PH or PAS candidates. This pattern suggests that basic infrastructural grievances, such as inadequate water supply, played a central role in shaping voter preferences. High expectations were placed upon PH and PAS candidates to address these long-standing service delivery failures (SPR, 2018).

A prominent example can be seen in the N9 Bukit Lada seat, which encompasses the Pokok Sena district. This constituency was won by PAS candidate Salam Mahmood Al-Hafiz, who garnered 9,573 votes, defeating the BN candidate Dato' Ariffin bin Man (8,288 votes), the PH candidate Mohd Aizad bin Roslan (6,337 votes), and an independent candidate Dato' Mohd Ismail bin Othman (444 votes) (SPR, 2018). The Pokok Sena district is widely recognised as one of the areas most severely affected by water supply shortages, forcing residents to revert to using wells and groundwater for daily consumption. Although some improvements were noted following the redistribution of load from the Bukit Pinang Water Plant to the Sungai Santap Water Plant, these technical measures did little to mitigate the deeply rooted frustration of the community.

This frustration stemmed from years of neglect and unfulfilled promises, which had conditioned residents to rely on their own coping mechanisms while losing trust in institutional responses. Moreover, local sentiment was shaped by a perception that the ruling coalition's last-minute efforts to resolve the water crisis were politically motivated and lacked long-term commitment. Many voters interpreted the timing of these efforts, immediately prior to the election, as an opportunistic move rather than a genuine attempt at reform.

The BN administration in Kedah was thus perceived as having failed to address the people's basic needs through sustainable and competitive infrastructural planning. As Abdul Rahman (2018) and Abdullah and Mohd Noor (2018) suggest, BN's failure to respond effectively to long-standing water grievances was a decisive factor in the erosion of voter trust. Historical events reinforce the urgency of this issue. For instance, in 1964, reports indicated that a resident in the same locality was killed in a violent altercation over access to water delivered by tanker services (PSU Kedah, 782/83). This tragic incident underscores the volatility that can arise when basic public goods such as water are mismanaged. It also highlights the extent to which water scarcity can become a deeply social and political problem, rather than merely a technical or environmental challenge.

Consequently, the case of Bukit Lada and Pokok Sena exemplifies how water crises can catalyse political realignment in rural Malaysia. The failure to ensure water security not only triggers personal hardship but also delegitimises state authority, fuelling a broader shift in political support away from incumbents. Such dynamics should serve as a critical lesson to future administrations. Ignoring infrastructural grievances, particularly those affecting essential services, carries significant political consequences.

The GE14 at the Pahang state level reveal the continued dominance of BN in the state. Voters in Pahang appeared to reaffirm their support for BN, largely due to the coalition's long-standing experience in state development, particularly in the provision of water supply infrastructure and public utilities (Abdullah & Mohd Noor, 2019). This political continuity is notable given the widespread and persistent water supply issues that plagued many districts in the state. However, BN Pahang's manifesto during GE14 explicitly acknowledged these problems and positioned water infrastructure as a central electoral priority. This strategic approach played a critical role in retaining the coalition's legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate.

Unlike the national manifestos of the opposition, BN Pahang presented a series of concrete and locality-specific promises to upgrade and expand the state's water infrastructure. Among its major pledges was to increase the capacity of existing water treatment plants from 1.3 million cubic metres to 2.0 million cubic metres per day. Additionally, the manifesto outlined plans for the construction of new treatment facilities in strategic districts such as Bentong, Kuantan, Pekan, and Bera (Manifesto Barisan Nasional Pahang PRU14, 2018). These commitments were not articulated in abstract developmental rhetoric but were framed as urgent and pragmatic interventions to resolve the water supply challenges that had become an everyday struggle for rural and semi-urban residents.

The federal constituency of Temerloh provides a compelling case in this regard. A localised manifesto was issued by BN, which included a direct promise to build a modern water treatment plant valued at RM100 million, conditional upon electoral victory. This infrastructure was designed to accommodate the rising demand for clean water in the constituency. In tandem, the manifesto outlined broader economic ambitions, such as transforming Temerloh into an international tourism hub, anchored by the construction of a new monument. By integrating infrastructural development with economic vision, BN offered a compelling narrative that linked tangible service delivery to long-term prosperity (Manifesto Barisan Nasional Temerloh PRU14, 2018).

In contrast, PAS Pahang's manifesto failed to offer specific proposals to resolve the state's water problems. Instead, it focused on macro-level criticisms of Pahang's financial management, attributing the state's economic instability to declining revenues from natural resources such as timber, sand, land taxes, and water. PAS prioritised human capital development, restructuring of state planning, and redistribution of resources, but these broad aims were not translated into

concrete commitments on water infrastructure, an omission that may have undermined their appeal in water-stressed areas (Manifesto PAS Negeri Pahang, 2018).

Similarly, PH Pahang also failed to place water infrastructure at the centre of its campaign. PH's manifesto revolved around economic revitalisation and social assistance schemes, including *Skim Mikro Kredit Makmur*, *Tanah Untuk Anak Pahang*, and *Perbadanan Kemajuan Eko-Aset Pahang*. It also included welfare measures such as *Skim Raya Makmur*, *Tabung Makmur*, and *Skim Khairat Makmur*. While these programmes were designed to enhance socio-economic well-being, the absence of a targeted response to the water supply crisis may have led voters in high-stress districts to perceive PH as detached from the electorate's most urgent needs (Manifesto Pakatan Harapan Pahang, 2018).

The results suggest that BN's strategy of offering direct, tangible solutions to water-related grievances proved electorally effective. Voters in water-stressed constituencies such as N32 Kuala Semantan and N31 Lanchang in the Temerloh district, despite facing prolonged water disruptions, continued to support BN (SPR, 2018). These outcomes imply that well-calibrated, geographically grounded manifestos can mitigate public dissatisfaction and re-establish political trust. In essence, BN's place-specific pledges helped defuse the political risks of service delivery failure by recasting the party as a pragmatic actor capable of implementing credible, needs-based solutions.

This case reinforces the argument that water infrastructure is not merely a matter of development policy but a significant political variable capable of shaping electoral outcomes. The Pahang example highlights how incumbent regimes can pre-empt political backlash by engaging in anticipatory governance, offering specific, measurable and financially grounded interventions that resonate with local communities. In doing so, they secure continued legitimacy even in contexts marked by chronic infrastructural underperformance.

In the Kuala Semantan state constituency (N32), the BN candidate, Datuk Nor Azmi Mat Ludin, secured 7,880 votes, defeating the incumbent, Syed Hamid Syed Mohamed of Pakatan Harapan (PH), who garnered 6,095 votes, and the PAS candidate, Hasanuddin Salim, who obtained 7,406 votes. In the neighbouring Lanchang constituency (N31), Datuk Seri Mohd Sharkar Shamsudin successfully defended the seat for the fifth consecutive term, receiving 8,824 votes. He defeated PAS candidate Hasan Omar, who received 4,836 votes, PH candidate Abas Awang with 5,099 votes, and independent candidate Khaidir Ahmad, who obtained only 80 votes (Ishak 2018).

These results indicate continued voter confidence in BN's leadership in Temerloh. The electorate appears to have endorsed BN's local manifesto, particularly its focus on addressing essential public concerns such as water supply infrastructure. The outcomes suggest that, in rural constituencies like Temerloh, well targeted manifestos that emphasise basic service delivery continue to shape voter preferences and sustain political dominance. In contrast, political dynamics in Selangor reveal a different pattern. As the most economically developed and demographically representative state in Malaysia, Selangor holds strategic importance for all major political parties (Ibrahim et al., 2014). In the GE14, PH secured a decisive victory in Selangor, winning 51 out of 56 state assembly seats, while BN won only 4 and PAS 1. This result was not unexpected, given Selangor's long standing status as a stronghold for Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) and the Democratic Action Party (DAP).

This study contends that BN and PAS struggled to sway the Selangor electorate with their campaign promises, particularly in relation to water supply. Despite recurrent polemics surrounding water disruptions in the Klang Valley, the electorate remained loyal to PH, largely due to their overall satisfaction with the socio-economic benefits experienced under PH's governance. Although media outlets such as TV3 and Bernama frequently highlighted severe water

supply issues in areas like Kajang and Seri Serdang, the opposition's narrative failed to translate into electoral gains.

In Kajang (N25), PH candidate Hee Loy Sian retained the seat with a substantial majority of 39,055 votes, defeating BN's Teh Yeow Meng (7,097 votes), PAS's Zaiton Ahmad (8,300 votes), and PRM's Wan Jinn Woei (103 votes). Similarly, in Seri Serdang (N29), PH's Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud secured victory with 27,088 votes, ahead of BN's Mohammad Satim Diman (12,725 votes) and PAS's Noor Hanim Ismail (5,552 votes) (SPR, 2018). These cases demonstrate the complex relationship between local service delivery issues and electoral outcomes. In Selangor, despite visible infrastructural shortcomings in water provision, the electorate did not interpret these as sufficient grounds for political realignment. This suggests that in more urbanised and politically entrenched constituencies, broader satisfaction with governance and economic management may override single issue grievances, even when these relate to critical public services.

The results of GE14 reaffirmed the dominance of PAS in Kelantan, where the party secured 37 state assembly seats and successfully formed the state government. This outcome suggests that Kelantanese voters continued to place considerable trust and hope in PAS's leadership, maintaining political continuity in a state historically shaped by Islamic political identity and regional exceptionalism. In contrast, BN secured only 8 seats, while PH failed to win any, underscoring the limited traction of opposition narratives in the state.

Despite BN's attempts to position itself as a reformist alternative on the issue of water supply, promising improvements to the existing infrastructure, Kelantanese voters largely rejected this appeal. PAS's narrative, which deflected criticism of its water management performance by attributing infrastructural stagnation to the federal government's suspension of water-related loans between 1990 and 2000, appeared to resonate strongly with the electorate. This explanation, rooted in a discourse of federal neglect and state victimhood, successfully reframed water failures as the result of systemic marginalisation rather than local misgovernance. As a result, PAS managed to neutralise a potentially damaging issue and convert it into a rallying point for continued political support.

National media coverage, including frequent reports on Kelantan's water supply crisis, did little to erode voter confidence in PAS. This suggests that infrastructural failures, although serious, were not necessarily decisive in shaping electoral behaviour in Kelantan. Instead, deeper ideological, religious, and historical affiliations continued to define political loyalty in the state. As Welsh (2018) notes, Kelantan represents a unique electoral context where party identification, Islamic moral authority, and anti-establishment sentiment override performance-based criteria in voter decision making.

This is illustrated clearly in constituencies such as Tendong (N11), one of the most prominent areas affected by water scarcity. Despite being at the centre of water-related controversies, the seat remained under PAS control, with Rozi Muhamad securing 8,951 votes. He defeated BN candidate Datuk Yahaya Mamat (6,700 votes), independent candidate Datuk Ibrahim Ali (1,479 votes), and PH candidate Dr Wan Zulkhairi Wan Md Zain (1,360 votes) (SPR, 2018). This result signals a broader rejection of both PH and BN manifestos in Kelantan during GE14, even in areas most acutely affected by infrastructural deficits.

The findings of this study confirm the relevance of the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment in several states such as Kedah and Pahang, where chronic water supply issues contributed to shifts in political allegiance. However, the theory also encounters notable exceptions in Kelantan and Selangor. In both states, despite enduring water crises, the electorate did not realign politically. In Kelantan, PAS maintained its grip on power, while in Selangor, PH

consolidated its control despite persistent disruptions in water services. These anomalies highlight the limitations of single-variable explanations and underscore the importance of ideological entrenchment, partisan identity, and satisfaction with broader governance indicators in mediating voter responses to basic service failures.

Kelantan Remains Under PAS Government

Kelantan remains one of the most structurally affected states in Malaysia in terms of prolonged water supply failures, with chronic deficiencies in clean water access and severely underdeveloped water infrastructure persisting across decades. Despite the gravity of this issue, which has received sustained media scrutiny and public attention, the PAS-led administration was decisively re-elected during GE14 (SPR, 2018). This electoral outcome underscores a fundamental anomaly in the rational choice-based assumptions of voter behaviour: that the failure to deliver essential services necessarily leads to political realignment. In Kelantan, the correlation between infrastructural crisis and voter backlash appears notably absent.

A central explanation for this paradox lies in the deeply embedded political identity of Kelantanese voters. Electoral support for PAS is not strictly conditioned upon tangible performance indicators such as the provision of basic welfare services, including water. Instead, it is underpinned by a powerful historical and symbolic association between PAS and Islamic moral governance. For many voters in Kelantan, PAS is not just a political party but a vehicle for the embodiment of religious values, communal dignity, and resistance to federal interference. This symbolic legitimacy, cultivated over decades of PAS rule, has produced a political culture where loyalty is mediated through religious identity rather than performance-based evaluation.

The strength of this political identity is further reinforced by the politics of perception. Despite mounting evidence of PAS's failure to address the state's water infrastructure crisis effectively, voters continue to view the party as a trustworthy guardian of Islamic values. This perception often supersedes concern over material grievances. As Saat (2018) persuasively argues, political behaviour in Kelantan cannot be disaggregated from ethno-religious identity, communal belonging, and a historically rooted narrative of marginalisation vis-à-vis federal authority. In this context, the issue of water, while publicly acknowledged as a problem, becomes subordinated to the broader cultural logic of loyalty and resistance.

This case thus illustrates an important theoretical caveat to the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment. In Kelantan, material deprivation does not automatically translate into political defection. Instead, it is mediated through a thick layer of symbolic loyalty, religious affect, and moral legitimacy. Voters interpret the failure of water delivery not as evidence of PAS's incompetence, but as the unavoidable consequence of structural neglect by the federal government, a narrative that PAS has effectively deployed to absolve itself of responsibility while reinforcing its oppositional and righteous posture.

The Kelantan case reveals that identity based political cultures may override rational incentive structures, thereby producing electoral outcomes that appear contradictory from a service delivery perspective. It also underscores the limits of manifestos and infrastructural promises when voters are embedded in historically constituted political imaginaries. In short, Kelantan exemplifies how electoral behaviour in semi democratic settings is not merely a product of governance performance, but also of ideological entrenchment, moral symbolism, and the enduring resonance of religious political identities.

Selangor Remains Under PH

While Selangor also experienced water supply problems prior to the GE14, particularly due to infrastructure maintenance challenges and governance shortcomings, the severity and persistence of the crisis were not as acute or widespread as in Kelantan, where access to clean water has long constituted a structural and systemic problem (Sakke, Ithnin & Ngah 2014; Abdullah & Mohd Noor 2019). Nevertheless, PH succeeded in retaining political control in the state (SPR, 2018). Several factors help explain why the water supply issue in Selangor did not translate into a significant electoral backlash against the PH-led administration during GE14. A primary reason lies in the overall economic performance of the state government. Despite intermittent water disruptions, the PH administration was perceived to have performed competently in other critical domains, including economic development, healthcare provision, and education. As a result, voters may have assessed the government's performance holistically, concluding that its achievements in these sectors offset the shortcomings in water governance. This voter behaviour aligns with the theory of retrospective voting efficiency, which posits that citizens evaluate incumbents based on cumulative performance rather than single issue failures.

Another contributing factor is the role of PH's electoral manifesto and the public's perception of its credibility in resolving the crisis. In its GE14 manifesto, PH presented a set of detailed and targeted proposals to address Selangor's water challenges, including infrastructure upgrades and institutional restructuring of the water services sector. This forward looking posture likely reassured voters that the coalition possessed both the political will and administrative capacity to manage the crisis. Consequently, although the issue had not yet been fully resolved at the time of the election, a substantial segment of the electorate continued to support PH, perceiving it as the party most capable of delivering a long term solution (Jama, Fauzi & Ghazali 2021).

Implications for Malaysian Politics

Although the theory demonstrates that water supply issues can exert a significant influence on electoral outcomes, as observed in states such as Kedah and Pahang, the cases of Kelantan and Selangor reveal that other contextual factors including political identity, religious sentiment, and the overall performance of the incumbent government also play a critical role in shaping voter behaviour. These cases suggest that while water supply is a salient and emotionally charged issue, it is not necessarily the sole or decisive determinant of political realignment.

The implication for Malaysian electoral politics is that basic welfare concerns such as water access must be understood within a broader analytical framework that incorporates voters' perceptions of governmental efficiency, socio political positioning, and enduring political identities and loyalties. For political parties seeking to retain power or expand their electoral base, attention must be paid not only to infrastructure governance but also to a constellation of other factors that influence electoral behaviour. These include religious sentiment, ideological orientation, ethnic identification, and macroeconomic performance. As such, any effective electoral strategy must be multidimensional, combining material responsiveness with symbolic and identity-based appeals that resonate across diverse segments of the electorate.

CONCLUSION

This study advances a theory that basic welfare issues, particularly water supply, can significantly influence political support during elections, as evidenced in several Malaysian states during the

GE14. However, this causal relationship is not uniformly applicable across all contexts. In states such as Kelantan and Selangor, other political variables such as entrenched political identity, religious affiliation, and retrospective evaluation of broader governance performance tend to override the influence of water related grievances. The findings, therefore, suggest that the explanatory power of the Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment is context dependent, shaped by underlying political cultures, regional voter priorities, and the extent of material deprivation experienced by communities.

Through an in-depth qualitative approach combining primary interviews, media discourse, and secondary sources, this study documents how prolonged water supply problems in states such as Kedah, Pahang, and Kelantan have cultivated political dissatisfaction, contributing to a realignment of electoral support. The central argument posits that voters affected by severe water supply disruptions are more likely to favour political parties that offer concrete and credible solutions. This observation aligns with rational choice theory and the theory of political efficacy. The link between service failure and political accountability appears particularly salient in semi urban and rural areas where infrastructural neglect is more acutely felt.

Nonetheless, the results also reveal the limitations of viewing basic welfare issues in isolation. In Kelantan, for example, despite years of inadequate water infrastructure and visible service breakdowns, the PAS retained majority support. This outcome underscores the enduring power of ideological alignment, religious legitimacy, and historical party loyalty in shaping voter behaviour. It suggests that, in certain political landscapes, identity-based affiliations and symbolic commitments may take precedence over material grievances. Voters may be willing to tolerate substandard public services when such shortcomings are offset by deeper resonances with the party's moral or religious authority.

The Theory of Water Induced Political Realignment developed in this study argues that while basic welfare failures such as water shortages can act as triggers for electoral discontent, their political impact is moderated by broader socio-political dynamics. These include voter perceptions of government performance in other domains, preexisting ideological commitments, and localised campaign strategies. Hence, a more holistic understanding of Malaysian voting behaviour requires integrating both materialist and identity based explanatory variables. This study contributes to the literature on rational choice theory and retrospective responsibility by demonstrating that Malaysian voters increasingly behave as rational evaluators of service delivery yet remain embedded within affective and identity based political frameworks.

From a policy perspective, the findings carry critical implications for political parties and state actors. Basic welfare concerns such as water, electricity, housing, and sanitation will continue to shape the terrain of political legitimacy and public trust. Electoral success, particularly in marginal or service deficit constituencies, may hinge upon a party's capacity to articulate and deliver concrete solutions to infrastructural problems. However, successful political mobilisation also requires attentiveness to the moral, religious, and cultural sensibilities that continue to anchor electoral behaviour in Malaysia. Political parties must therefore craft hybrid campaign strategies that speak to both the material anxieties and identity aspirations of the electorate.

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