

Why did the PKR elections take four months?

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COMMENT On Tuesday, Aug 26, Abdul Khalid Ibrahim tendered his resignation as menteri besar to the Sultan of Selangor - which is a huge milestone in the ongoing Selangor crisis.

Before anybody really had time to sing 'Ding Dong, the Witch is Dead', the request by the sultan to provide more than two names for the new menteri besar put Pakatan Rakyat into something of a quandry.

Things on this front are happening too quickly to write about, but I want to note briefly how encouraging it was to find Khalid in good cheer over this latest development.

For today, I want to discuss another development over the weekend that has not been the subject of much attention: the results of the PKR leadership elections.

A number of countries had their elections this year. The following are some facts and figures on those elections:

South Africa, about 16.5 million voters, voting begins May 7, results announced May 10 (three days later); Indonesia (presidential election), about 133 million voters, voting begins July 9, results announced July 22 (13 days); India, about 553 million voters, voting begins April 7, results announced May 12 (36 days).

The PKR elections were also held this year. Well under 100,000 voters were involved (final data apparently unavailable). Voting began on April 26 and the results were announced on Aug 22, making it 118 days.

Was there fraud?

As if the number of days wasn't bad enough, let's look at some of the things that took place throughout this ordeal.

For the first example, I quote from a previous article I wrote about the elections for the PKR Kuala Selangor division:

"At first count, in the division's vote tally for the PKR deputy president's post, Khalid garnered 517 votes against Azmin Ali's 440.

"Unbelievably, during the vote counting, the counting centre apparently experienced a blackout. After this blackout, it was found that in the division chief's race, Khalid had garnered 515 votes against Azmin loyalist S Manickavasagam's 701.

“Note here that the number of voters in the PKR Kuala Selangor division who are eligible to vote for the deputy president are the same as the number of voters who are eligible to vote for the division chief.

“That Khalid received almost the same number of votes for deputy president as he did for division chief should thus come as no surprise. The question is, how did Manickavasagam obtain 261 more votes in the division chief’s race?

“When the vote counters were queried about this blatantly illogical discrepancy, the reply given was apparently basically that there were about 261 spoilt votes in the deputy president’s race.

“This would mean that 261 people were able to vote correctly for Azmin’s man in the division chief’s race, but somehow failed to vote correctly for Azmin himself in the deputy president’s race.”

Is it possible that all these strange things happen just to procure one single headline? Something like ‘Khalid loses division chief race’, perhaps?

Numbers analysis

We fast forward to the final stretch between the last two updates of vote counts. As of June 28, the results for the deputy president, vice-presidents and youth chief and deputy chief posts:

Deputy president: Azmin Ali, 21,066 (43 percent), Khalid Ibrahim, 17,608 (36 percent), and Saifuddin Nasution, 9,944 (20 percent).

Taking just two results from the race for vice-presidency (these two being the only ones who changed positions in between the last two counts) - Rafizi Ramli, 17,461 votes and Dr Xavier Jayakumar, 17,587.

Youth chief: Amirudin Shari, 4,107 votes; Nik Nazmi, 3,911.

Deputy Youth chief (top two): Afif Baharudin, 4,730 votes; Chang Lih Kang, 3,274.

Here are the final results of the same, announced two months later, on Aug 22:

Deputy president: Azmin Ali, 22,562 votes; Khalid Ibrahim, unrevealed; and Saifuddin Nasution, 10,743.

Vice-presidents: Rafizi Ramli, 18,887 votes; Dr Xavier Jayakumar, 18,434.

Youth chief: Amirudin Shari, 4,259 votes; Nik Nazmi, 4,509.

Deputy Youth chief (top two): Afif Baharudin, 5,093 votes; Chang Lih Kang, 3,615.

My observation: First, for all we know, Khalid could technically have won the deputy president's race. To the best of my knowledge, PKR has provided no evidence to the contrary.

Second, in the final stretch for both the vice-president and Youth chief races, Anwar Ibrahim's candidates inched past Azmin's candidates to clinch their posts.

Interestingly, Amirudin's votes increased by only 152 as compared with his running mate Afif, whose votes increased by 363 votes. Nik Nazmi's votes increased by 598, while his running mate Chang (right) increased his votes by 341.

There is no solid evidence, at this point, to suggest any shenanigans. Perhaps all these are merely instances of split voting, or, in Rafizi's case, last minute popularity surges due to the warm reception of his Kajang Move.

Any manipulation?

A few salient questions remain, however. The most obvious, of course, being: why did this election process take so long?

If voting at certain branches were delayed, what could have possibly constituted logical reasons for delaying the results in the order of months, instead of days or weeks?

We recall as well the highly suspect phenomenon of the PKR election committee announcing at 10.17pm on Aug 12 via email that the results will be announced at 3pm on Aug 13. At 9.49am on Aug 13, they announced that the time has been postponed to 4pm.

At 3.17pm that same day, the PKR election committee announced that the announcement of the results has been postponed indefinitely.

So, what on earth was going on?

With this flip-flopping, the serious allegations of electoral fraud, the inconceivable amount of time it took to complete the elections, and (arguably) the changes in between the last two announcements of results, can Malaysians be blamed for thinking that there is something amiss?

If anyone associated with the Barisan Nasional was involved in a farce of this magnitude, Pakatan Rakyat, NGOs and members of the public would swarm them with endless allegations of manipulation and fraud.

Azmin-Anwar pact alive and well?

I personally have no idea about what the real state of the relationship between Anwar and Azmin currently is.

In public, they appear to be somewhat at odds. The best (but not entirely conclusive) argument that this is in fact the case is the failure of PKR (so far) to agree to submit more than one name for the position of menteri besar, and the manner in which Azmin's men were edged out of some key posts in the PKR elections.

On the other hand, it appears that Anwar has helped Azmin eliminate his biggest challenger - choosing to fire Khalid from the party instead of letting him compete openly against Azmin, and this after already fielding a third corner spoiler in the deputy president's race.

If the palace disagrees to Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail taking over as menteri besar (most likely on the grounds of her proximity to Anwar - something a politician of Anwar's calibre must surely have predicted), then the window of opportunity for the publicly unpopular Azmin to become menteri besar just gets that much bigger.

PKR's one member-one vote approach is an excellent system in theory - I daresay the best in the country.

In practice though, it seems to suggest that it does not eliminate the opportunity for manipulation; it merely makes manipulation require months of work (arguably, that is a step in the right direction).

In the end, it comes down to the same basics: transparency, transparency and transparency - all three of which seem to be painfully lacking in PKR's 2014 elections.