

The influence of anti-federal factions in Sabah politics: An assessment

Jeniwyat Mohd Jody^{1,2}, Mohammad Agus Yusoff¹, Jamaie Hamil¹

¹ Research Centre for History, Politics, and International Affairs (SPHEA),
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, National University of Malaysia (UKM)

² Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM),
Negeri Sembilan Campus

Correspondence: Jeniwyat Mohd Jody (email: jeniwyat@uitm.edu.my)

Received: 4 October 2023; Accepted: 11 May 2024; Published: 31 May 2024

Abstract

The discontent among the populace of Sabah towards the federal government has contributed to the emergence and growth of anti-federal factions within the state. It has been argued that the federal government has engaged in discriminatory practices towards Sabah, resulting in a significant lag in development compared to other states. As a result, these organisations appealed to the public, urging Sabah to secede from the Federation of Malaysia. This article investigates the reasons that led to the formation of anti-federal organisations in Sabah. The primary source used in this article, employing the anti-federal notion as an analytical tool, consists of an interview, while the secondary sources encompass books, journal articles and newspaper publications. This article contends that four major elements fuelled the creation of anti-federal factions in Sabah: historical considerations; ethnic distinctions; language, culture, and religion; as well as economic issues due to federal government control. All of these issues led to the formation of anti-federal organisations in Sabah, including the Sabah-Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM), Borneo's Plight in Malaysia Foundation (BOPIM), United Borneo Front (UBF), and Momogun Seek For Self-Determination (MOSIK). All anti-federal organisations have worked to promote the anti-federal movement in Sabah to encourage the state to secede from the Malaysian Federation, but their efforts remained futile. This phenomenon might be attributed to the perception that their influence is limited inside the interior region and that the majority of anti-federal factions in Sabah exhibited a preference for functioning as non-governmental entities rather than engaging in political activities.

Keywords: Anti-federal, BOPIM, Sabah, SSKM, the Federation of Malaysia

Introduction

Since the occurrence of the political tsunami in the 12th General Election in 2008, anti-federal factions have begun to form in Sabah by initiating a campaign to incite Sabahan's detestation of the central authority. It was claimed that when Malaysia was formed in 1963, the participation of Sabah and Sarawak had been based on specific conditions discussed at several meetings, including the Malaysian Unity Consultation Committee (MSCC), the Cobbold Commission, as well as the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) (the Lansdowne Committee). After several meetings, the

IGC ultimately produced a report in February 1963 containing an agreement known as Article 20 for Sabah and Article 18 for Sarawak. Its primary goal was to defend the special interests of the people in these two states in areas such as official language, religion, immigration, education, land and citizenship.

However, upon Sabah's admission to the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, anti-federal factions started to emerge, arguing that the central government had breached the implementation of the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63) and Article 20, resulting in the marginalisation of Sabah State Development. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM), Borneo's Plight in Malaysia Foundation (BOPIM), United Borneo Front (UBF), and Momogun Seek for Self-Determination (MOSIK) influenced Sabahans' decision to secede from Malaysia. Despite assertions that these organisations did not identify as "separatist movements," their ultimate objective was to achieve the secession of Sabah from the Malaysian Federation. This article examines the causes that led to the formation of these movements and their impact on Malaysia's political stability as a federal state.

Literature review

Academics have fiercely addressed previous research on the emergence of anti-federal organisations. Bakar (2007) examined federalism and its impact on racial harmony in his article "*Multinational Federation: The Case of Malaysia*." According to the author, feelings of jealousy and dissatisfaction among ethnic groups are inescapable in a multi-ethnic country. Moreover, in the event that the central government fails to administer federalism equitably, it could inadvertently foster sentiments of opposition towards federalism within the general populace. For example, in Sabah and Sarawak, the conflict between Muslim Bumiputera and non-Muslim Bumiputera emerged as a result of constitutional provisions and government policies that favour the Malay ethnic group as the majority ethnic group over other ethnic groups. According to Ismail, this may be evident in constitutional provisions that solely favoured Muslim Bumiputera or Malays, prompting unhappiness among non-Muslim Bumiputera in Sabah and Sarawak with the central government. He cited Article 160 (2) on Malay characteristics, Article 161A(6) on ethnicity in Sarawak, Article 161A(7) on ethnicity in Sabah, Article 153 on Malay privileges, Article 3 on Islam as the federation's official religion, Article 11(4) on religious freedom and the prohibition on spreading religions other than Islam, as well as Article 152 on Malay as the federation's official language. Furthermore, he argued that the New Economic Policy (1970–1990) and the National Development Policy (1990–2000), which were implemented to raise the Malays' and non-Malay Bumiputera's standard of living, only improved the Malay Bumiputera community's conditions. Consequently, the non-Muslim Bumiputera community experienced feelings of marginalisation and harboured resentment towards the central government, perceiving themselves as being subjected to unfair treatment. Bakar research is sufficient to help researchers understand the function of government policy in inciting anti-federal sentiments among Sabah residents.

Abdullah and Mulia (2017), Sinring and Govindasamy (2018), as well as Chin (2019) have all published similar research. They investigated the causes that led to the rise of anti-federal sentiments in Sabah and Sarawak, the history of SSKM, the techniques employed by SSKM to gain public support and the challenges raised by the Malaysia Agreement of 1963. According to their findings, the SSKM has had a positive response since its inception in 2011, particularly among the youth who seek more equitable economic and political rights for Sabah and Sarawak.

Furthermore, they claimed that the central government's violation of MA63 was the driving force behind the foundation of anti-federal factions. Among them was the allegation that the central government breached the oil royalty agreement by allocating only 5% of the profit when the states deserved more. Furthermore, the central government was accused of implementing a Malayization policy, which has resulted in the administration in these two states being dominated by Peninsular officials. In addition, the central government has also failed to distribute wealth, causing Sabah and Sarawak to lag far behind the Peninsular in terms of development.

The literature cited above demonstrates that numerous variables contributed to the establishment of anti-federal sentiments in Malaysia. Previous research in Malaysia indicated that the variables promoting anti-federal views were associated with constitutional restrictions, treaty violations and developmental gaps, causing the local communities of Sabah and Sarawak to become dissatisfied with the central administration. Hence, the creation of anti-federal groups, such as those in Sabah, has emerged as a manifestation of this discontent, which serves as the focal point of investigation in this study.

Research methodology

The use of a qualitative research design in the present study was justified and proved to be highly advantageous owing to its appropriateness in examining the emergence of anti-federal factions in Sabah. In addition, this research design is also suitable as the researcher can deeply understand the factors contributing to the existence of anti-federal organisations in Sabah. In terms of data collection, this study made use of primary data obtained through interviews with the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Parliament and Law), Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar, Dr Johnity @ Maximus Ongkili (Minister in the Prime Minister's Department; Sabah and Sarawak Affairs) and Usukan Assemblyman Salleh Said Keruak. They were chosen as informants as they had all been members of the cabinet, were knowledgeable about Sabah politics and were able to provide information and data related to this article. In addition, secondary data such as books, journals, theses, official government documents, electronic media portals and reports from international bodies were also employed. This article utilised the anti-federal concept as an analysis tool.

The Emergence of Anti-Federal Factions in Sabah

In Malaysia, anti-federal sentiments have evolved in two states: Sabah and Sarawak. In the instance of these two states, Yusoff (2006), Chin (2019) and Salleh et al. (2019) discovered that anti-federal sentiments arose as a result of power centralisation, with the central government frequently using this power to violate state governments' rights. Another cause was the central government's inability to uphold the spirit of MA63, which resulted in an imbalance of economic and social growth between Sabah, Sarawak and the rest of the peninsula. This disparity in growth fuels the discontent of the people of Sabah and Sarawak, leading to the creation of anti-federal factions in both states.

Four prominent factions have exerted considerable influence in motivating individuals to advocate for the attainment of Sabah's autonomy. These groups are identified as SSKM, BOPIM, UBF, and MOSIK. The selection of these groups as focal points for discussion was based on three distinct rationales. First, it should be noted that they belong to the Bumiputera community, which

comprises individuals who do not adhere to the Islamic faith. Second, both parties share a common aim, which is to advocate for the rights of Sabah. Third, they strive for independence and isolation.

Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM)

SSKM was established on 9th August 2011 by Doris Jones and used social media sites like Facebook to express displeasure with the position of Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia, especially from the political and economic aspects (Tauning & Lyndon, 2016). This group was formally registered in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (UK) in 2013 as Sabah Sarawak Union-UK (SSU-UK) (Sinring & Govindasamy, 2018). Initially, not many people joined this organisation, but 10 years later, its online followers had grown to 49,395 (SSKM-SSU (UK), 2014). The non-Muslim Bumiputera of Sabah, such as the Kadazan, Dusun and Murut (KDM), are the bulk of people who supported this organisation, particularly those who dwell in the interior of Sabah's west coast. Due to rural people's lack of in-depth historical knowledge, they became easy targets for SSKM to disseminate their influence over the federal government's violations of Sabah's rights (Puyok, 2018).

The establishment of SSKM was to articulate the discontent of the populace towards the preceding governmental administration in Sabah and Sarawak. This SSKM asserted that the establishment of their organisation is of utmost importance in preserving the rights of Sabah and Sarawak against any manipulation by the federal government. Three elements, according to Sinring and Govindasamy (2018), motivated the formation of SSKM. The primary reason pertains to the economic dimension since it is widely perceived that Sabah and Sarawak, being the principal oil-producing states, possess substantial wealth. However, it is worth noting that these states earned only a mere 5% royalty, which is comparatively low. The group said that the quantity of oil royalty money is inappropriate and insufficient for a state that produces oil (Lyndon, 2019). Thus, they insisted that Sabah and Sarawak secede from Malaysia for both states to benefit from the wealth of oil that they were entitled to. In an interview, Salleh Said Keruak (2022) indicated that the group does not completely comprehend the oil royalty issue. He stated:

“This oil royalty claim cannot be just a claim as it involves Petronas' high cost of extracting the oil. It is because of these expenditures that, once calculated, it is extremely difficult to increase the oil royalty by more than 5%.”

The second involves an issue of politics, as SSKM considered Malaya to be exploiting Sabah and Sarawak's resources rather than fighting for their rights (Sinring & Govindasamy, 2018), suggesting that the establishment of Malaysia since 1963 has only served to consolidate political power in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya by pooling the resources of the two countries. This policy decreased political power in Sabah and Sarawak, compelling the two states to submit to the federal government's decision.

The third includes a sociological aspect regarding the subject of Sabah and Sarawak's autonomy. The group argued that at Malaysia's formation through MA63, Sabah and Sarawak had independent powers in immigration and citizenship concerns but that the federal government has yet to completely provide this autonomy. According to Ismail and Yusoff (2022), while Sabah has some autonomy, particularly in terms of immigration, the institution in charge of the state's borders is under the federal government. As a result of lax policing, an influx of foreigners entered the

state. The increasing number of foreign immigrants has irritated the people of Sabah, who fear that they will outnumber the Bumiputera population in the future.

SSKM employed two major techniques to influence the people of Sabah, online and face-to-face, to propagate their message so that the people, particularly the youth, would support Sabah's efforts to secede from Malaysia owing to discrimination by the federal government. According to Tauning and Lyndon (2016), young people in Sabah learn a lot about the SSKM's cause via the group's Facebook page. In reality, some of the replies were discovered to support the SSKM's cause after being persuaded by their Facebook posts. The respondents hold the belief that the primary purpose of this group is to advocate for the rights of the Sabahan population, which has historically experienced neglect from Malaysian administrations.

According to Dr. Johnity @ Maximus Ongkili (2022), Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Sabah and Sarawak Affairs), the use of social media has considerably aided SSKM's expansion of its cause.

“SSKM used to have a few fans, but after a few months of operation and leveraging social media, its following expanded from 10,000 to 50,000. So, the central government was concerned at the time because, in 2015, some SSKM volunteers were arrested but later released for allegedly distributing flyers urging local citizens to sign the Sabah Petition to Leave Malaysia. As a result, I believe that SSKM's influence on the people of Sabah and other NGO groups has grown.”

Furthermore, SSKM has been attempting to gain support through an online petition, which is evident from the GoPetition petition titled “SSKM SSU Petition: Call for Action Over Restoration of Sabah Sarawak Independence” (GoPetition, 2011). Previously, GoPetition assisted several international NGOs in bringing their problems and hardships to the notice of the government and the rest of the globe. As of today, the website has received 144,895 signatures. As stated in an interview with Salleh Said Keruak (2022):

“We have no idea what they want with this petition. However, when we look at the SSKM followers, we see people from Kadazan, Dusun, Rungus and Murut. The key reason is that the founder of SSKM was also from their community. So, they believe that Doris's battle is right as they believe that the people of the peninsula have degraded the outcomes of Sabah to the point where Sabah has become a poor state. Another issue is that the people of Sabah observe that they are not progressing and believe it is the fault of the federal government. As a result, as SSKM members and others joined local political parties with similar goals, such as WARISAN, PBS and STAR, BN continued to lose its ruling power in the 14th GE. So, what Doris is fighting for is also what the people of Sabah desire.”

SSKM adopted a second strategy of personally disseminating its ideas through the organisation of small gatherings within the interior regions of Sabah and Sarawak. These areas are characterised by the significant presence of the original ethnic groups of Sabah and Sarawak (Sinring & Govindasamy, 2018). Consequently, a significant portion of the KDM ethnic population has been impacted by this particular group due to their little understanding of the subject matter.

The SSKM movement subsequently garnered the attention of authorities due to its advocacy for the secession of Sabah and Sarawak from Malaysia. One instance involved the arrest of Doris in 2015, who was purportedly apprehended on charges of using social media platforms to encourage individuals residing in the two states to advocate for the idea of the secession of Sabah

and Sarawak from Malaysia (Vanar, 2015). In contrast, Doris has managed to evade arrest due to her ongoing operations conducted in foreign territories. Consequently, the movement initiated by this group perseveres, albeit just in the realm of social media.

In Sabah politics, WARISAN effectively capitalised on the dissatisfaction of the Sabah populace towards the federal government during the 14th General Election (GE-14). This strategic move resulted in the acquisition of 21 state assembly seats by the party, ultimately leading to the formation of a government in collaboration with the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition inside the state. The victory ended BN's reign in the state and contributed to BN's demise at the federal level, exemplifying the effective influence exerted by this group on the populace of Sabah and resulting in a change of government at the state level, notwithstanding the absence of any affiliations between SSKM and WARISAN. WARISAN, on the other hand, was able to leverage the displeasure shown by this anti-federal faction to win the election.

Borneo's Plight in Malaysia Foundation (BOPIM)

BOPIM is yet another powerful anti-federal organisation in Sabah. Daniel John Jambun, a lawyer and NGO spokesperson based in Sabah, founded BOPIM. The goal of developing this movement is to safeguard the special rights of Sabah and Sarawak's indigenous people, with the ultimate goal of making Sabah and Sarawak independent states (BOPIM, 2022). BOPIM's campaign strategy is similar to SSKM's in that it uses social media, only that its influence is not as impactful. BOPIM had only 1868 social media followers as of 18th January 2022 (BOPIM, 2022).

To ensure that the BOPIM's agenda becomes more fruitful, the NGO has forged a collaborative partnership with the SSKM to supervise the execution of MA63, a strategic initiative aimed at achieving the secession of Sabah and Sarawak from Malaysian central governance. The relationship began on 11th June 2013, when Daniel met with SSKM spokesperson Moshidi Abdul Rahman in Kuching (The Borneo Post, 2013). During the meeting, the two NGOs agreed to work together to further the goal of completing the agreement between Sabah and Sarawak, which had been signed on 31st October 1963 and 22nd July 1963, respectively.

In terms of issues, BOPIM appeared active in responding to Article 20, particularly in the area of religion, as may be seen in the issue of the word Allah, where BOPIM became the most vociferous NGO opposing the government's decision not to allow non-Muslims to use the word Allah. They alleged that the ruling violated Article 20 as well as the Federal Constitution, which protects religious freedom in the country and allows the practice of religions other than Islam. As a result, BOPIM wants Sabah and Sarawak to secede from Malaysia to fully enjoy religious freedom in both states (Sabah Report, 2013).

In fact, BOPIM acted through Daniel John to apply for permission to conduct a judicial review against the KDN, which had detained 2,000 copies of the Catholic church's newspaper HERALD at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport on 25th October 2013 (Malay Mail 2014). The arrest was made after the newspaper published the word Allah, which alludes to God. Daniel views the arrest of the journalists as unlawful and a breach of the country's religious freedom (Daily Express, 2014).

Aside from that, BOPIM has a technique for obtaining support through face-to-face petitions. For example, they gathered signatures in Miri in 2014 to demand that the UN re-examine the question of self-determination for Sabah and Sarawak (The Borneo Post, 2014). The petition was also signed by 100 representatives, who hoped to collect hundreds of thousands of signatures

in Sabah and Sarawak before delivering it to the UN Secretary-General. According to BOPIM, the British and Malayan administrations perceived the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak into the Federation of Malaya on 16 September 1963 as a way to facilitate the merger of Singapore and Malaya.

BOPIM, similar to SSKM, possesses limited political influence in Sabah due to its status as an NGO without affiliation to any political party. They are commonly seen as those who do not prioritise the use of politics as a means to promote their agenda. The primary focus of the BOPIM movement revolves around the acquisition of petition signatures and the vocalisation of concerns pertaining to the preservation of religious freedom within Sabah and Sarawak. Due to their limited impact within the state, BOPIM is not perceived as posing a significant threat to the political landscape of Sabah.

United Borneo Front (UBF)

UBF, also known as Barisan Borneo Bersatu, was founded on 16th December 2010 by Jeffrey Kitingan, a former vice president of Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) (The Star, 2010). The UBF was founded to bring together all groups in Sabah that believe in the history of the “Borneo Struggle.” The UBF requests that the federal government follow MA63, particularly Article 8, addressing the formula for the sharing of land products and fairer representation, as well as the restoration of Sabah’s and Sarawak’s roles as partners in fellowship. Furthermore, the UBF wants the federal government to defend indigenous people’s customary rights, which are codified in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution (Joannes, 2013).

On 9th March 2011, UBF’s “Borneo Party Tea,” the organisation’s first campaign, was conducted. The tea party’s major objective was to rally the populace around Sabah’s rights, as outlined in MA63 (Puyok, 2015). The tea party, however, actually evolved into a platform for attacking the federal government, which is demonstrated by the following quote from Zainal Ajamain, a UBF leader who expressed displeasure with the federal government during the meeting:

“More importantly, Sabahans and Sarawakians are fed up with being funded and treated as if they were the 12th and 13th states of Malaysia when, under the federation, they were supposed to be recognised as equal one-third partners of the country alongside West Malaysia and its 11 states. The dominance of the UMNO and Malaya hegemony in every facet of economic and political life in Malaysia for the past 50 years has led to unnecessary discrimination, mismanagement, corruption and abuse of power at the expense of national security and prosperity” (Hunt, 2011).

Jeffrey intended to convert UBF into a political party after its formation. However, it failed to be registered as a political party, causing Jeffrey to take over the State Reform Party (STAR), or State Reform Party, based in Sarawak and move to Sabah (Puyok, 2013). On 6th January 2012, he formed the party in Sabah and revealed the party’s battle objective through the “STAR Sabah Chapter.” Although the intention to establish UBF as a political party was unsuccessful, UBF became the name of a coalition comprising STAR and another party, the Sabah People’s Progressive Party (SAPP) or Parti Progresif Sabah, which withdrew from the BN alliance in 2008 (Faisal, 2015).

The UBF coalition ran in the election for the first time in GE-13 for 29 parliamentary seats, with STAR winning 21 seats and SAPP taking 8 (Faisal, 2015). Despite being in a coalition, there were overlapping nominations between STAR and SAPP in Kudat, Kota Marudu, Sepanggar, Putatan and Kimanis. However, the election results showed that this coalition lost all of the contested seats. In Sabah's GE-13, BN won 22 seats, while DAP won two and PKR won one. In terms of the DUN seat, UBF only won one, Bingkor, through Jeffrey Kitingan (Adnan, 2013).

Despite losing all parliamentary seats and only one DUN seat in the election, the UBF continued to raise problems concerning Sabah's rights and criticised the Sabah government for not being serious about fighting for Sabah's rights due to the "fear" of losing its place in UMNO. Musa Aman reacted to the move until a video on social media surfaced showing his dismissal of Jeffrey's request to evaluate the implementation of MA63 in Sabah (Puyok & Sukhani, 2020).

Jeffrey took action in 2015 to integrate UBF into a new alliance, Gabungan Sabah (Daily Express, 2015), a Malaysian political coalition consisting of Sabah-based parties. Parti Maju Sabah (SAPP) and STAR co-founded it after SAPP took action to leave the BN coalition. Later, prior to GE-14, the alliance was joined by the Parti Harapan Rakyat Sabah (PHRS) and the Parti Perpaduan Rakyat Sabah (PPRS). In the face of the election, this new coalition was formed to challenge BN's strength. However, through the STAR party, the Sabah Coalition only gained one parliamentary seat in Keningau and two state assembly seats in Tambunan and Bingkor in GE-14, therefore demonstrating that anti-federal factions do not pose any significant threat to the political landscape of Sabah.

Momogun Seek for Self-Determination (MOSIK)

On 16th September, 2014, Daniel Jebon Janaun from Kota Marudu founded Momogun Seek for Self-Determination (MOSIK). The term "momogun" means "indigenous people of Sabah," while the phrase "mosik tokou" means "let us get up or wake up" in Kadazandusun (Sankar, 2014). In other words, this NGO seeks to awaken the spirit of the people of Sabah to rise and demand that the federal government respect Sabah's rights. As a result, the goal of the formation of MOSIK is to fight for the restoration of Sabah's position as an independent and sovereign state, in accordance with the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, MA63, Article 20, the IGC Report 1962 and the Cobbold Report 1962.

MOSIK opposed the Federation of Malaysia for two fundamental reasons. First, MOSIK stated that MA63 was not adhered to when Singapore was expelled from Malaysia on 9th August 1965 without consulting Sabah and Sarawak (MOSIK Times, 2014). Consequently, the autonomous status of Sabah and Sarawak underwent a slow erosion, culminating in its complete abrogation on 27th August 1976, with the amendment of the Federal Constitution to equate Sabah and Sarawak with the states of Malaya.

Second, MOSIK argued that the initial objective of the Malaysian proclamation on 16th September 1963 was to establish a confederation. However, over time, this objective transformed into the formation of a federation through the combination of Singapore, Sarawak, North Borneo (Sabah) and the Federation of Malaya, resulting in the creation of the Federation of Malaysia (MOSIK Times, 2014). This observation highlights the discrepancy between Malaysia's proclamation and the agreed-upon terms, specifically the transition from a confederation to another confederation, suggesting that Sabah and Sarawak were deceived. MOSIK's public endorsement

of SSKM was rooted in their perception that the central government has committed injustices towards Sabah.

MOSIK has taken four major steps to increase anti-federal sentiments. First, it employed social media to communicate views on the Malaysian Federation, as well as concerns surrounding Article 20 for Sabah and Article 18 for Sarawak. On Facebook, for example, MOSIK has created groups to ensure that social media users receive relevant information. Since its inception on 4th September 2014 (MOSIK, 2023), the group has grown to 1,100 members. MOSIK also actively used blogs to disseminate writings and statements representing the group. Since September 2014, a blog named MOSIK Times has published essays and statements from the NGO's founders to explain the group's cause.

Second, MOSIK published books to share writings and points of view. On 27th February 2018, MOSIK published a book titled "*Sabah Sebuah Negara: Satu Realiti Sejarah*," penned by Daniel himself (Borneo Today, 2018). This book tells the story of Sabah, which was previously an autonomous state in the Federation of Malaysia before being downgraded to one of the federation's 13 states in 1976. Furthermore, the book recounts the numerous histories and actions of the central government that have weakened Sabah and Sarawak's place in the federation. Despite the fact that Daniel died on 5th December 2014, the leaders of the NGO have worked hard to ensure that the book is successfully published in 2018.

Third, MOSIK has sent two petitions to the United Nations (UN), namely "*Call for Sabah-Sarawak Rights*" and "*People's Petition to the United Nations to Seek Self-Determination for Sabah and Sarawak*." These petitions assert that the Federal Constitution is in conflict with MA63 since, according to MOSIK, the terms and conditions of MA63 are not fully contained in the Federal Constitution, despite the fact that the Federal Constitution has been changed. As a result, through the petition, MOSIK hoped to obtain international justice for Sabah and Sarawak. In an interview, Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (2022), Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Parliament), stated:

"What is the aim of petitioning the UN, like MOSIK did? It will have no effect. Because each country has its own sovereignty, a country's fate is in its own hands. Even if millions of people sign the petition, nothing will change."

Fourth, while MOSIK professes to be an NGO, it is also indirectly active in politics, as can be observed in the run-up to GE-14 when Jeffrey Kitingan revealed in 2016 that MOSIK, together with the Sabah Change Forces (APS) and Sunduvan Sabah NGOs, became one of the NGOs supporting the Sabah Coalition (Daily Express, 2016). This move demonstrates that MOSIK indirectly exploited political channels by assisting the Sabah Coalition to achieve its fighting objectives.

However, MOSIK's presence in the Sabah Coalition was viewed as having little influence as it did not contribute to the coalition's victory in GE-14. The victory of one parliamentary seat and two state assembly seats indicated that MOSIK had little clout in Sabah politics, as the people of the state were more likely to vote for either BN or WARISAN in GE-14. It can be assumed that, despite the strong advocacy of anti-federal factions like MOSIK for Sabah's independence prior to GE-14, their endeavours failed to garner extensive backing from the Sabah populace, as evidenced by their rejection of the Sabah Coalition during the aforementioned election.

Conclusion

This article demonstrated four major factors contributing to the existence of anti-federal factions in Sabah. The first consideration is historical. Since Sabah's admission to the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, the state's officials have frequently expressed discontent with Malaysia's practice of federalism, claiming that this style of centralised governance has decreased the role of the state government. Furthermore, anti-federal organisations frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with the central government's failure to comply with the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 and the Article 20 Memorandum. The second involves the existence of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. In this regard, the KDM, the non-Muslim Bumiputera ethnic group of Sabah, founded and supported these anti-federal organisations. They asserted that the federal government's failure to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country has raised concerns regarding the shifting demographics of the Sabah people.

Third, it is important to note that Sabah is one of the most economically disadvantaged states in Malaysia. Despite Sabah's membership in the Malaysian Federation since 1963, the region's inhabitants continue to have a lower standard of living than those in Peninsular Malaysia. Finally, Sabah experienced a sense of marginalisation as a consequence of the federal government's hegemonic influence, which is why anti-federal factions advocated for autonomy and the restoration of their rights as stipulated in MA63 and Article 20. As a result of the state government's failure to comply with MA63 and Article 20, anti-federal organisations, such as SSKM, BOPIIM, UBF, and MOSIK emerged with the intention of exerting pressure on the federal government.

According to the findings of the investigation, the majority of anti-federal organisations disseminated their influence through social media, particularly Facebook. Even if they had been able to garner thousands of Facebook followers, they were unable to achieve much political clout after losing almost all of the seats contested in GE-13 and GE-14. In fact, some anti-federal factions have chosen to operate solely as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rather than political organisations.

References

- Abdullah, A. R. T., & Mulia, P. A. (2018). Isu Perjanjian Malaysia 1963 (MA63) dan hak autonomi Sabah dan Sarawak dalam konteks sejarah dan PRU-14. *Jurnal Kinabalu Khas*, 1-21.
- Adnan, M. H. (2013). Malaysia's 13th General Election in Sabah: Factors determining the winners. *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, 40(2), 93-112.
- Bakar, I. (2007). Multinational federation: The case of Malaysia. In Burgess, M. & Pinder, J. (Eds.), *Multinational federations* (pp. 68-85). Routledge.
- BOPIIM. (2022). Borneo's Plight in Malaysia – BOPIIM. <https://www.facebook.com/BorneanBorneoToday>.
- Borneo Today. (2018). New book argues that Sabah is a nation, not just one of 13 states. <https://borneotoday.net/new-book-argues-that-sabah-is-a-nation-not-just-one-of-13-states/>
- Chin, J. (2019). The 1963 Malaysia Agreement (MA63): Sabah and Sarawak and the politics of historical grievances. In Lemiere, S. (Ed.), *Minorities matter: Malaysians politics and people* (pp. 75-92). ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute.
- Daily Express. (2014). Lawyer, politician must file joint application over Herald seizure. <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=88861>

- Daily Express. (2015). Opposition parties form United Sabah Alliance. <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=113381>
- Daily Express. (2016). Sabah opposition group hopes others will stay out. <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news.cfm?NewsID=113381>
- Faisal S. H. (2015). Patronage, power and prowess: Barisan Nasional's equilibrium dominance in East Malaysia. *Kajian Malaysia*, 33(2), 1–24.
- GoPetition. (2011). SSKM SSU petition: Call for action over restoration of Sabah Sarawak independence. <https://www.gopetition.com/petitions/sabah-sarawak-rights.html>
- Hunt, L. (2011). A Borneo Tea Party: A tea party deep in Borneo offers a temporary alternative to forming a political party for three Malaysian states. <https://thediplomat.com/2011/03/a-borneo-tea-party/>
- Ismail, M. A., & Yusoff, M. A. (2022). Asymmetrical federalism and anti-federal sentiment in Malaysia: The Sabah experience. *e-Bangi Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 19 (7), 33-51.
- Jaafar, W. J. T. (2022). Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Parliament and Law). Interview at the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Parliament and Law) Office.
- Joannes, N. (2013). *Agenda Borneo: Perjuangan pimpinan Datuk Dr Jeffrey G. Kitingan untuk memartabatkan maruah Sabah*. STAR.
- Keruak, S. S. (2021). Usukan Assemblyman. Interview at Holiday Inn, Melaka.
- Lyndon, N. (2019). Perspektif sosiologi bidayuh terhadap gerakan Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM). *Geografia- Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 15(4), 233-245.
- Malay Mail. (2014). Sabah court sets July 10 date for decision on possible judicial review. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2014/08/13/group-draws-up-self-determination-petition-for-sarawak-and-sabah/>
- MOSIK Times. (2014). Tiada sebab mengapa status Sabah Sarawak sebagai negara tidak boleh dipulihkan. <http://mosiktimes.blogspot.com/2014/10/tiada-sebab-mengapa-status-sabah.html>
- MOSIK. (2023). Momogun Movement for Self-Determination (MOSIK). <https://www.facebook.com/groups/posik/>
- Ongkili, J. M. (2022). Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Sabah and Sarawak Affairs). Interview at the Prime Minister's Department; Sabah and Sarawak Affairs Office.
- Puyok A. (2018). What issues matter to local voters, and why?: Electoral politics in Ranau, Sabah. *Journal of Borneo-Kalimantan*, 4(1), 20-27.
- Puyok, A. & Sukhani, P. R. (2020). Sabah: Breakthrough in the fixed deposit state. *The Round Table*, 109(2), 209–224.
- Puyok, A. (2013). The 13th Malaysian General Election in Sabah: Does the “Borneo agenda” matter? Proceeding the 2nd International Conference on Election & Democracy. Kuching, Sarawak.
- Puyok, A. (2015). The appeal and future of the ‘Borneo agenda’ in Sabah. In Saravanamuttu, J., Guan, L. H, & Mohamed Nawab Mohamed Osman (Eds.). *Coalitions in collision: Malaysia's 13th General Elections* (pp. 199-220). Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD).
- Sabah Report. (2013). BOPIIM repeats call for secession. <http://sabah-report.blogspot.com/2013/10/bopim-repeats-call-for-secession.html>
- Salleh, A., Puyok, A. & Bagang, T.P. (2019). Constitutional asymmetry in Malaysia: a case study of Sabah and Sarawak. A country study of constitutional asymmetry in Malaysia. In

- Popelier, P. & Sahadzic, M. (Eds.), *Constitutional asymmetry in multinational federalism, federalism and internal conflicts* (pp. 315-339). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sankar, U. (2014). Suara dari negara Sabah. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/opinion/2014/09/23/suara-dari-negara-sabah/750655>
- Sinring, M. S., & Govindasamy, A. R. (2018). Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM): Hala tuju selepas PRU14. *Jurnal Kinabalu Khas*, 1-21.
- SSKM - SSU(UK). (2014). Kenyataan rasmi SSKM-SSU(UK) berhubung dengan aktiviti memungut tandatangan di Tambunan. http://www.sabahsarawakmerdeka.org/2014/11/kenyataan-rasmi-sskm-ssuuk-berhubung_12.html
- Tauning, V., & Lyndon, N. (2016). Pandangan etnik Sungai terhadap gerakan Sabah Keluar Malaysia (SSKM): satu kajian fenomenologi. *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 12(5), 44–52.
- The Borneo Post. (2013). Two NGOs team up for rights of Sabah, Sarawak. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2013/06/17/two-ngos-team-up-for-rights-of-sabah-sarawak/>
- The Borneo Post. (2014). Group draws up self determination petition for Sarawak and Sabah. <https://www.theborneopost.com/2014/08/13/group-draws-up-self-determination-petition-for-sarawak-and-sabah/>
- The Borneo Post. (2015). United Sabah Alliance to organise ‘Sabah Day’ in Kundasang 31 Aug. <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-borneo-post-sabah/20150823/283326111098463>
- The Star. (2010). Jeffrey Kitingan forms United Borneo Front to get more for Sabah, Sarawak. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2010/12/16/jeffrey-kitingan-forms-united-borneo-front-to-get-more-for-sabah-sarawak/>
- Vanar, M. (2015). Arrest warrant issued for SSKM’s ‘Doris Jones’. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/02/10/sabah-doris-jones/>
- Yusoff, M.A. (2006). *Malaysian federalism: Conflict or consensus*. Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.