



[ACADEMICIANS](#) [ALL](#) [CAMPUS](#) [EVENTS](#) [INSPIRE](#) [LIFESTYLE](#) [NEWS](#)

Reclaiming Political Islam for the Ummah

[Guest Submission](#) [May 6, 2023](#) [No Comments](#)

By Syaza Shukri

On 22nd February 2023, the prime minister of Malaysia visited the IIUM to give the closing speech to a conference on Professor Emeritus Dato' Dr. Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman. The next day, the IIUM community and the ummah in general were saddened by the passing of Professor Emeritus Tan Sri Dr. Mohd. Kamal Hassan. These two great scholars and teachers left behind unmatched legacies on the way forward for the modern Muslim society that is based on reason, justice, and most importantly, guidance from Islamic precepts. Despite their massive contribution to the ummah, politics of the Muslim world today are still far from ideal.

Political Islam is a concept that has been tossed around for decades to describe the approach towards politics by Muslims who found themselves without a caliph a century ago. Islamists are those who seek to put Islam at the centre of politics. The

GUEST SUBMISSION

that is not wrong per se. However, by focusing on the implementation of shariah law alone, some Islamists failed to take into consideration the objectives of shariah.

Among these modern Islamists, we have seen the rise of Islamist populists. Of course, Islamist populists have been around for some time with the cleric-led Iranian Revolution being a good example. Populists are those who claim to represent the people. In a democratic system, the voice of the people must be prioritized. Nevertheless, a leader should do more than simply follow people's sentiment as it could lead to tyranny of the masses. Populists today are dangerous because in claiming to speak for "the people", they have delegitimized their political opponents – the so-called "others". Islamist populists, unfortunately, are Muslims who justify their hierarchical and polarizing views of society on their reading of Islam.

Due to this unfortunate development, political Islam has been tainted because Islamist populists only view Muslims to be correct and only Muslim leaders are legitimate. Twenty years ago, in response to the failure of Islamists to lead so-called Islamic nations, scholars such as Olivier Roy has claimed that we are living in a post-Islamist world in which the objective is no longer to form a government but to use a bottom-up approach of Islamizing society. Taking this idea further, Rashid Ghannouchi claimed to have moved from political Islam to a Muslim democrat who values tolerance, peace, and inclusivity without having an immediate agenda to implement shariah law. It appears that everyone's turning away from political Islam.

It bears to remember that political Islam is not Islam. It is only one view on how politics in the Muslim world should be. Prof. Tajuddin Rasdi delineated three types of politics in Malaysia currently: ketuanan Islam (Islamist populism), institutional Islam, and Madani Islam. This shows the multiple facets and faces of political understanding by Muslims. Of the three, the spirit of Madani Islam, which is based on the holistic understanding of the shariah, must be championed. In doing this, scholars of political Islam and the ummah can begin to decolonize political Islam and

GUEST SUBMISSION

Abu Sulayman and Kamal Hassan alive for many generations to come.***

(Dr. Syaza Shukri has recently been promoted to Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, IIUM.)

[Author](#) [Recent Posts](#)

**Guest Submission**
