

Youths allured by BN's light and breezy approach
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ANALYSIS Youth voters in rural areas appear to be bucking the trend of their urban peers if the Kerdu by-election results are to be an indication, as they helped the BN cruise to an emphatic victory over PAS yesterday.

Youths account for a substantial number of the 8,999 voters registered under Kerdu, making up about 38 percent or some 3,420 voters.

And with the higher-than-expected voter turnout yesterday - standing at 83.20 percent - it can be inferred that a higher attendance from the youth contributed to this trend of BN support.

This trend is clearly illustrated by the total number of voters under polling stream three, which is reserved for youths, at the three largest polling districts - Felda Jengka 23 and 22 and Desa Murni.

In 2008, a total of 707 youth voters cast their ballots with 400 or 57 percent going to BN, while PAS earned 307 or 43 percent of the votes.

There were a lot more youth voters this time around with EC figures raising the total to 1,130. Of the number, 707 or 62.56 percent supported BN while PAS suffered a six percent drop in support despite a slight increase in votes, gaining 423 or 37.44 percent of the youth votes in the three areas.

This trend can be attributed to BN's concerted efforts in reaching out to youths in the constituency, easing up on the ceramahs and instead taking a more informal approach.

Apart from building more youth facilities such as futsal courts and WiFi internet projects at the many kampongs in Kerdu, BN youth leaders also spent more time with the youths doing less serious activities.

Bonding through futsal

A good example is Umno Youth deputy chief Razali Ibrahim, who despite coming unprepared, took the trouble to buy new sports attire and shoes so that he could play futsal with youths at Desa Murni during a campaign visit.

BN's shift in tactics was a clear winner among the youths as PAS, despite pulling in the help of popular comedian and songwriter Bob Lokman, failed miserably in reaching out to youths as they stuck to the old and tired method of non-stop ceramahs.

The situation did little to help PAS' overall campaign, with the noticeable absence of national Pakatan Rakyat machinery to help promote their candidate, Hassanuddin Salim (third from right).

The campaign was largely left to the local PAS divisions and branches, which relied too much on their daily press conferences for publicity and were also disorganised in promoting their candidate's activities.

Though they did get some help from the local PKR and DAP machinery, it appeared as if there was little effort from elsewhere to help galvanise their bid for the state seat.

BN on the other hand overwhelmed the PAS campaign, with the might of their election machinery made apparent from the very first day of the campaign period with a daily scheduled packed with ministerial visits and 'social' events bringing BN leaders and voters together.

BN were also far ahead in their print campaign, mixing standard anti-Pakatan Rakyat material with more imaginative publications that used humour to highlight various controversies involving Pakatan leaders.

Missed opportunities

PAS also made a clear tactical mistake in their approach to the all-important Felda and Felcra settlements, with only a last-minute push to gain support from the settlers.

Residents in the three Felda and one Felcra settlement under Kerdu make up a huge portion of the total number of registered voters, accounting for 3,721 or 41 percent of Kerdu's voters.

PAS' resident Felda expert, Persatuan Anak Felda Kebangsaan president Mazlan Aliman (left), only joined the campaign midway, and though his arguments over Felda's alleged penchant for selling settlers short made some waves, it was not enough to stop the BN machine.

BN again outplayed PAS in this department, with none other than Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak leading the charge and making his rounds on the second day of campaigning, visiting all three Felda settlements in Kerdu.

It is admittedly a long shot to expect a significant swing among Felda and Felcra voters against BN, considering their deep-seated sense of patronage towards the BN, and particularly Najib's father and former premier Abdul Razak Hussein, for helping them enter the scheme in the first place.

But the lack of effort from PAS is hardly a sound strategy to convince staunch BN supporters to turn around and instead vote for the Islamist party.

PAS' loss in Kerdu, coupled with their simultaneous loss in Merlimau, is a sure morale killer for the party, which has suffered four consecutive losses now after the Galas by-election in November last year and the Tenang by-election in January.

Faced with the changing landscape of voter sentiments in Malay heartland seats - which is traditionally their battleground of choice - PAS and Pakatan will need to re-evaluate their approach to future polls if they hope to keep up with a reinvigorated Umno and BN.