

**BN, Pakatan in final lap to nationwide polls**  
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With BN component party polls postponed and the PM zigzagging the nation on meet-the-rakyat tours, it is hard not to catch a whiff of snap elections in the air.

While PM Najib Razak is mum on the dissolution date, BN sources claim that the coalition's component parties have bunkered down for final strategic planning and have sent grassroots leaders for polling and counting agent refresher courses ahead of the snap polls.

Pakatan Rakyat too is getting ready to face the general election, which it is expecting later this year.

For political scientist Tunku Mohar Tunku Mohd Mokhtar, however, there is not much to gain for the BN if the premier dissolves parliament this year.

"The situation is similar to that in 2008, with the main issues still bread-and-butter issues and to a certain extent ethnic relations.

"The only difference is now there is the perception that Malay and Indian voters have returned to BN, but beyond that it won't benefit BN much," said the International Islamic University Malaysia lecturer.

**Umno growing in strength**

Although MIC is seen to have benefited from the departure of long-serving former president S Samy Vellu, Tunku Mohar believes that the only party which appears to be growing in strength is Umno.

As such, Umno will be a big winner in the general election, with component parties MCA and Gerakan, among others, unable to regain their strength after receiving devastating blows in the 2008 polls.

"But Umno's strength will be able to help MCA and Gerakan in constituencies with strong Malay presence (contested by the component parties)," he said.

Political commentator and chief executive of the Kuala Lumpur-Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Tang Ah Chai agrees, saying that Umno has lately been consistently on the offensive against Pakatan.

"They use NGOs or even the government to push things - from 1Malaysia to ketuanan Melayu to 1Melayu 1Bumi, as well as the controversy surrounding the Penang Komtar Hawkers' Association, all the way to allegations against (PKR de facto leader) Anwar Ibrahim - as a means to test support from different groups," he said.

**Backlash from sex video**

Chinese voters who had largely turned their backs on the BN in 2008 and the subsequent by-elections are unlikely to warm up to ultra-Malay sentiments, which Tunku Mohar said appears to be played up by Umno to attract Malay votes.

"But this is not good for BN, nor is it good for Malaysian politics, as it will make the political divide a racial one. It will also mean that MCA won't be able to justify its place as a senior partner in BN," he said.

The barrage of allegations against Anwar, too, can go either ways, said the IIUM political science department head.

"(The allegations) have yet to benefit BN, and there could also be backlash, particularly from this sex video (controversy) because as of now, there has been little evidence. If the 'actor' is proven to be Anwar, then we can expect a swing of Malay votes for BN," he said.

On the Pakatan side, Tang said that the party to come out stronger from the snap polls would be DAP, which has had a successful run in the recent Sarawak election.

“DAP is good at mobilisation and it is in good condition as all of the by-elections losses (by Pakatan) were suffered by PKR and PAS. DAP's morale is intact.

“Lim Guan Eng has also performed well in organising the party and taking advantage of media exposure, unlike PKR where Anwar has too many court cases to face to be able to lead properly,” he said.

PKR has also carved a flaky reputation with severe infighting following its party polls last year, as well as numerous defections.

Whether or not PAS can rise above the sort of factionalism which splinters PKR, said Tang, remains to be seen with the Islamic party conducting its party election next month.

### **BN needs more time**

While the string of defeats in by-elections by PAS and PKR gives an impression of a resurgence of BN support, Universiti Malaya political analyst Abu Hassan Hasbullah said that Najib as BN chief should still be wary of calling snap polls if he is keen for a two-thirds mandate.

“When you look at the previous by-elections (since 2008), BN only managed to win back (an average) five to seven percent of the Malay votes. To regain the two-thirds BN needs to maintain this and then win back more than 30 percent Chinese support,” he said.

It is for this reason that Khaw Veon Szu, the former chief of Gerakan's think tank, the Socioeconomic and Development Research Institute, believes that the BN will need “a bit more time” before polls can be called.

“This is the first battle that Najib will be leading and he needs to make sure that the other component parties are able to regain some of their seats alongside Umno's wins.

“As such, I believe that the polls will only happen in the early parts of next year,” he said.