

BR1M able to swing fence-sitters, says academician

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By Ram Anand

Despite charges that the federal government's 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) cash aid is nothing more than an election gimmick to appease voters, the programme does have an overwhelming influence on fence-sitting voters, an academician says.

Universiti Malaya's Mohammad Redzuan Othman (left) said according to his research, out of the 21 percent of the undecided voters - the topic of BR1M sparked an overwhelmingly positive response from 87 percent of them.

"It is pretty surprising that BR1M actually does play a role, not only among rural voters, but the young and on-the-fence voters, too," Redzuan said during Merdeka Centre's 'Who will win the 13th General Election' forum yesterday.

"When you go to rural areas, the effect of something like BR1M is actually quite huge. It means a lot (to the rural folk)," said the former director of the university's Centre of Democracy and Elections (Umcedel).

Redzuan said according to his team's ground research, Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim's popularity has been rising steadily since the year 2011, though he expressed surprise as to why Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak did not call for elections in mid-2012 when his popularity was at an all-time high over a period of two years.

"The anti-BN sentiment is very strong, but when we asked those who were against BN, they still wanted to vote for the BN. The opposition is yet to convert these disgruntled people' into voting for them," Redzuan said.

Graft charges have little impact

Meanwhile, Monash University's School for Political Science head, James Chin, argued that the people might not base their votes on the corruption track record of a candidate, even though many have hit out at some incumbents for corruption.

"I cannot remember a single constituency where the people had voted based on the corruption track record of a candidate," Chin said.

"The person complaining the most about corruption will, in all likelihood, be the very first person who will try to settle his or her summons amicably with a police officer at a discount," he added.

Chin (left) also said that political bloggers would not be able to play such a big role in the forthcoming election, unlike the 2008 election, because the people were now able to track the political allegiances of the bloggers, unlike five years ago.

"Political bloggers now are merely touching base with their own supporters. They are not converting any new believers to their cause," he said.

Chin even went on to state boldly that he does not believe the country will have a "free and fair elections" this year.

"In Malaysia, ever since the year 1955, we've never had a free and fair election," was his curt response to a question from the floor during the forum.

Young voters and on-the-fence voters are likely to be decision makers in the election, if research findings are anything to go by.

According to the Merdeka Centre's figures, the electoral roll has registered 3.27 million new voters since the 2008 election, representing a massive 28.3 percent growth - the highest since the centre started recording growth figures.

First-time voters will make up one quarter - or 25 percent - of the entire electorate in the 13th general election.

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