

Najib ups BR1M payout, but impact's down

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by Nigel Aw

Despite Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's promise to increase BR1M from RM500 to RM1,200 if BN wins in this general election, the impact of cash handouts on voters appears to be on a decline.

"Looking at polling data from the first BR1M and the second BR1M, the level of support for Najib and BN had not gone up to the same degree from the second handout.

"Diminishing returns is the general point of view," political scientist Bridget Welsh (left) said at a forum in Petaling Jaya last night.

However, the impact of the latest increase breaching the four figure threshold remains to be seen, she said.

"I think in the urban areas, BR1M will not have an effect, except for the lower classes of certain groups, particularly among the Indians and Malays.

"But I think it's going to be less than people realise," Welsh said.

The impact of BR1M and BR2M on the rural community would be harder to assess, she said, but noted that money politics had traditionally been influential there.

"At the same time, there is the issue of trust as people will want to see the money first," Welsh said, but added that there was more to cash handouts in winning support for the 13th general election.

According to a survey by Universiti Malaya Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel), the favourable view of BN following the BR1M payment declined from 66 percent in April 2012 to 61 percent on Sept 16.

In terms of gender, Welsh said, BR1M has had a disproportionate impact on women compared with men.

"This is because the money has gone into buying consumables for the family," she said.

'Women generally pro-incumbent'

In term of voting trends, she said women had a tendency to support the incumbent government, and in this case the BN.

"Among Chinese women, there is no gender gap, men and women support BN or Pakatan

(Rakyat) the same.

"But for Malay and Indian voters, the divide reaches five to 10 percent and in the rural areas you have much bigger gender gap," she said.

While the pro-incumbent stance of Malay and Indian women may benefit BN, the lack of gender gap among Chinese voters works against it as the ruling coalition cannot retain female voters among an already opposition-skewed demography, she said.

Welsh also predicted women's representation in BN would decline, while Pakatan Rakyat's side would see an increase in women representatives.

She explained that this was particularly true in MCA and MIC and their safe seats became increasingly few, resulting in juggling in internal party politics and leaders becoming less willing to make room for women's representation.

Welsh pointed out despite the growing size of Parliament since 1999, BN's women parliamentary candidates had only increased from 18 to 19 and subsequently to 21 in the last three general elections.

In contrast, the opposition's women candidates had increased from 11 in 1999 to 16 in 2004 and overtook BN with 23 in 2008.

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