

Poll: Malay approval for Najib's gov't hits all-time low

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Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's government has for the first time lost the approval of the majority of Malay voters, according to a poll.

Singapore's The Straits Times (ST), citing a survey by independent pollster Merdeka Centre, said only 31 percent of Malay voters is satisfied with the government.

This is the first time approval for the government among Malays has fallen below 50 percent since Merdeka Centre began recording the data in February 2012.

The fall among Malay voters was drastic as it had stood at 52 percent this January.

The demography is significant as it forms the bedrock of Umno's support base that has helped sustain the ruling coalition despite the weakness of some of its other coalition partners.

The survey was revealed to analysts in the financial sector last week, according to ST.

The government's overall approval rating also plummeted to 23 percent, the worst since the polls started in 2012.

5pct Chinese approval

As for Chinese voters, only five percent approved of the government compared to 11 percent this January.

The survey found the government's falling approval rating was largely attributed to its handling of the economy.

The survey found only 17 percent of respondents were satisfied with how the government was handling the economy, compared to 78 percent who were dissatisfied.

The survey was conducted among respondents in Peninsular Malaysia in August, shortly after Najib dismissed Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin for his critical stance on 1MDB.

Najib has been facing calls for resignation over the discovery of RM2.6 billion in his personal bank accounts and his handling of 1MDB, which is struggling to repay its US\$11 billion debt.

Najib had denied taking public funds for personal gain, while his supporters claim the money was a "political donation" from the Middle East meant for Umno's use.

Will Umno ditch Najib?

It remains to be seen how long Umno leaders are prepared to continue supporting Najib and whether they would allow him to lead BN into the 14th general election due in 2018.

As a comparison, the government's approval rating was at 43 percent in May 2013 when the 13th general election was held.

That figure was derived from 61 percent of Malays, 41 percent of Indians and nine percent of Chinese who approved of the government.

At a 43 percent approval rating at that time, the BN saw its worst electoral performance since its inception, and failed to regain the coveted two-thirds majority.

With an approval rating now that is almost half of what it was during the 13th general election, and with support among Malay voters at an all time low, Najib will have to work hard to cover lost ground or risk being ousted before the next general election.

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