

Five lessons from BN's polls victory, according to PAS
MalaysiaKini.com
June 19th, 2016

The Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar by-elections were a litmus test as they were the first contests under a new political configuration.

It was the first time PAS and Pakatan Harapan were contesting in a parliamentary election after the demise of Pakatan Rakyat, and also the first battle for BN in Peninsular Malaysia after the 1MDB and RM2.6 billion donation scandals broke out.

BN's thumping victory is telling of the effectiveness of the strategies employed by all parties, as well as what may be in store for the future, said PAS research centre director Zuhdi Marzuki, making several observations:

PAS core support stuck through thick and thin

Despite PAS taking a radical move to break away from Pakatan Rakyat and steer the party closer to Umno, it still managed to command around half of the opposition's votes in both by-elections.

Zuhdi observed, "PAS, which entered both by-elections as a single party, had its core support, that it came out ahead of Harapan in Kuala Kangsar and was slightly behind Harapan in Sungai Besar.

"From the percentage of votes PAS received (in the by-elections), it showed that PAS had contributed more than 50 percent of support to Pakatan Rakyat in the 13th general election."

In Kuala Kangsar, PAS won 5,684 votes to Amanah's 4,883 votes while in Sungai Besar, PAS won 6,902 votes to Amanah's 7,609 votes.

1MDB, GST and Rosmah issues ineffective

The opposition tried to capitalise on the 1MDB scandal and the unpopular Goods and Services Tax (GST) but voter disgruntlement did not translate into votes.

PKR secretary-general Rafizi Ramli even put the limelight on the prime minister's wife Rosmah Mansor's controversies, which also did not bear fruit.

Ultimately, it appeared voters were more concerned about local issues.

Zuhdi observed, "The issues raised about 1MDB, Rosmah's private jet and others were not effective in attracting support for the opposition parties.

"Even though voters complained about the GST and the increasing costs of living, the opposition parties failed to benefit from these issues as these did not translate into votes," he said.

Mahathir factor fizzles

Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad has mercilessly hammered at Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak for the latter's scandals and even helped to campaign for Amanah.

This too, did not translate into votes despite the elder statesman being well respected in the Malay community.

Zuhdi observed, "These results also showed Mahathir's influence is no longer significant among Malay voters. The more he involves himself with Harapan, the less his influence becomes."

DAP may see heavy losses in GE14

Zuhdi noted the purported Chinese swing to BN in the twin by-elections is a continuation of the Teluk Intan by-election, which DAP lost.

If this trend persists, he said, DAP being reliant on Chinese votes would suffer.

Zuhdi observed, "Since the Teluk Intan by-election, the Sarawak state election and now the Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Besar by-elections, Chinese voters appear to be returning to BN.

"These results will threaten DAP when it faces the 14th general election, where they will lose a lot in Chinese-majority seats where they contest," he said.

PAS can make PKR suffer

The twin by-elections bear similar demographics to many other west coast seats.

If PAS can take around half of the opposition votes against Amanah due to its staunch core supporters, then it can replicate the same against PKR, observed Zuhdi.

"It is also a threat to PKR. If PAS contests the seats against them in the west coast, they may lose as well."

However, this is likely to benefit BN instead of PAS, but will serve as a strong bargaining tool for the Islamist party.

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