

Harapan should stop appealing to emotion
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“Elections are about choices. Draw a contrast with your opponent on an issue that is important to the segment of voters who will decide the election and you will win.”

- Bob Franks, US politician

COMMENT | Public comments by Pakatan Harapan pundits, supporters and politicians of late have been in defending, extolling and cajoling the new world order of Harapan politics to an electorate which is divided along racial and religious lines. The fight over the urban voters, the traditional base of oppositional politics since the opposition become a viable threat to the Umno hegemon, has taken a new turn with the inclusion of Bersatu and former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad into Harapan.

The Undirosak movement, an apathetic youth demographic, and as highlighted in the *theSundaily* recently - registered voters who do not bother exercising their right to vote - is a boon for the Umno state. Mind you, this is not the fault of those mentioned but rather the fault of the opposition. The only way to get pass the gerrymandering, the voter fraud and the myriad of elections “strategies” of the establishment, is to overwhelm the system with numbers.

Implying that people who do not vote are akin to old maids or that some folks are waiting for Mr Right in terms of their politicians are not going to get people to vote, and more importantly, getting fence-sitters to consider giving their vote to your side.

What happens if the apocalypse does not come the day after an Umno win? What happens if the economy strengthens after an Umno win? The opposition would look like morons who would say anything to win and this would be used by Umno to further the narrative that the opposition always cries wolf and then blames the establishment when things do not go their way.

I give you an example. Instead of constructing silly analogies about sunscreen and the country is on fire, what DAP leader Hannah Yeoh should have done, is write in great detail about the legislative reforms in Selangor that Harapan has carried. How the Selangor government did not take voters for granted. And how not taking perpetual rule into account is reflected in the policy decision of the Harapan state government. You know, the very things that were mentioned in passing in her article before all the pleas to emotion and dire warnings took centre stage.

This way people can actually see there is a difference between Harapan-led state governments and BN state governments. This way, opposition supporters get talking points when they attempt to defend the record of Harapan as a viable opposition instead of pleas to emotion and using straw man arguments. This way the opposition in a constructive manner engages with people, who at this moment think there is no difference between paella and soggy fried rice.

And do not say silly stuff like people know the difference between the two - Umno and Harapan. The Umno hegemon does not want to talk about issues because they do not have a good track record. If the Harapan state governments can change the narrative and focus on issues, more people would participate and vote because the atmosphere would be less toxic and it will not be only about rehashing history that the opposition cannot credibly defend beyond saying "trust us."

It's a numbers game

And this really goes beyond attacking the Umno regime, because to my mind the clear and present danger for the opposition is people who do not want to vote, but more importantly, do not want to vote opposition. Remember just because people do not want to vote for the opposition, it does not mean that they support the Umno establishment. Their inaction may be the logical conclusion to the maintaining of Umno power, and I would argue that that the inability of the opposition to give them something to vote for is a major contributing factor.

By clearly articulating positions and policies will give Harapan a very clear edge over the Umno hegemon, who at this moment can only throw cash at people. Remember the demographic the opposition is after - while they struggle to put food on the table, they also care about issues that have no place in the Umno discourse.

Also, people who defend Harapan can use them in the discourse on the hard progressive forces in this country who are disappointed in the way how Harapan is conducting business instead of just ad-hominem attacks and the group-think mentality that just makes people think that opposition supporters are a bunch of trolls.

It has always been a numbers game and now with the possibility of three-concerned fights, either by establishment plants or because the opposition lacks the vision to expand the base by ceding the ground to grassroots-level organisations, the chances of Umno maintaining its grip on power grows tighter every day.

Whenever and wherever I strike up conversations with young people, I encourage them to register and vote. I am old fashioned. If you want to complain, the least you could do is vote. But I am also aware that merely telling people that the country is doomed under the current administration and if they do not vote, the country will go down in flames, does not matter. Asking them to vote for the lesser of two evils is old hat. That was the mantra for Pakatan Rakyat, remember?

Claiming that you have got the best team you can find – doubtful –and in the same sentence admitting that you wish you could “protect” yourself against betrayal (from leaders like Mahathir), is just dumb rhetoric. This may play well with the base but it is a howler to people who are actually thinking about voting for the opposition.

Nobody is just sitting around waiting for the house to burn down, some people are already leaving because they think that the house is not worth saving, while some people do not think the house is burning, while some people think that repairs done to the house is enough, while others... you see how stupid this analogy becomes?

Also, and this is important, do not say things like - “How will your vote change the lives of others who cannot afford what you have?” - because it implies something about the people who vote opposition which may not be entirely true. Indeed, I would assume that it is the goal of the opposition to get people who cannot afford what the urban class takes for granted, to vote for them.

The only way to overwhelm the Umno hegemon is for people to come out to vote in huge numbers. The establishment cannot withstand this kind of attack. There are not enough outsourced thugs in the country to intimidate voters in the voting booth. There are not enough jail cells to put people in who really want regime change which is the definition of democracy.

Remember when people voted and broke Umno’s two-thirds majority and delivered prime real estate to the opposition, they voted not out of fear but optimism.

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