

Political parties race to register new and young voters
Malaysiakini.com
June 27, 2010

With more than four million eligible voters yet to be registered, political parties are now in a hurry to get them on the electoral rolls ahead of the next general election due in 2013.

Most of them are young Malaysians who have reached 21 years and are eligible to become voters but many have not done so as they usually do not bother to register.

NONEMalaysia currently has 11 million registered voters out of a population of about 27 million.

Political analyst Ong Kian Ming said overall, between 25 and 30 percent of Malaysian voters are expected to be below 35 years old by the next general election.

"This is significant when one considers the larger number of unregistered but eligible voters in Malaysia. There would also be two million Malaysians who would be eligible to vote for the first time in the next elections.

"This is in addition to the four million eligible voters, many believed to be under 30 years old, who did not register in time for the March 8, 2008 polls. In total, we are talking about six million potential voters who are most likely, to be opinionated, Internet-savvy and idealistic," he added.

According to Khaw Veon Szu, executive director of the Socio-Economic Development and Research Institute (SEDAR), young and first-time voters played a decisive role in the last general election and caused Barisan Nasional to lose its two-thirds majority in Parliament. SEDAR is Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia's think tank.

Goldmine for support

"If we are flooded with another wave such as the one in 2008, it would change Malaysia's political landscape. If political parties ignore these young and unregistered voters, it would be at their own peril," he said.

Khaw said Gerakan had adopted several strategies, including getting the young and eligible to register as voters, irrespective of their political leanings.

voter registration campaign 110707 registration"Each component party tries to reach out, to say something to the young. They go on the offensive in the cyber world. From feedback we had gathered, it is still a daunting task for us (to reach out to them)," he said.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most political parties have stepped up efforts to register new voters because statistics from the Election Commission showed that last year alone, Umno registered the highest number of new voters at 24,818, followed by DAP with 17,756 and PAS with 16,987.

As this gathers momentum, some political parties have doubled their endeavours such as PAS, which has set to get 500,000 new voters registered under the EC's year-round registration programme.

The DAP, on the other hand, is targeting about a 10 percent increase in the number of voters in every constituency by carrying out registration exercises even at night markets and shopping complexes.

"For example, in a constituency where you have 50,000 voters, we should get at least 5,000 new voters," its youth chief, Anthony Loke, said.

Pakatan lots to gain

The race to register more voters is getting more intense, especially in states currently controlled by the Opposition or Pakatan Rakyat.

NONEThe reasons are pretty obvious: each of these political parties are hoping to register more voters to work in their favour.

Selangor executive councillor Ronnie Liu revealed that in Selangor alone, there are more than 700,000 eligible but unregistered voters while Kedah and Penang, the two other states controlled by Pakatan, have more than 300,000 and 200,000 unregistered voters respectively.

"That means that whichever party that manages to register their supporters will make a lot of difference," he said.

Another Selangor executive councillor, Hasan Ali, who is also Selangor PAS commissioner, admitted that the Pakatan-controlled states could fall back to BN if the Opposition failed to attract enough new voters.

However, other political analysts such as Sivamurugan Pandian pointed out that although the young and new voters had been crucial in deciding the results in the last general election, not all the six million unregistered voters would get themselves registered for the coming general election.

"The current political landscape plays a role in their thinking because some of them are of the view that the alternatives are still the same," he said, adding that there may not be a strong enough push factor to make them register as voters.

Voters want role models

"As long as these unregistered voters do not see politicians as role models, it would still be very hard to convince them to register and vote in next general election," he added.

NONEIn fact, Sivamurugan cautioned political parties to also focus on older voters, especially those who had cast protest votes in the last general election.

"For example, they must understand that there are two different types of voter groups - urban and rural.

"You just can't rely on the young voters alone. Political parties must also engage with NGOs (non-government organisations) and other groups who call themselves the 'third force' that play a decisive role," he said.

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/135701>