

**Unity survey finds 1Malaysia
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The latest survey by independent pollster Merdeka Centre reveals what most Malaysians already know: that the different racial groups have diametrically opposing views on government policies.

While an overwhelming majority of Malays back pro-bumiputera policies, most non-Malays are suspicious of Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's (right) 1Malaysia concept.

In the survey, a total of 2,104 Malay and bumiputera respondents were asked to pick one of two questions close to their opinion:

* Malays/bumiputeras need all the help they can get to move ahead, so programmes such as the NEP should be welcomed. (72 percent backed this statement).

* Assistance such as the NEP doesn't help Malays/bumiputeras in the long run as it makes them dependent (21 percent)

On a similar note, the majority (59 percent) of Malay and bumiputera respondents said they believed that "as the original inhabitants of this country, Malays/bumiputeras should continue to be accorded with special rights and privileges".

However, 40 percent of respondents asked the same question backed the statement that "people should be treated and accorded the same rights in Malaysia, regardless of race and religion".

The questions on NEP were exclusively for Malay/bumiputera respondents, while the non-Malay/bumiputera respondents were asked a different set of questions on 1Malaysia.

1Malaysia a hard sell for majority

For the non-bumiputera respondents, a clear majority said they were not convinced with Najib's 1Malaysia campaign, which seeks to bridge the racial gap and forge national unity.

Of the 1,036 non-bumiputeras polled, 46 percent were convinced that 1Malaysia was merely a "political agenda to win non-Malay votes".

Conversely, only 39 percent of the non-bumiputera respondents opined that 1Malaysia was a "sincere effort to unite all races in Malaysia".

A significant 16 percent of the respondents gave "don't know/no response" replies to this question.

The survey suggests that non-bumiputeras are yet to be convinced that the Umno-led BN is prepared to foster meaningful inter-ethnic ties, which at many times has been soured by Umno's own racial posturing.

It also suggests that Najib's New Economic Model (NEM) and 1Malaysia concept appear to be a hard sell for the country's diverse population.

The NEM and 1Malaysia are part of the Najib administration's four main thrusts for the nation, which, among others, seek to resolve long-standing problems such as economic imbalances and ethnic tensions.

azlanBut the survey finding indicates that Najib will hit a potential snag, such as in the case of the much touted NEM, which seeks to develop Malaysia into a high-income economy.

The NEM espouses gradual reduction in subsidies for essential goods and the gradual lifting of affirmative action policies developed under the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the 1970s, which critics argued have affected Malay and bumiputera competitiveness.

Corrupt leaders to blame

Malay and bumiputera respondents were also asked what they thought were the main threats to their political position, of which a whopping 70 percent blamed "corruption among its leaders".

Only 22 percent believe that the main threat was from "demands made by other races", while seven percent did not provide a direct answer.

In the same vein, Malay and bumiputera respondents were equally split when asked whether government programmes benefitted the "ordinary people" or the "rich and politically connected".

azlanThe responses for these two questions are likely to raise heckles at Malay rights group Perkasa, which repeatedly accuses the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese, for conspiring against the Malays.

The survey also sought the opinion of respondents across the board on whether Malaysia was more united or divided today. Responses to this question were almost evenly split.

Interestingly, topping the list of factors that "divided the people" respondents cited were political instability (13 percent) and racial issues (nine percent).

Other reasons cited included ideological differences (five percent), inequality (five percent), the use of the term 'Allah' by Christians (five percent), religious differences (five percent) and discriminatory government policies (four percent).

azlan"The survey found marked differences between public attitudes in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak, for example, only 35 percent of Peninsular Malaysia respondents agreed that the government was spending public funds prudently while the figure for Sabah and Sarawak was 45 percent," said Merdeka Centre.

It also revealed that almost 60 percent of respondents (58 percent to be exact) said they were not interested in politics while 41 percent said they were.

Interestingly, more young people said they were turned off by politics (a whopping 72 percent from the 19-24 age group), while the older generation (52 percent of those above 50) said they were interested in politics.

The survey was conducted between January and April this year, involving a total of 3,141 respondents from both the peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak.

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