

**Snap polls: Who would win?**  
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**Ong Kian Ming and Oon Yeoh**

Yesterday, we argued  
MCPX

that it's unlikely that there will be a snap election anytime soon. We believe that even if the situation were such that Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi wanted to have one, his request might be rejected by the king.

Still, we think it's worthwhile discussing what would be the likely outcome if a fresh election were to be held, which would only be at the federal level. Pakatan Rakyat would naturally refuse to hold fresh elections for the five states that it controls and there is no reason for Abdullah to call for fresh elections in the states that Barisan Nasional controls.

One school of thought is that the BN would gain ground because the people who had voted against it in the recent election would swing back, the rationale being that the message they wanted to send has been sent.

The other school of thought is that even those who had voted against the BN (but never really supported the opposition) are pleasantly surprised at the way the way the Pakatan states are being run and would like to see Pakatan control the Parliament as well.

Which is right? It depends on a lot of factors, actually.

As has always been the case in Malaysia, racial politics and sentiments are part and parcel of the political landscape. While the previous election has demonstrated the public's capacity for some cross-ethnic voting, it's still way too early to declare the end to racial politics and racial voting.

**Pakatan has advantages in three areas**

In a snap poll, there are still many issues that can be 'racialised'. For example, Umno would probably stoke Malay fears that a Pakatan government would feature more non-Malays than Malays. Whether this kind of scare tactic would work or not hinges on de facto PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim's ability to assure the Malay ground that their rights would not be eroded.

Of critical importance is how Pakatan would fare in East Malaysia. If Anwar is able to get whole parties, as opposed to individuals, to cross over, Pakatan would have a better chance of winning there.

In Malaysian politics, people tend to vote for parties rather than individuals. Even in Sabah and Sarawak, where independent candidates have a better track record of winning elections compared to Peninsular Malaysia, it's by no means certain that a crossover MP running under the Pakatan ticket can win back his seat.

Pakatan however has clear advantages in three areas.

Firstly, it is willing to offer concessions that the BN is either unable or unwilling to give to the East Malaysians. We're talking about things like a larger percentage of oil royalties;

removing illegal immigrants from the electoral rolls; and even promising a deputy prime minister position to an East Malaysian.

Secondly, Anwar is now able to contest, not just for parliament but for the PM of the country. This is a big psychological boost for Pakatan. It's actually better for him to do so in a general election than a by-election because BN would not be able to concentrate all its efforts on defeating him when it is contesting in seats all over the country.

Thirdly, Pakatan MPs have so far held themselves up quite well, debating vigorously in parliament. Also, it helps that they've not held their positions long enough for voters to be potentially disillusioned or dissatisfied with them.

The candidacy selection process is always a difficult one for both coalitions under any circumstances. Under the current scenario, Pakatan would have it considerably easier than BN. It could simply stick to its winning formula from the last election, and possibly offering even better candidates in the seats that it did not win.

### **BN to face even tougher election**

BN, in contrast, will have a much more difficult time.

One of Abdullah's big challenges would be to ease out incumbents who have fallen out of favour and replacing them with new candidates for different strategic reasons. With a looming leadership challenge from Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and a potential challenge from Muhyiddin Yassin as well as possibly Najib Razak himself, the complications surrounding this process would be manifold.

For example, should he drop Razaleigh or Muhyiddin now that it's apparent they are against him? Can he afford not to nominate them given the internal repercussions of such a move, not to mention the real possibility that these seats may be lost to the opposition if these two leaders are not contesting?

Then there are the others who, though not challengers for the Umno presidency, have openly voiced their opposition to Abdullah's leadership. We're talking about people like Mukhriz Mahathir and Dr Mohd Khir Toyo. How about the pros and cons of nominating people like Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, who is a loyalist but who is unlikely to win back her constituency?

Whatever candidate mix Abdullah opts for, there's bound to be discontent amongst the rank and file because Umno is currently so fragmented. The level of sabotage could reach historic proportions.

While there is uncertainty how the Malay ground would vote in a fresh election, especially if Umno politicians play up the race card, there is less uncertainty about how the non-Malays would vote. It's highly unlikely that MCA, Gerakan or MIC would be able to improve on its performance in the last election.

While the leaders of the three parties have all become noticeably more outspoken, it's also obvious that Umno is simply ignoring them, possibly because none of them are even cabinet members.

In contrast, non-Malay voters can also see for themselves that the DAP is by no means a

junior partner in Pakatan and that has influence in the coalition, the likes of which MCA, Gerakan and MIC have never had in BN.

For the many reasons outlined above, we take a cautious view that Pakatan would actually fare even better in a new election than it did in the last one, which was already groundbreaking.

Yesterday - Snap polls: Why it's unlikely to happen

ONG KIAN MING is a PhD candidate in political science at Duke University and OON YEOH is a writer and new media analyst. You can listen to both of them discuss this topic in their Realpolitik podcast.

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