

# Politicians 'like' to fight on

## Social media users give Najib the edge over Dr M and the others

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**PETALING JAYA:** It's been a year since the general election, but many of our politicians are still in full swing fighting foes and attracting supporters not just personally but online on social media channels including Facebook.

The *Star's* analysis shows that 86% or 191 of the 222 MPs have active official Facebook pages maintained with updates, statements and other information.

Two stand out among them - Datuk Seri Najib Razak and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The former and current Prime Ministers rank first and second among the 222 MPs in terms of the number of "likes" their pages received from Facebook users.

Najib has some 3.8 million "likes" followed by Dr Mahathir with 3.6 million. PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim comes in third with 1.8 million, Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (1.7 million) and former Umno Youth chief Khairy Jamaludin (1.2 million).

For uniformity, the analysis only looked at data from the official Facebook pages of the MPs.

The Internet Archive Website, used to gather earlier snapshots of the politicians' Facebook pages, offers only a rough image of the growth in "likes" for each of the politicians.

However, the picture does show that Najib and Dr Mahathir have been in the lead since 2009, the year Facebook introduced the "like" button on its website.

That was also the year Najib became prime minister after his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi resigned, which in turn is widely credited partly to a push led by Dr Mahathir.

"Our politics has always been personality driven, centred on leaders including Dr Mahathir, Najib, Anwar and others such as Khairy, who was an early adopter of social media to reach out to younger Malaysians," said Merdeka Center's programme director Ibrahim Suffian.

Najib and Dr Mahathir have the two most "liked" official Facebook pages, but they are not the most prolific in terms of the number of postings.

That record goes to Anwar, whose official Facebook page contains a total of 6,274 postings since the page was set up on May 5, 2008 - three days before the country's 12th General Election.

According to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's 2018 Internet Users Survey, 23.94 million social networking users in Malaysia have a Facebook account, more than Instagram (14 million) and Twitter (5.4 million) combined.

"For voters who can't have face-to-face communication with

politicians, social media channels - such as Facebook - offer a direct channel of engagement," said Prof Sivamurugan Pandian of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

A case in point was Dr Mahathir's May 8 speech last year in Langkawi - on the night before polling began for GE14.

The live broadcast drew a staggering 3.4 million viewers on Dr Mahathir's Facebook page.

Najib's "Malu Apa Bossku" campaign, its rapid growth in popularity driven by the former prime minister's social media channels including his Facebook page, is another example.

However, being popular on Facebook may not tell the whole story.

"The number of likes is one indicator (of support), but it is not necessarily a good one as it might be possible to manipulate this," said Dr Cassey Lee, Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Regional Economic Studies Programme at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore.

In the run-up to GE14, Reuters reported how automated accounts, known as bots, flooded Twitter with tens of thousands of pro-government and anti-opposition messages, raising questions whether some of our politicians were buying fake support on social media. On Thursday, Facebook announced that it had removed more than three billion fake accounts from October last year to March.

Lee, who wrote a paper in 2017 - which studied the social media presence of Malaysian politicians - reckoned that it's possible that fake support would be a problem in the run-up to GE15.

"That is why we should go beyond just number of followers or likes. My preference is to look at the number of comments and shares as additional data," Lee said.

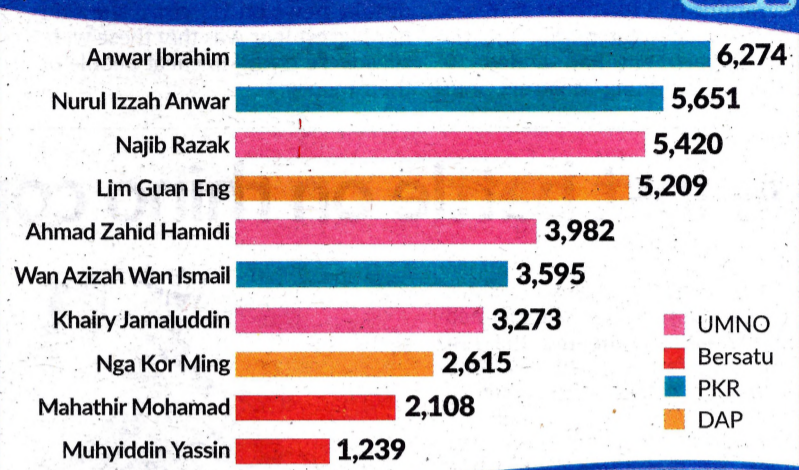
Despite his number one position, in terms of likes, Najib's "Bossku" charm did not work in the Sandakan parliamentary by-election despite his visit to the constituency to indirectly help PBS. The party ended up losing to Pakatan Harapan.

In addition, while Dr Mahathir is the second most "liked" politician on Facebook, his popularity as tracked by polling firm Merdeka Center via a series of surveys has dropped from 83% shortly after GE14 to 46% nearly a year later.

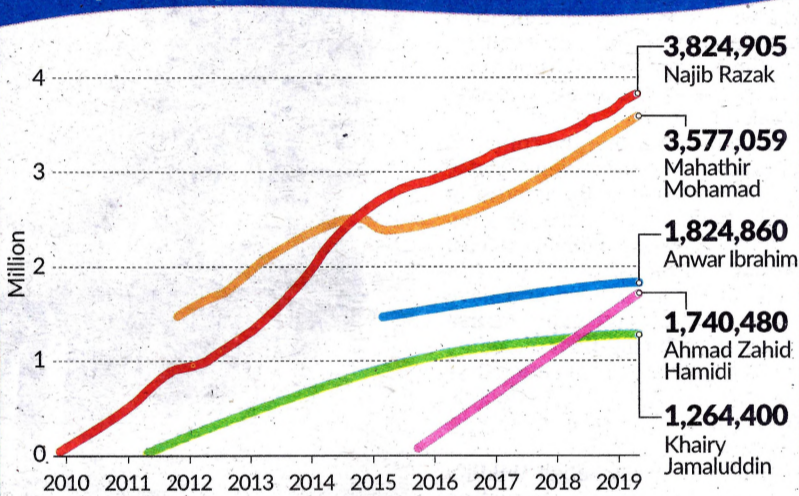
"Voter support is not static, so the number of likes a politician gets on Facebook should be considered as a snapshot, not the whole picture," said Ibrahim.

\* For interactive graphics explaining the battle for popularity on Facebook and a link to the data set used in the analysis, read this story at The Star Online (<https://www.thestar.com.my>).

The number of Facebook posts by Malaysia's 10 most "liked" MPs



Malaysia's top five "liked" MPs on Facebook



The top 20 Malaysian MPs on Facebook

Rank	Party	Name	"Likes"
1	Umno	Datuk Seri Najib Razak	3,824,905
2	Bersatu	Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad	3,577,059
3	PKR	Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim	1,824,860
4	Umno	Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi	1,740,480
5	Umno	Khairy Jamaluddin	1,264,400
6	PKR	Datuk Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail	1,204,534
7	Bersatu	Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin	901,987
8	PKR	Nurul Izzah Anwar	799,931
9	DAP	Lim Guan Eng	689,229
10	DAP	Nga Kor Ming	598,742
11	Umno	Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein	594,515
12	PAS	Datuk Seri Abdul Hadi Awang	493,260
13	Bersatu	Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir	464,502
14	Bersatu	Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman	378,862
15	DAP	Lim Kit Siang	376,481
16	PKR	Datuk Seri Azmin Ali	366,105
17	DAP	Tony Pua	356,552
18	DAP	Yeo Bee Yin	332,727
19	Umno	Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh	308,213
20	DAP	Hannah Yeoh	300,345

Note: Figures are as of May 24, 2019

Source: Facebook

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