

# Three ways to turn ratings around

PMX's approval ratings have dropped from 68% to 50%. How can this trend be reversed?



## All the pieces matter

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IN December 2022, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's approval rating stood at 68%.

Today, it stands at 50%.

This statistic and all that follow come from pollster Merdeka Centre's survey results, where I compare the December 2022 results and the November 2023 results below.

Respondents who feel the country is moving in the right direction: 48% right after the 15th General Election (GE15) last year to 31% today. Of this 31%, only 3% "agreed strongly".

Respondents who feel the country is moving in the wrong direction: 29% right after GE15 to 60% today. Of this 60%, 18% "agreed strongly".

The number of Malaysians who feel the country is moving in the wrong direction has apparently doubled. This should be setting of alarm bells, red alerts, and calls for everyone to man full battle stations.

It should be a wake-up call to

take a long pause, and instead of spending a lot of money to "celebrate" the last year's achievements, regroup and re-strategise.

My personal gut feeling is that roughly 70% of the reason why the government is perceived this way is the result of the government's communication strategies (or lack thereof), as compared with maybe 30% due to actual government policy and performance.

This article posits three ways the government can turn around the alarming decrease in its public support: by being clear, being bold, and being different.

Being clear involves political narrative; being bold involves political positioning; and being different involves stopping "politics as usual".

One key reason why the public is losing confidence in the government is because it cannot see clearly what it is the government is doing.

Perhaps once in a while we will get some piecemeal information about one government initiative or another. Once in a while we will hear one piece of positive news.

But it never seems to be part of a bigger picture, or another step taken towards a grand, inspiring goal. In particularly bad times, every good thing is drowned out by a hundred different scandals or other bad news.

Without this element - a narrative to tie everything together and tell the story of a great national quest - the overall effect is one of a government that is just somewhat lumbering semi-aimlessly from one day to another.

People used to make fun of slogans like 1Malaysia or Keluarga Malaysia. Today, when we talk of Malaysia Madani, we still find ourselves asking that very same



**Important milestone:** Anwar greeting colleagues and supporters at a thanksgiving ceremony in Putrajaya to celebrate the one year anniversary of Anwar's leadership as the country's 10th Prime Minister and his Malaysia Madani concept. — Bernama

question we did when it was first announced: What is that?

If you take the time to study Anwar's philosophy and all the ideas and values behind it, you may come to understand it as something wise and noble.

The question is, how many Malaysians are going to take the days and weeks necessary to do that?

1Malaysia and Keluarga Malaysia may have rung hollow, given who was behind them, but at least their meaning was crystal clear. Even Wawasan 2020 way back in the day gave the sense and mood of a grand aspiration that the nation was working together towards.

The best word for that mood is "ethos" - a sense of national identity and purpose.

A hundred good policies will not improve the public's perception of the government if it is not part of a bigger, clearer, and simpler to understand narrative. Being bold involves having the strength of one's political convictions.

When describing the government's positioning on many sociopolitical issues, we begin to hear words like wishy washy, pandering, and perhaps most damning of all, "meh".

There are two ends of the spectrum - one where you operate primarily from a place of fear, always afraid that voters aren't going to like what you do or say; the other where you lead boldly from a place of conviction.

In trying to please everyone, you will please no one. No one is suggesting the government take

extreme far left, liberal positions. But knowing its voter base, for Pakatan Harapan to constantly try to be more conservative than the conservatives is a plan that will lose them votes on both sides of the divide.

Having been a supporter of the previous Opposition, I know that trying to beat the Opposition at their own game only drives your voters to them, not their voters to you.

The solution is to work towards redefining the paradigm and the narrative - for example, from one where it's conservative against liberals, to one where it's Malaysians against poverty and injustice.

Voters respond to such bold ideas; they do not respond well to the perception that you are trying to behave just like the people they voted out.

Being different, at the risk of stating the obvious, means not being the same as before.

The Malaysian government has a tendency to do things a certain way, no matter who is in power.

This speaks to the growing power of the institutions and groups that do not change even when the government of the day changes.

These institutions and groups constitute a huge centre of gravity. Indeed, perhaps the biggest one there is. And it is far too easy to be bent towards that centre of gravity - the "old way" of doing things. In other words, to do things the way things have always been done.

I know it's not easy to try and blaze a new path. The resistance

will surely be immense.

But failure to do so will result in voters seeing the government as being exactly the same as the one before, where "business as usual" is once again the order of the day.

I think many correctly perceive the Prime Minister as a man with his heart in the right place. But voters are not traditionally the most patient or forgiving of people.

One simple measure of assessing the teams surrounding the Prime Minister is to ask whether those teams spend more of their energy focusing on matters that directly impact the plight of the rakyat, or whether they spend it more on fighting among themselves.

Given the constant problems, scandals, and infighting we seem to be seeing, an outsider could be tempted to feel it leans towards the latter.

We all want PMX and his government to succeed. We all want our leaders to fulfil their massive potential.

In order to do so, it's imperative that the powers-that-be read the increasingly clear writing on the wall and understand that big changes are urgently needed for their survival.

If there is indeed an upcoming Cabinet reshuffle, that will be one rare opportunity to jumpstart a fresh, invigorating leap towards a bright new direction.

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