

**Najib's rating dips to 59pc**  
**The Malaysian Insider**  
**August 29, 2011**  
**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 29 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's approval rating is now at 59 per cent, the lowest point since last May, fuelled by rising concerns over the surge in living costs and his government's handling of the tumultuous July 9 Bersih 2.0 rally, a new poll released today showed.

Local pollster Merdeka Center reported the results in its latest survey conducted between August 11 and 27, revealing that the Najib (picture) brand took a severe beating in public perception following several significant events that rocked the nation, including the Bersih rally, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's Sodomy II trial, the ongoing amnesty programme for illegals, the recent raid on a church in Selangor and allegations of Christian's proselytising to Muslims in the country.

Of the 1,027 respondents polled, 59 per cent said they were satisfied with the prime minister's performance, down a significant 13 percentage points from 72 per cent in May 2010.

Since hitting a record high last year, Najib's rating has been on a consecutive decline; from 72 per cent in May 2010 to 69 per cent in November 2010, 67 per cent in March this year and 65 per cent in May.

When Najib first took over the country's reins in April 2009, his administration's rating improved quickly on his predecessor Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's flailing legacy from a bleak 34 per cent in March 2009, soaring by 31 percentage points to 65 per cent within just three months.

According to the pollster's report released today, Najib's scored the poorest with the Chinese community, with his rating dipping from an all-time high of 58 per cent in May last year to 38 per cent this month.

Only the Indian community grew more confident in the prime minister, climbing by four points from 65 per cent in March this year to 69 per cent. Malay community support dwindled marginally within the same period, from 76 per cent in March to 73 per cent in May and 69 per cent this month.

The survey included respondents aged 21 and above across the peninsula who were elected through random stratified sampling method along the lines of ethnicity, gender, age and state. Of the 1,027 polled, 59 per cent were Malays, 32 per cent Chinese and nine per cent Indians.

"From the survey, we note that the significantly reduced approval rating may be due to the increased concerns over cost of living related matters as ordinary citizens begin to feel the impact of hikes in the price of fuel and electricity. Besides pocket-book issues, the poll result also suggests some linkage with adverse public perception of how the government handled events and public discourse arising from the Bersih 2.0 rally and other related events," the research house reported.

The survey found that economic-related issues were among the respondents' key concerns

such as the surging inflation rate, low wages, the unfavourable economic condition and poverty.

“With respect to issues, the survey found that the public’s topmost concern remained the economy, mentioned by an aggregate comprising 38 per cent of respondents, followed by concerns over social problems at 10 per cent. Worries over political-related matters ranked third at nine per cent of the public mindscape, while concerns over public safety and crime stood at seven per cent,” the survey said.

A total of 51 per cent of respondents also felt that the country was headed in the right direction, down slightly from 54 per cent in May, while 32 per cent said otherwise.

Najib is expected to call for polls within the next few months and with Hari Raya celebrations in full swing, politicians across the divide have been in a race to woo Malay voter support. The prime minister recently signalled to his Cabinet that the next general election is near, telling them that he intends to hit the ground weekly from Friday to Sunday after the Hari Raya break to meet people and assess the political landscape.

He has also been focusing on the economy, doling out bonuses and cash to government servants, Felda settlers and the poor while talking up the investment inflows into the country through the Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) under the New Economic Model (NEM) in what is seen as an attempt to convince fence-sitters to vote for BN.

But the recent harsh security crackdown on electoral reform movement Bersih’s July 9 rally has dented his image, prompting him to do a U-turn five weeks later by announcing a bipartisan parliamentary select committee to review the election system although there is no guarantee that elections will not be held before the reforms are implemented.

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