

**Can Good Looks Earn Votes?**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, May 4 (Bernama) -- Should good looks be a major criteria to garner votes in the 13th general election (GE)?

Or, to put it in another way, can an engaging personality coupled with good looks, immaculate dressing and grooming, give the much-needed edge to the potential candidate to win in the GE?

While there is no known research to date -- to determine the sure-fire qualities needed for a winnable election candidate -- the subject has been bandied, whenever a GE draws near.

Recently, there have been debates on the 'beauty or brains' issue as political parties are abuzz over the selection of potential candidates for the general election which is said to be around the corner.

Should or should not good looks be one of the major criteria for winnable candidates?

Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) president Datuk Seri G. Palanivel said recently, it would be advantageous for the party to offer good-looking candidates, in the hope that they could bag the desired votes in the GE.

Beyond that, the minister in the Prime Minister's Department said that politicians certainly must have other more important qualities, such as good leadership, scandal-free resume and be well-respected within the party and the Indian community.

Universiti Sains Malaysia political analyst Dr Sivamurugan Pandian notes that being good-looking, to some extent, would be a value-added point in gaining popularity.

However, that alone would not be sufficient, he said.

"Other more relevant criteria for voters in determining their choice of wakil rakyat would be honesty, talent, intelligence, kindness and caring for the constituents.

"Maybe, handsome and beautiful politicians are more appealing to voters in other countries like the United States whose President Barrack Obama is tall, good looking and attractive. Another example is Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra who is pretty, he told Bernama here recently.

However, for Malaysia, Pandian believed that voters were more inclined and looked forward to giving their support to responsible representatives or political parties that could serve them best, rather than those with just good looks.

"What is the point, if at the end of the day, good-looking elected representatives cannot deliver their promises and keep up with the peoples aspirations? It s okay if he (/she) has

good looks and can easily touch base with the rakyat, he added.

Meanwhile, former MIC strongman D. P. Vijandran said physical appearance of politicians should be seen in terms of his or her charisma and leadership.

"Yes, to some extent, good looks are admirable like in the case of President Obama. Yet, charisma plays an important role. A politician should be a blend of strong intellectuality, integrity and commitment to serve people," he said.

Taking Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, the former DAP leader who left the party as an example, Vijandran said Lee had all those values expected by the people.

"He is good at making peace and touching base with the rakyat, and became a celebrated leader. He even continues doing social service for the public. This is how a leader should be. It's all about total impression that we make," he said.

For school bus driver Mohd Kamarul Ishak, 50, from Tapah, Perak, good looks certainly make a good first impression and easily attract the people to get to know the would-be candidate better.

However, he noted that the people's judgment would be based more on service delivery.

"If he does not fulfil our needs here, I'm sure no one will vote for him in the next general election. He must be good and caring at heart, said Mohd Kamarul.

As for housewife Fatimah Yahya, from Klang, pleasant looks help make a "very good first impression" but only for a short period of time.

The real impression, she said, would be based on the amount of time, effort and service above self which the people's representative offered.

"However, that does not mean that handsome and pretty leaders cannot win the people's heart, if they are also sincere, hardworking and understand the constituents well, she added.

Concurring with most of the opinions, a psychologist, Associate Professor Dr Arifin Zainal said good looks played certain roles, especially in shaping perception and readiness by the community to give space to be comfortable with their leader.

"The (good) looks factor always attracts the people and they would feel that the wakil rakyat is more approachable in a way," said the dean of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Open University of Malaysia.

However, Dr Arifin said, it did not mean that good looks could override the inner qualities needed to be a leader, where creating a long-term good impression among the people was especially, vital.

He said the elected representative should be the beacon of the people's hope and happiness.

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