

Najib's approval rating stable but BN's slides 6pc, survey shows
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KUALA LUMPUR, July 26 — Datuk Seri Najib Razak's approval rating dropped one per cent to 64 per cent in June but the government's approval rating dipped six per cent to 42 per cent in the same month with a major drop in satisfaction coming from Malay voters, a Merdeka Center survey revealed today

The opinion survey conducted among voters in peninsular Malaysia showed that satisfaction with the prime minister's performance declined among Malay and Indian voters from 79 per cent to 75 per cent, and from 72 per cent to 69 per cent, respectively. But Najib's numbers among Chinese voters rose from 37 per cent in May to 42 per cent in June.

"The mixed views from the communities may likely be influenced by increased concerns over the state of the economy and, among Indian respondents, coupled with dissatisfaction over statements towards civil society activist Datuk Ambiga Sreenivasan," Merdeka Center for Opinion Research said in a statement today.

"On the other hand, some respondents may have been well disposed towards the government's intention to replace the Sedition Act, recognition of the degrees awarded by Tunku Abdul Rahman college as well as easing anger over the response to last April's Bersih protests," the country's most respected polling centre said.

Najib's approval ratings have been steady in the 60 to 70 per cent band over the past three surveys by Merdeka Center as speculation mounts that he will call snap elections this year before the Barisan Nasional (BN) mandate expires in April 2013. In contrast, his predecessor Tun Abdullah Badawi enjoyed a 71 per cent approval rating before going for elections in March 2008 where the ruling coalition received a drubbing.

His popularity has been lifted by giveaways to lower-income households and reforms to repressive security laws. He announced Malaysia's first national minimum wage at the end of April in another boost for poorer voters.

He has faced a tougher struggle winning over middle class voters, however. At least 25,000 demonstrators rallied in Kuala Lumpur in April to demand reforms to an electoral system they say favours the ruling coalition.

The protest ended in chaos after police fired teargas and water cannon to disperse crowds. Opposition Leader Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was charged in May for defying a court order related to the protest and could be disqualified from parliament if convicted.

However, the stable and high satisfaction for Najib (picture) in the same survey was not reflected for the Barisan Nasional (BN) government.

The survey showed voters' views of the government continued to decline with 42 per cent of respondents reporting that "they were happy with the government", a drop of six per cent compared to the survey conducted in the middle of May 2012.

The pollster said the decline was particularly noticeable among Malay voters, where responses of those saying "happy" with the government declined from 65 per cent in May to 58 per cent in June 2012.

"In our view, the decline may have less to do with politics or how they perceive the prime minister but with how voters perceive the economy is performing and its effect on their livelihood," Merdeka Center said.

The same survey found that concerns over economic issues, particularly cost of living and wages, were topmost on the minds of voters, at 39 per cent of them compared to 33 per cent in May 2012.

This is followed by concerns over crime and social problems at 12 per cent and political issues at eight per cent.

The survey found that rising concerns over the economy may have also dampened the national outlook with 54 per cent saying the country is headed on the right track compared to 58 per cent in April 2012.

The survey was carried out by the Merdeka Center between June 22 and 29 among 1,010 registered voters comprising 59 per cent Malay, 32 per cent Chinese and nine per cent Indian respondents who were interviewed by telephone in the poll.

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