

Actual voter sentiment not shown in opinion poll, say analysts

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SHAH ALAM, July 28 — Pundits have disputed an independent pollster's latest electoral survey showing a slide in ratings for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) in the run-up to key national polls, saying the results did not accurately depict voter attitudes.

On Thursday, Merdeka Center revealed that Najib's approval ratings dipped one per cent to 64 per cent in June while the federal coalition's approval ratings dropped six per cent to 42 per cent in the same month with a major drop in satisfaction coming from Malay voters.

Political analysts told The Malaysian Insider that the falling ratings were not an accurate indicator of how the BN will score at the 13th general election due to the limited responses from those polled.

"Issues related to ratings are usually temporary in nature," said Universiti Malaya's Professor Datuk Paduka Mohamad Abu Bakar.

"Because these issues are digested for immediate impact such as the giving of bonus, coupons, or vouchers; all those are temporal in nature," said Mohamad, who heads the premier university's strategic studies and international relations department.

"That's why the prime minister's ratings can go up and down in a short time and not necessarily affect the elections because when elections come, the issue is no longer 'hot'."

Mohamad also said that the prime minister's personal popularity may not affect his ruling BN coalition as a whole.

The Chinese community's dissatisfaction with the government was too deep-seated to have reversed recently, said one analyst.—File pic

"Support towards Najib's performance cannot be interpreted as support towards BN.

"The rise and fall of perception towards Najib may not necessarily be interpreted to be the rise and fall of support towards BN," he added.

Najib took over to become the country's sixth prime minister from Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in April 2009, just a year after BN lost its customary two-thirds control of Parliament and five states. He is seeking a personal mandate in the next polls and is hoping to regain the ground that BN lost in Election 2008.

Institut Asas Kajian Kemasyarakatan (INSKA)'s executive director, Anuar Mohd Nor, also labelled Merdeka Center's survey findings on Najib's performance as "inaccurate".

Anuar said political support was not like the stock exchange where share prices can swing rapidly.

"How can the support for the PM fluctuate so much within a year?" he asked, disputing the independent pollster's results, the third to be carried out recently in the run-up to elections, which could see a regime change in Malaysia for the first time since independence in 1957.

"Support is not a commodity or a share price," he said.

He also disagreed with Merdeka Center's polls result that showed Malay support for BN dropping by seven percentage points to 58 per cent.

"I think the survey is inaccurate. I believe the Malay vote is still on Barisan Nasional (BN)'s side, or more specifically Umno's side."

Anuar also said that BN's main problem now is that the other component parties in the coalition are lagging behind, with Umno appearing to be "the only one" pushing for reforms.

Prof Dr Jayum A. Jawan, a lecturer from Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) faculty of human ecology, also disputed the survey's findings that indicated Chinese voter support towards the prime minister has increased to 42 per cent, saying that it did not reflect the community's sentiment.

"From my experience going to the ground to teach and attend forums (sic) whether as a speaker or participant, I feel that the survey done by Merdeka Center is not so accurate," Jayum said when contacted yesterday.

"I don't think Chinese voters will return to support Barisan Nasional.

"This is because their anger towards BN is too strong because the government has failed to solve too many issues," he said, without elaborating on what the issues were.

Support from the community had shifted in Election 2008 from BN to the opposition DAP, PKR and even the Islamist PAS parties, which have since formed a loose opposition pact known as Pakatan Rakyat (PR).

"In the coming elections, the percentage of Chinese community voting for the opposition (will be) much higher compared to the 2008 elections," he predicted.

However, Mohamad said that surveys such as those carried out by research organisations like Merdeka Center and Universiti Malaya's Centre for Democracy and Elections (Umcedel) were good as they provided the government views from independent bodies.

"The government now no longer listens to intelligence reports or Special Branch only," he said, referring to the police's special intelligence unit.

"A third opinion or additional views are good; they are independent. But their surveys are also limited by respondents that may not be wholly representative," he said.

Merdeka Center's opinion survey conducted among voters in peninsular Malaysia showed that satisfaction with Najib'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.

Opposition figures, however, see the survey results as indicative of voter perception of a viable alternative to BN rule after more than half a century.

The DAP's Tony Pua and his PKR ally, Rafizi Ramli, weighed in on the survey results yesterday and said that Najib's personal popularity is unlikely to keep the BN ship afloat in

GE3, judging from declining support among Malay voters, who have the most clout as they represent more than 60 per cent of Malaysia's 28 million population.

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