

**Mudslinging counter-productive as polls loom, warn politicians, analysts**  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 2 — Voters are becoming increasingly turned off by the negative campaigning of both Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) and analysts have warned that the mudslinging in the current Budget session in Parliament and ahead of the next general election could cost the more aggressive coalition to lose support.

Analysts say that the political smear campaigns publicised by newspapers owned by or linked to BN are leaving many voters disgusted.

“Sensible and sophisticated voters, even those who are not sophisticated, all know these are nothing but dirty politics,” said Centre for Policy Initiatives director Lim Teck Ghee.

File photo of people lining up to cast their votes in last year’s Sarawak state elections. Analysts feel voters will concentrate on real issues that affect them, not on mudslinging campaigns.

He said voters may show interest in reading about so-called sex scandals and other allegations but when it comes to voting, all these will be forgotten.

“Voters will concentrate on real issues that affect them such as corruption, education and the economy when making a decision, not on these mudslinging campaigns,” he told The Malaysian Insider.

While PR politicians have also engaged in negative campaigning, BN operatives and outside organisations linked to the ruling coalition have stepped up their attacks against PR politicians through newspapers, blogs and on social media.

Another analyst said negative campaigning would only serve to push fence sitters, especially the non-partisans and weak party identifiers, to the other side.

“The fence sitters want to see concrete solutions to issues that are important to them so if BN merely attacks the opposition over trivial issues such as the personal attacks against the DAP’s Lim Guan Eng and PKR’s Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, it will lose support,” said political scientist Dr Faizal Hazis.

He said the opposition was slowly making ground with the fence sitters by addressing their concerns through several policy reforms such as lowering of car prices, providing affordable housing and free tertiary education.

“This might explain the increased popularity of the opposition and the significant decline of Najib’s popularity, as indicated by the UMCEDEL’s recently published survey results,” he said.

He said Malaysian politics should be shaped by ideas and policy debates and not unhealthy negative campaigning.

It was perfectly fair if a politician were to attack his opponent's ideas and policies which can lead to a healthy debate that could lead to policy formulation or reforms, said Faizal.

"It is the unhealthy negative campaigning that sidetracks the major issues that are important to Malaysian voters," he said.

With the general election expected some time soon before next April, BN's negative campaigns have kept many PR politicians on the defensive.

In recent times, sex scandals allegations have surfaced, especially against the DAP's Lim who is considered a big threat by BN.

This Penang chief minister has had to suffer through allegations of first a so-called sex scandal involving him and then another scandal involving his teenage son.

When these died down, other allegations of corruption and abuse of power surfaced but without concrete evidence to back them up.

Anwar too faced allegations from sodomy charges, in which he was later acquitted, to hidden sex tapes.

When asked about such tactics, BN politicians agreed that the negative politics was not productive.

"All this smearing will not make the leaders more productive nor will it be good for the nation," said the People's Progressive Party's (PPP) Datuk Dr Loga Bala Mohan.

"Voters will have to look above all this dirty politics and also above race and religion when casting their votes," he said.

Penang Gerakan vice-chief H'ng Khoon Leng agreed that political smear campaigns will not bring in votes.

"The sex scandals and other politically-motivated exposes of various scandals are mere entertainment for the public. The voters will know who they want to vote and it is not based on all these scandals in the media," he said.

As for Gerakan's part in one of the smear campaigns involving the Penang state government and Lim, H'ng denied that it was mudslinging but insisted that it was a way for the party to expose the truth to the voters.

"Leaders should be talking about real issues such as the country's development and issues that affect the people, not meddle in this kind of dirty politics," said Parti Cinta Malaysia vice-president Major Huan Cheng Guan.

"Each side can come out with whatever tactics or expose all sorts of scandals but in the end, I think the voters will know what to do and they won't decide based on these non-issues," he said.

He said voters will not be easily fooled by such dirty politics.

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