

**GE13 a test of Malaysians' appetite for change, says academic**  
**Malaysian Insider**  
**April 13, 2013**  
**By Debra Chong**

KUALA LUMPUR, April 13 – Malaysians have shown they crave a different Malaysia but Election 2013 will test voters on the kind of change they want, a Singapore-based academic said today.

Political pundits have been touting the May 5 polls as the closest contest for federal power between the Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in the country's 56-year history but Bridget Welsh, an associate professor of political science at the Singapore Management University, observed that the battleground was not limited to Putrajaya.

"The battleground is not just at the federal level," she said in her analysis of "grey seats" or potential areas where voters could swing to either side published on news portal Malaysiakini.

"Of the 12 states going to the polls, seven of these could go either way. They are Kedah, Perlis, Negri Sembilan, Sabah, Selangor, Terengganu and Perak," she said.

Welsh noted the balance of power at the state level have been shifting since the last general election in 2008 when the BN lost its customary two-thirds parliamentary supermajority and also five states to opposition parties.

Three of them, PKR, DAP and PAS have teamed up since then to form the PR alliance to go toe-to-toe against the BN.

"Whatever the result, there is a reality of increasing decentralisation of power," she said.

The switch in the state government administration of Penang and Selangor, she noted, have seen leaders adopting new policy frameworks to spur investment and economic growth.

"This election is a test of whether this trend will continue," she said.

"For ordinary voters, this means that the votes they cast for state assemblies are potentially as transformative as those at the national level."

In her analysis of federal seats, she estimated 42 per cent of the total 222 seats fell in the "grey" category, with the BN certain to retain 32 per cent while PR was likely to bag 26 per cent.

Welsh noted that the political landscape continues to remain fluid in the 22 days left to polls, which made it very hard to predict the vote result.

She said Datuk Seri Najib Razak has "systematically worked" to paint himself as a driver for change and his BN coalition as the one that offers the better chance at reforming the country to convince voters they did not have to switch regimes.

"The reason Najib has opted for this route is that he knows that the underlying driver in the last three elections has been the call for reform and a desire for a better Malaysia," she said.

The downside of Najib's message, she said, was that it came from a man who had been part of the entrenched system for 40 years.

The momentum was currently with the PR pact with their promises of greater resources, such as oil revenue, to be placed in the power of individual states if they take federal control, Welsh said.

The problem, she said, lay in making clear the kind of reforms that would improve the country, and working together to get it done.

"As the election campaigning proceeds, the battle over 'change' will only intensify, and the numbers in the table above will shift.

"Malaysians will ultimately decide the chances for change, but the political landscape shows that change is already shaping the campaign," she said.

Some 13.3 million Malaysians are eligible to vote for the 222 parliamentary and 505 state seats up for grabs.

Hakcipta © 2013 The Malaysian Insider

Source:

<http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/malaysia/article/ge13-a-test-of-malaysians-appetite-for-change-says-academic/>