

Did Umno really scare up strong Malay support? Not quite, shows study
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Umno's election strategy of ratcheting up fear among Malays over the loss of political power actually yielded only a slight increase in Malay support in the past general election.

In contrast, right-wing rhetoric, unresolved issues of race and religion as well as the belief that Pakatan Rakyat should be given a shot at running the country saw a 20% swing of Chinese voters and 5% swing of Indian voters away from Barisan Nasional, compared with 2008.

In fact, what really did help Umno tap the rural vote was its strong political machinery there as well as the villagers' continued dependence on government aid and services. Cash handouts under BR1M also played a part.

These facts were revealed by a Merdeka Center study of voting patterns in the past election. To determine the voting pattern by ethnicity, the independent pollster analysed 9,000 polling districts.

The study isolated polling districts with over 90% of a particular community and then compiled the lists according to the state and rural areas versus an urban setting.

Merdeka Center said that while this method does not take into account the interplay between ethnic groups in mixed seats, it still gives what is the closest reliable estimate. The increase in Malay votes helped Barisan Nasional in capturing more Parliament and state seats in rural areas. TMI pic, August 13, 2013. The increase in Malay votes helped Barisan Nasional in capturing more Parliament and state seats in rural areas. TMI pic, August 13, 2013.

Umno/Barisan Nasional obtained 61.6% of the Malay vote, a 1.5% aggregated increase over the 2008 vote share. Its biggest gains of Malay voters was in Kedah, up by 5.6%, and Kuala Lumpur, up by 6.4%.

Malay support for Umno/BN dropped noticeably in Perlis, down by 3.1% and Terengganu, down by 3.6% – the two states where the infighting among warring Umno factions was most severe.

The study also confirmed the urban-rural divide, with Malay support for Umno/BN rising in rural areas and dropping in the urban ones.

This year, there were 119 Malay districts, and of these only 20 were considered urban. BN swept 78 out of the 99 rural Malay seats but only five of the urban Malay seats. – August 13, 2013.

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