

**Khairy, Shahrizat thumping victories a win for Najib, snub to Umno right wing**  
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**NEWS ANALYSIS BY EILEEN NG**

The Umno Youth and Wanita wings' results which returned its incumbent chiefs Khairy Jamaluddin and Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil for a second term with thumping wins indicate one thing - the party is rejecting those who want to change the status quo for their own reasons.

In other words, the score is Datuk Seri Najib Razak and the status quo: 1; and Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad and the party right-wing: 0.

The Dr Mahathir camp has opposed Khairy since the last party elections due to his links to his father-in-law Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi while Shahrizat has been seen as a millstone for the party due to scandals engulfing her ministry and family.

But yesterday's outcome means the hardline stance taken by Khairy's four opponents in the two weeks of intense campaigning to counter the Umno Youth chief's perceived liberal leanings did not find traction among rank and file members. This message might carry through to next week's supreme council election, say party insiders.

It also means that despite talk of change, the Umno grassroots went with tried and tested dynamic leaders over inexperienced unknowns to work with the top leadership to steer the Malay party through its most challenging time where support for Umno's Barisan Nasional ruling pact is at an all-time low.

At the 13th general election, BN won 133 federal seats to the opposition Pakatan Rakyat's 89, but the opposition secured 51% of the popular votes compared to the ruling coalition's 47%.

Party insiders say the results also showed that members prefer the personable Shahrizat to lead the women's wing and are unfazed by her link to the RM250 million National Feedlot Corporation (NFC) cattle-rearing scandal, which had implicated her family and caused her to give up the Women, Family and Community Development Minister's post before the 13th general election.

More importantly, it means that Najib, who was returned unopposed as Umno president on September 21, can bank on Khairy, 37, and Shahrizat, 60, to help stem the tide of conservative forces, especially those linked to influential former president Dr Mahathir, who had pushed for a more Malay-centric platform.

Najib had talked about change, renewal and transformation for Umno and analysts noted that despite being the same faces, Khairy and Shahrizat can step up to rein in the hardliners and prod the party towards reform.

Both the Youth and Wanita chiefs sit in the powerful supreme council as automatic vice-presidents.

"Khairy is centre-left while Shahrizat is centre-right. Both will provide a balance to the party and steer it towards the middle ground," said Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political

analyst Associate Professor Datuk Dr Mohammad Agus Yusoff.

It will also help prop up Umno's current image as being too right-wing.

Since the May 5 national polls where Umno/BN got 61.6% of the Malay votes, a segment of Umno leaders have used this to play the Malay champion by running down other races, much to the horror of Malaysians.

Khairy, especially, is being singled out to take the lead to reform the party due to his progressive image. He had championed an inclusive agenda since heading the wing in 2009.

"He will give a good impression to Umno because he is a leading moderate and progressive voice in the party," noted Sabah UiTM political analyst Dr Arnold Puyok.

Shahrizat, meanwhile, has been viewed as a Najib loyalist and is willing to go along with Najib's plans, utilising her popularity with the women members to effect change from within.

However, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (Ideas) chief executive Wan Saiful Wan Jan cautioned that the results of the top two is not a full proof indication that reformists had triumphed over the conservatives.

Umno, he noted, has a long tradition of not challenging the incumbent leaders at the top posts.

"I don't see the Khairy and Shahrizat wins as an indication of anything more. The real dynamics will be in the full line-up," he said. – October 13, 2013.

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