

**Invoke, Rafizi's data warhead to help oust Najib**  
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**Rafizi Ramli estimates Pakatan Harapan could win as many as 116 seats if the election is held in six months if it manages a 5% swing in support from ethnic Malays.**

KUALA LUMPUR: In a sparse office on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, dozens of millennials are busy crunching numbers, barely looking up from their computers as they sip coffee.

Sunlight filters through the floor-to-ceiling windows onto a concrete floor. Desks are scattered about. Some construction tools are lying in a corner.

This is the home of Invoke, a policy research shop with about 80 employees set up last October by Rafizi Ramli, vice-president of the opposition PKR. He calls the data operation his "secret weapon" to oust Prime Minister Najib Razak in an election expected this year.

So far, Najib has proven resilient despite facing corruption allegations that sparked the interest of the US Department of Justice last year – all of which he denies. Divisions among his opponents, combined with racially tinged populist messages to his majority Malay Muslim base, have analysts predicting that his ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition will extend its seven-decade grip on power in Malaysia.

But Rafizi says Invoke's numbers tell a different story. The group's telephone surveys and analysis of voting patterns in competitive districts suggest that support has fallen among ethnic Malays for Najib's UMNO. The opposition alliance Pakatan Harapan could take power if it swings Malay votes and sees high turnout from ethnic Chinese and Indians, Rafizi said.

Najib's travails

"The drop in Malay support for UMNO benefits PH the most as we are expected to get the largest share of the non-Malay votes," he said, adding that voters wouldn't automatically switch to the opposition.

Rafizi says the key to winning over UMNO members is attacking Najib personally, even though Invoke hasn't done a full survey on why they aren't happy with the prime minister.

“My press statements and political talks are always centred around Najib and what he’s doing wrong,” said Rafizi, 39. “I don’t touch on UMNO, or BN, or even the idea of changing the government. That would just scare them.”

Not everyone is convinced. The opposition bloc is rife with disagreements, and the one politician who managed to bring unity – Anwar Ibrahim – is in jail on a sodomy charge. The parties can’t agree on who would replace Najib, with former leader Mahathir Mohamad saying last week the issue is “not relevant unless you win”.

‘Time to attack!’

The opposition bloc lost the last national election to Najib’s coalition even though it won the popular vote. BN currently controls about 60% of parliamentary seats, with the rest split among a smattering of opposition parties.

“Before the opposition can talk about winning Putrajaya, they must first decide who is their prime minister candidate,” said Asrul Hadi Abdullah Sani, an analyst at public policy consulting firm BowerGroupAsia. “Attacking Najib alone is not a campaign strategy and will not win them the election.”

Najib’s party has seen success in recent local elections, including one in Sarawak in February. The prime minister last week called on the party’s social media activists to go on the offensive against his political opponents.

“We have been in defensive mode for a long time,” Najib wrote in a blog post. “Enough. It is now time to attack!”

His party also questioned the credibility of Rafizi’s polling. The data amounts to “political predictions based on maximum rhetoric and minimum data integrity,” said Abdul Rahman Dahlan, a member of UMNO’s supreme council.

### Uphill climb

At Invoke, Rafizi acknowledges it’s an uphill climb for the opposition to take power. His own party is split into separate factions that barely speak with each other and doesn’t have a common policy platform.

Rafizi said his group intends to produce a set of policy proposals on everything from education to economics. While several politicians are prepared to publicly adopt them, there’s no guarantee the alliance will formally adopt them.

Invoke has been polling daily since the middle of December using large sample and short surveys, according to Rafizi. They have included questions on voter preference in three-cornered races, identification with political figures and choice of political party. The polls can take a few weeks to several months to complete, with survey samples ranging from 10,000 people to 100,000 respondents.

Rafizi said that Invoke's numbers indicate that the opposition alliance can win 97 of 222 seats if the election was called this month. That assumes three-cornered contests against Najib's alliance and PAS, which had joined the opposition bloc in the last national election.

Rafizi estimates that Pakatan Harapan could win as many as 116 seats if the election is held in six months if it manages a 5% swing in support from ethnic Malays. To do that, it's planning targeted campaign messages for voters based on age, gender, race, religion and voting history, as well as where they live.

"We are aiming for efficiency – we're not going in blind when we approach the constituents," Rafizi said. "We know who we're talking to, and what they want to hear."

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