

Can Sabah voters break away from racial politics?

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KOTA KINABALU: Sabah voters are divided over whether they should support a single party trying to represent all races or back a coalition of parties each representing a certain race.

A street poll by FMT found that people, especially youngsters, are warming up to the idea of a one-party-for-all system.

However, this might not have significant bearing on the 14th general election (GE14) as the tendency to support race-based parties, such as those in the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN), appears still entrenched among voters.

A heated debate on the issue recently erupted among opposition outfits after Parti Anak Negeri Sabah (PAN) called on opposition Kadazan Dusun Murut (KDM) parties to unite under one banner and contest the 22 KDM-dominated state seats in Sabah.

Parti Cinta Sabah (PCS) welcomed the idea while Parti Warisan Sabah (Warisan) shot it down, claiming that it would run counter to Warisan's aim of promoting the interests of all races under the spirit of "Bangsa Sabah".



Lindsay Michael

Lawyer Lindsay Michael said voters were ready to let go of race-based politics, adding that societal attitudes are always changing.

“We are still strongly attached to our (communal) roots but at the end of the day, we are all Sabahans and Sabah is a multicultural state,” she told FMT.

The 28-year-old from Ranau said demarcation along racial lines was not the best way forward for Sabah.

“We are one, and all of us should reap the benefits as a whole and not be focused on race.

“When we are fighting for the people of Sabah, we are fighting for all the races that make up Sabah. I am a Dusun but my concerns are not limited to those of my race.”



Clarentino Aduk

Clarentino Aduk meanwhile said BN components practising such racial politics had failed to address issues affecting the people, whatever their ethnic identities.

“This formula has brought us nowhere. What we need now is a wrecking ball, in the form of Warisan, to totally end their rule in Sabah,” said the 37-year-old who works for a digital marketing agency.

“The KDM alone cannot accomplish this task. We need all communities to unite and join one party to get this done.

“Sabahans are ready because they are united by a common cause: to end BN rule in Sabah.”



Mukiman Latiam

Meat seller Mukiman Latiam, 58, from Kiulu, said a one-party system was the new way to get things done as decision-making would be easier.

“The BN parties cannot make decisions on their own as they have to depend on Umno,” he said.



Darrell Ho

“Maybe it’s better to have Warisan, whose president (Shafie Apdal) is a Suluk, the deputy president (Darell Leiking) is a Kadazan and the vice-presidents are people of various races.”

Darrell Ho, a businessman from Penampang, said a coalition of various parties would not guarantee that the components would get what they demanded.

“Things could be different in a single party that is made up of leaders from various ethnic groups,” said the 27-year-old.

“In my opinion, Generation Y and baby boomers are ready to let go of race-based politics while Generation X (the older generation) is still keen to hold on to it.”

He added that urban Sabahans were more likely to accept non-racial-based politics than those in the interior or suburbs.

‘Race-based parties in pact must be local’

However, Beecher MacAlister, from Penampang, said a pact with parties of various races was the way to go as it would be able to address the problems of many communities.



Beecher MacAllister

“I think more voters are beginning to accept the concept of one-party-for-all but generally, voters in Sabah still opt along racial lines,” said the 33-year-old event management company owner.

Franceslyn T, 45, said while she supported the coalition concept, it should be made up of Sabah-based parties.

“It has to consist of local parties,” she said, adding that the BN system allowed the needs and views of the people to be heard.

Lasuni Sampong

Vegetable seller Lasuni Sampong, 54, from Tamparuli, said BN’s various components better understood the struggles of the communities they each represented.



Joel Darryl Joseph

A KDM-majority seat should have a KDM candidate, and a constituency with a dominant race should be politically represented by a member of that race, Sampong added.

Farmer Joel Darryl Joseph, 36, from Ranau, said every ethnic group had its own aspirations and desires.

“The reality in Sabah is that race-based politics is still strong.

“That is why it is better to have a coalition of parties that represent the different groups.”

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