

News Release

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1600 (GMT+8)

BN poised to retain power despite popular vote decline

BANGI – Just hours ahead of Malaysia’s historic 14th general election, a survey carried among registered voters in Peninsular Malaysia between April 28th until noon on May 8th found that ruling coalition Barisan Nasional is poised to retain federal power in what is seen as one of the most contested elections ever in the country’s political history.

Cost of living and governance, top voters’ concern (refer to slide #8)

This has been an election propelled by a voter revolt over the GST as well as concerns over rising cost of living, running parallel alongside perceived governance shortfalls. The top three issues considered most important to the voters were economic concerns at 43%, followed by good governance (corruption) issues at 21% and weakness of leadership at 8%.

Malay voters expressed the highest concern about economic issues (46%) and followed by good governance issue (17%). Chinese voters placed equal emphasis on economic (37%) and corruption issues (35%). Meanwhile Indian voters also held high levels of concern over economic issues (43%) and placed the need for better treatment towards the Indian community at 15%. Younger voters, those below 40 years old, placed more emphasis on matters related to good governance and leadership, while voters over 40 years expressed slightly higher on concerns over communal rights (11%).

Factors influencing voting choice (refer to slides #9-11)

Aside from voters’ top of mind issues, the survey also asked about latent factors underpinning their political choices. Following up on earlier surveys which sought to work out the importance voters attached to factors underpinning Malaysian politics, the survey detected a significant shift to factors such as ethnic rights, which saw a perceptible decline, while desire for better economic performance increased.

The table below illustrates the factors before and after nomination.

All respondents

Factor	19 April 2018	8 May 2018
Clean government (fighting corruption)	33%	18%
Defend the Malays and the position of Islam religion in Malaysia / Protection of minority rights	29%	23%
Improving the economic resilience of the people	22%	24%
Credible leadership	10%	20%
Improving public services such as health, education and safety	4%	9%

Malay respondents only

Factor	19 April 2018	8 May 2018
Clean government (fighting corruption)	32%	15%
Defend the Malays and the position of Islam religion in Malaysia / Protection of minority rights	38%	30%
Improving the economic resilience of the people	18%	23%
Credible leadership	10%	21%
Improving public services such as health, education and safety	2%	6%

Voting Intentions (refer slide #20)

The survey asked voters which parties between Barisan Nasional, PAS and Pakatan Harapan, which they preferred to represent them. Subsequently, these findings were placed into Merdeka Center's electoral model to elicit likely choices to be made by non-responsive voters.

Peninsular Malaysia only (%)	Actual Survey Response	Estimated Popular Votes after Modelling
BN	28.2	37.3
PAS	12.5	19.3
PH	29.0	43.4
No preference	6.0	-
No response	15.3	-
Not sure/Undecided	9.0	-

Estimated Support for Political Parties in West Malaysia

For the record, there remained two important events that were to take place that is, the final address by BN chairman and prime minister Najib Razak as well as one from PH chairman, Dr Mahathir Mohamed. As our survey was concluded at noon on May 8th, about 12 hours before the end of the official campaign period, it may not capture any last minute shift or changes that may take place in the final hours of the campaign.

Our final national level popular vote estimate for contesting parties as at noon, May 8th 2018 as below:

West Malaysia Only	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Others	Estimated Popular Votes as at May 8 2018
BN	44.3%	15.8%	41.3%	90%	37.3%
PH	27.6%	84.2%	56.5%	5%	43.4%
PAS	28.1%	0.0%	2.3%	5%	19.3%

Opinion on Election Outcome

Based on the survey results and assuming a smooth election process on May 9th 2018, we found that Barisan Nasional presently retains a sizable seat advantage over rivals, Pakatan Harapan and PAS.

Transposed onto the parliamentary constituency grid, our estimates for current standings based on this national, and augmented by other concurrent state surveys are as follows:

	Estimated Safe Seats for BN	Estimated Safe Seats Pakatan Harapan	Estimated Seat for PAS	Toss-Up (within margin of error of $\pm 3.00\%$)
Peninsular Malaysia	62	76	2	25
Sabah & Labuan	15	5	0	6
Sarawak	23	2	0	6
Total	100	83	2	37

Given the above findings, its retention of a plurality of support among Malay voters, alongside PAS' ability to retain at least one-quarter of the Malay vote share, we anticipate that BN will prevail in the election.

The high number of marginal seats (37), implies that voter turnout will be a critical factor in determining the outcome of many seats on election day.

Details of the expected seat count by state and contesting coalition are in the appended presentation report. Please note that results for Sabah and Sarawak were developed based on a combination of field observation teams along with simulation from surveys conducted in March 2018.

Background Information on the Survey

We note that our election modelling method is based on national and state-level surveys, augmented by seat specific historical ethnic voting patterns, turnout estimates and adjustment factors for party strength and candidate quality.

The estimates above is based on a rolling survey carried out by the Merdeka Center for Opinion Research between 9:00AM 28th April and 12:00PM on 8th May 2018. About 1,579 registered voters in 70 marginal seats in Peninsular Malaysia comprising 68% Malay, 24% Chinese and 8% Indian respondents were interviewed by telephone in the poll. In addition to the national marginal seat survey, additional state level tracking surveys were concurrently carried out in Selangor, and Johor. These were complemented by earlier surveys in Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Penang, Kedah, Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka, all of which were conducted between 7th and 26th April 2018

Respondents were selected on the basis of random stratified sampling along ethnicity, gender and parliamentary constituencies. The interviews were carried out in the preferred language of the respondents. These surveys were funded internally by Merdeka Center for Opinion Research for release to the public.

About Merdeka Center for Opinion Research

Merdeka Center for Opinion Research was formally established in 2001 as an independent organization focused on public opinion research and socio-economic analysis. Merdeka's mission is to act as a bridge between ordinary Malaysians and other stakeholders with the leading members of the nation – by collecting public opinion studies and expressing them through survey results, analysis and position papers. For details, visit: www.merdeka.org

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