

YOUTH PERCEPTION ON NEW MALAYSIA 2018



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IMAN Research

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IMAN
Society. Religion. Perception

FOREWORD

Political discussions are always celebrated by the IMAN team - be it among ourselves or with friends and acquaintances who visit our humble little abode. Though a small team, we at IMAN consists of individuals with very different personalities, political stances and strengths. Needless to say, our discussions on politics are never boring.

When it came to the GE14, the IMAN team was excited from the word go. It took us some "strategic financial planning" to set up a small team to observe the election campaign nationwide in the run up to GE14. It was a wise move indeed as the experience we gathered throughout the journey was priceless. The tears and laughter we saw as the nation witnessed the exit of a 61-years old government gave us both hope and humility.

We were finalising the election observation report when we were contacted by UNICEF who eventually gave us the opportunity to study further the outcome of the election results which among others showed youths were a major catalyst for the change the nation went through. This sealed our determination to embark on this study.

It must be pointed out that we had adopted a qualitative approach for this study simply because we knew it would provide for us much more than any quantitative study ever could. I believe you will be inclined to agree with us when you read the quotes from Malaysian youths on the various issues. We are confident that this report would give a clear picture on their thoughts and hopefully encourage the current leadership would take heed of their priorities and needs in strategizing policies and programmes. Ignoring them would be dangerous not only to politicians but also the nation.

I quote the late Kofi Annan who once said: "Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."

Lastly, this report is indeed a labour of our passion for new and important research, and would have never seen the light of day if not for the dedication shown by the men and women who came together with a desire to see progress and improvement in Malaysia. Apart from the IMAN team who worked tirelessly on this for weeks on end, I extend a heartfelt "thank you" to our visiting researcher, Benjamin Loh, our intern Muhammad Fathi Rayyan and the 40 youths whom we cannot name, but will always remember.

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BACKGROUND

Based on a previous study conducted for UNICEF on the 14th General Election (GE14) outcome, our findings showed that youths played a pivotal role in the recent shift of political power. Statistics from the Election Commission showed that 40.9% of registered voters for the GE14 were aged between 21 and 39 (*Malay Mail Online*, 2018). This shows the increase of voting power among youths in Malaysia, who were also most vocal in venting their grievances of a corrupt government and its impact on their livelihood. As a result, youth participation was heavily emphasized throughout the election campaign period.

As such, IMAN felt it was important to return to the field to communicate with youths on their varied opinions and perceptions of the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) Government, as well as their desires and hopes in moving past their first one hundred days in power. This study engaged with youths from selected states across Malaysia on their views of the new government as a way to expand discourse on governance, politics and leadership.

Upon PH winning the elections, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad returned as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia, a position he held for 22 years prior to his retirement 15 years ago. Upon his reappointment, he promised that PH will deliver its manifesto in 100 days, which are:

- 1. Abolish the Goods and Services Tax (GST)**
- 2. Investigate scandal-plagued institutions**
- 3. Introduce Employees Provident Fund (EPF) scheme for housewives**
- 4. Re-introduce fuel subsidies for targeted groups**
- 5. Standardise and increase the minimum wage**
- 6. Postpone repayment to the National Higher Education Fund Corporation for those earning below RM4,000**
- 7. Relook the awarding of mega projects to foreign countries**
- 8. Set up a task force to study how to return autonomy promise to Sabah and Sarawak, as set out in the Malaysia Agreement 1963**
- 9. Abolish FELDA settlers' debts**
- 10. Introduce national healthcare assistance initiative**

However, leading up to the 100 days, political pundits, media personalities, analysts and activists have been scrutinising the manifesto and have cautioned that an overnight change cannot materialise if certain fundamentals are not employed.

COMPREHENDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

Local media outlets and a number of research centres paid close attention to PH's 100 Day Promise, especially leading up to their first three months in power. *The New Straits Times* reported on May 31, 2018 that PH postponed¹ at least five '100 Days' manifesto pledges, such as the following:

- Targeted petrol subsidy for cars under 1,300cc and motorcycles under 125cc
- Employees Provident Fund contributions for housewives
- Raising the minimum wage
- Delaying the repayment period for National Higher Education Fund Corporation (PTPTN) loans for graduates earning RM4,000 and below a month
- Expanding the Selangor government's Skim Peduli Sihat nationwide, which offers RM500 basic treatment at registered private clinics for B40 households

Similar to this, on August 17, 2018, *The Star* reported that PH had fulfilled 21 out of 60 promises in 100 days². Some of the achieved pledges are as follows:

- Establishing a Special Cabinet Committee on Anti-Corruption (JKKMAR)
- Establishing the Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Centre (GIACC) to enable the efforts to save Malaysia from corruption
- Formulating the National Anti-Corruption Plan to enable the issues of governance, integrity and anti-corruption to be addressed comprehensively
- Legislation that allows punitive action to be taken against officers who deliberately cause leakages or wastage of government funds
- To combat money politics, a Political Funding Bill is being drafted
- A policy on the giving of gifts and donations to members of the civil service (from ministers to political secretaries) is being drafted. At the moment, this policy only focuses on civil servants
- The Government has decided that Members of the Administration (ministers and deputy ministers) should no longer issue support letters in relation to any project or application
- On the declaration of assets, the guidelines are being amended to expand the definition of Members of the Administration so that the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister will also have to declare their assets

¹ Pakatan govt postpones at least five '100 days' manifesto pledges

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2018/05/375185/pakatan-govt-postpones-least-five-100-days-manifesto-pledges>

² Pakatan fulfilled 21 out of 60 promises in 100 days, says Dr M

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/08/17/pakatan-fulfilled-21-out-of-60-promises-in-100-days-says-dr-m/>

However, *Malaysia Today's* report "K'jaan Baru: 4 Hari, 3 Kejanggalan."³, dated May 14, 2018, focused on issues of inconsistencies; The new government had announced that a full Royal pardon would be bequeathed to Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim, and that the Yang di-Pertuan Agong had agreed to do so. Yet they questioned the act, as under the Federal Constitution Article 42, for while the Agong had the power to pardon, the act itself could only proceed under the advise of the Pardons Board. Summarily, the above wanted clarification on Anwar's pardon as it was apparent that the Pardons Board may have been overruled. *Malaysia Today* also questioned Lim Guan Eng's appointment as finance minister while still facing misappropriation charges, as the appointment taints PH's quest to establish a fair and just government. The removal of Tan Sri Apandi Ali as the Attorney General (AG) contradicted PH's criticisms on the sacking of Tan Sri Abdul Gani Patail from the same office.

In short, there are mixed reviews on PH's performance within the first 100 days, regarding their decisions and actions on economic issues, as well as social and political issues such as institutional reforms, handling of government institutions, appointment of cabinet members et cetera. In lieu of these preliminary findings, IMAN felt that it was necessary to engage with youths on the ground, to get a broad and general overview of how they perceive the new government and the current state of politics. The study intended to explore questions surrounding youth expectations on the new government, what criteria they had and wanted in choosing a leader, and to gauge how they could participate in politics and society at large.

³ K'jaan Baru: 4 Hari, 3 Kejanggalan
<http://www.malaysia-today.net/2018/05/14/kjaan-baru-4-hari-3-kejanggalan/>

METHODOLOGY

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were selected as the primary method of data collection for this study.

FGDs are a simple and effective way for researchers to collect participant responses towards a particular topic in a group setting. Unlike quantitative methods, FGDs are qualitative in nature and designed to explore people's perceptions, views, and understanding of a particular topic. This approach is important and allows for researchers to find new information based on groupthink. The method involves organizing a session with five to seven participants mediated by one or two facilitators. The purpose of the facilitator is to manage the discussion and provide the group with questions or topics to respond to. The group then discusses these questions amongst themselves with little to no input from the facilitators. The facilitators' job is also to ensure that the discussion is kept on the topic, moderate the discussion by encouraging more passive participants, and probe certain emerging topics that may be of interest.



PHOTO CREDIT: IMAN RESEARCH

FGDs also allow researchers to learn about the participants' views on a subject directly and through their interaction with others. In a group setting, where not all participants may know each other, participants would alter their views and opinions on a subject depending on the members of the session. If the members of the group share similar traits and qualities (race, gender, class, etc.), they would be more likely to share their views on the issue as the other

participants may support or add to their own arguments. On the other hand, in a mixed group, opposing views may cause some participants to limit their participation and to keep quiet on more sensitive issues. In rare cases, open disagreements may occur as multiple contrasting ideas cannot be reconciled. In either case, these interactions provide invaluable information to researchers as they will be able to determine what are common topics of certain groups of people and what are clashing ideas for others. This information is used to determine what subjects are relevant to different groups of society and how different demographics of youths can develop different viewpoints on various subjects.

The study targeted Malaysian youths between the ages of 18 - 35, of any gender, class, employment and marital status, all of whom were residing in five major states around the country: Klang Valley, Johor, Terengganu, Penang and Sabah. Participants either came alone or together with friends, but no sessions were conducted where every participant knew each other. The terms for participation for this study, were that each session would be audio-recorded, they would remain anonymous as their personal data would not be published, and that they could leave at any time. The session was established as a safe space where each participant was encouraged to talk candidly and freely about their feelings about the current state of Malaysia without fear of judgement from others. Each session was conducted in a mixture of both the English and Bahasa Malaysia languages. Participants were asked to sign consent forms (Borang Persetujuan/Keizinan Peserta) indicating that they understood these terms. Each participant was given RM50 for their participation.

Participants were asked to answer five specific questions (their answers were recorded for transcribing purposes). The questions were designed to allow participants an opportunity to express their opinions without influence. The questions for this study are:

1. What do you think about the current political landscape?
 - i. National level
 - ii. State level
2. What about the 100-day promises resonates with you?
 - i. What would be a good time to see changes if they are not currently made?
3. What about the ruling coalition/government makes you:
 - i. Happy/Satisfied
 - ii. Unhappy/Unsatisfied
4. What are your thoughts on the Opposition front?
5. What do you hope to see from the government/political parties?

Demographics & analysis

Despite limited time, IMAN was able to successfully conduct a total of seven FGDs (each consisting of at least five participants), with each FGD running from between 90 - 150 minutes, depending on the chemistry and interaction of the group members. Seven FGD sessions were held each with a variety of participant compositions. Two FGDs were organized in the Klang Valley, two in Penang, and one each in Terengganu, Johor, and Sabah. In order to reflect the plurality of Malaysia's population, each FGD comprised of various compositions for a variety of social groupings. We formed FGDs that were representative of social groups with a single common characteristic (like ethnicity, location, age range) as well as social groups with a high majority or mixed membership.

Examples of these high majority FGD groups are FGD2, FGD6, and FGD5; FGD2 comprised of four participants from Johor and one participant from Kuala Lumpur, FGD6 comprised of six Malay participants and one Sabah Bumiputra participant, and FGD5, four Chinese participants and two Malay participants.

By having such varied compositions of participants, the sessions produced discussions that would otherwise be different. In a homogenous group, people would be more willing to speak out about subjects that they know others to value as well while the presence of an outsider may cause them to change how they speak instead.

Focus Group label ***Location***

<i>FGD1</i>	Klang Valley
<i>FGD2</i>	Johor
<i>FGD3</i>	Terengganu
<i>FGD4</i>	Penang
<i>FGD5</i>	Penang
<i>FGD6</i>	Sabah
<i>FGD7</i>	Klang Valley

For location, we assumed that participants living in the same geographical area would share common concerns about local governance and issues. In a mixed setting, exposure to participants from other areas can broaden discussions on national issues as issues important in one area may not be important in another. We also divided the FGD locations based on urban centres (Kuala Lumpur and Penang) and rural-periphery areas. In our FGDs, we had three FGDs with participants from urban areas and four sessions in rural-periphery areas.

For age ranges, we subdivided the demographics between younger (under 27 years of age) and older youths and also among groups of similar age (participants are within five years of each other). This was to see the effects of age in how youth process and deliberate on political issues. The majority of our FGDs (6) comprised of all or majority of participants that were close in age. In general, all groups comprised of younger youths as opposed to older youths.

Ethnicity, one of the most prominent structures in Malaysian society, was reflected in various ways in our FGD compositions. The sessions had either participants from the same ethnicity, mixed ethnicity, or a single majority ethnicity. This was done to explore the various ways in which people choose to talk about issues depending on the company that they had. We had two sessions with a single ethnicity, three with a large single majority ethnicity, and two others with mixed ethnicities. In addition to that, we had one FGD which had a minority Malay presence to see how this affected the non-Malay participation.

The analysis was conducted with a small team of coders. The team worked with a general code book to look for insights from these FGD sessions. These insights comprised of trending points between the FGD groups and themes that are related to the state of New Malaysia. Members of the team regularly worked together to share findings, combine themes, and discuss larger issues.

FINDINGS

Findings from the FGDs are narrowed down into three main categories: the first consisted of views and opinions on national issues, followed by issues that were more rooted in their respective localities, and finally some opinions on the state of politics in the country.

National issues

Socially

All FGDs agreed that the biggest outcome from the GE14 elections was the new social space in Malaysia. There is a sense of freedom in expression, the media and in general, the country feels more open. This extends up until the issue of LGBT (which was current during the time of the FGDs) where our participants had mixed opinions on the issue; there were anti-LGBT participants who felt that it was not an important issue and those who were pro-LGBT recognized that it was a complex issue that needed a more delicate approach to it. Despite these mixed opinions, all agreed that the issue was handled poorly by the government and many felt that it was over-politicized and used as a diversion from other issues.



PHOTO CREDIT: IMAN RESEARCH

Education was another issue that cropped up regularly amongst the FGDs. The main complaint was the issue of PTPTN, which many felt as a major burden for youths. As one of the items on the PH manifesto, this was the one promise that many participants felt should have been completed. Other aspects of education include the lack of proper sex education in schools. Some participants attributed the lack of sex education as one of the causes for social issues such as unwanted pregnancies and sexual abuses:

“Kerajaan tidak serius dari segi pendidikan kerana tiada skim atau pendekatan yang terbaru. Contohnya, di negara luar ada pendidikan seks untuk mengurangkan masalah sosial. Ini penting kerana pelajar-pelajar hari ini sudah lebih terbuka berbanding dahulu.” as to add a hyperlink or insert a comment” – FGD6 F1

“The government is not serious about revamping the current education system because until today, there are no new schemes or approaches. In other countries for example, sex education is introduced to address certain social issues. This is important for students to be exposed and develop an open-mind, compared those from the previous generations.” - FGD6 F1

Economy

The largest concern brought up by all participants was pertaining to the economy and how that impacted their personal lives. Most indicated a strong support for the abolishment of the GST, as promised by PH in their manifesto. However, one of the bigger gripes participants had in regard to the GST’s transition into an SST tax system, was that they had very little knowledge on how it actually worked and felt it was the government's duty to further educate the public on it.

“Saya betul betul berterima kasih kepada PH sebab menurunkan kadar GST kepada sifar, memang saya rasa lah perubahan tu. (Tapi) saya masih keliru untuk SST, sebab bos saya Singaporean, dia tak faham, confirm dia akan tanya saya pasal SST, dan saya ...kurang ilmu pasal ni, sebab saya dapat maklumat GST lebih baik dari SST. Saya dapat maklumat lain pulak SST lebih baik dari GST. Saya masih mencari (maklumat).”- FGD2 F2

“I’m thankful to PH for reducing the GST to zero, I can feel the impact from these changes. But I’m still confused about the SST, because my boss is Singaporean, and he will ask me about the SST, and I don’t have much knowledge on it. I heard somewhere that the GST is better than the SST and in other places the SST is better than the GST. I’m still finding answers.” - FGD2 F2

Many of those who participated in the FGDs were honest about voting for PH because they sought better employment opportunities and felt the change in government could help. A majority of the participants in this study had admitted to not being able to gain steady employment or are in between jobs. The lack of financial stability had been linked to what is perceived to be a turbulent political landscape and thus, voting for the PH coalition was believed to have stabilised that. Thus, they hoped that more job opportunities would arise with this new government.

The lack of job opportunities has been associated with a rise in migrant workers, as pointed out by some participants. One participant (FGD3 M1) stated directly that he felt the lack of jobs was due to the strong presence of the informal working sector which is often fueled by illegal immigrants. In general, the participants see the need for migrant workers to supplement the local workforce, but some they felt that further regulation was needed and more opportunities for locals should be made a priority. Participant FGD1 F5 highlighted that she felt the government needed to improve its approach to migrant workers and felt some empathy towards their struggles:

“The government (is) irregular and inconsistent on how to regulate migrant workers, foreign labour. One day ‘No we don’t want them,’ the other day ‘I think we need them,’ I think things like this are dangerous because maybe they haven’t done the research properly... they need to consider the impact it (has on) people... because (they) think that ‘they are stealing our job,’ (and some) migrants (are) saying ‘I gave up everything to come here and if I give up everything in 6 months, where should I go?’” - FGD1 F5

The establishment of a minimum wage is another matter of importance that emerged in our FGDs. This was highly necessary as costs of living continue to increase, mainly from the implementation of GST, and it is getting more difficult for Malaysians to earn decent wages. Even as the abolishment of GST came about, the prices of goods stayed the same. With the coming of SST, many expected costs of living to rise further and a minimum wage is absolutely necessary at this point for all Malaysians. It is important to take note of this call for minimum wage as these were youths struggling to find employment.

<p><i>“Gaji minimum sangat penting dan utama kerana rakyat sedang berhadapan dengan kos sara hidup yang tinggi. Gaji minimum lebih perlu kerana ianya melibatkan semua rakyat.” - FGD6 M1</i></p>	<p><i>“Minimum wage is so important for the rakyat who are faced with the high costs of living. A minimum wage is necessary because it involves everyone.” - FGD6 M1</i></p>
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Many other issues related to the higher cost of living such as affordable housing and infrastructure development came about in the discussions. The overall impression from our participants was that Malaysia seems to be becoming more expensive and the government needs to increase their efforts to provide more supporting facilities to alleviate their day-to-day expenses. The government’s initial plans to stop mega projects such as the ECRL, MRT, and LRT, was lauded as a good way to save money for the country. One mega project, the third national car, was universally condemned by all FGDs as a waste of money and resources. As one participant (FGD7 M1) noted, *“I doubt the third car can make us go anywhere.”*



PHOTO CREDIT: IMAN RESEARCH

Overall, on the economy, only participants from the urban centres of Kuala Lumpur and Penang highlighted the PH government's lack of any clear economic plan. These participants noted that there was generally no mention of how Malaysia was going to improve economically, no cohesive and unified plan was ever communicated to the public, and questioned some of the actions relating to top management at high valued government-linked companies:

“I’ve yet to hear something they will do with our country’s financial projection. There’s no clear plan, thought, on how to propel Malaysia further in the international level.” - FGD7 M1

“Need to get their things done as I said before and they need to stop trashing the old Government. We already know the old Government did bad (things), but it’s time for making plans on how you want to progress.” - FGD5 F2

“I did not like how they handled (the) Khazanah issue. They make it a cost issue (and) stopped hiring experts, consultants from abroad. A lot of it high profile leaders were sidelined or replaced.” - FGD7 F1

Local issues

As the FGDs were conducted across the country, there were several issues that arose reflecting local sensibilities and contexts. Despite the fact that these issues affected only certain parts of the country, it is important for people who live outside the urban centres of Kuala Lumpur, who are affected by national laws and policies in different ways. Our FGDs have unearthed interesting opinions and views that would otherwise be buried under a majority narrative and as such are worth taking into account when creating nationally implemented policies.

One common example stood out in terms of two states having different opinions about a national edict. As part of PH's plan to streamline its government operations, certain bodies have been abolished or consolidated such as the Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK), for example. The reduced role of this particular committee was viewed both positively and negatively in the states of Terengganu and Johor. For the former, the FGD participants considered the JKKK as a tool of cronyism during the BN era and liked that it could no longer serve that purpose.

“BN mengamalkan kronisme, JKKK adalah orang mereka “kuasa tandatangan” – memberikan imbuhan, sumbangan kepada sanak saudara sahaja. PAS menghentikan kekuasaan politik JKKK yang dipraktikkan sejak dari zaman Wan Mokhtar sebagai Menteri Besar lagi.” - FGD3 F1

“BN practices cronyism; JKKK staff works based on the whims of these politicians, providing and distributing incentives for their family members and loyalists only. These rampant political endorsements were practised since the time of Chief Minister Wan Mokhtar. Under the PAS administration, this practice has been halted.” - FGD3 F1

However, in the state of Johor, the participants there held a much more positive view of this organisation as it was important in supporting community level services such as marriage ceremonies. Instead of having village heads for each locality (who would handle marriage ceremonies), there was only one village head for each district, which caused complications for locals as the communal connection is no longer present as illustrated with this example:

“Kan sekarang dah takde ketua kampung, so ketua kampung berpusat di mukim di Johor Bahru, Pejabat Tanah, ada sorang yang akan tunggu di situ, so semua yang mahu status bujang mereka di declare masa tu, awak dari Pasir Gudang, awak dari Pekan Nenas, saya tak kenal awak, saya tak kenal awak. Kalau biasa kita ada ketua kampung untuk declare status bujang untuk perkahwinan dan segala macam, tapi di Johor Bahru tiada. Macam saya nak kenal awak dari Pasir Gudang, saya dari Pontian. Jadi betul ke awak ni bujang? Adakah awak kahwin rushing ni sebab dah hamil ke? Jadi masalah masalah sebegitu.” - FGD2 M1

“In Johor Bahru, there are officially no more village heads. There’s only one operating from the Pejabat Tanah in the city. For those requesting to change their bachelor status, whether they are from Pasir Gudang or Pekan Nenas, if the person in-charge does not know you, nothing can be done. He can make the registration more complicated, because he would assume since I am from Pasir Gudang and my girlfriend is from Pontian, we are just here rushing to declare our marriage because she is already pregnant. This becomes a problem.” - FGD2 M1



PHOTO CREDIT: BADRUL HISHAM ISMAIL

Certain issues affected certain states differently such as i) petrol subsidies (which affected fishermen in Sabah), (ii) oil royalties for Sabah and Terengganu, (iii) the cost of medical care among Sabah and Penang participants, (iv) how Islam was being handled by the government was heavily discussed among the Terengganu and Johor FGDs.

Participants from these two conservative states wanted for a more strict and direct stand that the government should take when dealing with Islamic issues. In Terengganu, the participants regarded the values of Islam of utmost importance and wanted its (Islam) presence to be strengthened. For the Johor participants, they felt that non-Muslim politicians should not handle Islamic issues as they felt that they would be ill-equipped to address them and Muslim politicians should step up instead. For these participants at least, the presence of Islam in politics is urgent and crucial for the country's well-being.

“Rumusannya di Terengganu ialah apabila isu yang melibatkan orang ramai Islam-Melayu dijadikan kayu pengukur oleh masyarakat demi mempertahankan maruah Islam dan Melayu di sini kerana nilai-nilai Islam yang masih kuat.” - FGD3 M2

“The status of Malay Muslim persons is often used as the benchmark when it comes to defending issues concerning the people of Terengganu, who have professed strong adherence to the Islamic principles.” - FGD3 M2

The Sabah FGD produced the most interesting findings that were highly specific to their state. The participants did not have great trust in their local politicians over fears of “frogging” (mengatak) - the act of jumping into and out of political parties by politicians. Through this act of “frogging”, participants felt that politicians were untrustworthy and would renege on their promises at the slightest opportunity. This FGD also discussed how the state of Sabah is “dianak-tirikan” (neglected) by the Federal Government based on how new policies have been put in place. Most notably is the lack of care and conviction with the handling of the oil royalties.

“Sabah masih dianak-tirikan. Royalti minyak oleh kerajaan federal dilihat sambil lewa seakan-akan ianya tidak penting.” - FGD6 M4

“Sabah is still treated like a forgotten step child. The oil royalties from the federal government are treated like a joke that is not important.” - FGD6 M4

Essentially, Sabahans felt that the **new** Federal Government appears to be exercising the same lackadaisical attitude towards its well-being.

***“Sabah continues to be neglected. It is as if the Federal government (has) broken the promise regarding oil royalty. Suddenly (there has been) no news.”
- FGD3 F1***

Politics

10 Promises in 100 days

The main question for all our FGDs was an assessment of the Pakatan Harapan government's performance in completing their "10 promises in 100 days." Virtually all participants agreed that the 100-day deadline was not important. A large majority even said that the promises were mostly trivial as the most important factor for the election was the ousting of former Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak. That being said, the participants all agreed that it was still important that these promises be kept, and generally they all felt that the 100-day timeframe was too short and would be willing to give the government more time to complete them.

"I don't think they have fulfilled the promises. I don't really care about the 100-day (promise). I just want to see real changes. I don't even remember what are the pledges. In general people just want to see change. Over 60 years, we are asking the same questions, why can't we become new and better?" - FGD7 M1

"For me the janji (promise) is like too good to be true because I don't really focus on the janji (promise) all I think is to change. That's all I want. So, the promises are like secondary things for me, because is too good to be true, I (was) already sure that they cannot achieve in 100 days." - FGD1 F4

Pakatan Harapan Government



SOURCE: BERNAMA

All our participants expressed great positivity when it came to the current PH government. Ironically, many were also skeptical of this new government with some expressing that they have trouble trusting them. The reasons for this are based on two main factors: many of its members are former Barisan Nasional (BN) members, and they still retain elements of identity politics. Some participants were wary of these ex-BN members who currently operated within the new PH government as they may influence the PH government to return to the old BN ways. There were some others who were optimistic as this was necessary until the new parties can shore up enough membership to rid themselves of the old guard:

“The current politicians are actually the same people, sisa sisa dari dulu (remnants from the past). So, we just (need to) wait for sisa sisa tu hilang (the remnants to disappear). But I’m optimistic for the younger ones.” - FGD1 F4

The issue of identity politics is more dire as this was a general cause for concern among all our participants. Identity politics is practiced by parties who operate around political ideologies that revolve around a particular ethnicity or religion.

Our participants unanimously agreed that the composition of the PH coalition resembled the original BN lineup; PPBM bears the most resemblance to UMNO and DAP with MCA/GERAKAN. This general comparison is the main reason why our participants felt uneasy with this new government despite all of them expressing joy with the change of government. As one participant puts it, the new PH government resembles the old BN government in all but name:

“Bagi saya permainan politik mereka sama iaitu ingin menguasai Malaysia dengan cara mereka sendiri. Oleh itu, bagi saya, Malaysia Baharu hanya pada nama sahaja. Namun pemain politiknya masih sama, datang dari tempat yang sama dan hanya tahu untuk merebut kerusi.” - FGD6 M2

“For me, their political games are the same, which is to run the nation according to their own plan. Therefore, I think the New Malaysia is just a brand. The latest batch of players are from the same mould, only to wrestle for position and influence.” - FGD6 M2

One other aspect of the current political climate is the reduced social distance between regular people and politicians as they can be contacted through social media and other means. Politicians feel more approachable and accessible, when taken together with the increased freedoms in society, encourage our participants to become more politically engaged than before.

There was also a trend among participants where they held political allegiances that did not follow along party lines, and were open to considering new leaders on both sides of the political divide. If there was ever time to consider a third force, one that would cater to the needs of youths, this would be it.

“We need young leaders, we don’t look at political parties. We look at who are the young leaders now.” - FGD5 M3

Notable pro-government political figures

Over the course of each FGD, through no direct prompting on our part, participants would regularly make remarks or comment on current political figures. These comments indicate how much they approve or disapprove of their actions or demeanour and provide insights into the public perception of each of these political figures. It is important to note that these politicians are mentioned in our FGDs due to their public nature and presence in the current political space and should therefore be reflective of how influential they are in the public sphere. For these pro-government political figures, there were more negative criticisms than positive views by our participants which reflect a possible tacit disapproval at their political activities.

Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad



SOURCE: TIMETRAVELLERWIKI.COM

The majority of our participants voiced concerns and dissatisfaction over the current leader of the PH government. Even as some participants noted that they were forgiving of his past, they were still wary of him due to his lack of transparency since being in power again. Several participants made note of various actions that have been undertaken by Mahathir in recent times which eroded the trust they had in his leadership. There is a fear of a return to “neo-Mahathirism”, where he may be consolidating his power in government and becoming the sole decider in all policies and government actions.

<p><i>“Perkara yang paling bermasalah dengan PH ini adalah apa apa yang Mahathir cakap, semua PH takkan menyuarakan kalau ada bantahan terhadap apa apa, macam kereta nasional ketiga” - FGD2 M3</i></p>	<p><i>“The most troubling issue with PH is whenever Mahathir says something, but none of PH politicians would voice out objections, for example about the third national car” - FGD2 M3</i></p>
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<p><i>“Pemerintahan sekarang sedang dipandu oleh Mahaguru UMNO sebelum ini, iaitu, Tun Mahathir. Mahathirisme kepada Neo-Mahathirisme. Walaupun rakyat sudah mula bebas beraktiviti, akan tetapi, diktator kerajaan PH lama-kelamaan ditonjolkan dengan membuat sekatan itu dan ini. Sebagai contoh, SKMM mengeluarkan beberapa istilah yang tidak boleh digunakan di media sosial seperti Mahafiraun. Kronisme dan nepotisme masih berlangsung dalam politik Malaysia; mengutamakan keluarga sebagai contoh Tun Mahathir memberikan projek kepada anaknya baru-baru ini. Adapun tampuk pemerintahan PKR dipegang oleh 3 beranak” - FGD6 M4</i></p>	<p><i>“The current government is headed by Tun Mahathir, the oligarch of UMNO. It’s a transformation from Mahathirism to neo-Mahathirism. Although, citizens are expressing their political views more openly, it’s only a matter of time before the PH administration begins constricting rights. For example, recently the MCMC issued a list of made-up words that are banned from being used on social media platforms such as Mahafiraun. In the meantime, corruption and nepotism are still prevalent; e.g. Mahathir awarding his son lucrative project. Apparently, the top-tier positions in PKR are run by the same family.” - FGD6 M4</i></p>
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<p><i>“Macam poyo je cakap tak nak pegang jawatan tapi kau jadi CEO Khazanah, so macam tu lah.” - FGD1 F2</i></p>	<p><i>“It’s like, how lame is it to say no to holding more than one position and yet you made yourself the CEO of Khazanah.” - FGD1 F2</i></p>
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Some participants also mentioned that Mahathir was engaging in revenge politics through his actions and rhetoric. This was reflected in his administration’s constant blaming of the current financial predicament of the country on the previous government and GLCs. They felt that this was unfair and not necessary as they should focusing on fixing the problems rather than assigning blame.

“The need for change of government is needed, the move is good for democracy. I’m glad that happened. However, I have to disagree with the notion of vilifying the previous government. They can’t look at it objectively. No assessment. They kind of using the media to vilifying and created hatred towards the old administration. For example, influencing lay person to think of them as bad. GLC – (Axiata, MAHB), Institut Jantung Negara (IJN) put under Ministry of Health. There’s nothing wrong with IJN being by itself. What they do is like throwing ourselves under the bus.” - FGD7 F1

“Walaupun tampuk pemerintahan telah diambil oleh kerajaan PH. Saya menganggap sifat dua blok politik ini adalah sama. Ekonomi sekarang dikatakan tidak maju akibat kesalahan pemimpin sebelum ini. Namun bagi saya, pemerintah sekarang (PH) hanya menganggap pemerintah dahulu (BN) salah dan kepimpinan mereka hari inilah yang betul.” - FGD6 M2

“Although the previous government has been unseated by PH, I still think the two sides are the same. The previous government is blamed for regressive economic condition we are facing now, but I think PH is only looking for the mismanagements under the BN administration. PH also claimed that they are better.” - FGD6 M2

The Council of Eminent Persons (CEP) was rarely discussed in the FGDs except by two participants who took note of its lack of clearly defined powers. The lack of discussion on the role of the CEP, especially when talking about the first 100 days, is notable as they are neither lauded nor condemned by the majority and are just absent from the discussion. This indicates that perhaps the public presence of the CEP had diminished around the time of the FGDs (nearer the end of the 100 days) and its prominence was waning.

“The Council of Eminent Persons (CEP) is another entity that has no clear role; not too sure what their stances are; are they influencing decisions made in the for the cabinet, the parliament... What power do they have? These are not under the purview of the Constitution. Their actions so far do not show where we are heading. We have not seen anything towards betterment.” - FGD7 M1

Dato' Seri Dr Wan Azizah binti Dr Wan Ismail



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Deputy Prime Minister was viewed quite negatively amongst all participants. Many felt that she was merely a puppet or seat warmer for her husband, Anwar Ibrahim.

“She is seen as a puppet, a lot of her decisions are programmed/influenced by Anwar Ibrahim.” - FGD7 M2

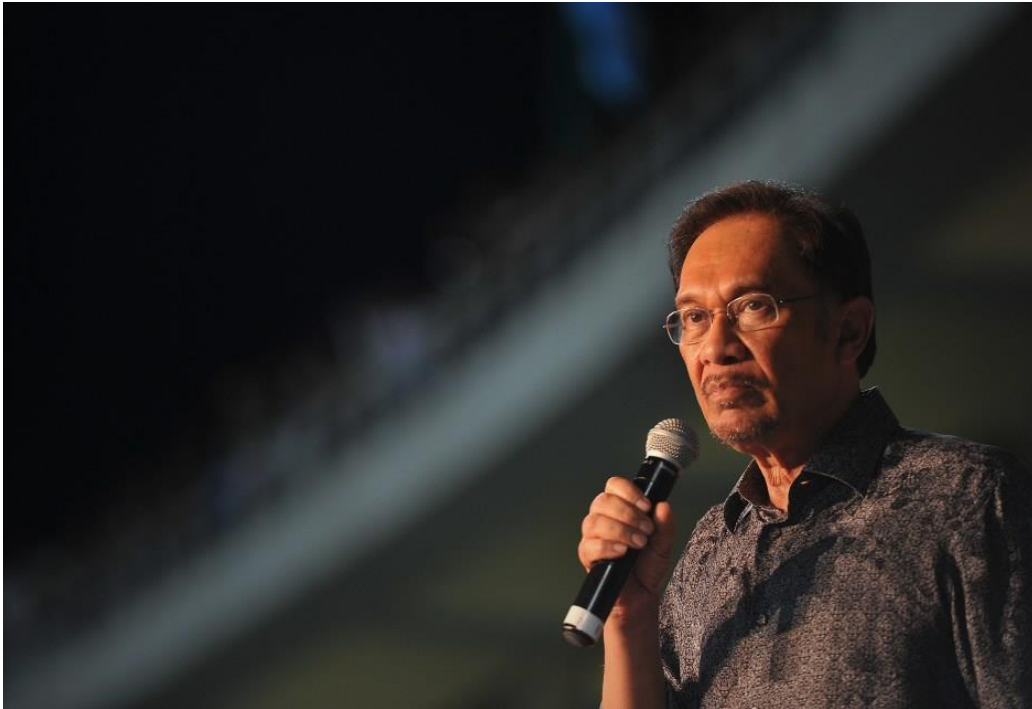
Participants did not like that she constantly played up her religion and role as the wife of Anwar Ibrahim. As a Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, one participant noted that she was a poor choice for this position since Wan Azizah was not a feminist. Combined with her highly religious views, this participant felt that Wan Azizah would prioritize religion over women’s rights which is highly problematic for this Ministry.

Despite these negative views, some participants felt that she was also a capable woman and probably able to run the country, but only if she were to step out of Anwar’s shadow. These participants noted that they would increase their support for Wan Azizah if she sheds her patronage to Anwar.

“Is Wan Azizah going to run the country? I don’t mind, I think she’s a great PM. But I want to know that that is the plan.” - FGD5 F3

“Wan Azizah is good. But she is the voice of her husband.” - FGD5 M2

Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim



SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The vast majority of our participants voiced a dislike and uneasiness at Anwar Ibrahim's sudden rise to prominence post-GE14. Even though he is not an elected representative, many commented that he acted like one by making comments on various national issues and made statements as though he was in office. These same participants felt that his time had passed and he should take time away from politics.

“Biarlah kita anggap dia sebagai idol reformasi, lebih baik dia retired, main dengan anak cucu dia, family dia, bagi orang lain yang lebih baru, yang lebih banyak idea, yang masih kuat untuk bekerja. Saya rasa dia dah basi, boring lah cerita dia.” - FGD1 M1

“Just let him be the Reformasi icon, better for him to retire, play with his grandkids...give the space to new faces ... I believe he's a has-been.” - FGD1 M1

“I don't want Anwar Ibrahim – can't trust him. Throughout history since the time with ABIM, his Turkey connection.” - FGD7 M2

The disdain for Anwar Ibrahim was widely discussed and here is an example of our moderator's discussion with the participants:

FGD7

MODERATOR: DO YOU WANT ANWAR TO BE PRIME MINISTER?

M1 & M2: TAK (No)

MODERATOR: MENGAPA? SILA NYATAKAN. (WHY? PLEASE EXPLAIN.)

F3: I DON'T TRUST THAT DUDE.

M1: DAH TENGOK MUKA DIA, DAH TAK SUKA (JUST LOOKING AT HIS FACE, I ALREADY DON'T LIKE IT)."

The few that did voice support for Anwar, included the Terengganu FGD, where they felt that he would make a good Prime Minister if he were to collaborate with PAS.

"Jikalau Anwar bergabung bersama PAS – "If Anwar collaborates with PAS, maybe he has mungkin ada peluang lagi jadi Perdana Menteri. Sentimen Anwar memang kuat." - Anwar is very charismatic." - FGD3 M2 FGD3 M2

The only other participant to hold Anwar in high regard was from an FGD in Penang who felt that he was cunning. This participant described being cunning as crucial for a new leader that is necessary for New Malaysia.

Lim Guan Eng

There was a bit of a mixed reaction towards the Finance Minister from our participants. Some felt that he was too aggressive and undemocratic like Mahathir.

***“Lim Guan Eng is someone you cannot trust easily. He talks without thinking.”
- FGD7 M2***

“He’s very flash-and-bang, he gets angry very fast. And he’s got a very quick temper and he goes for it.” - FGD5 F3

Others instead found that those traits were necessary for a good leader. These traits were considered necessary during the time he was the Chief Minister of Penang which had just achieved independence as an opposition state during the BN regime. The positive view of Guan Eng was shared by many outside of Penang who admired his good leadership qualities.

“Menteri-menteri yang disukai oleh orang Terengganu ialah seperti Azmin Ali dan Lim Guan Eng.” - FGD3 M2

“Ministers that are respected by people from Terengganu are like Azmin Ali and Lim Guan Eng.” - FGD3 M2

Syed Saddiq bin Syed Abdul Rahman

The Minister of Youth and Sports was not well received by many of the participants except for those from his home state of Johor. Participants felt that he was very young and therefore inexperienced for the position of Minister and that there was an air of elitism about him.

“Syed Saddiq ni dia mungkin tak akan turun ke bendang. Aku rasa dia ni jenis tengok dari atas batas je.” - FGD4 M1

“I think Syed Saddiq, he won’t come to the ground and get his hands dirty, he would just observe things from afar.” - FGD4 M1

Dr. Maszlee bin Malik

The Education Minister was widely regarded as indecisive, inexperienced, and lacked conviction. Participants made note of the actions he had undertaken as the Education Minister, most notably the use of black shoes and UEC acceptance. In both these issues, the FGDs felt that these were poor decisions that were not well thought out. The constant flip-flopping on the issue of UEC acceptance further eroded our participants' faith in his ability to stick through his own decisions.

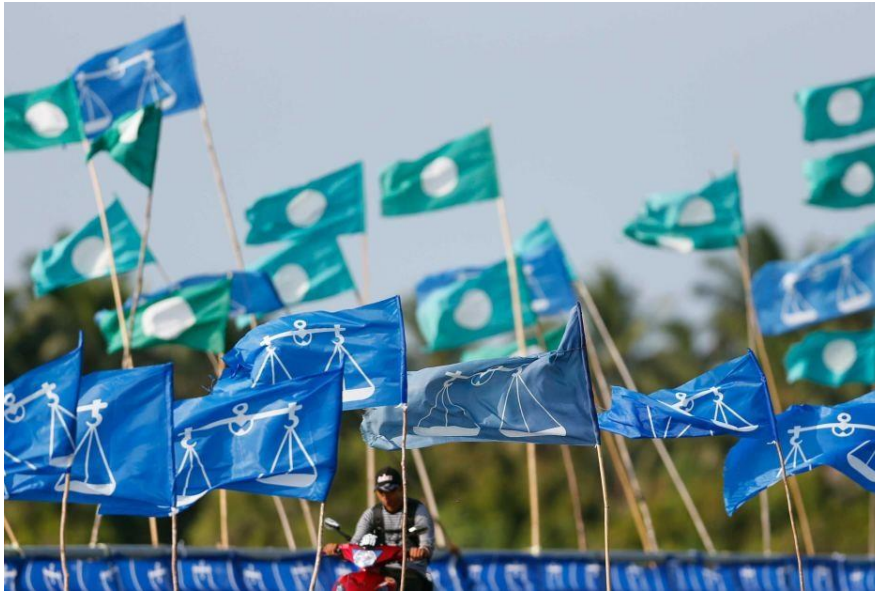
“Dari segi pendidikan, misalnya isu UEC, ia masih bersifat tolak-tarik/was-was kerana di masa hadapan ia akan mengelirukan pelajar. Saya risau, tahun ini setuju UEC, tahun hadapan sebaliknya. Jadi saya harap, kerajaan kaji dengan serius berkaitan UEC.” - FGD6 F1

“From an education perspective, the UEC is being dragged back and forth (treated unfairly). Essentially, it will be a problem in the future especially for students. My concern is, they will backtrack from their earlier decision in the near future. My hope is for the government to seriously look at the predicament with regards to the UEC.” - FGD6 F1

Mohd Rafizi bin Ramli

The last notable person that came up during the FGDs was Rafizi Ramli. While not mentioned by many, he was not viewed positively by those that did. He was described as a loose cannon and not a team player. They cited his lack of diplomatic tact at addressing issues publicly which only served to make the PH coalition appear weak and fragile.

The Opposition



SOURCE: BORNEOTODAY.NET

All our participants felt that the opposition (BN and PAS) was incredibly weak and struggling to be relevant. Despite celebrating PH as the new government, many had hoped that BN would rise to the challenge of being the opposition in order to keep the ruling coalition in check.

“Lepas pada BN kalah dalam pilihanraya dan PH menang, kita ada satu masalah di Malaysia di mana kita ada pembangkang yang lemah sebenarnya. PH dah menang, dan kita dah tukar kerajaan, pembangkang kita pulak lemah, that is not a good thing because bila kita ada pembangkang yang lemah apa yang kerajaan buat tu, so there is no balance.” - FGD1 F6

“Soon after BN lost power and PH emerged victorious, we have a problem, our opposition is weak. It is not a good thing to have a weak opposition because their role is to provide a check and balance for the government.” - FGD1 F6

Instead, the FGDs agreed that the opposition MPs were small-minded and did not engage in proper debate in Parliament. These MPs chose to just blame the PH government rather than attempting to offer better solutions instead.

“Di Parlimen contohnya kita tengok, hujahan MP BN berpangkat Tan Sri, Dato sangat lemah dan kebudak-budakan, tetapi mereka terlalu menyalahkan kerajaan PH, tidak menjadi pembangkang yang professional.” - FGD3 M2

“In the Parliament we witnessed how BN representatives with honorifics to their names, behave and argue immaturely, continuing their tirades against the PH government. They are completely useless as the opposition.”- FGD3 M2

Notable opposition political figures

Despite the poor opinion of the opposition amongst our FGD participants, there were some beacons of hope which many spoke positively off. These political figures were seen as acting as proper members of the opposition and were considered highly competent and capable of holding the current government accountable. Other members of the opposition, including former Prime Minister Najib, were almost completely absent from discussions about the opposition.

Khairy bin Jamaluddin



SOURCE: ANYGATOR.COM

Better known as KJ, the former Minister of Youth and Sports was the only political figure that was held in high regard amongst all our participants. Many stated that they felt that he was doing a commendable job as an MP and was highly professional in how he debated issues. Unlike other politicians, he has not employed religion as a reason for arguing and instead focused on logical, fact-driven debate.

“Macam Khairy Jamaluddin, saya suka dia sebab dia tak bangkitkan isu-isu agama, isu itu lah, isu ini lah, dia bangkitkan isu GST, SST, so I know, ohh GST ni tak lah teruk sangat.” - FGD2 F2

“I like Khairy Jamaluddin because he avoids petty and religious topics, and raises issues such as the GST and SST. Because of that, I understand that the GST is not as bad as others have claimed.” - FGD2 F2

In fact, many participants had hoped he had won the UMNO Presidential elections, with some stating that they would have joined UMNO if he did. These participants argued that he had strong leadership qualities which were attractive for younger voters. Out of all the public figures noted, Khairy was the only one that seemed to be discussed with almost no caveats or negative points.

“Macam misalnya, banyak kawan kawan kami dalam USM sendiri banyak cakap, kalau KJ menang Presiden UMNO, semua masuk UMNO. Sebab kami perlukan pemimpin muda, kami tak pandang pun parti. Kami pandang siapa pemimpin anak muda sekarang.” FGD4 M3

“Many of our friends from USM said, if KJ won the UMNO Presidential race, we would all join UMNO. Because we need young leaders, we don’t look at party. We look at who the young leaders are now.” - FGD4 M3

“Actually, when KJ contested for the president election UMNO, I can say that there was a little bit of hope, (but) then suddenly he lost, and actually all politic wang saja (it’s all just money politics).” - FGD1 F4

“Kalau KJ yang naik, dan kita tau solid stance dia macam mana untuk anak muda. Depa akan start voting untuk BN, sebab ada jalan untuk improvement.” FGD4 M2

“If KJ had won, we know what his stances on youths are. We’d support BN, because there would be room for improvement.” - FGD4 M2

Datuk Seri Ahmad bin Maslan

The last notable member of the opposition is the former Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry. A number of participants spoke fondly of him and noted that he had become considerably more effective as an opposition MP during his time in Parliament. According to the participants, there was an air of confidence about him that was reassuring, and he asked the right questions that needed to be asked of the PH government. Some of the terms used on Ahmad Maslan was that he was “more confident”, and as a new member of the opposition “aktif” (active).

“Tapi pada saya Ahmad Maslan bukan kosong tau. Sebenarnya pada saya dia bercakap atas kepentingan, so misalnya PH tak sedar budaya diaorang lebih sama. Maksudnya bukan budaya rakyat je yang kena berubah, first sekali budaya diaorang, macam mana diaorang nak kerja, dengan politik baru, dengan cara diaorang bercakap kat parlimen, bukan lagi yang macam dulu, bergaduh macam monyet, cakap semua ada yang ni kan, respect, dari situ kau patut dah tahu macam mana professional kau kerja.” - FGD2 M1

“I don’t think Ahmad Maslan is an empty can. I think he speaks the UMNO’s mind as to why PH is oblivious about the culture (gutter politics), because they are from the same flock. It means, do not force change on the people when they (politicians) can’t change their own behaviors, what are their work ethics? With the new political realm, with the way they speak in the parliament, it’s not like before, where they quarrel like monkeys...what respect? From these you know if they are professional or not.” - FGD2 M1

One participant went as far to say that Maslan was no longer “bingung” (based on an Internet meme that went viral many years ago which alluded to Ahmad Maslan being lost and confused) as he was now articulate and very logical.

“Ahmad Maslan tidak lagi “bingung”. Hujahan beliau tidak merapu-rapu lagi ketika mempersoalkan penghapusan GST oleh kerajaan PH.” - FGD3 M1

“Ahmad Maslan is no longer “confused (bingung)”. His arguments questioning the abolishment of GST make sense.” - FGD3 M1

CONCLUSION

From our FGDs, we find that youth in Malaysia are more fired up about politics than ever before. “The corrupt Najib regime needed to go in order to save the country,” they said. Recognizing that the BN government had left the country in a poor state, the youth were more forgiving and were willing to allow time for the new PH government to fulfill their promises. During the election period, the economy has always been seen as a primary factor for voters and the youth reflect that in our FGDs. Even as the youth are willing to forgive the PH government for not meeting the 10 promises in 100 days, they would certainly change their tune if the economy is not improved come GE 15.



PHOTO CREDIT: IMAN RESEARCH

The change in government has also resulted in a change in prospects for the country. Youths see the value in individual leaders and are more willing to support the best leaders regardless of party affiliations. Even with the overwhelming support and positivity for the new PH government, our participants were also highly critical of individual political figures. On the other side of the coin, they had little to no faith in the current opposition but showed support for a couple of opposition political figures who were behaving as proper statesmen. The youth all felt that the days of a dictator-like BN regime are over and in order for the country to advance forward, the political space needs to become more comprehensive with the government working together with a viable opposition in order to enact policies and actions that would benefit the rakyat.

Thus, politicians cannot merely rely on party ties to build up their support and need to actually establish positive public opinion through well-reasoned actions and logical thought. As one participant mentioned:

“We need young leaders, we don’t look at political parties. We look at who are the young leaders now.” - FGD4 M3

GLOSSARY

Council of Eminent Persons (CEP) – Majlis Penasihat Kerajaan

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) – Diskusi (Perbincangan) Kelompok

Goods and Services Tax – Cukai Barang dan Perkhidmatan

Government Linked Companies (GLC) – Syarikat Berkenaan Kerajaan

Governance, Integrity and Anti-Corruption Centre (GIACC) – Pusat Governans, Integriti dan Anti-Rasuah Nasional

Sales and Services Tax (SST) – Cukai Jualan dan Perkhidmatan

Special Cabinet Committee on Anti-Corruption - Jawatankuasa Khas Kabinet Mengenai Anti-Rasuah (JKKMAR)

Suruhanjaya Komunikasi dan Multimedia Malaysia (SKMM) – Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)

Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) – Sijil Peperiksaan Bersepadu