

Don't take voters for granted

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Many netizens had put high hopes for DAP's Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud to win the by-election in Teluk Intan on May 31. However, much to their surprise, the Gerakan won the by-election with a majority of merely 238 votes.

Undoubtedly, this was one of the toughest by-elections in our electoral history. The DAP had taken a big risk, fielding a young, inexperienced politician as a candidate.

Moreover, as a party whose majority are Chinese, the DAP fielded a Malay, while Barisan Nasional picked a local, Datuk Mah Siew Keong, as the candidate. Psychologically, elder voters who have been staying in Teluk Intan all this while would have felt more comfortable with Mah, as he had strong family and friends connection in his hometown. Tactically, the BN made the right move.

However, the difference of 238 votes, which is less than the spoilt votes of more than 700 votes, sends another signal. After all, it was not an easy fight for the Gerakan. DAP's courage in taking the risk by fielding Dyana in its attempt to break the racial barrier deserves to be praised. The close by-election results underline the unpredictable and dynamic political landscape in the country.

I view this by-election result positively.

The voters in Teluk Intan have voted Mah, a more experienced politician compared to Dyana to serve their constituency. Dyana, on the other hand, did not appear convincing enough in defending her manifesto. It also sends the signal that it is no longer easy to be an "instant superstar" like what happened during the 2008 political tsunami. Whoever wishes to win an election, the candidate must ensure that he or she has the necessary credibility that the voters demand.

While the trend of new politics is a good sign for the future of the country, this by-election proves that the voters have chosen quality of the candidate over the political party.

Gerakan, also a Chinese-based political party, is a party that is not being taken seriously by many voters due to their many failures in the past. The DAP, however, received a much stronger support in Teluk Intan.

It is an indication that voters now cannot be taken for granted. Their level of political awareness is increasing and they are aware that they will decide who serves their constituency.

Moreover, the voters too considered practicality. With merely 238 votes distance between the two candidates, this shows a healthy competition.

In future, any candidate in a by-election or general election will need to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills. The small votes difference and low turnout in Teluk Intan – as many young voters did not return to vote – showed that voters were ready to give an opportunity to the young politician.

The lesson is that young politicians now could not take the 2008 political tsunami as a precedent, because at that time, most voters went mainly for the party, and not the candidate. It was in that elections that Malaysia produced many "instant" politicians, some who successfully stayed on until today, while others have not been able to win the people's hearts due to their lack of experience in handling "fame".

Sadly, the by-election in Teluk Intan also shows that communal politics is still very much in place in the country. This is a very tough challenge for the opposition coalition to make a breakthrough. Looking at the broader picture ahead of GE14, both the ruling and opposition coalitions will have to come up with new strategies and tactics to attract voters.

In a nutshell, no political party or individual is able to predict the outcome of elections, and most importantly, they should not take voters for granted.

Congratulations to Mah, and to Dyana and other young politicians. Do not give up as Malaysia needs both the veteran and young politicians to provide the best service to the country. – June 2, 2014.

** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of The Malaysian Insider.*
