

INTRODUCE PUBLIC FUNDING OF POLITICAL PARTIES, ENHANCE TRANSPARENCY and LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

The Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (BERSIH 2.0) calls on the prime minister, political parties and the Election Commission (EC) to implement a public funding policy for political parties in Malaysia to increase the transparency of political party funding and level playing ground between ruling parties and opposition parties.

All political parties need to be involved in this effort so that partisan politics in Malaysia is more stable, institutionalised and professional.

This call is made based on a research report launched by BERSIH 2.0 today entitled "Public Funding for Political Parties: Debates, Case Studies and Recommendations". The study was conducted by Ooi Kok Hin under the auspices of BERSIH 2.0.

Malaysia is the opposite of the mainstream of the world where more than two-third of the world's countries have laws that provide for public funding for political parties.

Based on the research, BERSIH 2.0 proposed an annual public funding policy of RM133 million for political parties at the parliamentary level, and the Election Commission is responsible to channel these funds to political parties in accordance with the three recommendations below:

1. Vote-based direct public funding to political parties for regular party and campaign expenses. The amount of public funding will be given proportionately to the number of votes the party received in the most recent election. The threshold for the political party's eligibility to receive this fund is 2% in any of the regions of Peninsular, Sabah or Sarawak. The threshold based on these three regions aims to ensure that regional parties in Sabah and Sarawak are not discriminated and also to respect the spirit of 1963 Malaysia Agreement.

2. Seat-based direct public funding to promote women's representation in Malaysian politics. We propose an allocation of RM10 million to be set aside for this proposal. The main purpose is to promote women's representation in the Parliament. To be eligible, parties only need to elect at least one woman as an MP. This allocation will be distributed proportionately based on the number of women MPs in the party. In addition, the usage of the amount is earmarked for the parties' programmes and staffing in promoting women's participation in politics.

The more women MPs there are, the more the party would receive the public funding annually. Small parties can also benefit by nominating female candidates in competitive seats. For example, if a small party has only a single Member of Parliament, they will probably receive only a small amount of public funding under the first recommendation. But if their sole Member of Parliament is a woman, the party stands to gain additional public funding. This provides an incentive to political parties to not only nominate more women candidates, but also treat them as serious candidates by putting them in winnable seats.

We call on female elected representatives and women's wings in all political parties, as well as women advocacy groups, to support this proposal for seat-based direct public funding to promote women representation in politics. The imperative for this recommendation is the low number and discouraging state of women representation in Malaysian politics. According to the ranking by Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), as of January 2021, Malaysia ranked 142 out of 190 countries on women's representation in national parliament. While a record number of women candidates were nominated in GE14, only a minute 14.4% ended up as Members of Parliament.

3. The third proposal is indirect public funding through the subsidies such as broadcast, printing, postal and free use of government and public buildings at certain times. This proposal will cost less than the previous two proposals and can provide valuable assistance and resources to political parties.

The proposals put forward in this study paper mostly focus only on public funding at the federal level but we also recommend that the proposed mechanism also be adopted at the state level. Progressive states such as Sarawak, Selangor and Penang can pave the way for the implementation of public funding at the state level.

Institutional and political reform can improve the quality of political competition between political parties in Malaysia to drive our country to have a healthier and meaningful democracy. Healthy political competition can lead to politics based on who has better ideas as well welfare and people-centered policies.

Released by,

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