

Urban, young Malay Johoreans warm to Pakatan

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ANALYSIS On the night of May 5, the whole nation witnessed how Pakatan Rakyat achieved a major breakthrough in Johor, the traditional vote bank of BN, capturing five out of 26 parliamentary and 18 out of 56 state seats, a stunning, unprecedented victory.

batu pahat dap ceramah 050413 03 crowdThe opposition coalition was only one seat away from breaking the two-thirds majority of BN at the state level.

The fact that it also captured Batu Pahat, the birthplace of Umno, must have been most painful for the BN coalition leader.

Undoubtedly this outcome was largely due to the substantial swing among Chinese voters to Pakatan, raising DAP's parliamentary and state seats from one and four to four and 13 respectively.

A closer look at the results also reveals a slight increase in Malay support for Pakatan in certain areas of Johor.

A preliminary study of the results confirmed the support level of Chinese voters to be as high as 80 to 85 percent in hot seats, including Gelang Patah and Kluang.

Two additional state seats won by PAS - Puteri Wangsa and Parit Yaani - were likely due to a hike in Chinese support as well.

Malay rural-urban divide clear

While the swing in Chinese voters was statewide, the voting trend among Malay voters demonstrated a clear rural-urban divide.

BN's majority in the Malay majority seats in the less developed east coast of Johor, namely Mersing, Tenggara and Kota Tinggi, saw an increase, if compared with the west coast and southern Johor.

However, in southern Johor, the most urbanised part of the state, Pakatan could have garnered as high as 40 percent of the votes in certain Malay majority polling districts.

For instance, in the parliamentary constituency of Tebrau where PKR deputy national secretary-general Steven Chong managed to reduce BN's majority from 14,658 to 1,767, about 40 percent of the votes in the Bukit Mutiara polling district, an urban residential area consisting of 75 percent Malay voters, was won by PKR.

However, in the same constituency, the rural polling district of Felda Ulu Tebrau saw PKR securing only five percent of the votes.

According to DAP strategist Liew Chin Tong, who captured the traditional BN stronghold of Kluang with 7,359 majority, it would have been impossible for the DAP to record a comfortable majority in several parliamentary constituencies without substantial Malay support.

Liew cited Kluang and Gelang Patah, which have 49 and 52 percent Chinese voters respectively. DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang wrested Gelang Patah with a whopping majority of 14,762 votes.

DAP Youth national secretary Tan Hong Pin, who defended the Mengkibol state seat under Kluang with an increased majority of 10,001 votes, claimed some Malay youths applied to join the party immediately after polling day.

"We were thanking the voters in Kluang town on Monday and a few Malay youths approached us asking to join the party. It showed the Malay youths have started to accept DAP," Yan said when contacted yesterday.

In the less-urbanised north Johor, there was also a general swing of Malay voters towards Pakatan Rakyat, albeit small.

In the parliamentary constituency of Segamat, on average, the Malay swing, largely fuelled by youths, was around five percent as observed in polling stations such as Mensudot Lama, Gelang Chin Chin and Balai Badang.

Chinese support for Pakatan in urban centres of this constituency rose well above the 80 percent mark.

Felda: Unusual spike in voters

However, in Indian areas, Pakatan's support remained largely static, regressing in certain locations, with the most severe being the Indian-majority Sungai Senarut which saw an almost 16 percent swing back to the BN.

Furthermore, the factor that put the nail in the coffin for Pakatan in Segamat is the

unnatural growth of voters in Felda Palong Timor, 40km away from the town centre deep within an oil palm plantation.

This spike in the votes cast there rivalled or outpaced polling stations in town area such as Buloh Kasap and Bandar Jementah Timor with a turnout of almost 100 percent.

This was also observed by political science professor Bridget Welsh who pointed out that there was an sharp increase of some 3,600 new voters in the remote Felda scheme, and the turnout rate there was over 90 percent, with one stream at 99 percent.

All these factors have shattered the dream of Johor PKR chief Chua Jui Meng to wrest the mixed seat from BN incumbent S Subramaniam.

Indian votes regressed

In Labis, there are three concentration of Chinese voters, Labis town, Bekok and the MCA stronghold of Chaah, which all overwhelmingly swung in favour of Pakatan while Malay votes were largely static.

However, the critical swing needed by Pakatan from the Indian community the largest in Johor here, did not materialise, thus MCA's incumbent Chua Tee Yong survived with a wafer thin margin of 353 votes

DAP's Labis candidate S Ramakrishnan revealed that his Indian support was only at 45 to 55 percent due to money politics and sabotage attempts at last minute by his rival camp but Chua has denied this charge.

Machinery, groundwork do matter

The sluggish and inept machinery of PKR and PAS in southern Johor was another major weakness contributing to the poor performance.

In Pulai the parliamentary constituency where PAS vice-president Salahuddin Ayub was beaten back by BN incumbent Nur Jazlan Mohamed despite slashing the latter's majority from 20,449 to 3,226, it was learnt that the PAS campaign team there was forced to 'borrow' polling and counting agents from the DAP.

"We wanted to help but they always failed to provide Salahuddin's campaign schedule to us," said a DAP campaigner in the constituency.

PKR faced the same problem in the Johor Bahru parliamentary constituency where some polling and counting agents were only pulled in at last minute, and its Wanita and youth wing were not functioning well enough to help penetrate Malay villages controlled by Umno through the Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK).

lieu chin tong hou kok chung ge13 kluang battle 210413 pakatan billboard
On the other hand, DAP built the best machinery in Johor with one major achievement being the 'people's campaign' - first arousing the enthusiasm of the local folk and then aggressively recruiting them as volunteers.

In Kluang and Tanjong Piai, DAP managed to train and register more polling and counting agents than the BN.

The surprise victory of PKR in Batu Pahat constituency despite 'parachuting' Idris Jusi, who was born locally but a Kuala Lumpur resident for years, was due to the solid groundwork done by Batu Pahat PKR division chief Syed Hamid Ali coupled with the tremendous Chinese support.

Although Syed Hamid did not campaign for Idris, he and his team had built up PKR's image and credibility among Batu Pahat folk through years of hard work.

In Muar and Bakri, the strong groundwork of PAS paid off as Pakatan boosted its majority in the state seat of Maharani from a razor thin 158 votes to a whopping 3,136 and in the other state seat of Sungai Abong, its majority vaulted from 1,550 to 3,813.

This also indicated that urban Malay support for PAS already as high as 40 percent here in the last general election continued to climb on top of the strong Chinese support for Pakatan.

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