



Assessment and Early Analysis of the 2026 Johor State Election Results

Ben Suffian



RSIS Commentary is a platform to provide timely and, where appropriate, policy-relevant commentary and analysis of topical and contemporary issues. The authors' views are their own and do not represent the official position of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), NTU. These commentaries may be reproduced with prior permission from RSIS and with due credit to the author(s) and RSIS. Please email to Editor RSIS Commentary at RSISPublications@ntu.edu.sg.

Assessment and Early Analysis of the 2026 Johor State Election Results

By Ben Suffian

SYNOPSIS

The results of the 2026 Johor state election marked a significant shift in voter mobilisation, reflecting Barisan Nasional's growing strength and the softening support for Pakatan Harapan, which could destabilise their working relationship within the federal unity government.

COMMENTARY

The July 11, 2026, Johor state election saw a dramatic surge in overall participation compared with the pandemic-era March 2022 polls. Total voter turnout jumped to 69.57 per cent, a substantial 14.65 per cent increase from the historic low of 54.92 per cent recorded in the strict SOP-driven landscape of 2022.

The Asymmetrical Turnout Divide

While overall turnout rose across the state, micro-level data reveal a stark divergence that heavily penalised the state opposition, Pakatan Harapan:

- Incumbent Strongholds: Turnout in Barisan Nasional (BN) – held seats averaged 65.7 to 68 per cent, fuelled by highly structured grassroots mobilisation and core loyalist enthusiasm.
- Opposition Strongholds: Turnout in Pakatan Harapan (PH) seats – particularly traditional Democratic Action Party (DAP) urban bastions – lagged behind, averaging closer to 60 per cent. Many out-of-station voters simply abstained.

Barisan Nasional's Success Factors

BN's commanding victory in the Johor state election, in which it secured a 48-seat supermajority, was the product of a well-executed local strategy meeting with a deeply fragmented opposition. The landslide was driven by four principal factors:

The "Onn Hafiz Effect" and Economic Stewardship

The single most potent factor was the immense personal popularity and performance track record of caretaker Chief Minister Onn Hafiz Ghazi. Since 2022, his administration has successfully capitalised on Johor's exceptional economic momentum, leading the nation with a massive 8 per cent GDP growth rate in 2025 and pulling in a record RM 110 billion (US\$27 billion) in approved investments. Our own survey, conducted a month before election day, found that the chief minister had an 80 per cent approval rating among voters.

Realignment of the Malay Electorate

Another important factor was BN's successful consolidation of the crucial Malay swing vote, which had fractured in previous electoral cycles. Perikatan Nasional's (PN) internal structural instability – notably the friction between Bersatu and PAS – severely degraded its campaign effectiveness. Recognising its ground weakness, PN made the highly significant tactical decision to sit out 23 seats, creating a vacuum for BN. Instead of remaining unaligned, right-wing, anti-PH Malay voters transferred their support to BN candidates.

The Collapse of the PH Non-Malay Base

Crucially, BN capitalised on profound disillusionment within PH's traditional non-Malay voting bloc. Frustrated by the slow pace of structural reforms and economic anxieties under the federal unity government, many Chinese and Indian voters opted out of the process.

This led to an asymmetrical voter turnout: while BN maximised its traditional strongholds, turnout in urban, PH-dominant strongholds lagged significantly. In competitive multi-ethnic marginals, even a modest 10 to 20 per cent shift in Chinese support towards BN – coupled with low turnout among outstation voters – enabled BN's minority component parties, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), to flip long-standing opposition strongholds like Johor Jaya and Perling.

We note in particular that the Indian community shifted support to BN, signalling an end to their nearly two-decade-long support for PH. Slightly over 60 per cent of Indian voters cast their votes in favour of BN candidates. Chinese voters largely remained supportive of PH at 75 per cent, although this was significantly lower than about 85 per cent in the 2022 general election.

The Fragmented Opposition

Finally, the introduction of multi-cornered fights completely diluted the opposition vote. The entry of BERSAMA party – a new party formed by former Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) deputy president Rafizi Ramli – acted as a direct spoiler for PH, siphoning away progressive, urban protest votes that traditionally went to the DAP or to PM Anwar Ibrahim's PKR.

This fragmentation meant that although PH maintained a 32.64 per cent share of the popular vote, its support was highly concentrated and inefficiently distributed, allowing BN candidates to cruise to victory with comfortable pluralities across the state. BERSAMA contributed to BN victories in 4 constituencies by fragmenting the opposition-leaning base.

Democratic Action Party's Seat Paradox and Vote Share

The stark reality of the DAP losing four seats despite a rise in overall vote share highlights a profound structural challenge under a First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) electoral system. This outcome is a classic illustration of extreme vote concentration. DAP's increased popular support was heavily concentrated in its existing, urban super-majority strongholds.

This concentration left DAP highly vulnerable in diverse, multi-ethnic marginal seats. In areas where the non-Malay demographic was not an absolute majority, even a minor 5 to 10 per cent shift in Chinese support back to the Barisan fold – coupled with low turnout among outstation voters – proved catastrophic. Long-standing opposition strongholds such as Johor Jaya, Tangkak, and Perling flipped directly to BN. Ultimately, these results show that DAP has hit a structural ceiling in its traditional strongholds.

Significance of Perikatan Nasional's Non-Contest Strategy

Perikatan Nasional's decision to leave 23 seats uncontested was a pivotal strategic choice that fundamentally altered the mechanics of the election. Rather than diluting the right-wing electorate, PN's strategic retreat eliminated destructive vote-splitting among Malays that characterised the 2022 polls.

This massive consolidation of Malay votes proved a direct lifeline for BN's minority component parties, the MCA and MIC. Historically vulnerable in mixed seats due to declining non-Malay support, MCA and MIC candidates were carried over the finish line by this imported block of Malay votes. MCA successfully claimed 8 seats, and MIC secured 4, winning in competitive areas such as Jementah, Tangkak, and Bekok.

The move proved that, when forced to choose in the absence of a PN candidate, the Malay electorate prioritised blocking Pakatan Harapan over punishing UMNO.

Impact on Federal Stability and Early Elections

The definitive landslide in Johor shifts the tectonic plates of Malaysian politics, introducing intense pressure on the federal unity government. A 48-seat supermajority dramatically strengthens UMNO's internal leverage within the federal ruling coalition emboldened by proof that the UMNO brand has successfully rehabilitated its standing among its core Malay demographic.

This structural shift severely complicates federal stability. Anwar's Pakatan Harapan must now navigate an increasingly assertive UMNO while trying to stop the visible erosion of its traditional non-Malay and reformist voter bases. The results highlight an efficiency crisis for PH, revealing that its support is becoming dangerously concentrated in urban areas.

Anwar may face immense pressure to call an early election before the opposition can regroup and fix its vote-efficiency flaws. In this area, Anwar must decide whether to cave in to UMNO or soldier on with support from Borneo parties that have pledged to continue supporting his administration until the end of the term, should Barisan Nasional pressure the prime minister for an earlier election to be held.

Ben Suffian is the Programmes Director at The Merdeka Centre, an opinion research firm which he co-founded. Ben is a prominent analyst and commentator on Malaysian politics, widely respected for his work at the centre.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798

Please share this publication with your friends. They can subscribe to RSIS publications by scanning the QR Code below.

