

## Who won Hulu Selangor?



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Apr 27, 10  
2:06pm

TEXT SIZE

Despite the BN victory, the geography and ethnic breakdown of the victory does not suggest that Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and BN are out of the woods. Quite the opposite is the case; the close Hulu Selangor by-election win of 2.7% shows that the BN is far indeed from regaining national and state power.

The main finding from the by-election results is that the electorate remains deeply polarised. The results show that there is no major national swing across races or generations.

Let me take you through my analysis of the results. Let's begin with a bit of basics about this constituency. It is huge – with isolated communities, many with little connection to each other. The Chinese communities are comprised of 13 new villages and Chinese in the main town of Kuala Kubu Bahru. The Indian communities are concentrated in estates, with considerable number living throughout the constituency especially in the south.



Malays are concentrated in key rural communities, the Felda area of Ulu Bernam in the north to the eastern areas such as Sungai Buaya in Batang Kali in the south. The more east and south, the greater the level of development, as it is closer to Kuala Lumpur. The key exception is the lovely town of Kuala Kubu Bahru, which is comprised of small businesses and a large number of civil servants.

So what do the results of the 48 different polling stations tell us?

1. Every vote did count. Gains and losses were well distributed over the entire constituency. There are only a few areas where significant swings occurred. Most of the gains for the BN were in Batang Kali. The gains for the opposition were primarily in Kuala Kubu Bahu.



2. Ethnic voting is not consistent overall. No coalition won over one group consistently. Local dynamics did shape the contests. For example, Indian voters in Kerling stayed in Pakatan's camp, while in other areas such as Ladang Nigel Gardner they moved. This was the product of ongoing concerns about land in Kerling, and the local efforts of the MIC in Nigel Gardner which included financial incentives of around RM300, for example. This was a contest about individual localities and the results confirmed this pattern.

3. Chinese votes show the most consistency. They swung on average over 5% to Pakatan Rakyat. This was most obvious in Rasa, where the BN's promise of RM3 million backfired. A similar trend occurred in Kalompang. More

Chinese voted, in part due to the high level of political campaigning in these areas from both sides and strong sentiment on the ground.

The BN remains unable to win over Chinese support, particularly through financial incentives. The MCA did not effectively deliver the Chinese votes, in part due to DAP's strength on the ground.

### **'Lots of promises'**

4. Indian voters remained the most likely possible swing voters, as they moved in different directions in different localities. There is an overall slight return to the BN, but very small. Part of this had to do with the race of the candidate (one of their own). Part was tied to the heavy rewards for voting in some areas. Part was tied to which party has the strongest local machinery. No question, the campaign lacked the same level of passion of 2008 among Indian opposition supporters overall.

5. Malay votes did swing but only in certain areas. There was very little overall movement in the Felda area of Ulu Bernam. Movement toward the BN occurred largely in Batang Kali in the areas of Sungai Buaya and Bukit Beruntung. These were areas where the Umno machinery was well-oiled and the BN engaged the issues of land.



Lots of promises were made to resolve outstanding concerns. The overall pattern does not suggest a convincing swing toward Umno or the BN. Gains were small, usually less than 5%. Low voter turnout was focused in Malay areas, which reinforce the pattern of limited reengagement of the BN with the Malay ground.

6. The localised Malay swing was decisive. The swing in the Malay voters in these two localities were arguably the most important factor in the results in that they comprised an estimated quarter of the voters in the BN majority. The movement in the Chinese areas was the second most important factor.

7. Younger voters voted primarily opposition, including new voters. This pattern was across ethnic groups, but most striking among Malays. This follows the traditional generational pattern in 1999 and 2008. There were very few new voters registered in this area, which suggests that new voters are not registering – another national pattern.

8. Voters did not come home in large numbers. The number of those stationed outside who returned to vote was lower than in 2008 and this contributed to lower voter turnout particularly in the Malay areas. It also contributed to the loss for Pakatan. The police handled the movement of voters and traffic professionally on voting day.

9. The Election Commission factor did not decisively affect results. The movement of voters to other schools made for some confusion and there are reports (estimated less than 100 of voters who could not vote at all), but this not prove decisive to the final results.

### **Ground remains competitive**

10. No consistent urban-rural divide. While there were gains for the opposition in the town area of Kuala Kubu Bahru, and the BN won most of its returned support in the rural areas, the diversity of the pattern of voting suggests that the semi-rural periphery remains highly contested and winnable for both sides.

So, what is the national upshot here? Let me begin with a caveat - it is important to remember that one cannot read too much from one constituency and contest. This constituency, however, offers diversity to allow for broader national indications, yet it was unique in its size and proximity to Kuala Lumpur that added even more intensity to the level of political engagement.

This said, the key finding is that the Malaysian electorate remains highly polarised within ethnic communities and across generations. While the passion of *reformasi* has ebbed, the core loyalists to both sides of the political terrain remain firm.

The middle ground was less inspired this time round, in part due to the nature of both the campaigns that did not draw voters to the polls clearly and convincingly. In short, the ground remains competitive for both sides.

As we look to the next national polls, ethnically, the BN has the slight advantage, but generationally the opposition is favoured. In the final analysis, BN's slim margin does speak to substantial changes in voting behavior.

*This is the first of three articles analysing the Sunday's Hulu Selangor [by-election](#). The second article will appear tomorrow.*

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