

INSAP: DELIVERY ON PROMISES DECIDED THE RESULT OF THE 16TH JOHOR STATE ELECTION AS THREE LONG-HELD VOTING ASSUMPTIONS FAIL

KUALA LUMPUR, 21 JULY 2026: The Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research (INSAP) has released their analysis that examines three long-held assumptions about how Malaysians vote, using the results of the 16th Johor State Election (PRN16), and finds that all three no longer hold true.

This analysis is based on the SPR score sheets for the 15 seats contested by BN-MCA, covering all 1,541 polling streams and 860,421 voters, close to one in three voters in Johor. This matters because votes in Malaysia are counted in streams (*saluran*) that are arranged by age, with the oldest voters in the first stream and the youngest in the last, so reading the results this way shows how each age group actually voted.

For a generation, analysts, newsrooms and political parties have read Malaysian elections through three assumptions: a) older voters support Barisan Nasional (BN) while younger voters support Pakatan Harapan (PH); b) outstation voters, when they return home to vote, back PH; and c) when BN wins in mixed seats, it is because Chinese voters stayed home. The score sheets allowed INSAP to test all three against the official record, and finds that all three assumptions failed.

“The results of this election show that all three assumptions have failed, and the finding that matters is that voters rewarded delivery,” said Datuk Dr. Pamela Yong, Chairman of INSAP. “They judged the BN state government on their response to rising cost of living, the economy and jobs, saw that it was answering those concerns, and rewarded it, while judging the federal government on its own record. This was substance over sentiment.”

Younger voters backed BN, not PH

The long-held rule was that younger voters lean to PH and older voters lean to BN. Results from these 15 seats in Johor showed otherwise. Within the same polling centre, where the neighbourhood and candidate are identical, the younger the voters, the more they backed BN, in every one of the 15

seats.

The youngest voters gave BN more support than the oldest at 219 of the 281 polling centres compared, by about 8.5 points on average. In 2022, the same streams leaned the other way.

Part of the reason is generational. The firmest PH support now sits with middle-aged voters shaped by the reform campaigns of 2008 and 2018, whose loyalties have not changed. The youngest voters carry no such attachment and judged the parties on their track record, rewarding the BN state government for delivering on the cost of living, jobs and economic growth.

The line flipped: BN share by stream age position, 2022 against 2026

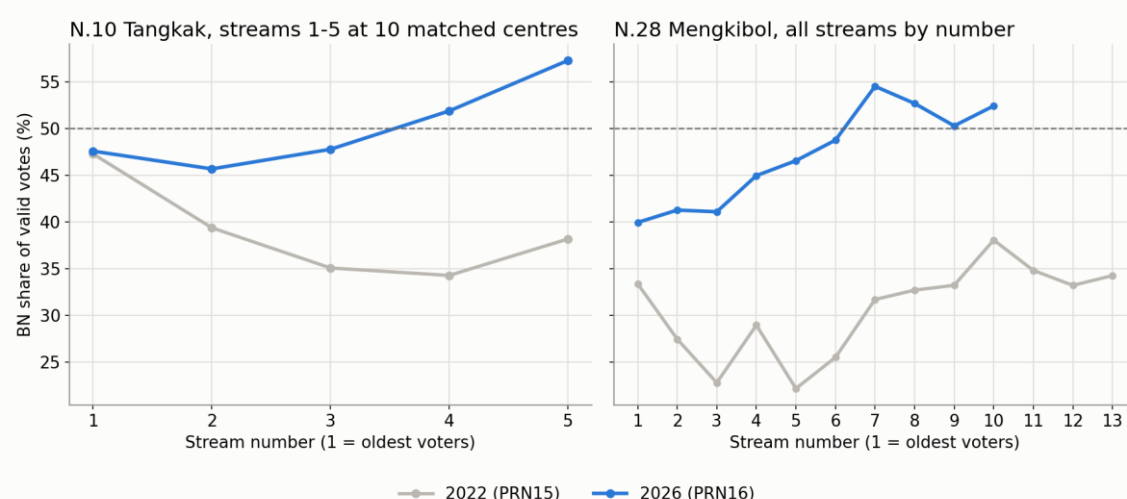


Figure 1. How BN's share changed from the oldest to the youngest voters, 2022 against 2026, in Tangkak and Mengkibol. Source: official SPR result sheets and the 2022 stream records.

Returning outstation voters are no longer guaranteed votes for PH

Turnout rose in all 15 seats, from 8.6 points in Paloh to 19.7 in Puteri Wangsa, and the biggest rises came in and around Johor Bahru, where many young Johoreans live and work.

These returning and first-time voters are mostly younger, and they are exactly the voters who moved most towards BN. In Mengkibol, for example, the youngest voters gave BN-MCA 51.6 per cent of their votes, even though BN won 45.1 per cent in the seat as a whole.

The postal vote, the most mobile group of all, tells the same story. In 2022, PH-DAP won the postal count in these seats. In 2026 it swung sharply to BN-MCA, which took roughly three in four postal votes, up from about a third in 2022, and BN's postal share rose in every seat.

Turnout rose in every seat, and rose most in the most Chinese districts

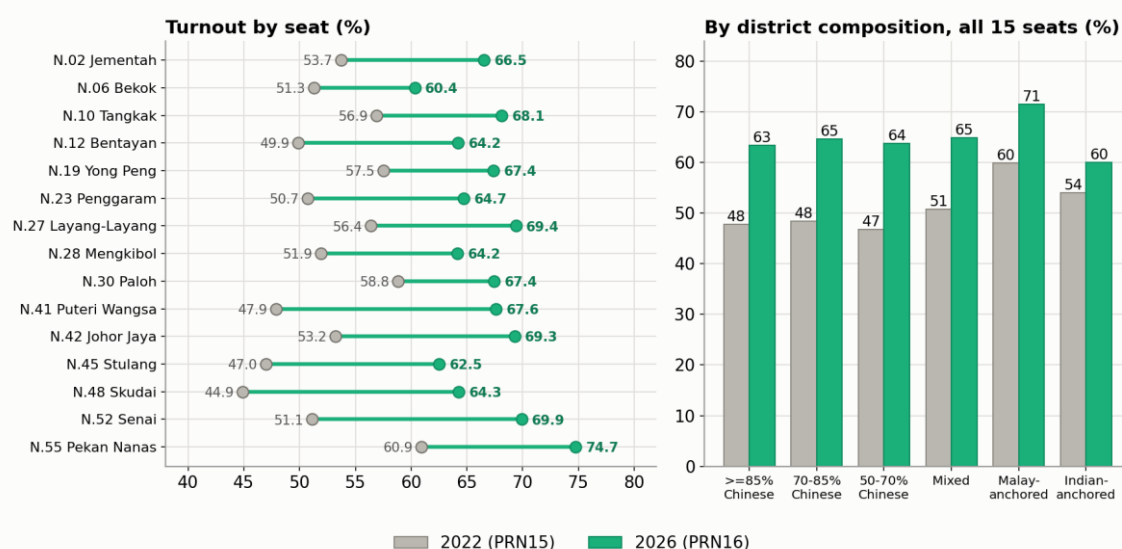


Figure 2. Turnout in 2022 against 2026, by seat and by the make-up of each area. Source: official SPR result sheets; electiondata.my (2022).

Chinese voters did not stay home

The electoral roll does not record race, so INSAP grouped polling areas by their demographic composition. Turnout in the most Chinese areas rose the most compared to any other communities, by 15.6 to 17.0 points, well above the 11.7-point rise in Malay-majority areas. The long-standing voter turnout gap between Chinese and Malay turnout narrowed from about 12 points to 8. The Chinese community, whom some said to have stayed home, in fact turned out more than any other at this election.

What changed the result was arithmetic. The number of voters grew by about a third, and that growth, in mixed neighbourhoods and among younger voters, leaned towards BN. While DAP defended their strongholds, the wider electorate grew around them and moved towards BN.

The most Chinese neighbourhoods stayed with PH-DAP, and moved at the edges

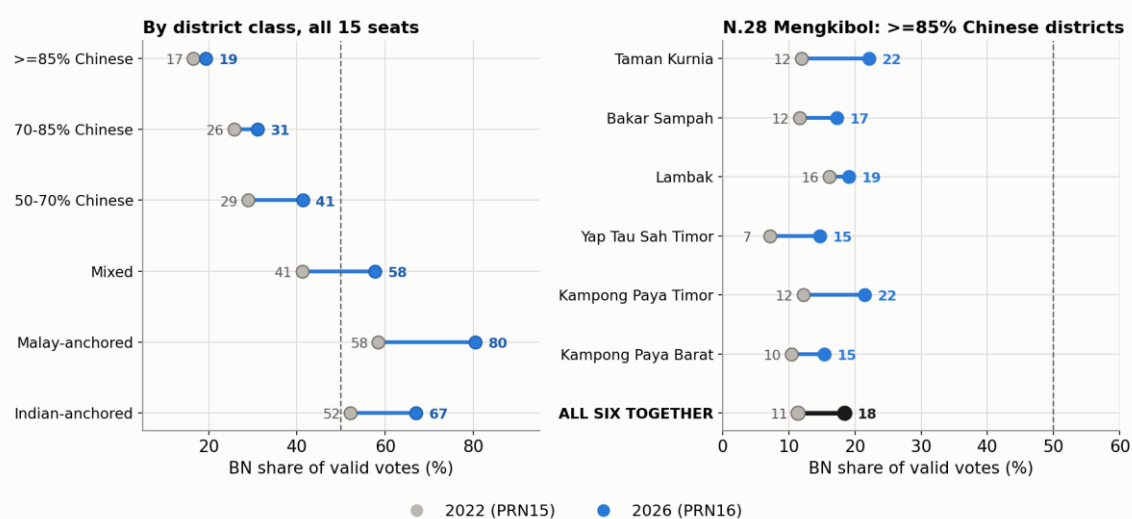


Figure 3. BN's share of the vote by the make-up of each area, and in the most Chinese parts of Mengkibol, 2022 against 2026. Source: official SPR result sheets and the 2022 stream records.

Why it happened: Voters judged the state and federal governments separately

Behind all three findings is one clear pattern. Johor voters judged the BN state government and the PH-led federal government separately, and marked each on its own record.

In INSAP's April 2026 survey, voters' top concerns were the cost of living (66 per cent), the economy and jobs (56 per cent) and political stability (50 per cent). On these, most approved of the state government, 55 per cent on the cost of living, 54 per cent on the economy and 62 per cent on basic infrastructure, while approval of the federal government was lower, at 45 per cent. This was the same electorate that had given PH big wins at the November 2022 general election, in seats such as Kluang and Ledang.

The same trend also extended to individual assemblymen. In the four seats MCA was defending, where voters had a full term of MCA service to judge, BN won an estimated one in three Chinese votes, about three times its share elsewhere. INSAP's April 2026 survey had signalled this: 69 per cent of Chinese respondents in those seats rated their assemblyman favourably, against 40 per cent in seats then held by DAP. Voters rewarded the service they had actually received.

This pattern is not unique to Malaysia. In many democracies that voted in 2024 and 2025, governments were punished over rising cost of living, and the long-assumed lean of younger voters towards progressive parties weakened.

What this means for future elections, starting with Negeri Sembilan

INSAP believes analysts should read future elections in a new way, using better signals: a) how each age group votes, stream by stream, which shifted a full election cycle before the seat results did; b) the postal vote, the earliest sign on results night, which swung sharply this time; c) turnout read against the make-up of each area, rather than assumed by race; and d) the government's delivery and track record, which drives the other three.

"The clearest lesson for every political party is that no community's vote is a fixed deposit any more," said Datuk Dr. Pamela Yong. "Support has to be earned voter by voter and cycle by cycle, and that discipline binds BN and MCA as much as it binds PH and DAP."

She said the same test now applies to Negeri Sembilan, which votes on 1 August, where it is a PH-led state government defending its own track record. "Each state is fought on its own merits, and nothing in the Johor result carries over automatically," she said.

INSAP's central finding is that voters now reward delivery and track record over emotion and sentiment, in every community and in every state.

ABOUT INSAP

The Institute of Strategic Analysis and Policy Research (INSAP), established in 1986, is one of the pioneer think tanks in Malaysia, focusing on political economic research. A not for profit organisation, INSAP develops long term strategies and policies which are relevant to the interests and aspirations of Malaysians. Since its early days leading to its corporatisation in 1995, INSAP has produced strategic reports and recommendations for the Malaysian government. INSAP is an independent think-tank and research outfit that conducts research and analysis on politics, economics, education, women's rights and development, social and other issues in Malaysia. INSAP aims to provide fresh perspectives and bold recommendations to policy formulators, decision-makers and political leaders in Malaysia.

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