



N27 Rantau By-Election Brief

Background:

This by-election was held on 13 April. The result would determine the seat of Rantau for the Negeri Sembilan State Legislative Assembly. This seat became vacant when the uncontested victory of Mohamad Hasan (UMNO) during GE14 was declared null and void.

Mohamad Hasan is a former 3-term Menteri Besar of Negeri Sembilan. During GE14, PKR's candidate Dr Streram Sinnansamy was not allowed to enter the nomination centre as he was accused of leaving his tag behind. The Election court however reversed this ruling in 16 November 2019 and declared that Mohamad Hasan's victory was unrecognized. Fresh elections were called after Mohamad Hasan's appeal was dismissed later in February of 2019.

In the lead-up to this by-election, Malaysia post-GE14 had seen numerous by-elections already. The biggest one being in parliament seat Cameron Highlands where BN also secured a big win. Rising trends from the previous elections indicate that the ground is upset with the new government's in-ability to fix issues of cost of living. Wages have not increased and SST has failed to, as promised, reduce prices.

Key in this Rantau by-election is the youth vote, a block that had overwhelmingly voted for PH. Youth unemployment has not reduced and many hint frustration at PH's internal fighting.



The Election Court on August 29, 2018 has dismissed an application by Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan to strike out an election petition filed by PKR member Dr S. Streram to nullify the former's win as Rantau assemblyman in the 14th General Election (GE).

Photo credit: Iqmal Haqim Rosman

Surveys on the ground:

We surveyed over 590 voters in Rantau to further understand the sentiment on the ground. We wanted to identify the main issues that were discussed as well as project the likely winners of this by-election. This survey was also used to identify key political figures that were popular in the area. The survey on the ground lasted roughly 2 weeks.

Two thirds of those polled were aged 30 and above. 59% were Malay, 23.8% were Chinese and 16.6% were Indian voters. 52% polled were male while the rest were female.

From this survey, 65% noted that employment and unemployment were their primary concerns. In second place was cost of living at 60% whilst interestingly, religious issues was noted as one of the main concerns as well at 50%. Our surveys also pushed further to ask whether the prestige and work of ministers was high amongst their concerns, only around 10% of those polled noted that they were concerned about the work of ministers.

When asked about personalities, an overwhelming amount of the respondents noted positive responses to Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad (72%). Meanwhile, Anwar Ibrahim and Deputy Prime

Minister Wan Azizah was seen to have tied in second place with a 50% positive response rate. Amongst PH, the personality with the lowest score was Kulasegaran at 8% and Khalid Samad at 6%.

Amongst the BN personalities, Mohamad Hasan, the candidate, received the highest positive responses at 79%. The next was Khairy Jamaluddin at 54% whilst Hishamuddin Hussein received a better response rate than Najib Razak at 26%.

Key takeaways here are that cost of living and employment are the main topics that voters want solutions from.



BN personalities, Mohamad Hasan received the highest positive responses at 79%

Post-Election Surveys:

The by-election saw a voter turnout of around 79.3%. Some 40% of the 20,926 voters in Rantau were aged between 21 and 40 years old. Pakatan Harapan hopes were raised when Indian voters turned up at a high percentage.

In the end, Mohamad Hasan received 10,397 votes to beat Dr Streram at 5,887 votes with a 4510 majority. Despite having Anwar Ibrahim campaign for PKR, it does seem that economic and employment issues plagued the PH candidate.

Of the 20,926 voters, Malays made up 56%, Indians made up 26% and Chinese made up 18%. Initial indicators and exit-polls suggest that the BN candidate secured around 30% of Chinese votes, 40% of Indian votes and over 85% of Malay votes. For Chinese voters, according to our exit polls, many noted their trust for Mohamad Hasan, claiming he had served them well at times of difficulties in the past.

Many of the Indian voters note that they can relate to Tok Mat because he also worked hard and came from a poor family.

On the federal level, Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng's last ditch attempt to pull Rantau voters by announcing that the ECRL would have stations in Negeri Sembilan also failed to impress voters. Whilst Rantau voters only wanted to hear solutions about cost of living and unemployment, it does seem that PH was overthinking a lot of their approach to pull these voters.

Of the 500 that were polled before the election, many hinted at their frustration that the introduction of SST has not reduced the price of goods. Business owners even noted a drop in sales after the introduction of SST. These sentiments were left unanswered by the ruling government.

A lot of the farmers in our over 500 voters studied noted that business was down by a lot since the general election. Income from palm oil has apparently, according to one we polled, dropped by 25% in the last seven months. Just as with Cameron Highlands, economic issues are top of the priority for these voters. And PH is doing little to answer their concerns.



BN candidate Datuk Seri Mohamad Hasan, Dr S. Streram (PH), with two independents candidates Mohd Nor Yassin and Malar Rajaram during nomination day for Rantau By-election, 30 Mac 2019. — Picture by Yusof Mat Isa

Highlights:

Economic issues are plaguing PH's campaigns. For as long as cost of living is getting worse and unemployment is not decreasing, PH will find it very difficult to sell their reformist ideals. People do care about change and structural improvements to their federal institutions. But people will care less if they have less and less to spend for food on the table.

Whether Chinese or Indian or Malay, the sentiment on the ground was overwhelmingly that cost of living and employment was the priority concerns. Over 65% of the 500 voters polled noted these issues as their top two dissatisfactions.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir is, by a long way, leading the popularity polls amongst PH leaders. Dr Wan Azizah and Anwar Ibrahim are a distant second at 50% popularity.

For BN leaders, it was interesting to see that Hishamuddin Hussein was a more popular figure than former Prime Minister Najib Razak.



Tun Dr Mahathir is still leading the popularity polls amongst PH leaders.



Hishamuddin Hussein received a better response rate than Najib Razak at 26%.