



Cent-GPS

Centre for Governance
and Political Studies



P132 Port Dickson
By-Election Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Talk of Datuk Seri Anwar's return had been prevalent in the weeks prior to Datuk Danyal's announcement. Numerous member of parliaments from PKR, eager to showcase their loyalty to the incoming party President, had openly offered their seats.

The Port Dickson by-election was eventually called after incumbent Datuk Danyal Balagopal Abdullah vacated the newly named parliamentary seat to make way for incoming PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar's return to parliament, and supposedly Prime Minister. Datuk Seri Anwar's place in Port Dickson found six other contenders, including former Menteri Besar Tan Sri Isa Samad and Anwar's former aide, Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan.

The Centre for Governance and Political Studies (Cent GPS) employed a ground team throughout this by-election to interview voters, collect ground data and shadow the campaigns of selected candidates. This election unfortunately cannot be compared with other by-elections of late due to its dynamic, UMNO's exclusion (protest), as well as national circumstances leading up to the vacancy. Unlike the past by-elections, this one was planned. The former Member of Parliament did not pass away. The emphasis therefore was less about replacing a representative of people and more about replacing an MP for Anwar's premiership.

It is in this regard that Cent-GPS restructured its analysis on the PD election not on the predictable Anwar-win, but rather on the sentiments and interviews with PD voters in regards to this vacancy, its implications on the national level.

In total, Cent-GPS interviewed 37 individuals throughout this by-election. Whilst the number of profiles is admittedly low, the frequency and period of our interviews with the 37 individuals happened throughout the campaign, at least once every two days. Constantly asking them of certain opinions on certain topics both Anwar related and not. Some were hawkers on the PD waterfront. Some were retired teachers, current teachers, parents, coffee shop goers, coffee shop cashiers, waiters, entrepreneurs, boat rental operators, school bus drivers and even hotel receptionists. Whilst few we filmed and published, the majority of our interviewees were intentionally left beyond the camera lens, to ensure the subject was free to express himself without retribution. Our team split in 3 groups of 4. Each group was designated their own area of Port Dickson, with a quota of interviewing at least four individuals amongst our selected 37. Each group travelled their areas with different daily strategies. One group constantly visited a barbershop (with the permission of the owner) to catch outlier opinions from locals who came to get a haircut.

Before diving into the main points that we concluded from this profile-based analysis on Port Dickson, it is worth noting that this study was not conducted on the hopes of finalising the result of the election. The result was clear from the start, an Anwar-win. We have decided not to configure the obvious. But more crucially, our focus was on how this PD election could foreshadow a potential national sentiment with regards to Anwar's eventual (and presumed) role as Prime Minister. **Ideally, if we want to understand how Malaysians react to Anwar as Prime Minister, the best place to start is in a constituency where Anwar is their representative.** This was our main objective.

Results of the Election:

	Harapan	PAS	BN	Bebas Isa Samad	Bebas Stevie Chan	Bebas Lau Sek Yan	Bebas Saiful Bukhari	Bebas Kan Chee Yuen	Bebas (Total)	Spoilt	Total Votes
GE14	36,225	6,594	18,515	0	0	0	0	0	0	948	62,282
By-Election	31,016	7,456	0	4,230	337	214	82	154	5,017	598	43,489
Difference	-5,209	862	-18,515	4,230	337	214	82	154	5,017	-350	-18,793

GE14 vs PD By-Election (Votes)

	Harapan	PAS	BN	Bebas Isa Samad	Bebas Stevie Chan	Bebas Lau Sek Yan	Bebas Saiful Bukhari	Bebas Kan Chee Yuen	Bebas (Total)	Spoilt
GE14	58.16%	10.59%	29.73%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.52%
By-Election	71.32%	17.14%	0.00%	9.73%	0.77%	0.49%	0.19%	0.35%	11.54%	1.38%
Difference	13.16%	6.56%	-29.73%	9.73%	0.77%	0.49%	0.19%	0.35%	11.54%	-0.15%

GE14 vs PD By-Election (%)

The Profiles We Interviewed

37 Total
Subjects

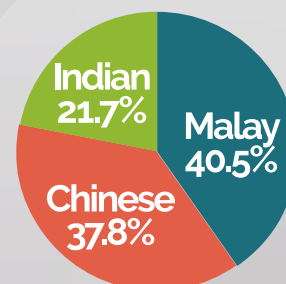
15 Female
22 Male

Aged
21➔

Age Group:
21-29: 27% (10)
30-39: 41% (15)
40-49: 18% (7)
50-59: 13% (5)
60-69: 0% (0)

Proportionate to
RACE & GENDER
breakdown in PD

*Questions provided in
BM & ENG



*conducted: 1 October 2018- 14 October 2018

What We Found

1) Umno Is Nowhere To Be Seen

The biggest indicator we received from our profiles was in what none of them mentioned, UMNO. Throughout our stay in PD and throughout our daily interviews with our subjects, not a single respondent, on any single day, were reminded of UMNO's choice to boycott the by-Elections. When finally asked about UMNO's boycott, some of our respondents had little to say about the former party of government. Clearly, the biggest losers from this by-election is the party that failed to scratch a headline throughout. Whilst UMNO is now the biggest opposition party in Malaysia, their decision to sit out the by-election failed to rile the voters into protesting the polls, further reflecting their unpopularity. Anwar's increased majority win therefore continues to signify UMNO's continued downfall into irrelevance in national politics. None of our subjects cared or were moved by the decision to boycott. If anything, the boycott only succeeded in strengthening UMNO's continued insignificance in the public psyche. For the voters, UMNO's protest of the by-election was one less thing to worry about.

Moreover, their absence proved to be the key factor to PAS's increased voter share.

2) Mahathir Is Still The Key Ingredient In PH

Whilst Anwar numerical proves superior in this by-election with a whopping increased majority—not everything that came out of this by-election is promising for the former Deputy Prime Minister. The majority (92%) of our profiles recorded that they would vote for Anwar because he is designated to be the next Prime Minister. However, what we don't see from their votes is the frustration that this move proved the politics of old, that it was a reminder for voters of a priority on the political elite over the voters. Of our respondents who said they would vote for Anwar, many noted their hopes that such a move would not happen again to any other constituency. As one of our subjects recorded, "PD voters are not stupid. It makes (us) tired to go vote second time. So if this happens again, we really hope not."

In this process then, what did not help Anwar's cause nationally was his political gimmicks throughout the campaign. When we asked our subjects about Anwar's use of "Port Dickson ku" many scoffed and rolled their eyes. Some were even dismissive, "what to do, they are politicians," said one parent. Whilst we may never know if Anwar's cleaning of the beach or jogging on the beach came from sincere goodwill, the response from those moves certainly did not help to portray Anwar as a new kind of politician.

But most interestingly was the affect that Tun Dr Mahathir made when he came down to campaign in PD. Before Mahathir's visit, around 32.4% of our subjects still had doubts about whether they would turn out to vote. Some said they were lazy, that they were tired, and one even joked that it was pointless since there could be another election in 5 months. Yet when Mahathir came down to campaign on Monday 8 October, the by-election was suddenly legitimized. Perhaps it quelled talks that Mahathir had not agreed to the move in the first place. Perhaps the fact that Mahathir and Anwar shared the same stage signified a stronger image of unity. But only after Mahathir's arrival did our respondents record their interest to participate in the polls. The approval of the by-election jumped to 94%. What we can derive from this is simple; Mahathir is still the key ingredient in Pakatan Harapan's (PH) success. He had been credited for bringing victory to PH on May 9th, with his experience and automatic appeal to the Malay vote. But here, where neither the Malay vote nor Anwar's experience was in question, we can identify a different appeal of Mahathir to voters on the whole. He is still the main man, despite Anwar's return.

Whether or not this signifies future problems for Anwar, only time will tell. So while Anwar claimed a huge majority, the ethics of this by-election could prove to be a long lasting dent on PH's image as a reformist government. Legally, the by-election was legitimate. But the by-election still cost RM3.6 million of tax payer money, for a move that many of our subjects initially saw as pointless. The other is a question of nepotism. Anwar now has his wife and daughter

in parliament, the beginning of a butt of jokes for many but a serious issue when considering the essential need for a separation of powers and diversity of ideas in parliament. Moreover, many of the people who had previously voted for Datuk Danyal voted for him as a voice for the veterans. He was assumed to stand in parliament to bring forward the issues of veterans, only to let go of his post 5 months later.

Despite an elaborate campaign by Anwar's camp, one that saw the launch of free e-tuition, a grand scale concert, hundreds of talking events and even campaigns to clean up the PD beach, it was hard for many voters to initially ignore the fact that Anwar would not be making his rounds in their neighborhoods if the nation's premiership was not waiting for him in parliament. No matter what Anwar's campaign tried to portray, that Anwar would help the constituency once he was in power, personal intent was always a penetrating truth. With whoever advised Anwar that this was a good move, while they may be credited for bringing Anwar back into parliament, they can similarly be credited for tainting Anwar's vulnerable image to the nation. It is only five months since May 9th, so strategically, this was the best time to employ this 'PD Move'. By GE15, this will likely be old news. Yet it may also be the first in a potentially long list of disservices that voters begin to jot down psychologically on part of the PH government.

3) Independent Candidates Still Insignificant

Other than PAS, the only other contestants in this by-election were independents. These were:



Tan Sri Mohd Isa
Abdul Samad



Stevie Chan



Lau Seck Yan



Saiful Bukhari Azlan



Kan Chee Yuen

Our team shadowed many of these independent voters, observing their interaction with voters, how they campaigned and their general message to Port Dickson. Whilst initially Port Dickson seemed a promising ground for these independent candidates—again, the sentiment for returning to the polls was quite negative initially—none of the independent candidates really took off. There was no significant news headline that put these candidates at the centre of attention, to purposefully take advantage of the initial negative feelings to Anwar. Amongst our subjects, the general response was that they were encouraged by what these independent candidates stood for, that they wanted to offer a choice for the people of PD to express their frustration of having to repeat their May 9th experience.

Perhaps it was the lack of a platform, or the ground mobilisation, but many of our respondents also expressed that they did not quite know what candidates such as Lau Seck Yan and Kan Chee Yuen would bring. The agenda and manifesto thus was lacking. Around 10% of our respondents however did note that they were intrigued by Stevie Chan's posters around their town. The tagline that a 'mandate is 5 years, not 5 months' clicked with many of our initial negative respondents. Yet even as these anti-Anwar notions made sense to our subjects (86%), almost all of them expressed concern that these individuals had no party basis to stand on.

Clearly here, we can recognise that party politics is still the mainframe of influence and show of strength and work. Individual candidates, regardless of their background (Tan Sri Isa Samad was a former Menteri Besar of Negeri Sembilan), seems unlikely to win in Malaysia's political climate. Party-based politics remains as a determinant factor in this new Malaysia.

4) Local Candidate Unimportant

Another indicator from this by-election is the growing insignificance for a local candidate. Anwar was criticised on social media for his "Port Dickson-ku" beach photo. Yet from our subjects we got an entirely different message. Many noted that they did not mind an outsider candidate, for as long as that candidate had something to contribute to Port Dickson. Another subject was more encouraged by outsider candidates because, and we paraphrase, the candidates from PD would have interests of sharing the projects with "friends and family." Tan Sri Isa Samad banked on the fact that he was a local candidate, that he was one of the PD family. Amongst all the candidates, Tan Sri is the only one able to vote. Yet, Tan Sri Isa lost his deposit. A whopping 73% of our subjects recorded that their least concern is the candidate was from Port Dickson or otherwise.

Perhaps it is because Port Dickson is used to having people of Klang Valley swarm their beaches over the weekend. Perhaps Port Dickson as a tourist hub has been immune to the fear of having "outsiders" come into their area. But from our observation, having a candidate be from that constituency is proving less of a significance for voters.

5) Voters Support on the Transition of Mahathir to Anwar

On the night of October 13, it was a big moment for the former Deputy Prime Minister. Anwar Ibrahim won with a bigger majority compared to his predecessor with a whopping 23,560, achieved amid of the relatively turnout rate, 58.3% against 83.6% on May 9. This was a signal that voters are in-tune with Pakatan Harapan's plan to return Anwar to Parliament and perhaps eventually succeeding Tun Mahathir. However, the power transition plan remains doubtful.

Conclusions

Our work in Port Dickson was not conducted on the hopes of finalising the result of the by-election. The result was clear from the start, an Anwar-win. We decided therefore not to configure the obvious. But more crucially, our focus was on **how this PD election could foreshadow a potential national sentiment with regards to Anwar's eventual (and presumed) role as Prime Minister**. Ideally, if we want to understand how Malaysians react to Anwar as its Prime Minister, the best place to start is in a constituency where Anwar is their representative. This was our main objective.

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This Port Dickson by-election is seen as a springboard for Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's return as a Member of Parliament at the Dewan Rakyat, eventually putting him on Malaysia's map as a Prime Minister.

UMNO and its coalition Barisan National (BN) had decided to sit out in this by-election. This boycotting move has however, failed to rile the voters into protesting the polls. With Anwar's increased majority win, UMNO is seen to head further downhill. Their presence in the Malaysian political landscape could remain insignificance in months and years ahead.

All five independent candidates lost their deposits, after failing to obtain at least one-eighth or 12.5 % of the total votes polled. Theoretically, independent candidates in Malaysia have a hard time being accepted by voters without the backing of political parties. Without having clear visions and offers, on top of being unknown to the local folks, independent candidate may be seen as incapable of bringing the local voices to greater heights.

Despite leading Negeri Sembilan for 22 years as its Menteri Besar, Tan Sri Isa came in third at the polls. He took a gamble - gave up his membership as an UMNO member a few days before the nomination day. Amongst all candidates, he was the only candidate eligible to vote in Port Dickson. However, this was deficient in obtaining the votes despite being a local candidate.

Anwar has now been sworn in as the Port Dickson MP. His path to the big office in Putrajaya has restarted. The resounding support is a basis and a bargaining chip in succeeding Tun Mahathir as the Prime Minister. Despite the low turnout, the majority garnered indicates the popular will for Anwar and Tun Mahathir's presence as the building glue for Pakatan Harapan's clear testament in keeping their unwritten promises. The idea that Anwar would eventually become the Prime Minister still remains the main pull factor, albeit initially reluctantly.



Cent GPS Research

002868327-U

B-12-03A Menara Bata
PJ Trade Centre
Bandar Damansara Perdana
47820 Petaling Jaya Malaysia

P : +603 7726 6700

F : +603 7726 6076

www.centgps.com.my