



Position Paper

Technological Solutions Are No Antidote to Inadequacies in the Petugas Pilihan Raya Programme

22 October 2026

Introduction: Expanding OCR-VA Without Addressing Fundamental Concerns

In the lead-up to the 2026 Melaka state elections, the Election Commission (EC) announced in early October the expansion of its pilot Optical Character Recognition for Voter Attendance (OCR-VA) system to all polling streams across all 28 state constituencies (DUN) in Melaka.

The EC had first piloted OCR-VA across all seven polling streams at Sekolah Menengah Agama Dato' Mansor in the DUN Ampangan constituency, Seremban, during the Negeri Sembilan state elections on 1st August 2026.

When OCR-VA was first announced for the Negeri Sembilan elections, the EC communicated its deployment after nomination day, and the formal training sessions conducted for Petugas Pilihan Raya (election workers) and Pemerhati (election observers appointed by the EC). As a result, a formal objection by the Pakatan Harapan candidate for DUN Ampangan was filed an objection to EC State Office and Returning Officer of the said DUN (as he got notice of the implementation of OCR-VA through his party member).

Persatuan Bertindak Pilihan Raya Bebas dan Saksama ("Tindak") subsequently assigned one of our Pemerhati to observe the implementation of OCR-VA at Sekolah Menengah Agama Dato' Mansor. Our observer, an experienced election observer and former Ketua Tempat Mengundi (KTM) and Kerani Pengundian (KP) since 2018, documented several concerns regarding the system's practical value and implementation.

During the Negeri Sembilan pilot, the EC stationed its officers at every polling stream except Saluran 4, where KP 2 was tasked with operating OCR-VA.

Under the existing voting procedure, KP 1 verifies a voter's identity document and checks the voter's details against the electoral roll for the relevant polling stream. Previously, KP 1 would pass the identity document to KP 2, who would cross-check the voter's name and details as announced by KP 1 against the physical document.

With OCR-VA, KP 1 passes the identity document to an EC officer, who scans it using the OCR-VA mobile application. The application displays the voter's details, which the EC officer checks

against the information announced by KP 1 from the physical electoral roll. The system then records and marks the voter's attendance.

According to the EC, OCR-VA is intended to expedite identity verification and attendance recording, minimise errors arising from manual checks, and improve the overall efficiency of the electoral process.

However, our observer's assessment raised questions about whether the system delivers these intended benefits in practice. As an additional procedural step, OCR-VA appeared to offer limited practical value, particularly when an EC officer had to be stationed at the polling stream to perform the task.

Tindak documented these observations in our Pemerhati report, which was submitted to the EC in August 2026. In our recommendations, we called on the EC to consult election stakeholders on the justification for implementing OCR-VA and to communicate any planned technological changes to all parties involved in elections—including political parties, Pemerhati and Petugas Pilihan Raya—before nomination day. Refer to our Negeri Sembilan 2026 Pemerhati Report [here](#).

Partial Implementation of Recommendations, Without Meaningful Consultation

The EC has since acted on one aspect of our recommendation by providing earlier notification of OCR-VA implementation ahead of the Melaka elections. However, the EC has yet to meaningfully consult election stakeholders or provide feedback addressing the concerns raised about the system's necessity, effectiveness and ability to minimise errors by KP 1.

It is therefore concerning that the EC has proceeded to roll out OCR-VA across every polling stream in all 28 Melaka state constituencies without first addressing these fundamental questions.

The issue is not whether technology has a place in election administration. Rather, it is whether the technology addresses an identified problem, whether its benefits justify its operational requirements, and whether those responsible for implementing it have received adequate preparation.

These questions are particularly important given that the EC and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) recently conducted internet connectivity tests at polling centres for OCR-VA. Following one of these tests, a polling centre was relocated from Dewan Penyayang at the Lesung Batu Welfare Complex to the Machap Baru State Constituency Development and Coordination Committee (Japerun) Complex.

This development raises further questions about the implications of introducing a technology-dependent process into polling operations, particularly when connectivity issues can affect polling centre arrangements and potentially inconvenience voters.

Five Fundamental Questions for the Election Commission

1. Why has the EC not responded to the findings and recommendations in our Pemerhati report?

Pemerhati serve as the EC's eyes and ears on the ground. Their observations provide valuable insight into how electoral procedures operate in practice, including the challenges that may not be apparent from policy documents or centralised planning.

Yet, the EC has not provided a substantive response to the concerns we raised about OCR-VA. The last formal feedback session between the EC and Pemerhati groups that we recall took place in 2019, when documented responses were provided to various concerns and observations.

A credible system of election observation should not end with the submission of reports. The EC must establish a structured mechanism to assess these findings, respond to recommendations and explain how feedback informs its decisions. Without such a mechanism, the value of election observation is diminished, and opportunities to improve electoral administration may be lost.

2. Why has the EC not adequately considered biometric verification as an alternative?

Tindak has advocated for the implementation of biometric verification for years. Given that Malaysian identity cards (MyKad) contain fingerprint information, we urge the EC to examine whether fingerprint-based verification could strengthen voter identity checks and address the concerns that OCR-VA is intended to resolve.

We are not suggesting that biometric verification should be adopted without proper assessment. Any proposed system must be evaluated for its technical feasibility, reliability, security, privacy implications, accessibility and operational requirements.

Nevertheless, the EC should explain why OCR-VA is the preferred approach and whether alternative technologies have been properly evaluated against the same objectives. Technological adoption should follow a transparent assessment of available options, rather than proceeding with a particular system without sufficient justification.

Refer to our Election Reform Proposal [document](#) that EC has sighted before.

3. Have Petugas Pilihan Raya been adequately trained and prepared to operate OCR-VA?

The EC cannot deploy all of its own officers to operate OCR-VA at every polling stream throughout Melaka. If KPs are expected to operate the application, several practical questions must be answered.

- Have the EC's training sessions for the Melaka elections adequately covered the implementation and operation of OCR-VA?
- If KPs are required to use the application, will they receive appropriate allowances for mobile internet usage and any other relevant operational expenses?
- Which of the three KPs at each polling stream will be responsible for operating OCR-VA, and how will that responsibility be assigned?

The last question is particularly important. At some polling streams, the KTM may rotate responsibilities among the KPs. If OCR-VA requires one specific KP to operate the application throughout polling day, will this restrict the rotation of duties and reduce opportunities for other KPs to gain experience in different aspects of polling operations?

The EC must clarify these arrangements before implementation. Introducing a new application without clearly defined responsibilities, adequate training and appropriate operational support risks creating additional burdens for election workers instead of improving efficiency.

4. Why is the EC relying on technology to minimise human error without adequately addressing the quality of election worker training?

The EC has justified OCR-VA partly on the grounds that it will reduce mistakes by KP 1 when marking voters' names on the electoral roll. However, this raises a more fundamental question: has the EC done enough to improve the training provided to Petugas Pilihan Raya?

Tindak has consistently raised concerns about the adequacy of election worker training. The EC generally classifies its training activities as briefings, which we consider insufficient to prepare Petugas Pilihan Raya for the practical demands and responsibilities of administering an election.

Has the EC systematically studied the experiences and reports submitted by Tindak concerning Petugas Pilihan Raya since 2023? These reports contain observations and recommendations that could help identify gaps in training, clarify operational procedures and improve the quality of election administration. Our most recent reports were submitted to EC on 1st October 2026.

Our reports and related materials are available here: [Tindak: Laporan kepada SPR](#)

If the EC identifies human error as a problem, it must examine its underlying causes. These may include insufficient training, unclear procedures, inadequate practical exercises or weaknesses in supervision. Introducing technology may help mitigate certain errors, but it cannot replace the need to ensure that election workers understand their responsibilities and can carry them out competently.

5. Has the EC adequately assessed the consequences of connectivity problems and the overall impact of OCR-VA before rolling it out statewide?

The relocation of a polling centre following internet connectivity tests highlights the need to assess the operational implications of OCR-VA beyond the application itself.

Has the EC evaluated whether the replacement polling centre will continue to provide voters with convenient and accessible voting arrangements? More broadly, did the EC conduct a comprehensive assessment of the benefits, limitations, risks and operational costs of OCR-VA before deciding to implement it across the entire state?

Such an assessment should consider not only whether the application functions as intended, but also whether it improves the overall voting process, creates additional work for Petugas Pilihan Raya, depends on reliable connectivity, or introduces new operational complications.

The EC should be able to demonstrate that the benefits of the system outweigh its costs and risks, and that contingency arrangements are in place should the technology fail or connectivity become unreliable.

Technology Cannot Substitute for a Strong Petugas Pilihan Raya Programme

The concerns surrounding OCR-VA reflect a broader issue in the EC's approach to electoral administration: the growing use of technology without sufficient attention to the people responsible for implementing election procedures.

Over the years, the mySPR KTM application has evolved from a tool primarily used by Ketua Tempat Mengundi to record hourly voter turnout into a platform that also supports the digital completion of Form 13 (Statement of Ballot Papers) and Form 14 (Statement of the Poll). These additional capabilities were introduced beginning with the Pelangai by-election in 2023.

Digital tools for completing these forms may help reduce certain errors and improve administrative efficiency. However, their effectiveness depends on whether KTMs understand the forms, know how to complete them correctly and can respond appropriately when discrepancies arise.

This brings us to a fundamental question: has the EC taken sufficiently serious steps to strengthen the Petugas Pilihan Raya programme, from recruitment and training to performance evaluation after polling day?

Have KTMs received sufficient training, through varied and practical training methods, to understand the requirements for completing Forms 13 and 14 accurately? Tindak has repeatedly highlighted the inadequacies of the current training arrangements.

The EC must recognise that the successful administration of an election depends on more than the availability of digital tools. It requires competent, well-trained and motivated election workers who understand electoral procedures and can carry out their duties confidently, accurately and impartially.

Before investing further in technological solutions to improve election efficiency, the EC must address the underlying weaknesses in its Petugas Pilihan Raya programme. Technology should strengthen the capabilities of election workers, not serve as a substitute for the training, support and institutional improvements they need.

Conclusion: Address the Actual Problems Before Introducing Technological Solutions

Technological solutions are no antidote to inadequacies in the Petugas Pilihan Raya programme.

Tindak does not oppose the use of technology in election administration. We support improvements that demonstrably strengthen electoral integrity, reduce errors and make the voting process more efficient. However, technological adoption must be driven by clearly identified needs, supported by evidence, and informed by meaningful consultation with election stakeholders.

The EC must move beyond merely receiving reports from Pemerhati and establish a structured process for evaluating their observations, responding to their recommendations and incorporating relevant feedback into decision-making. It must also be prepared to explain the rationale for new technologies, demonstrate their practical benefits and ensure that the people expected to use them are adequately trained and supported.

Most importantly, the EC must distinguish between the symptoms of a problem and its underlying causes. If mistakes arise because election workers lack adequate training, introducing an application alone will not resolve the issue. If operational procedures are unclear, digitalisation will not automatically make them clearer. And if election workers are insufficiently supported or motivated, technological upgrades cannot replace the institutional reforms required.

The EC should therefore prioritise strengthening the Petugas Pilihan Raya programme, improving training and evaluation, and establishing meaningful engagement with election observers and other stakeholders. New technologies should be introduced only when their necessity and effectiveness have been properly assessed.

The priority must be to solve the actual problems confronting election administration, not to rush into adopting technological solutions simply because they appear modern or innovative.

Issued by: Committee

Persatuan Bertindak Pilihan Raya Bebas dan Saksama (Tindak)