

Electoral boundaries drawn 'to benefit BN'

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By S Pathmawathy

Malapportionment and gerrymandering of constituency boundaries have caused election results to be lopsided towards the ruling coalition, political analysts say.

A forum organised by election watchdog Tindak Malaysia in Petaling Jaya yesterday was told that the BN secures its wins by ensuring rural electoral boundaries are larger than that of urban seats.

"For instance, one rural voter is equivalent to six urban voters," Tindak Malaysia representative PY Wong said in his opening speech at the 'How clean will the 13th general election be?' forum.

Although the opposition gained momentum in the 2008 general election, Wong said, the BN retained its position with just a simple majority of 18.9 percent of the popular votes.

"Nothing happens by accident in politics. Everything is designed," he added, prompting laughter from the 350 people in the audience at the Petaling Jaya Civic Centre auditorium.

Wong noted that out of 139 parliamentary constituencies classified as a rural, 112 were bagged by BN in 2008, making up 50.4 percent of the 222 parliamentary constituencies.

"It is evident in federal seats like Putrajaya. Well, in this case Putrajaya is probably a rural seat in the Federal Territory as it has 6,008 voters and which BN won. In the Kapar, which has 112,000 voters, PKR won," he said.

chart on gerrymandering 02

Political analyst Wong Chin Huat said only in Malaysia were "urban seats surrounded by an enclave of rural seats and vice-versa".

NONEChin Huat (right), who is also a Coalition for Clean and Fair Elections (Bersih) steering committee member, said the 112 rural seats bagged by BN only made up 33.8 percent of the voters.

In the 2004 general election, BN won 90.87 percent of the parliamentary seats with just 63.85 percent of the popular votes.

This was in contrast with the votes received by then opposition leader Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who held PKR's only parliamentary seat with just 8.43 percent of the popular votes, said Chin Huat.

"The constitutional provision stating that the largest and smallest constituencies must only have a 15 percent parity was amended in 1962 to 50 percent and then abolished completely in 1973," he said.

"The Election Commission has deliberately misinterpreted the constitution and acted unconstitutionally in formulating its own schemes.

"There is no ceiling for urban seats, which could make up 60,000 or 25,000 voters and no floor for rural seats, which could have anything less than 30,000 or 15,000 voters," he explained.

Overlapping local authority boundaries

Chin Huat pointed out that the vast disparity could only be rectified by "ensuring the largest state constituency in a state is not larger than half of its smallest parliamentary constituency in electorate size".

"Believe me when I say that if this is not fixed now, before the 13th general election, even if the opposition wins, it will not do it," said Chin Huat.

As for gerrymandering of electoral borders, Chin Huat said there were cases in Selangor where assemblypersons had to deal with multiple local councils as their state constituencies come under several local authorities.

NONE "Sri Muda and Dengkil are two state constituencies that span across three local authorities, while there are 11 other state constituencies in which two local authorities operate," he said.

Political analyst Ong Kian Ming (left) said transparency in the next general election would depend largely on the EC's responsiveness to fixing reported frauds in the electoral roll.

Citing his research where he had discovered the existence of 3.1 million non-resident voters who vote in constituencies that do not tally with the addresses stated in their MyKads, Ong said this was yet to be rectified.

Another speaker, Bersih 2.0 chairperson Ambiga Sreenevasan, said recent amendments to the Election Offences Act had "far reaching consequences" as vote observers were no longer allowed to be anywhere near polling booths.

"This completely removes any checks. There will be no independent check of the MyKad, the distance that they can work from is 100 metres, so they can't tell if indelible ink is placed on the forefinger of a person who has voted," she said.

Ambiga said the third chapter of Bersih's rally will take place at Dataran Merdeka on Saturday in the hope that the electoral roll and procedural discrepancies highlighted are resolved, despite the blockades imposed by the police and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall.

