

**Unfair redelineation may backfire, says don
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The manner that Malaysia's electoral boundaries are drawn is discriminatory and divisive, and could ultimately undermine the government's legitimacy if continued, warned academician Bridget Welsh.

"If the lesson that the government takes from the 13th general election is that we have to use the redelineation exercise to strengthen our political power in a polarised fashion, it will ultimately weaken itself...

"If you continue of follow a pattern that is divisive, that is exclusive, that is diminishing rights; these things - I fundamentally believe - will backfire," she said during a seminar in Petaling Jaya today.

This is because being under-represented - whether by race, age or socio-economic background - create 'bad feelings' and anxiety, hence further polarising Malaysian society.

She was speaking on past redelineation exercises in Malaysia and comparing it to international best practices, which are based on principles of impartiality, equality, transparency, representativeness and non-discrimination.

Welsh said there is "no question" that redelineation exercise is being used to strengthen BN's grip on power, and the Election Commission's (EC) rationale underlying each redelineation exercise has not been consistent.

For example, the 1974 redelineation exercise emphasised on rural constituencies, while the 1983 exercise created mixed constituencies, and the 2003 exercise emphasised the creation of 'safe' seats.

'Unintended consequences'

However, Welsh added that it should not be assumed that redelineation can be continually used to adapt to a changing political landscape, because political players will adapt to it as well.

For example, she said the 2008 political tsunami was an "unintended consequence" from the creation of mixed-race seats.

Asked to elaborate, she said the creation of mixed-race seats began with the 1983 redelineation exercise, partly to reduce competition from PAS, and partly to capitalise on then Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad's greater outreach to ethnic minorities at the time.

However, these mixed-race seats became a weak point for BN in 2008, where the opposition won many of such seats.

"This is not only in Malaysia, it happens in a lot of places. When you have set in place a set of rules and procedures, the implications are that people will learn to adapt to them and respond to them.

"You cannot guarantee that what is in place in this particular time will still be relevant 10 years down the line," she said.

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