

**The 30% rule – what holds back Opposition from Putrajaya**  
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There's no two ways about it: the road to Putrajaya is not a urban highway but rather one than wends its way through the kampungs and plantations of Malaysia, reveals a study of the way votes went in the past general election.

Just 30%, a little under one-third of Malaysians, live in the rural and semi-rural parts of Malaysia, but they sent 71% of the politicians into Parliament last May 5.

Yes, Pakatan Rakyat (PR) snared 51% of the popular vote. Yes, it snagged more than three-quarters of the Chinese vote. It even scored 54.9% of the Indian vote and stole about 40% of the Malay vote. But that only made PR the undisputed champion of urban Malaysia.

Barisan Nasional-friendly (BN) gerrymandering and unequal constituency sizes means that 158 or 71% of the 222 parliamentary seats are non-urban, so even if the pact of PKR, DAP and PAS performs better in all the above categories in the next general election, it will likely be occupying opposition benches in Parliament.

These facts were culled from a survey by Merdeka Center on voting patterns in 222 parliament seats. The data from voting streams from first-time voters to senior citizens was analysed by the independent researchers.

PR politicians and election watchdog groups have long complained that the carving out of constituencies is aimed at keeping BN in power and makes a rural vote worth an average of six urban voters.

But nothing is likely to change in the composition of seats and the redrawing of boundaries between now and GE14, making it necessary for Pakatan Rakyat to think up new approaches to win more friends in the rural heartland.

Ibrahim Suffian, head of Merdeka Centre, said that PR will have to come up with policies which address concerns of Malays, the largest segment of voters in rural and semi-rural seats. Or it has to make a much better effort in getting across its message of a new Malaysia to the back of beyond.

"If Pakatan Rakyat wants to win more support in rural areas, it has to first address some of the concerns about Islam and Malay rights.

"Barisan Nasional has done an effective job of creating some fear among rural folk, even planting in their minds the concern of whether Pakatan Rakyat has a plan for their economic wellbeing," he told The Malaysian Insider, noting that even the decrease of Chinese support for BN was less pronounced in rural constituencies.

It is just not good enough to talk about corruption or the murder of Altantuya Shariibuu in areas where the Umno/BN network is strong, and where government handouts are welcomed by grateful hands.

The task of winning the rural vote was left largely to PAS in GE13 and the party had a patchy record in fighting off BN propaganda that PR rule would diminish the position of the

Malays and Islam.

In a recent interview with The Malaysian Insider, PKR director of strategy Rafizi Ramli said that the Opposition pact had to focus more attention on the fears and concerns of rural Malay voters.

"It has to do with the fears of Malays on security and confidence in a multi-racial country and their livelihood in the rural areas. These are the issues that BN has been able to capitalise on successfully, to create a fear of Pakatan Rakyat, " he said.

He added, "We can't keep riding on urban dissatisfaction to make the numbers. We are working on strategies to get the message across to rural areas." – August 14, 2013.

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