

Malapportionment – The biggest electoral fraud

In its eight demands for reform for a clean and fair electoral system, Bersih has overlooked the single most important dishonest feature built into the present system by BN – malapportionment, which is the systematic variation in the size of electoral constituencies resulting in disproportionate and large representation for BN in Parliament.

Fig. 1 shows how this has worked in the 2008 Parliamentary Elections. Each column (or vertical line) in the graph represents a parliamentary constituency. The number of registered voters in it is indicated by its height. Constituencies won by BN and the opposition are shown as blue and red columns respectively.

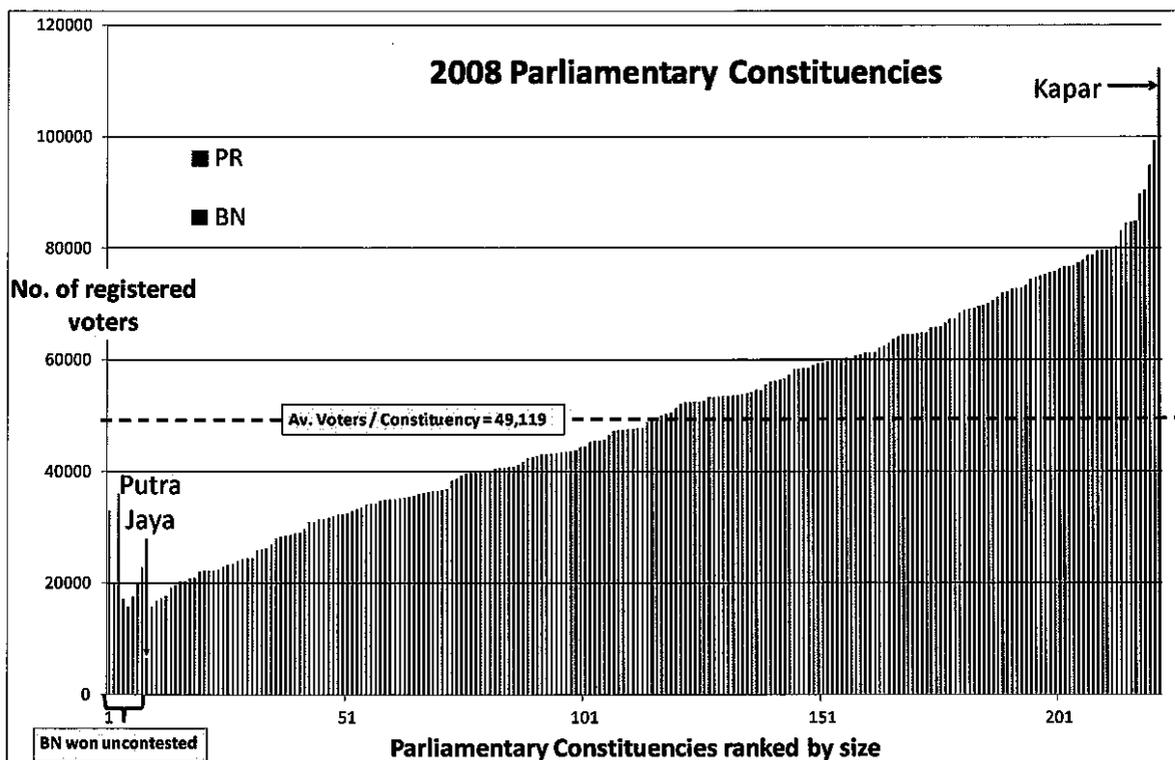


Fig. 1: No. of registered voters in each Parliamentary constituency

In the chart, the constituencies are arranged in order of size, with the smallest on the left to the biggest on the right. Exceptions are the first eight on the left which have been won by BN uncontested.

It is at once clear in this chart that BN constituencies are generally much smaller than PR constituencies. Since there is no valid reason why bigger constituencies tend to back PR and smaller constituencies vote for BN, the only plausible explanation is that BN has carved out its strongholds into small and therefore many more constituencies while opposition strongholds are lumped together into larger and therefore fewer constituencies.

This form of electoral fraud is so effective that BN could have won 51% of the seats in Parliament in the 2008 Elections with a mere 15.4% of the popular votes counted when the eight uncontested seats are included in the overall tally as shown in Fig. 2 where the number of BN MPs as a percentage of the total is plotted against the number votes received by BN again as a percentage of the total votes cast, starting with the smallest to the largest constituency.

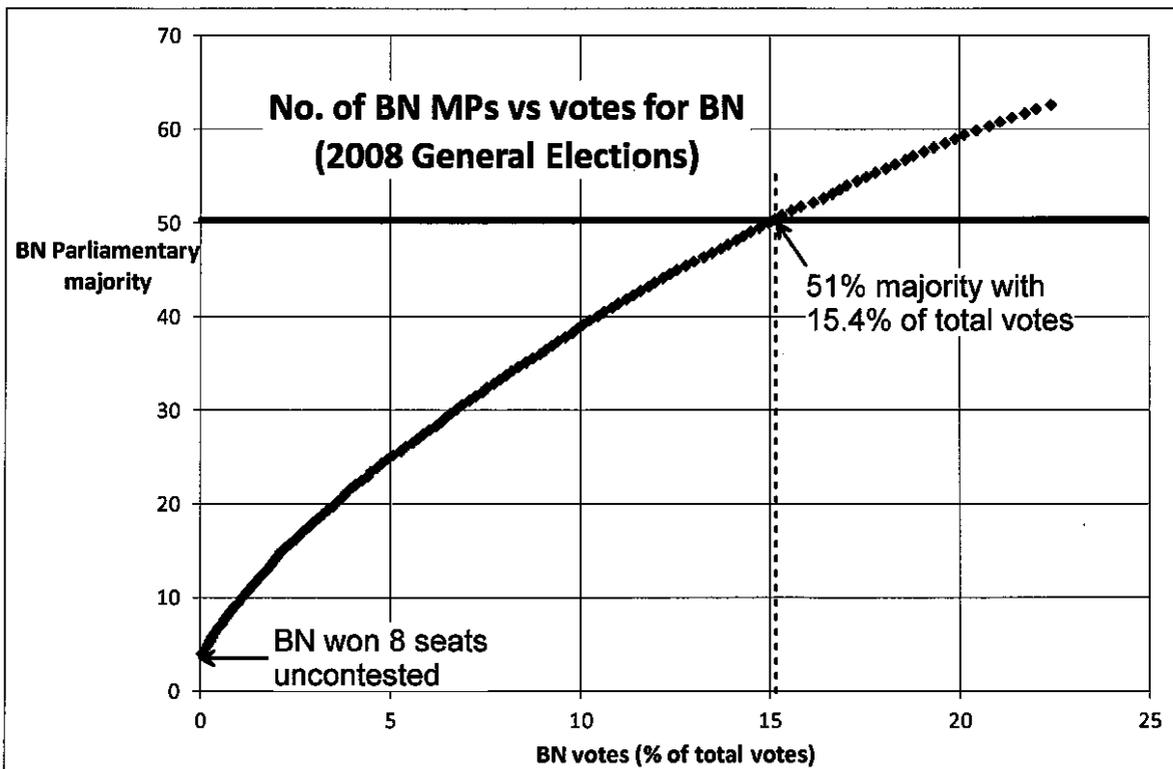


Fig. 2: How BN needed only 15.4% of the votes to win

What it means in terms of voter's right is that those who live in opposition strongholds had their rights strongly diluted. This is clearly illustrated in the comparison between Putra Jaya, a BN stronghold with only a total of 6608 registered voters, and Kapar an opposition area with 112,224 registered voters. If Kapar had been divided into

constituencies of the same size as Putra Jaya, Kapar voters could have sent up to 17 MPs to Parliament instead of just one.

When BN strongholds are consistently subdivided into small constituencies and opposition areas are equally consistently lumped into super-sized ones, the opposition is systematically and effectively emasculated. The average number of voters in each BN-held constituency is 39,179 voters compared to the opposition's average of 63,016 which is 60% higher. If all constituencies had about the same number of voters and the number of BN MPs remained at 139, the number of opposition MPs could very well increase by up to 60%, or to 133 MPs. That would be quite a change of political landscape which of course BN would never allow!

What is strange is why Bersih has not included this as one of their eight demands for reforms to make the electoral system clean and fair. Even if all Bersih's eight demands were met but nothing is being done for fairer apportionment of constituencies, BN would remain in power forever.