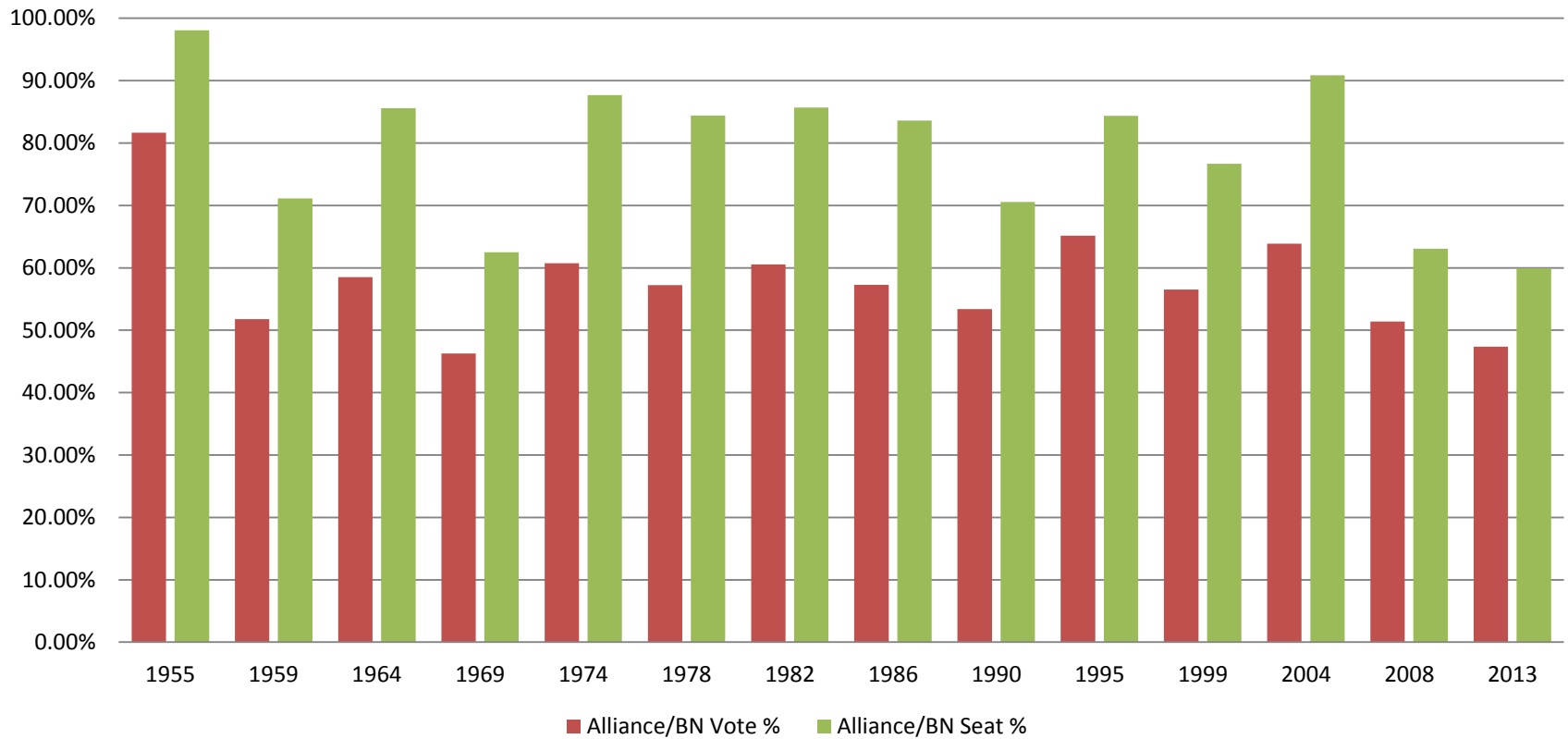


First-Past-The-Post and Electoral One-Party State in Malaysia

WONG, Chin Huat (Phd, Essex)
Fellow, Penang Institute
for International Conference on
“Democracy in Taiwan: Looking at the 2012 Elections”
Organised by
Studies of China Studies, UM;
Taiwan Foundation for Democracy
University of Malaya, 24-25 October, 2013

The Alliance/BN's Amplified/Manufactured Majority

Amplified/Manufactured Majority under FPTP
in Malaya/Malaysia (1955-2013)



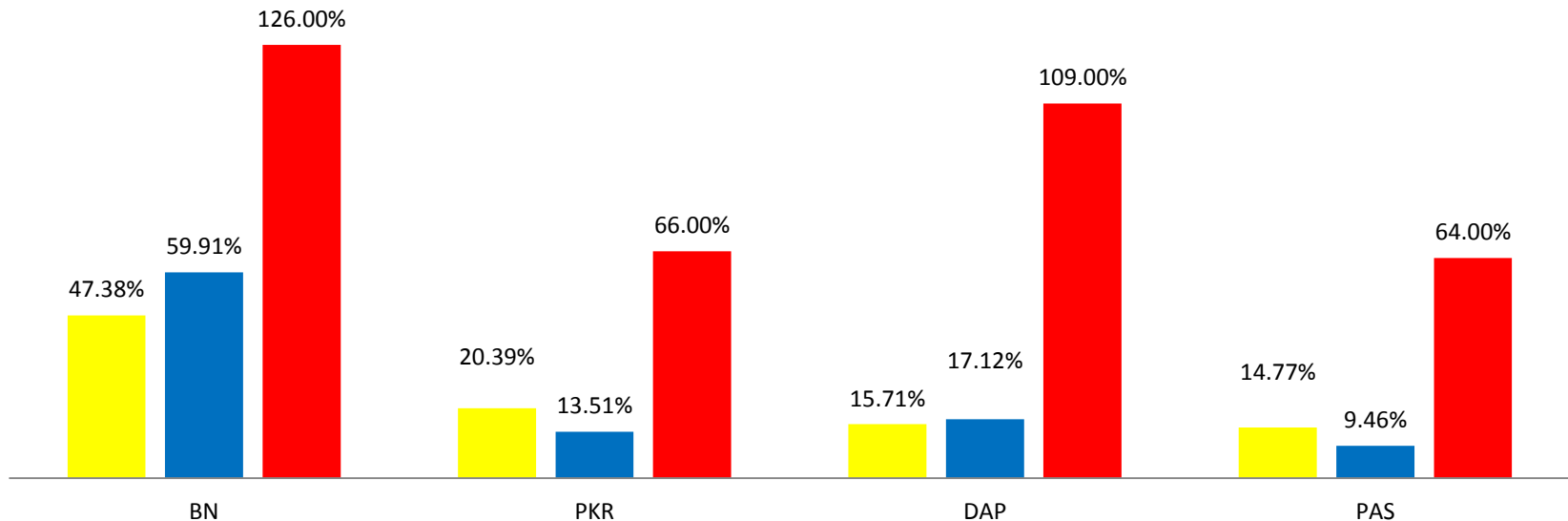
BN- The Permanent Ruling Coalition?

- Fourth time lucky?
 - 1990 – two new opposition coalitions with a common dominant party
 - 1999 – a new opposition coalition
 - 2008 – informal pact of three coalitions
 - 2013 – a 5-years-old opposition coalition
- Why?
 - Genuine popularity
 - Uneven playing field in contestation
 - Fraud in polling
 - Malapportionment
 - Gerrymandering

Vote-Seat Disproportionality

Vote-Seat Disproportionality in the Parliamentary Elections 2013

■ Vote % ■ Seat % ■ Relative Value



$$S\%/V\% \text{ BN} = 59.91\%/47.38\% = 1.26$$

$$S\%/V\% \text{ PR} = 40.09\%/50.87\% = 0.79$$

$$1 \text{ vote for BN} = 1.26 / 0.79 = 1.6 \text{ votes for PR}$$

Vote-Seat Disproportionality

Elections	Largest Opposition Party	Votes to match 1 Alliance/BN vote	Second Largest Opposition Party	Votes to match 1 Alliance/BN vote	Third Largest Opposition Party	Votes to match 1 Alliance/BN vote
1955	PN	Infinity	PAS	2.54	NAP	Infinity
1959	PAS	2.34	Labour	2.31	PPP	2.25
1964	SF	12.25	PAS	2.47	UDP	6.65
1969	PAS	3.39	DAP	1.79	Gerakan	1.81
1974	DAP	4.52	SNAP	1.37	Pekemas	11.39
1978	DAP	2.72	PAS	7.03	Pekemas	Infinity
1982	DAP	4.75	PAS	6.30	PSRM	Infinity
1986	DAP	2.27	PAS	40.41	PSRM	Infinity
1990	DAP	2.10	S46	4.48	PAS	2.28
1995	DAP	3.33	S46	4.22	PAS	2.59
1999	PAS	1.45	DAP	3.28	PKN	6.11
2004	PAS	8.15	DAP	2.58	PKR	26.08
2008	PKR	1.67	PAS	1.70	DAP	1.37
2013	PKR	1.91	PAS	1.98	DAP	1.19

Is FPTP an inherent problem?

Two ways of looking at Malaysia's democratisation and electoral system:

1. FPTP is alright if uneven playing field, electoral fraud, malapportionment and gerrymandering are corrected.
2. FPTP is one problem in itself or may even induce the other problems

The “M+1” Rule

- Cox (1997): “M+1” rule: if there is only one grand prize ($M=1$) in the political race, competitors will form only two teams.
- Strategic voting
 - supporting the 3rd, 4th to n-th teams is instrumentally irrational
- Party system is determined by electoral system
 - legislative electoral structure → constituency party system
 - Executive electoral structure → national party system

The Supposed Benefits of FPTP

A classical embodiment of the “winner-takes-all” logic, the “First-Past-The-Post” system is thought to be good in delivering

- Two-party system
- “Responsible Government” (wholesale party alternation)
- Moderation – the need to appeal to median voter (Downs, 1957)

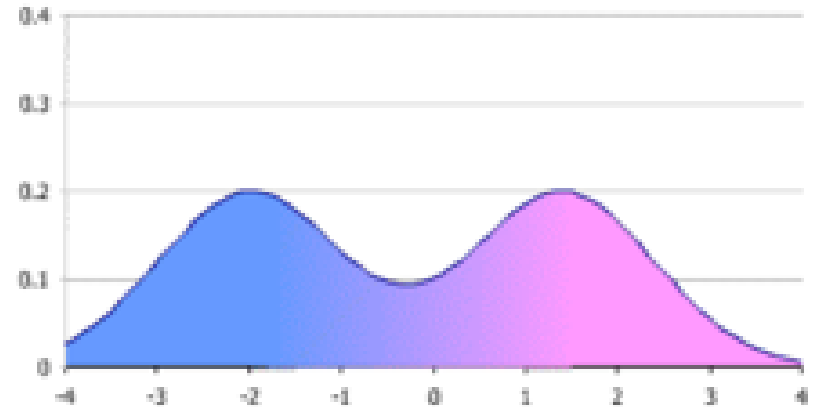
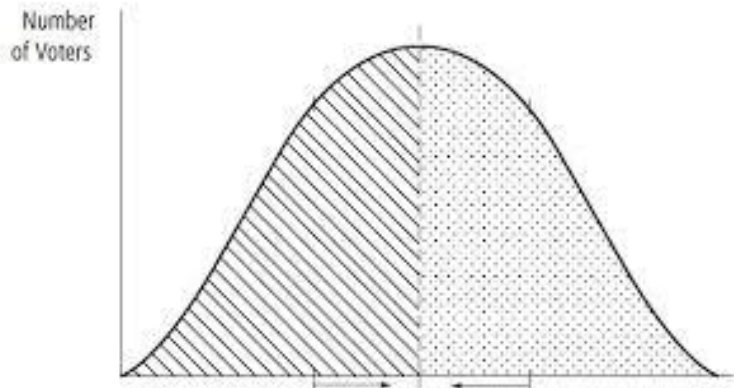
The democratic deficit in term of proportionality is then the necessary evil.

Why doesn't FPTP work for Malaysia?

Reinforced by centralisation of power,

- The Bipolar Society Mismatch –
 - Winner-takes-all feature intensifies ethnic tension
 - The legitimacy problem of democracy
 - FPTP elections are like gambles
- The temptation of flank competition for losers
- The Vulnerability of FPTP to Fraud
- The incompatibility of Coalition politics and FPTP
 - the impossibility of intra-party democracy

The Problem with FPTP in Malaysia 1: The Bipolar Society Mismatch



- Median Voter Theorem assumes a unipolar/unimodal society
- In a bipolar society, the median position is a valley rather than the peak, not so profitable electorally.
- Ethnic politics (Horowitz, 2000)
 - Ethnic two-party system: Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Surinam
 - Flank competition confronting the centrist party/bloc: Malaysia

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e/e2/Bimodal.png/220px-Bimodal.png>

<https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSUK9QMQfifGTq172M0uufDA4GBxdUtexhSUppzIhIP0s4rmdIRlw>

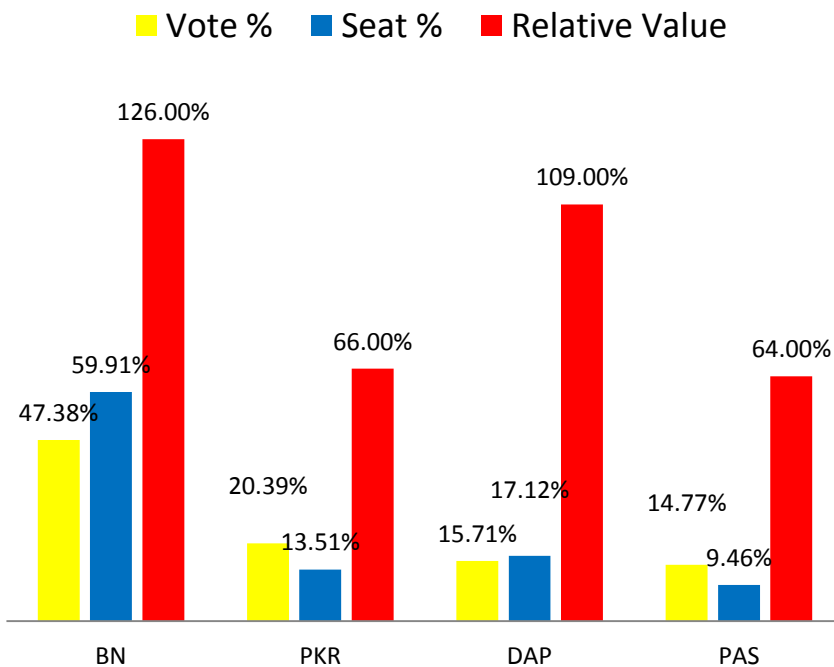
Prisoners' Dilemma

- Bipolar society easily gets trapped into “prisoners’ dilemma”
 - zero-sum game
 - “floodgate” anxiety
- Manifestation of bipolar politics
 - The “Allah” ban
 - The “no-pork” rule

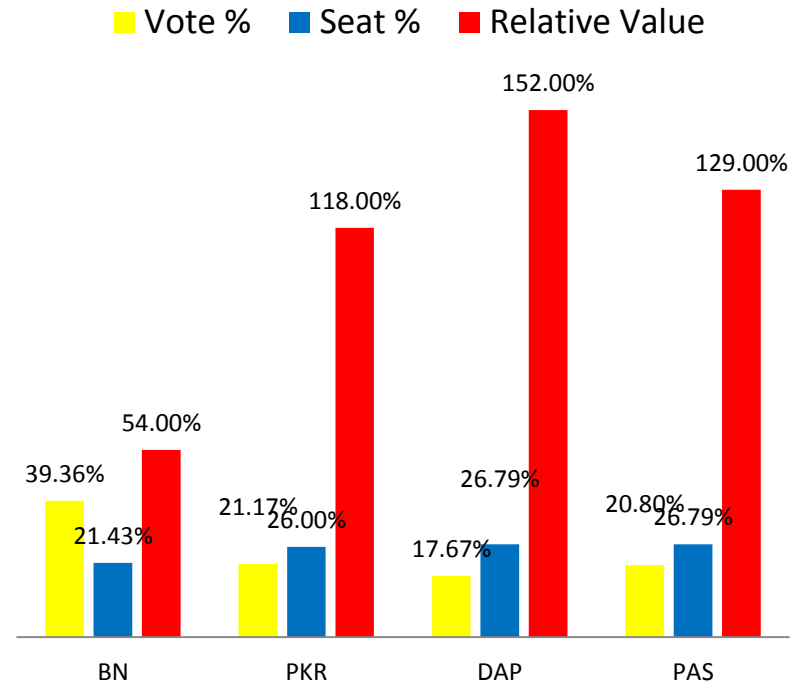


FPTP Elections Are Like Gambles

Vote-Seat Disproportionality in the Parliamentary Elections 2013



Vote-Seat Disproportionality in the Selangor Legislative Elections 2013



The Legitimacy Problem of Democracy

- Democracy is a numerical game
- Elsewhere, ethnic minorities may dismiss democracy as tyranny of majority
- In Malaysia, ethnic majority worries that democracy may become rule of minority, leading to
 - the constant call of ethnic unity for majority
 - the legitimacy of democracy
 - Electoral manipulation as the “necessary evil”?

The Flank Temptation for Permanent Losers

- When pushed to the extreme, “winner-takes-all” may mean no prospect of coming to power for the losers.
- All the motivations for going moderate are gone.
- There may not be a two-party system even after regime change.



The Problem with FPTP in Malaysia 2:

The Vulnerability of FPTP to fraud

- The “Marginality” problem
 - Its key to “sensitivity” is also its fatal weakness
- Under FPTP, for a seat with a real margin of 1,000 votes, to turn the outcome around may need only:
 - Deploying 1,001 phantoms
 - Spoiling 1,001 votes cast for the winner
 - Buying 501 votes
- Under a proportional system, to attain the same effect in national/regional seat change, fraud needs to be much more extensive, hence “inefficient” or “unprofitable”
- Efficiency or Profitability in electoral fraud defies democracy:
 - Why win on policies when you can win on fraud?

The Problem with FPTP in Malaysia 3:

The Incompatibility of Coalition Politics and FPTP

- In UK, all parties can contest in all constituencies. Coalitions, if any, are not permanent and formed after elections.
- Intra-party democracy and bottom-up selection of candidates is possible
- In Malaysia, parties within a coalition cannot compete with each other. Bottom-up selection of candidates is impossible.
- Intra-coalition and intra-party competition goes underground, often resulting in selection of unpopular candidates and sabotaging.

Tun Abdul Razak and UMNO's Electoral One-Party State (1969-2008)

The electoral one-party state was founded in the ruin of the Alliance-dominated "Consociational Democracy" in the May 13 post-election riot in 1969 by DPM Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

"The view we take is that democratic government is the best and most acceptable form of government. So long as the form is preserved, the substance can be changed to suit conditions of a particular country."

Report of the Proceedings of the 17th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held in Kuala Lumpur, London, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, September 1971. p.xx.; cited in Michael Ong, (1987) "Government and Opposition in Parliament: The Rules of the Game," in Zakaria Haji Ahmad, ed., Government and Politics of Malaysia, USA: Oxford University Press..

"... in our Malaysian society of today, where racial manifestations are very much in exercise, any form of politicking is bound to follow along racial lines and will only enhance the divisive tendencies among our people."

Malaysian Digest 5, no 1 (January 1973): p5, cited in Zakaria Haji Ahmad (1989) "Malaysia: Quasi Democracy in a Divided Society" in Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour martin Lipset (eds.) Democracy in Developing Countries, Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner, p 366.



***--- Tun Abdul Razak Hussein,
Prime Minister (1970-1976)***

Is two-party system possible with FPTP?

- Malaysia:
 - West Coast Malaya (political core) – Bipolar Society
 - East Coast Malaysia (Malay periphery) – Unipolar Society
 - Sabah and Sarawak (Borneo periphery) – Multipolar Society
- 50 years of Malaysia has been the socio-cultural expansion of West Coast Malaya's bipolar society, upon which UMNO builds its electoral one-party state.
- The winner-takes-all character of FPTP elections has amplified and perpetuated the fears and anxieties of bipolar society.
- Can a non-communal two-party system emerge?