



# Malaysian Politics After 14th General Election: Do the Number of Parliamentary Seats Matter for Bn's Victory?

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## Abstract

*This empirical study aims at examining the effect of the total number of parliamentary seats on the performance of Barisan Nasional (BN) over the past 45 years. This study is designed to investigate the strength of the relationship between the number of constituencies and electoral votes. Within the framework of grounded theory and documentary evidence, this paper deploys a simple linear regression analysis to estimate the model using yearly secondary data from 1974 till 2018. The empirical findings show that there is no significant relationship between the number of parliamentary seats and BN's dominance in the past general elections. Surprisingly, we also notice a remarkably low positive correlation between these two variables. It is clear based on the study findings that it is voter sentiment that contributes most significantly towards sustaining political dominance in each general election. For this reason, it is imperative for every political coalition or individual party to understand the voter's emotion and devise its manifesto accordingly to instill a higher level of voter's confidence through their political and electoral campaigns.*

**Key words:**  
*Barisan Nasional (BN), Total Number of Parliamentary Seats, Electoral Votes, Linear Regression Analysis.*

## Introduction

Politics may be defined as the set of activities connected with the governance of a country or area (Potrafke, 2020), and particularly concerns the questions of how political parties understand and exert power. Throughout the course of history, politics has played a central role (Chung, 2021; Samarjani, 2021) in defining the relations between nations and cultures. It bears to note that political relations are associated with social relations insofar as they relate to the distribution and consolidation of authority or power. Parliamentary or party politics is particularly important because it allows one party the opportunity to gain maximum votes from the general public, and by doing so, take precedence over other parties contending to form the government in a parliamentary system. It is the ultimately the amount of positive influence exerted by a political party as well as the relationship between individual political parties which creates a differential in terms of voter sentiment and supports as well decides the final political outcome for the next five years. A political election is an official group decision-making procedure (Насимов, 2021) by which a part of the population selects an individual or more than one individual to hold public office in such a way as to give them the responsibility to strengthen the economy, resolve citizen's issues and strategically work for the welfare of the public. Elections have been regarded as the normal mechanism through which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century.

As in other countries, political elections hold key importance in Malaysia (Jalli et al., 2019; Nadzri, 2018). Malaysian politics is framed within the structure of a federal representative democratic constitutional monarchy, in which the Yang di-Pertuan Agong is head of state, and the Prime Minister of Malaysia is the head of each successive government. Legislative power is vested in the federal parliament and the 13 state assemblies. Like most other countries, multiple political parties compete with each other's to gain control over the highest number of seats in the Malaysian parties. Major political parties in Malaysia include Barisan Nasional (BN), Malaysian Indian Congress, Progressive Democratic Party, Malaysian Chinese Association, Sarawak United People's Party etc. Each party seeks to win the maximum number of parliamentary seats to achieve success in elections. The parliament is the main legislative body or arm of government. Usually, a modern parliament has a broad mandate and an extensive range of functions to help it discharge its duties as the central law and policy-making body in the country. The three major functions of the parliament include representing the electorate, promulgating new laws or amendments, and supervising the actions and inactions of the incumbent government via hearings as well as inquiries.

BN is the leading political party of Malaysia (Sakke et al., 2018). The National Front is a political alliance of Malaysian citizens that was initiated in 1973 as a coalition of right-wing and center-affiliated parties. It is a major part of the contemporary political system of Malaysia. BN Electoral

victory for BN depends on the number of parliamentary seats. A higher number of parliamentary seats as compared to other parties or opponents will eventually ensure overall party success. In this direction, the current study is an attempt to identify the importance of parliamentary seats for BN's victory. Several previous studies have considered (Noor et al., 2018; Wan Hassan et al., 2018), however, it is very rare that the previous studies considered parliamentary seats for BN's success. Therefore, the current study has important contribution to the literature by examining the importance of parliamentary seats for BN's victory. Consequently, the current study aims at examining the effect of the total number of parliamentary seats on the performance of BN over the past 45 years. In this direction, this study is particularly geared towards investigating the strength of the relationship between the number of constituencies and electoral votes.

## Literature Review

### Overview of Malaysian Political Elections

The Barisan Nasional (BN) was established on 1 Jan 1973 by the second Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak Hussein. The formation of this new coalition came in the aftermath of the 1969 general election coupled with the 13<sup>th</sup> May riots in Kuala Lumpur. The establishment of three new parties, namely Democratic Action Party (DAP), Gerakan and Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) before the 1969 general elections had divided the electoral vote which was once controlled by the Alliance Party. In June 1974, BN was made up by bringing together nine political parties (including those in Sabah and Sarawak) and the party contested in the 1974 general election. As expected, this grand coalition party won its first general election with remarkable success. Table 1 shows the allocation of parliamentary seats for individual parties.

**Table 1.** BN Coalition and Parliamentary Seats in 2018 General Election

Barisan Nasional (BN)	Parliamentary Seats
UMNO	119
MCA	48
MIC	10
GERAKAN	1
GABUNGAN PARTI SARAWAK (GPS)	31
PBS	9
SUPP	4
Total	222

According to Mohammad Hassan, UMNO shall continue to hold the 55 seats that they won in the 14<sup>th</sup> general election. Table 1 presents the allocation of parliamentary seats among component parties and UMNO alone controls about 54% of the total seats. It is estimated that 64% of all parliamentary seats (or 141 out of 222 seats) fall into Malay-majority constituencies while

the other 27% (or 61 out of 222) are categorized into balanced constituencies.

Mohammad Hassan also stresses that UMNO will contest in the seats where its BN component parties have never won before as the voter's demand Malay candidates in those constituencies. As part of UMNO's new strategy, the party will emphasize the need to strengthen Sharia or Islamic law through constitutional amendments as a means of attracting Muslim votes. He also asserts the need for UMNO to build its own strength and not downplay the importance of cooperation with other Bumiputera parties, particularly PPBM (SunDaily, 2021, January 3). Table 2 presents the results of the 2018 general election.

**Table 2.** Outcome of 2018 General Election – BN's Seats and Pakatan Nasional (PN)

Party	Seats
UMNO	35
MCA	2
MIC	1
GPS	19
PBS	4
STAR	1
PPBM	31
PAS	18

(Source: Election Commission Malaysia)

The outcome of 2018 general election came as a surprise for all BN leaders and UMNO acknowledged the mistakes which had been made. UMNO subsequently revised its strategy to improve its chances of winning the next general elections as well as to regain exclusive control of the new government set-up. As presented in Table 2, UMNO is still the dominant party in Pakatan Nasional (PN) coalition which currently runs the government. Based on UMNO's discussion with other Malay-dominated parties and even BN component parties, this study has identified three models that UMNO would explore and only one will be considered as the winning formula. The first model is referred to as the status-quo model as depicted in Table 3 below. This model is built upon the underlying assumption that UMNO will retain all the seats won in the 14<sup>th</sup> general election i.e., the upcoming general election. Employing this first model, we are likely to witness another defeat for BN with only 35% control of the parliament.

**Table 3.** Model 1 – Possible Number of Parliamentary Seats Won

Constituency	BN Component Party	Possible Outcome (Seats)
Malay-majority (Malay>50%)	UMNO	55
Balanced (Malay (40%), Chinese (30%))	MCA/MIC	4
Chinese-majority (Chinese > 50%)	MCA	2
Sarawak-Ethnic	GPS	18
Total		79

The second model is quite unconventional since UMNO might investigate the possibility of working with PKR and DAP, which are currently part of the opposition bloc. If this coalition is rendered possible, there is a higher probability that MCA, MIC and even GPS would leave BN. If the plan goes as predicted, then UMNO, PKR and DAP can easily form a government with 62% control of the parliament. The true question is whether UMNO can work together with DAP in one government. The two political parties have been well-known for their continuous hostility over the past 45 years. [Table 4](#) shows the possible number of parliamentary seats won for Model 2.

**Table 4.** Model 2 – Possible Number of Parliamentary Seats Won

Constituency	BN Component Party	Possible Outcome (Seats)
Malay-majority (Malay>50%)	UMNO	55
Balanced (Malay (40%), Chinese (30%))	PKR	40
Chinese majority(Chinese > 50%)	DAP	42
Total		137

The third model involves a coalition among all Malay-dominated parties – UMNO, PAS and PPBM. If UMNO were to refocus on its Shariah and pro-Islamic agenda in the next government, then this Malay-centric coalition will be ideal. Deploying this third model successfully, we can see that this coalition will secure approximately 58% control of the parliament. Interestingly, this coalition can potentially reap at least 10 out of 61 balanced constituencies throughout Malaysia. Even though the predicted outcome is less than a two-third majority, this three-party coalition can easily form a new federal government. [Table 5](#) illustrates the possible number of parliamentary seats won for Model 3.

**Table 5.** Model 3 – Possible Number of Parliamentary Seats Won

Constituency	BN Component Party	Possible Outcome (Seats)
Malay-majority (Malay>50%)	UMNO/PAS/PPBM	119
Balanced (Malay (40%), Chinese (30%))	UMNO/PPBM	10
Chinese majority (Chinese > 50%)		0
Total		129

It is evident that UMNO has all three options at its disposal. Even though the three proposed models are purely estimated, we anticipate that the actual results later may not vary significantly from the ones predicted herein.

### Review of Previous Studies

In the early 1970s, [Kramer \(1971\)](#) writes an influential paper on voting behaviour, which concludes that votes depend on economic events in the year of the election in the U.S Elections. Similarly, [Foir \(1994\)](#) also reports the dependency of votes on economic events. The general theory behind the model is that a voter evaluates the past economic performances of the competing parties and votes for the party that provide the highest expected future utility. [Stigler \(1973\)](#) believes that well-informed voters would look back more than a year, and this behavioral approach is consistent with the earlier theory propounded by [Foir \(1994\)](#).

Similarly, Malaysia elects a new government every five years, and it is established knowledge that elections are bound to have an overwhelming effect on the economy of the country, particularly its financial markets. The stock market has been an influential variable in the government's index of leading economic indicators ([Wong et al., 2009](#)) which is also highlighted by [Nidar et al. \(2017\)](#). When investigating the effect of general election on financial markets, past researchers examine the role of electoral systems, partisanship, political uncertainty, democratic elections as well as U.S presidential elections in constructing both, the value and volatility of financial assets ([Hays et al., 2000](#)).

As researchers from investment institutions and academics work to discover the existence of stock market anomalies, the effect of a political election has appealed to their attention. Some researchers claim that the national political election holds a significant influence on the performance of the stock market. A study by [Har et al. \(2016\)](#) demonstrates the

existence of the political business cycle in the U.S market as the propensity for the incumbent party to amend government policies in their favor. However, earlier findings by [Chuang et al. \(2009\)](#) reveal that a change in ruling party in America, Japan, Britain, and France respectively leads to poor performance of their financial markets. This may be due to different economic agendas espoused by different political parties resulting in frequent changes or modifications in economic policy.

Researchers often link elections and stock markets ([Leblang et al., 2005](#); [Mnasri et al., 2021](#)) as part of their efforts determine whether the incumbent party has played a positive or negative role in steering the nation's economy. Studies by [Kim et al. \(2001\)](#) as well as [Ferri \(2008\)](#) point out that unexpected election results or changes in government structures are often linked to the poor performance of the incumbent party in terms of managing the economy. [Pantzalis et al. \(2000\)](#) investigate the behavior of stock market indices before the election time. The presence of positive abnormal returns before the election reflects a country's degree of political freedom, economic freedom, press freedom, a function of election timing as well as the likelihood of the incumbent party to be re-elected.

[Foerster et al. \(1997\)](#) and an earlier study by [Nordhaus \(1975\)](#) show that stock returns are better during the fourth year of a U.S president's term regardless of his political party. [Nippani et al. \(2002\)](#) examine the effect of the delay in the announcement of election results and reaction of the stock market. Their findings point to significant negative reaction during the 2000 U.S presidential election. [Nippani et al. \(2005\)](#) conduct a similar study to examine the effect of the delay in the announcement of U.S election results on Canadian and Mexican stock markets. Both markets react negatively to the delay in the announcement of the U.S election results.

[Jensen et al. \(2005\)](#) examine the market relationship between politics and the Brazilian stock market during the rise of Lula (former President of Brazil, from 2003 till 2011). They use a time series regression to measure the effect of four main presidential elections on the mean and variance of the Brazilian stock market. Even though the researchers can derive several important conclusions, the evidence indicates there is no statistical significance between the Brazilian election and the stock market return.

In the Malaysian context, bearish investor sentiment is observed at the announcement of the dissolution of the parliament, but the amount or level of public confidence increases by the time BN is announced as the winner ([Lee, 2004](#); [Ngu, 2004, Mar 22](#); [Yusof, 2004, Mar 23](#)). Since Malaysia's 12<sup>th</sup> general election in 2008, public confidence is being observed to be declining; this is mainly attributable to loss of parliamentary seats to the opposition ([Moten, 2009](#)). In the 13<sup>th</sup> general election held in 2013, Malaysia's financial market demonstrates a rather peculiar trend, reflecting new risk appetite among the investors ([Chandran, 2013](#)).

## Research Methodology

This is an exploratory research focusing on providing important insights and new understandings of patterns of voter sentiment from 1974 until 2018. It is important to note that this research is based on a grounded theory as our problem statement is still at a preliminary stage. Most of the datasets are obtained from the Malaysia National Archives and the Election Commission of Malaysia. This 44-year period is considered ideal as it covers the entire performance of BN since its inception in 1973 by the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussain. The ordinary least square (OLS) regression is employed to investigate the relationship between the number of parliamentary seats and BN's victories. In statistics, OLS is a kind of linear least squares method for assessing the unknown parameters in a linear regression model. In this condition, the method of OLS delivers minimum-variance mean-unbiased estimation when the errors have finite variances. The OLS long-run regression acts as the baseline estimation for the yearly time series data. Using univariate analysis, we can subsequently prove that the outcomes of the past general elections are somewhat normal, a pattern quite like the ones observed in other democratic countries around the world.

## Dependent and Independent Variables

The number of parliamentary seats is one of the key variables in electoral management. This number tends to increase in accordance with the size of the population. In the 2018 general elections, as many as 31 seats were offered in the state of Sarawak, making it the largest recipient of the parliamentary seats. In Peninsula Malaysia, there were 26 parliamentary seats in Johor, followed by 25 seats in Sabah. It is worth noting that the two Borneo states make up about 25% of total parliamentary seats offered in the last general election. In this study, the outcome of the general election is our variable of interest, and it is imperative to look at how BN's dominance changes over the passage of time. As part of the model specification process, the number of parliamentary seats offered in every successive general election is assigned as the controlled variable (or independent variable) that could theoretically influence the outcome of the general elections.

## Estimation Methods

Based upon Vroom's expectancy theory, this study employs Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) linear regression function as a baseline analysis. The use of linear regression is warranted because the observed variables in this study demonstrate some element of linearity in time series. This is an attempt to measure any potential relationships between the number of parliamentary seat and the outcome of the general elections. As such, our model specification is based on grounded theory whereby allowing us to propose the hypothesis that the number of parliamentary seats directly influences

the outcome of the elections. Empirically, our bi-variate model is expressed as follows:

$$BN_t = \alpha + \beta_1 TOTAL_t + \varepsilon_t \quad (t=1,2,\dots,N=T) \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

where:

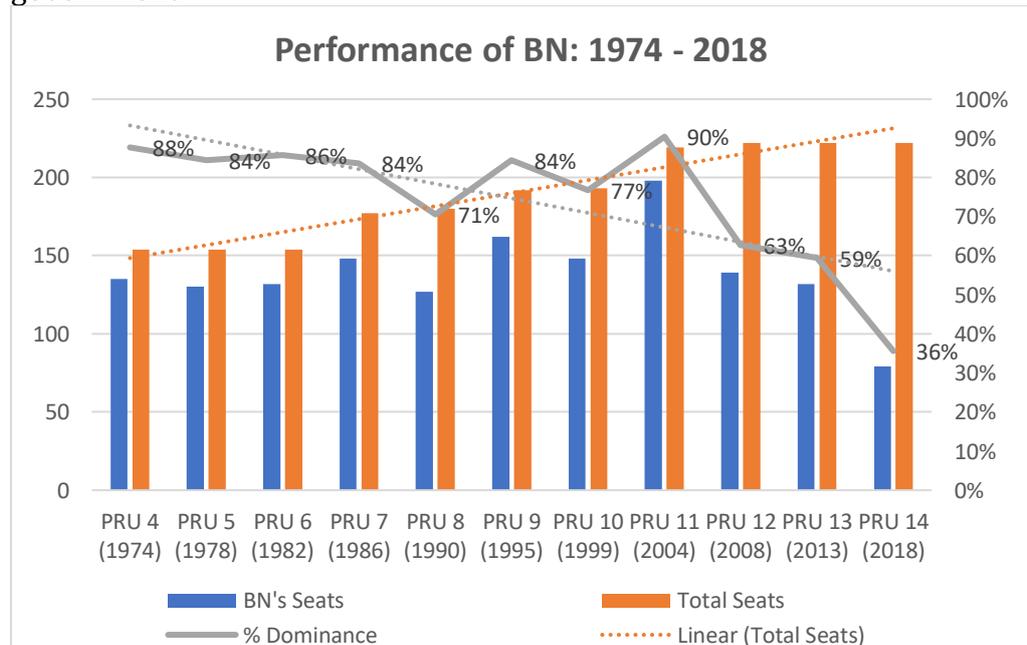
- $\alpha$  = Intercept of the regression model
- $\beta_1$  = Slope of the regression model
- $BN_t$  = Total Number of Seats Won by BN at time t
- $TOTAL_t$  = Total Number of Parliamentary Seats at time t
- $\varepsilon_t$  = Error term (assumed to be normally distributed)

**Data Analysis and Results**

We regress BN’s seats on the total number of parliamentary seats over a 45-year observational period spanning from 1974 through 2018. This section provides detailed explanations on the empirical findings from the OLS regression analysis. The correlation matrix and descriptive statistics are also reported and elaborated in this section.

**Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Analysis**

Figure 1 below shows the performance of BN coalition over a 45-year period. Looking at the trend line, the BN’s dominance in the past 11 general elections has been declining significantly. It appears that a series of unfavorable events like the Asian Debt Crisis 1997-1998 and the 1MDB Scandal 2015-2018 have tainted BN’s reputation and its dominance in the realm of local politics. Any dramatic changes that affect the quality of life of average Malaysians can most definitely influence their political opinions or favorites, particularly in terms of which part gets to form and lead the government.



**Figure 1.** Performance of BN over a 45-year period

Figure 1 also shows the upward trend in the total number of parliamentary seats. From 154 seats in 1974, the size of federal constituencies has now increased to 222 seats. Statistically, the annual compounding growth of parliamentary seats over this 44-year period is estimated at 0.83%. It bears to note that the total number of parliamentary seats has remained at 222 since 2008 due to the inability of the then-ruling government to hold a two-third parliamentary majority.

As shown in Table 6 below, the average number of seats that BN managed to secure in the past 11 general elections is 139. The standard deviation of the total seats won by BN is 28 in which a landslide victory in 2003 garnered 198 seats. The poorest performance is reported in 2018 general election when BN manages to secure only 79 out of 222 seats throughout Malaysia. Unlike BN, the opposition bloc seems to be favored by voters and continues to dominate the popular vote in the last two general elections. In terms of variability, a higher standard deviation in BN's seat justifies its unpredictability in controlling the parliament in the upcoming election. The higher max-min spread in BN's seat also supports this variability.

**Table 6.** Descriptive Statistics of BN's Performance

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Max	Min
BN (Number of Seats)	139	28	198	79
TOTAL (Number of Seats)	190	28	222	154
BN's Dominance (%)	74.64%	16.53%	90.00%	36.00%

From Table 7, it is obvious that there is a positive correlation between the number of seats won by BN and the total number of parliamentary seats. However, this correlation is not statistically significant, most probably due to the small sample size. Given the low value of correlation coefficient i.e., 0.045, the degree of positive association between these two variables is rather weak.

**Table 7.** Pearson Correlation Coefficients (N=11)

Ho: Rho = 0 (p-value)

Variable	BN
BN (Seats)	1.00
Total (Seats)	0.045 (0.8958)

### OLS Regression Analysis

Our baseline analysis is built upon this long run regression and the empirical results in Table 8 demonstrate an insignificant relationship between BN's winning seats and the total number of parliamentary seats

offered during the general elections. This empirical evidence clearly contradicts with our expectation that the number of parliamentary seats *did* influence BN's performance in the past 11 general elections.

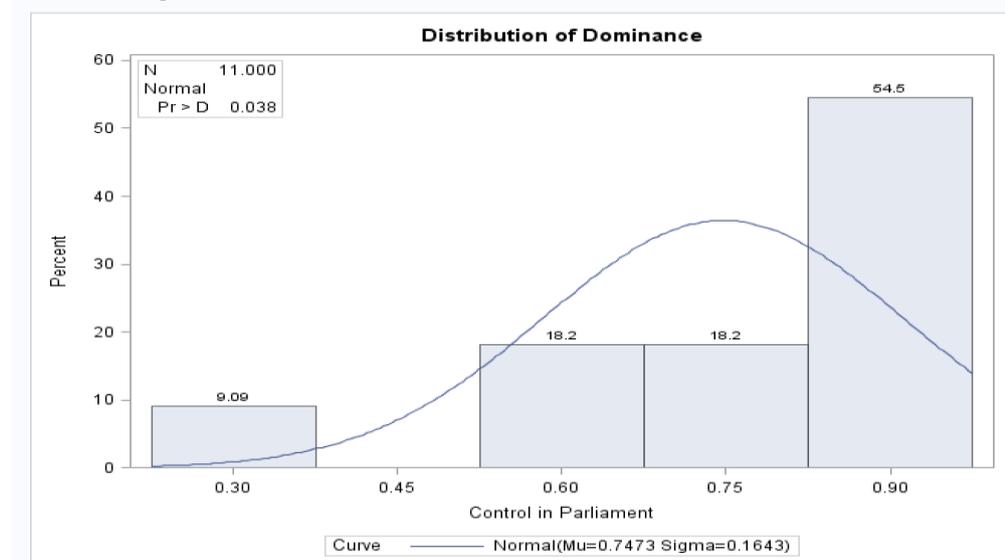
**Table 8.** Parameter Estimates of Long-run Regression  
Dependent Variable: BN's Winning Seats

Variable	DF	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	t value	Pr > t
Intercept	1	130.56	63.99	2.04	0.0717
Total Seats	1	0.044	0.333	0.13	0.8958
R-Squared	0.002	Adj R-Square	-0.1089		

Due to the outstanding performance of BN coalition in the past, our hypothesis predicts a significant relationship between BN's winning seats and the total number of parliamentary seats offered in each general election. However, it bears to note that the statistical results from our long-run regression do not support the hypothesized relationship. Given the p-value is much higher than the  $\alpha$  of 5%, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of absence of relationship between these two variables.

### Normality Test

It is important to conduct a normality test on data since normality is an underlying assumption in parametric analysis. The normal approach will involve either relying on statistical tests or visual inspection. Statistical tests have the advantage of making an objective judgement; however, the results are sometimes undermined by the sample sizes. Kolmogorov-Smirnov is one of the most popular normality tests (Lilliefors, 1967), followed by other refined tests like Cramer von-Mises and Anderson-Darling. The procedures in parametric testing are strictly adhered to in this study and all the basic requirements for this approach must be fulfilled before the present its final outcomes or conclusions.



**Figure 2.** The distribution of BN's dominance in the past 11 general elections

From [Figure 2](#), we can see that BN’s overall performance in the past eleven general elections is relatively normal. Although the distribution is left-skewed, the p-value 3.8% from Kolmogorov Smirnov’s test (as in [Table 4](#)) almost surpasses the 5 percent significance level ( $\alpha$ ). As such, the distribution of BN’s dominance is said to be a skewed normality with the same properties as the normal distribution.

**Table 4.** Goodness-of-Fit Tests for Normal Distribution

Test	Statistic		p- value	
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	D	0.2592	Pr > D	0.038
Cramer-von Mises	W-Sq	0.1245	Pr > W	0.045
Anderson-Darling	A-Sq	0.7472	Pr >A	0.038

\*Significant at 5%

Recalling that our hypothesis predicts a significant positive relationship between the number of seats won by BN and the total number of parliamentary seats offered in each general election. However, the regression results prove otherwise. In other words, there must be other relevant factors that our model has not taken into consideration when estimating this theoretical relationship. As such, the existing model may need further modifications, particularly in terms of identifying relevant variables into the new model specification.

Demonstrably, there is nothing unusual about BN’s dominance in the past eleven elections. Like other political parties around the world, there are times when BN needs to rejuvenate its party members and regain the confidence of investors and member of the public at large. The normality test proves that BN is just a normal party which is susceptible to progress and setbacks over the course of time.

## Conclusion

It is quite surprising that the performance of BN is not influenced by the number of parliamentary seats offered in the past eleven general elections. UMNO has been the dominant party in the coalition exerting a strong control in Malay-majority constituencies since 1974. There are two particularly consequential findings that the author = like to highlight based on this study. The first finding points to a weak positive correlation and an insignificant relationship between BN’s victory and the total number of parliamentary seats as revealed based on the regression results. This empirical evidence suggests that there is no significant association or relationship whatsoever between these two variables. Secondly, documentary evidence shows that the formation of new parties before the general elections (in 1969 and 2018) results in a political upset, which in turn destabilizes the local political landscape. Present study findings are consistent with the work of [Sibon \(2020, May 28\)](#). It is now evident that the political direction (either moderate or radical) will be determined not

only by the political ideology of each contesting party but also based on voter sentiment on pressing local issues. The impartial and professional image of Election Commission is imperative to ensure sustained public faith in the Commission. The voter turnout should be the focus of the Commission and a high turnout is definitely understood to be a clear manifestation of public confidence.

In addition, it is important to ensure that international trade and domestic economy are well taken care of so that a vibrant economy and an uninterrupted flow of business activities can continue to support the livelihood of the average Malaysian citizen. For an industrialized developing country like Malaysia, a sustainable economic growth, which is driven by strong domestic aggregate demand, will reflect our economic resilience as well as public confidence in the reigning political party/government. It is government's primary duty to promote quality foreign direct investment into our economic sectors, particularly in manufacturing and services industries. As such, the current ruling party must hold a clear-cut objective of improving the quality of life of all Malaysians by promoting good governance and operational efficiencies at all levels.

### **Implications of the Study**

The objective of this study has been to examine the effect of the total number of parliamentary seats on the performance of BN over the past 45 years. To this end, study is streamlined towards investigating the strength of the relationships between the number of constituencies and electoral votes. This objective of the study has significant potential to contribute theoretically. Therefore, along with the theoretical contribution, the unique relationship(s) examined in this study have fair contribution in practical terms as well. Several studies available in existing literature focused on studying the BN, however, these studies have not adequately considered the relationship between parliamentary seats on the performance of BN. Additionally, literature widely considers parliamentary seats in relation to political elections; however, no past study has considered the influence of parliamentary seats on the performance of BN. Hence, for reasons cited above, this study also makes a valuable contribution by filling the literature gap and offering rewarding insights for relevant practitioners and stakeholders.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The current study makes number of theoretical and practical contributions, however, there are certain limitations which could be addressed in future studies. For instance, the current study is carried out in the environment of COVID-19, even though the pandemic factor has not been factored into the study design and analysis. It represents one of the most important factors to have a potential link or relationship with electoral behaviour. In view of the intense challenges put up by Covid-19

around the world since early 2020, a new and unprecedented approach in understanding how this pandemic impacts the electoral behaviour has been deemed necessary and desirable. Therefore, future studies should take stock of the role of the pandemic in political development or, in this case, electoral behaviour. The results of the current study are limited to the OLS regression only. Furthermore, enlarging the sample size across countries coupled with employing a more relevant technique such as sentiment analysis via social media is strongly suggested. The current study does not consider the country-specifics or to combine psychological variables with other relevant macroeconomic. Therefore, in future, expanding the country-specifics and combining psychological variables with other relevant macroeconomic variables will not only improve the estimation model but also help contribute towards a more in-depth understanding of electoral management and democratic governance. It is hoped that future studies will investigate these recommendations so that a new perspective or a new policy approach can be presented for stakeholder organizations (say, political institutions or parties) as well as members of the community at large.

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