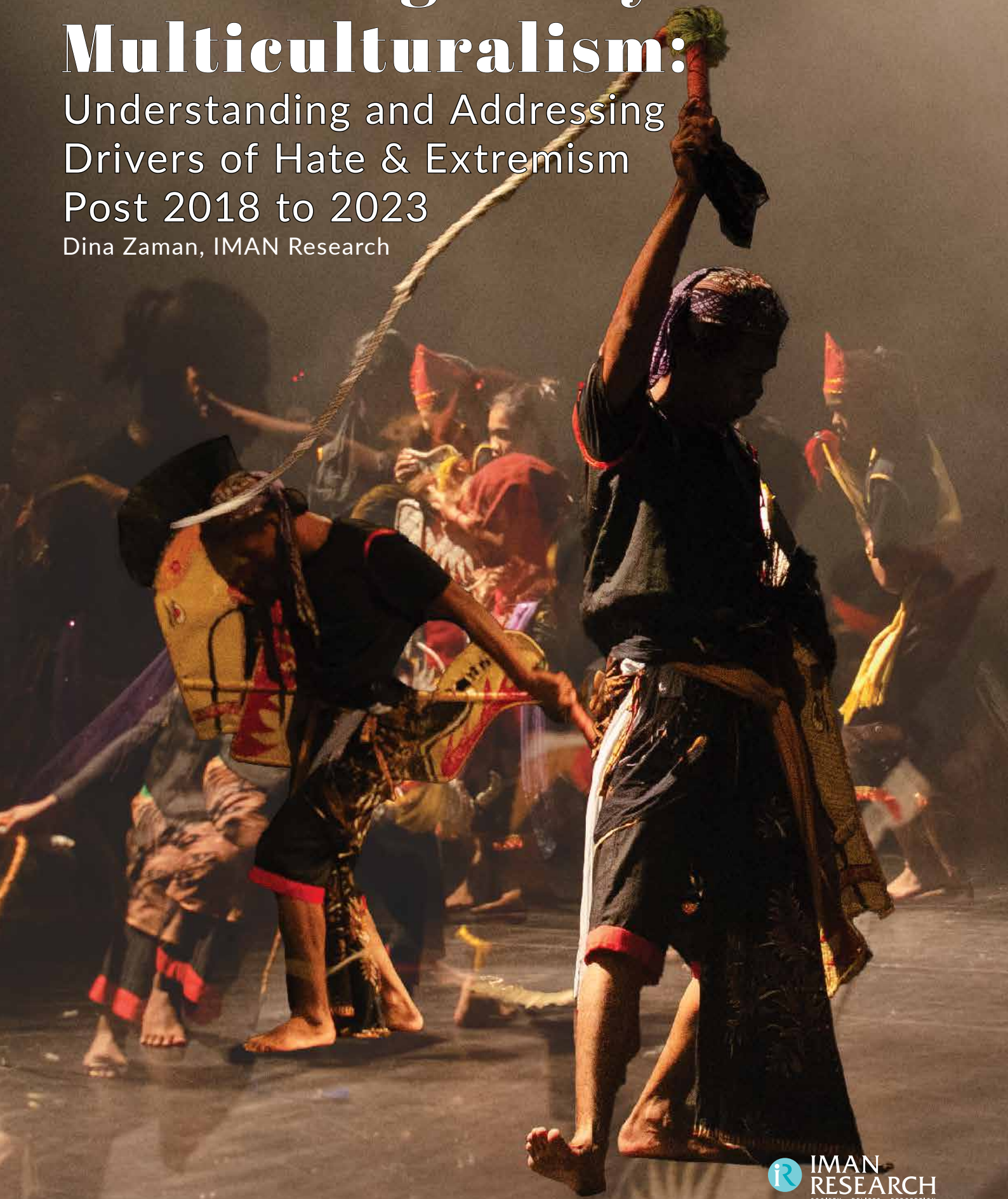


Protecting Malaysian Multiculturalism:

Understanding and Addressing
Drivers of Hate & Extremism
Post 2018 to 2023

Dina Zaman, IMAN Research



Protecting Malaysian Multiculturalism: Understanding and Addressing Drivers of Hate & Extremism Post 2018 to 2023

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Executive Summary	5
Definitions	7
Introduction	13
Section One - Malaysia's Status Quo	16
The Mainstreaming of Ethnocentric Supremacy in Governance and Human Rights	16
Malays at Siege	18
Green is Here to Stay	19
Racism and Hate on The Rise	21
Section Two - The Drivers of Hate and Extremism in Malaysia	24
Activists and Researchers Responses	24
The LGBTQ Community	27
Terengganu Islamist Network	27
The Nationalists	28
Case Study: The Indian Community	30
Section Three - Recommendations	31
Strengthening Social Cohesion	31
Suggested Best Practices	32
Efforts in Creating a United Malaysia	33
Civil Society	34
Case Study: Architects of Diversity	35
Conclusion	37
References	38
Academic references	39
CSO/Think tank reports	39
Media links	40
Screenshots of hate on social media	42
Attachments	44

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Writing about Malaysia and her politics is not easy, even for the experienced scholar and writer (I profess to be an inexperienced one). Analysing Malaysia means one has to unpack chunks of the country's challenges: race, religion, economics and social capital, and the entry points are many. And it is true that Malaysian politics revolves around two things: race and religion. Governments and prime ministers change, but the two bogeymen live on.

However, Malaysia's current political dynamics have surprised its people with its twists and turns, especially after Pakatan Harapan (PH), the opposition bloc, defeated Barisan Nasional (BN) in 2018, and what is certain is the presence of nationalist politics that is growing from strength to strength. The 2022 General Elections which saw Anwar Ibrahim finally becoming the prime minister, confirmed to observers that Islamists have come to roost finally in urban areas of the country and that Malaysia's pluralism is even more endangered. At the time of writing, the Malay Mail¹ reported that Malaysia is leaning more and more towards far right politics as Perikatan Nasional (PN) trumpets Malay rights and cohesion, and it does not seem to be wavering in light of increasing (Malay) public support.

This report focuses on Peninsular Malaysia's multiculturalism at stake post 2018, during COVID-19 and to the present time. If the reader wonders why Sabah and Sarawak are not included in Federal politics, it is due to the fact that they deserve a separate report and rightly so. While it has been stressed many times that Sabah and Sarawak are excluded from almost all political discussions surrounding Malaysia, this writer feels that these two states are too important to be included in this report. Sabah and Sarawak have played a huge role in the formation of the Federal government. The politics in these two states have different dynamics and perspectives that they bring to the table, especially with factors such as Malaysia Agreement 1963, which is rarely discussed by Peninsular politicians, and rarely known by the Peninsular residents.

Some of the findings elaborated in this report are as follows:

- Malaysians are at the end of the tether and do not see any hope for an inclusive Malaysia.
- Racism is an equal opportunity sport: everyone feels shunted by everyone else, everyone believes the other has better lives, and that all Malaysians have experienced racism at work and in their personal lives.
- Race and religion were once the weapons of politicians; today, racism and hate have become mainstream.
- For many Muslims, they enjoy and want all the races to get along, but feel that non-Muslims refuse to engage and accept their Islamic faith.

¹ Noorshahrizam, Shahrin Aizat and Zarrah Morden. Will Perikatan tone down to court non-Malay votes? Pundits predict race, religion cards likely to stay until GE16? The Malay Mail. August 21, 2023. Available at <https://www.malaymail.com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.malaymail.com/amp/news/malaysia/2023/08/22/will-perikatan-tone-down-to-court-non-malay-votes-pundits-predict-race-religion-cards-likely-to-stay-until-ge16/86413>

This report is inspired by the work I have done together with IMAN Research as a co-founder and director, and as a Malaysian keen to understand the fragility of Malaysia's (imagined) diversity. Briefly, Malaysia touts itself as a successful example of multiculturalism, with a population made up of Malays (who are predominantly Muslim), Chinese, Indians and Indigenous people who are known as Orang Asal (The Original People). The latter are natives in Peninsular Malaysia and are generally divided into three major groups, namely the Negrito, Senoi and Proto-Malay, while in Sabah, the population consists of 32 ethnic groups and the major ethnic is Kadazandusun while Sarawak population consists of 27 ethnic groups and the Iban is the major ethnic group.² In the past two decades, ethnonationalism among the Malays, who consider themselves as the rightful heir to Malaysia (Bumiputera/ Princes of the Earth; this is explained later in the report) have called on non-Malays as 'pendatang' - outsiders - and they have to abide to Malaysia's Constitution, Malay rulers and not question Malay rights. For this researcher whose friends come from all ethnicities and backgrounds, seeing hate and politics affecting the lives of all races, in spite of the united front of Malaysians, has been painful to observe and experience.

I embarked on a research and writing quest starting in 2020, where interviews were conducted under the spectre of the COVID-19 pandemic, which are still on-going as the country heads towards concretised far right sentiments. For this report, I will be referring to previous unpublished and published work as well as analysing Malaysia post the 15th General Elections and the Green Wave that came with it. I will also include some of my findings from fieldwork and interviews.

As a researcher who has been writing about identity and religion in Malaysia's public space for over a decade, I do not see enough serious long-term commitment to abate hate and extremism in the country. There have been many initiatives founded and organised by the government and civil society, but they are not consistent. Religious bodies and non governmental organisations (NGOs) have been active, but like politics, preach to a converted crowd. Also, even for stellar, groundbreaking NGOs such as Architects of Diversity, Projek Dialog, to name a few, good work lasts only for a time as there is the issue of funding and sustainability.



State election

² The Malaysia Government Portal. Population. Available at <https://www.malaysia.gov.my/portal/content/30114>

DEFINITIONS

This is a brief summary of definitions used by Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) PCVE practitioners, researchers and scholars. In the beginning it focussed solely on terrorism and violent extremism, but in the past few years, hate and polarisation have been included into the PCVE space. Researchers and PCVE practitioners have long argued that hate in all its forms (speech, art, other types of expressions) and (political and economic) polarisation contribute to extremism. Hate and extremism have been used interchangeably, and like the definition of PCVE, their meanings differ from country to country, community to community. Hate in its many forms may not be seen as bad as violent extremism, but its impact on a country's well-being can destroy the social fabric of the nation.

Below is a short introduction of definitions that the United Nations have decreed, and used by PCVE practitioners.

PCVE

There is no universal definition to describe concepts such as terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, etc given that terrorism has appeared under so many different circumstances. Neither is there a concrete definition to preventing violent extremism (PVE).

However, to provide some clarity and ease the understanding of what may seemingly be complex concepts, this guide will use the following definitions:

Term	Defination
Violent Extremism	Violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or are willing to use ideologically motivated violence to achieve radical ideological, religious or political goals. ³
Terrorism	A strategy or act of violence that is adopted or undertaken to achieve a political goal. Terrorist-related offences include the use of violence for political purposes, such as the hijacking of aircraft, the targeting of marine vessels, the use of chemical or nuclear weapons against civilians, kidnapping and other forms of targeting civilians. ⁴
Preventing Violent Extremism/ Countering Violent Extremism	An approach which aims to address the root causes of violent extremism through non-coercive approaches. ⁵
Radicalisation	A process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations. This may include the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological or religious goals. ⁶

³ UNODC. *Glossary for E4J Secondary Education: Terrorism and Violent Extremism- Teacher's Guide*. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/Secondary/Terrorism_Violent_Extremism_Glossary.pdf

⁴ *Ibid*.

⁵ Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), *Preventing Violent Extremism: An Introduction to Education and Preventing Violent Extremism* (September 2017), https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/INEE_ThematicPaper_PVE_ENG.pdf.

⁶ UNODC. *Glossary for E4J Secondary Education: Terrorism and Violent Extremism- Teacher's Guide*. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/e4j/Secondary/Terrorism_Violent_Extremism_Glossary.pdf

Multiculturalism

Just like PCVE, there is no definitive meaning of multiculturalism, hate and even extremism. However, multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion are part of the UN's mandate.⁷ Multiculturalism may mean the same to the casual reader, but scholars such as John Clayton⁸ has described it as *"... multiculturalism refers to the existence of difference and uneven power relations among populations in terms of racial, ethnic, religious, geographical distinctions and other cultural markers that deviate from dominant, often racialized, norms."* Clayton adds *"... multiculturalism also refers to formal recognition and incorporation of those defined by such differences through policies and discourses that acknowledge the rights and needs of minoritized groups within the public realm, but which also control the terms of such integration."*

The scholar Felipe Fernández-Armesto champions migration as enriching society culturally and linguistically; challenged traditional ideas and made societies more innovative.⁹ Yet multiculturalism itself is controversial in Western countries as well as Southeast Asia. Its concept acts like a band aid of sorts to address and appease the demands and needs of people of different faiths and cultures living in a country or community.¹⁰

Will Kymlicka in his essay, *Multiculturalism Without Citizenship*¹¹, expressed that multicultural citizenship differs from country to country. For example in Canada, the policy was *"... originally demanded in the 1960s by long-settled and well-integrated European ethnic groups - Ukrainians, Italians, and Poles – whose members had been in Canada for decades, if not generations, and who were, therefore, already citizens. And their claim for multiculturalism was in large part a demand for recognition of their historic contributions to the nation."* In Germany however, multiculturalism was adopted as a policy for "foreigners" or "aliens" who were not able to become citizens (Schönwälder 2010).¹² It was a consolation prize for non-citizens who needed a status to facilitate their return to their home countries.

Lastly, multiculturalism can be interpreted differently: liberals may have their own idea of it, an all embracing approach, regardless of creed and race, but for nationalists, it may come with a set of criteria supporting the majority but conditions for minority groups. It is not immune to criticism - some have said the policy was a tool of the state to control its citizens, instead of empowering them. In the case of Malaysia, multiculturalism has caveats: the majority Malay Muslim community may seemingly welcome non-Muslims in the country, but it comes with a price. Many have claimed that this has emboldened minority communities to demand more rights politically, which will be discussed further in this report.

Hate

The world has become more insular and populist in recent years, and driving authoritarianism is the rise of hate speech and hate towards a particular community, government and person. Hate in all forms has become a popular currency among politicians and citizens as they take potshots at their enemies. What is hate?

The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech¹³ defines hate speech as... *"any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."*

⁷ UNDP. POLICY BRIEF. *From Pilots towards Policies: Utilising online data for preventing violent extremism and addressing hate speech*. 2022.

⁸ Clayton, John. *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition)*, 2020

⁹ Hurn, Brian J and Barry Tomalin. *Cross Cultural Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2013.

¹⁰ Barry, B. *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (London: Polity Press). 2001.

¹¹ Kymlicka, Will. Anna Triandafyllidou (ed) *Multicultural Governance in a Mobile World* (Edinburgh University Press), pp. 139-161. 2017

¹² Schönwälder, Karen. "Germany: integration policy and pluralism in a self-conscious country of immigration", in Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf, eds., *The Multiculturalism Backlash*. London: Routledge. 2010.

¹³ United Nations. *Hate Speech*. Available at <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech>

Tackling Hate,¹⁴ a collaborative aiming to build capacities to tackle hate and extremism, describes hate as *“Hate can be a precursor of individual and group violence and conflict and can feed further hate. Hate is often fuelled by feelings of desperation, a lack of control and powerlessness, and it is associated with a willingness to obliterate and destroy the enemy. Haters do not need to know the people they hate, but only what they represent. In this sense, hate can be a precursor of both hate crime and violent extremism.”* Yet, even here, there is the perennial debate about the definition of hate. Hate differs from context to context, is ideological, and as Vergani said, is hating by itself a crime?

In the case of a Muslim majority country like Malaysia, there is a need to discuss collectively what hate truly is. An ethnic community’s idea of hate and prejudice may not be perceived the same by another community.

Populism

(Even) the term ‘populism’ is dependant on context, geography and governments,¹⁵ as Cas Mudde and his colleague had noted in their book. (Populism) is a huge political buzzword of the 21st century, the authors said, but it can be used to describe left-wing presidents in Latin America, right-wing groups in Europe and in the United States, both right- and left-wing factions.

In short, it can be said that populism¹⁶ is about a people’s stance or fight against governments that they feel are repressive. In most cases, the latter can be ascribed to a group of people who are considered as the elites.

In Malaysia, and especially in the peninsular of which this report is focusing on, there are two political terms to look at: Malay nationalism and Islamist populism. While both claim to be about ethnic Malay and Muslim rights, there is a distinct demarcation between the two. With Islamist populists, it is tied *“... to power-grabbing elites who are facing a diverse Malay electorate. These populist elites may operate within a democratic framework, but their commitment to democratic values is unpredictable.”*¹⁷ As we know, Islamists’ worldviews override ethnicity, as they claim, and dealing with ethnic nationalism is a new game altogether. However, Islamists groups are not easily flustered: combining Malay dissatisfaction with religion is a shrewd strategy to shore up their powerbase.

Again, the above definitions are not definitive and as the reader can see, the terms are used interchangeably.

In Malaysia, there does not seem to be any concrete definition of hate and extremism. Terrorism yes, as below:

The Malaysian laws on terrorism are broad; the reader may find them at the Federal Legislation Portal (<https://lom.agc.gov.my/>). There are two primary laws dealing with terrorism, namely the Security Offences (Special Measures) Act 2012 (SOSMA) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2015. SOSMA was enacted as a replacement to the Internal Security Act 1960 (ISA) whilst POTA was enacted in response to the increasing threat of terrorism corresponding with the rise of the Islamic State (IS) terror group. The writing of VE and terrorism also comes under the purview of the Printing Act.

¹⁴ Tackling Hate website. Available at <https://tacklinghate.org/trainingmodule/defining-hate-incidents-hate-crime-and-hateful-extremism-issues-and-perspectives/>

¹⁵ Mudde, Cas and Christobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP, 2017

¹⁶ European Centre for Populism Studies. *Populism*. Undated. Available at <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/populism/>

¹⁷ Shukri, Syaza. *Malay Political Polarisation and Islamic Populism in Malaysia*. Stratsea.com. July 5, 2021.

Available at <https://stratsea.com/malay-political-polarization-and-islamic-populism-in-malaysia/>

There is no protection for any Malaysian citizens if they are caught keeping items linked to a terrorist group or terrorist activities. This includes any publication linked to a terrorist group, in one's phone, laptop; even if it may be for research purposes, you may be prosecuted. This includes media practitioners. Please refer to the following:

1. Under the Penal Code, there is no specific definition of "terrorism". "Terrorist act" is defined by s.130B(2) of the Penal Code as reproduced below:-
 - (2) For the purposes of this Chapter, "terrorist act" means an act or threat of action within or beyond Malaysia where-
 - (a) the act or threat falls within subsection (3) and does not fall within subsection (4);
 - (b) the act is done or the threat is made with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause; and
 - (c) the act or threat is intended or may reasonably be regarded as being intended to-
 - (i) intimidate the public or a section of the public; or
 - (ii) influence or compel the Government of Malaysia or the Government of any State in Malaysia, any other government, or any international organization to do or refrain from doing any act.
 - (3) An act or threat of action falls within this subsection if it-
 - (a) involves serious bodily injury to a person;
 - (b) endangers a person's life;
 - (c) causes a person's death;
 - (d) creates a serious risk to the health or the safety of the public or a section of the public;
 - (e) involves serious damage to property;
 - (f) involves the use of firearms, explosives or other lethal devices;
 - (g) involves releasing into the environment or any part of the environment or distributing or exposing the public or a section of the public to-
 - (i) any dangerous, hazardous, radioactive or harmful substance;
 - (ii) any toxic chemical; or
 - (iii) any microbial or other biological agent or toxin;
 - (h) is designed or intended to disrupt or seriously interfere with, any computer systems or the provision of any services directly related to communications infrastructure, banking or financial services, utilities, transportation or other essential infrastructure;
 - (i) is designed or intended to disrupt, or seriously interfere with, the provision of essential emergency services such as police, civil defence or medical services;
 - (j) involves prejudice to national security or public safety;
 - (k) involves any combination of any of the acts specified in paragraphs (a) to and includes any act or omission constituting an offence under the Aviation Offences Act 1984 [Act 307].
 - (4) An act or threat of action falls within this subsection if it-
 - (a) is advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action; and
 - (b) is not intended-
 - (i) to cause serious bodily injury to a person;
 - (ii) to endanger the life of a person;
 - (iii) to cause a person's death; or
 - (iv) to create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; and
 - (5) For the purposes of subsection (2)-
 - (a) a reference to any person or property is a reference to any person or property wherever situated, within or outside Malaysia; and
 - (b) a reference to the public includes a reference to the public of a country or territory other than Malaysia.

From the provision, it seems that the definition of terrorist act is too broad. In Chapter VI A of the Penal Code, there are wide range of terrorism offences, from a simple act such as having in possession an image or publication related to a terrorist group, without having to prove the intention of having the same (section 130JB) to commission of terrorist act by means of weapons (section 130C)

- Special Measures against Terrorism in Foreign Countries Act (SMATA) 2015 - SMATA was drafted alongside POTA and allows the Immigration Department director-general to suspend or cancel the travelling documents of any Malaysian involved in a foreign terrorist organisation.
- National Security Act 2016 - to provide for the establishment of the National Security Council, the declaration of security areas, the special powers of the Security Forces in the security areas and other related matters.
- Sedition Act 1948 - is a law prohibiting discourse deemed as seditious. The act was originally enacted by the colonial authorities of British Malaya in 1948 to contain the local communist insurgency.
- The Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLATFA)- AMLATFA is applicable for cases involving terrorism financing offences. Under chapter VI A of the Penal Code, the offences are as per sections 130N, 123O, 130P and 130Q. Under Malaysian law, the terrorist entity/group is as specified under s.66B and s. 66C of AMLATFA, not in any other statute or gazette.

The Sedition Act

The Sedition Act 2015 (rev) prohibits discourse deemed as seditious. The act was originally enacted by the colonial authorities of British Malaya in 1948 to contain the local communist insurgency. It outlaws speech deemed to incite unrest, racial or religious tensions, or insult Muslim-majority Malaysia’s ceremonial Islamic royalty.

Those found guilty of sedition could face fines and jail terms of up to three years.

The Principal Act has been amended to include electronic publications, “Special power to issue order regarding seditious publication by electronic means, making or circulation of a seditious publication by electronic means by a person who cannot be identified - (a) is or if commenced or continued would likely lead to bodily injury or damage to property; (b) appears to be promoting feeling of ill will, hostility or hatred between different races or classes of the population of Malaysia; or Sedition (Amendment) 9, (c) appears to be promoting feeling of ill will, hostility or hatred between persons or groups of persons on the ground of religion.”



Wayang Kulit

Printing Act

The Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 is considered to be one of the most strict sets of regulations overseeing the media in all forms. Newspapers and printing presses must obtain licences to operate. Section 3 of the Act gives the Internal Security Minister absolute discretion to grant a licence and absolute discretion to refuse any application for a licence. The licence can be revoked or suspended at any time, and can be given for a limited period.

The amended Act, currently in force, not only regulates the press and publications, but also, in Section 9(1), regulates books, pamphlets and the import of publications from abroad.

Article 4 of the Act also states that (1) Any person who prints or produces, or causes or permits to be printed or produced by his printing press or machine any publication or document— (a) which is obscene or otherwise against public decency; or (b) which contains an incitement to violence against persons or property, counsels disobedience to the law or to any lawful order or which is or is likely to lead to a breach of the peace or to promote feelings of ill-will, hostility, enmity, hatred, disharmony or disunity, shall be guilty of an offence and shall on conviction be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to a fine not exceeding twenty thousand ringgit or to both.

The Malaysian Government takes the work of regulating news on terrorism and violence seriously. When the Christchurch shootings happened, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) contacted all social media platforms to take down any video of the Christchurch shootings. They still continue to monitor the spread of such videos on the Internet; The public is also encouraged to self-regulate and be aware of the things they share online, either through instant messaging apps or on social media platforms, and to report any inappropriate content to the social media platform so that accounts which violate its terms of service can be deactivated. This includes the Malaysian media, who must be aware of the legal obligation to report to the authorities regarding any activities linked to terrorism if they get to know through interviews or information from the public.



Printing Machine

INTRODUCTION

In many plural societies, assimilation, deservingsness, and acknowledgement become part and parcel of community dynamics, as its people navigate life's ups and downs. The politics of such is not prevalent to Malaysia only; even liberal countries like Canada face challenges as migrants and refugees (re)settle in a country that is geographically and socially different from theirs.

As this report is about multiculturalism under attack in Peninsular Malaysia, we will have to recognise that the politics of acknowledgement and resentment are daily occurrences in Malaysian life. One of the subjects under constant scrutiny is Malaysia's Constitution which has long been contested by non-Malays and a number of Malays who want reform. In order for the reader to understand Malaysia, here is a brief primer of the country's demographics.

Malaysia in summary

Malaysia is home to over 33 million people of various ethnic groups. The total population comprises over 29.96 million citizens and 2.69 million non-citizens. The annual population growth rate decreased to 0.6 per cent in 2019 as compared to 1.1 per cent in 2018. The decline was attributed to the decrease in both fertility rates and net international migration.

The Malays/Bumiputras (69.8 per cent) are predominantly Sunni Muslims and are *constitutionally* the original settlers of the land, making up the dominant ethnic group, and The indigenous peoples of Malaysia who make up about 13% of the population are also Bumiputras. They are followed by the Chinese (22.4%) and Indians (6.8%) whose ancestors were economic migrants who moved to Malaysia in the 19th century. Malaysia is composed of 13 states and operates within a constitutional monarchy under a Westminster-style parliamentary system. The Federal government controls most policies and decision-making, with religion and some limited matters such as land left to the state level. The Sultan, the head of the state, heads all religious matters for each state, assisted by the state religious department.

Despite the fact that Malaysian politics can be volatile, with a series of prime ministers helming the position from 2018 to present time, Malaysia has always been viewed as one of the more stable countries in Southeast Asia, having had uninterrupted democratic elections since independence. The country is relatively secular and has experienced positive economic growth. Today, Malaysia is a highly open upper-middle income country, providing twelve years of basic education and healthcare. In terms of gender equality, women account for the majority of students in public universities, and with nearly 32.3 percent of decision-making positions in public service held by women.

However, Malaysia has seen a rise in both religious and nationalist extremism in the past few years, which was apparent in 2018 after the 14th General Elections (GE), when populist narratives became mainstream in Malaysia and political radicalisation increased. This has increased since the last GE in 2022 which saw Anwar Ibrahim becoming the 10th Prime Minister of Malaysia.

One of the possible contributing factors towards far right politics and increasing hate is the increasing income gap among Malaysians due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Statistics Malaysia reported in its Household Income Estimates and Incidence of Poverty Report 2020, that the number of poor households increased to 639.8 thousand households in 2020 and absolute poverty increased from 5.6 per cent in 2019 to 8.4 per cent in 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on household income is tremendous. The World Bank also reported that the pandemic has had a major economic impact on Malaysia, particularly on vulnerable households. Having revised its national poverty line in July 2020, 5.6% of Malaysian households are currently living in absolute poverty. The Malaysian Government is focused on addressing the well-being of the poorest 40% of the population ("the bottom 40"). This low-income group remains particularly vulnerable to economic shocks as well as increases in the cost of living and mounting financial obligations. Today in 2023, this remains a huge concern to the government, and the unity government remains committed to eradicating poverty in Malaysia, launching the ambitious Madani Economy which seeks to

enhance economic growth, promoting investment, and strengthening the local industries to become more innovative, competitive, and capable of expanding into the global market. It will cater to every segment of society, from traders and entrepreneurs to public servants, professionals, workers, as well as urban, rural, and inland poor communities. In fact, the current government looks towards China as it has been effective in eradicating poverty, having lifted 800 million of its people from poverty over the past 40 years, which serves as an inspiring example for Malaysia to emulate.¹⁸

The past few years witnessed the pandemic upending jobs, exposing the cracks in the social welfare system, and the country saw its citizens blaming minority groups such as refugees and migrant workers for spreading the virus. This was covered in a South China Morning Post report by Amy Chew.¹⁹ The pandemic was a challenging time for all - the loss of income, sudden unemployment, and general hopelessness - gave rise to public anger with many turning to social media to express their frustrations. As youths spend much of their time online pre-pandemic, the Internet and social media became their 'haven' from the world outside. This trend was picked up by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue, "... global lockdowns have led to growing engagement in a toxic online cocktail of extremist material ranging from terrorist content to conspiracy theories and disinformation." On Malaysian social media, 'netizens' and 'trolls' add to racial tension by throwing slurs and insults to those they feel are prejudiced against them and this is harmful for our unity.²⁰

Mentioned earlier are the Bumiputeras, who are made up of Malays and Indigenous peoples in the country. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia²¹ in Article 160 deems the Malay as a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or is on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person.

Article 153 of the Constitution also stressed the importance of the position of the Malays and²² "... natives (Indigenous people) ... It shall be the responsibility of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (The King) to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities in accordance with the provisions of this Article."

"Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, but subject to the provisions of Article 40 and of this Article, the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall exercise his functions under this Constitution and federal law in such manner as may be necessary to safeguard the special position of the Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and to ensure the reservation for Malays and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak of such proportion as he may deem reasonable of positions in the public service (other than the public service of a State) and of scholarships, exhibitions and other similar educational or training privileges or special facilities given or accorded by the Federal Government and, when any permit or licence for the operation of any trade or business is required by federal law, then, subject to the provisions of that law and this Article, of such permits and licences."

The above has been challenged by opponents of the clause, who disagree with the prioritisation of the Bumiputeras in almost all aspects of Malaysian life, from education privileges to entry into entrepreneurship where grants abound for Bumiputeras, and that this privilege disrupts Malaysia's diversity.

While this report is not a history book, we must acknowledge that the roots of ethnic and class divisions were mooted by Malaysia's former colonial masters, the British Empire, who created class segregations among the Malays, and economic and ethnic divides among the Malays, migrant Chinese and Indians. Even then the indigenous peoples of Malaya were not taken into account. Malay insecurity stemmed from there, with the Malays demanding rights and the position of

¹⁸ Lai, Allison. October 25, 2023. Malaysia can emulate China's success in poverty eradication, says DPM. The Star. Available at <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/10/25/malaysia-can-emulate-china039s-success-in-poverty-eradication-says-dpm>

¹⁹ Chew, Amy. 2019. Malaysia's dangerous racial and religious trajectory. The Interpreter. Available at <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/malaysia-s-dangerous-racial-and-religious-trajectory> (November 3, 2021)

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Federal Constitution of Malaysia. Available at https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10_akta/perlembagaan_persekutuan/federal_constitution.pdf

²² UN Women. Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database. Federal Constitution of Malaysia 1963, as amended to 2019. Available at https://constitutions.unwomen.org/en/countries/asia/malaysia?provisioncategory=3b1b2696e4f54ddd9636_e5644ffb33b9

Malay rulers.²³ As said by the now former Deputy Chief Minister II of Penang, Professor Ramasamy Palanisamy, *“The seeds of separate ethnic and religious identities were sown during the British colonial era and were merely continued in the post-colonial era.”*²⁴

On May 13, 1969, a racial riot broke out among the ethnic Malays and migrant Chinese and Indians, due to rumours and war-mongering among Malay leaders that the Chinese would take over the already ailing Malay

economy. After the riots were quelled, after much blood spilled, the Government of Malaysia drafted the New Economic Policy to elevate the economic standing of the Malays. This policy however has divided multiethnic Malaysia over the years, and even among the Malays who feel that the policy benefited only the politically connected Malays. A number of racially charged incidents of unrest have occurred in the country, which spiked up after 2018. Since then, there have been sporadic racially charged incidents over the years.



Bersih Rally

²³ Muzaffar, Chandra. *Protector. SIRD Malaysia*; William Roff. 1967. *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*. Yale University Press; Reid Commission. (1979). 2020. Available at <http://www.arkib.gov.my/en/web/guest/suruhanjaya-perlembagaan-reid>

²⁴ Palanisamy, Ramasamy. *Assimilation is an archaic political model*. Focus Malaysia Today. 2021. Available at <https://focusmalaysia.my/ramasamy-assimilation-is-an-archaic-political-model/>

SECTION ONE: Malaysia's Status Quo

Malaysia is in an interesting situation today. The country has a new Prime Minister in Anwar Ibrahim who is known to be an Islamist. While the opposition, Perikatan Nasional (PN), did not win the 15th General Elections (GE15), the Green Wave it sparked has caused fear among Malaysians, especially non-Muslims of the country becoming an Islamic state. In the runup to the state elections which wrapped up in August 2023, the unity government won the race but it was by a very slim margin. The nationalists and Islamists have taken over the six states, such as Terengganu where there is no opposition party at all and PN is making inroads into Penang, especially George Town.

Since the 14th General Elections in Malaysia when the Oppositionist coalition - Pakatan Harapan (PH) - destroyed the BN's hold on Malaysia, racial attacks and hate have increased and been played up in the media, with a number of religious preachers – ulamas – issuing *fatwas*²⁵ (religious edicts) to Muslims in Malaysia to not partake in non-Muslim religious festivals, even though Muslims were allowed to accept invitations to food feasts and meet-ups organised by their non-Muslim friends. For Malaysians who celebrate each other's cultural occasions, the fatwa was polarising, questionable, and confusing. There have been attempts to stop Muslims from attending these festivals. In 2022, the Japanese community in Malaysia celebrated the Bon Odori Festival after a hiatus of three years due to the pandemic. The festival had always been enjoyed by all and sundry but this time around, religious authorities and Islamist organisations like PAS and ilk spoke against celebrating the festival, deeming it as sinful for Muslims. In the end, the Sultans (Malaysia has 13 states, of which nine are ruled by Sultans) who act as an important factor in moderating the country's tense religious politics, stepped in²⁶ to remind the authorities that multiculturalism in Malaysia must be respected and accepted.

The festival went on without a hitch but for many Malaysians, this question arose: when would the day come when they would not be allowed to attend festivals per se? In the last two decades, as conservatism seeped into the mainstream, many no longer attend each other's events like Eid Mubarak, Deepavali, Chinese New Year and Christmas, because of the fear of legal repercussions and backlash from populist groups and conservatives.

Suffice to say, racial politics, with politicians using race and religion to drum up support and flare up tensions is an almost daily occurrence in the country, to the point where Malaysians are almost desensitised and resigned to these attacks. This is expected even in the future, as mentioned earlier.

The Mainstreaming of Ethnocentric Supremacy in Governance and Human Rights

I had mentioned earlier that in 2018, Malaysia saw an unprecedented move in politics: the ruling political alliance, BN which was made up of race-based politics parties, lost to the opposition, PH, a bloc made up of oppositionist parties. While many Malays and their non-Malay counterparts voted for a new government in 2018, there were as many Malays, if not more, who could not reconcile with the fact that the Pakatan Harapan government fielded many non-Malay ministers holding important positions. Thousands of them took to the streets in December 2018, to protest against the ratification of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) in Malaysia, which was perceived to be a threat to Islam and Malay rights as enshrined under the Federal Constitution.²⁷ As we all know, ICERD is an international treaty by the United Nations calling for the end of racial discrimination, criminalising the spread of ideas based

²⁵ Malay Mail Online. February 2, 2023. Available at <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/02/02/johor-islamic-council-issues-fatwa-prohibiting-muslims-from-participating-in-rituals-of-other-faiths/53134>

²⁶ Azmi, Hadi. Bon Odori festival saga sheds light on how Malaysia governs Islam, after sultan rebukes federal minister. South China Morning Post. June 10, 2022. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3181269/bon-odori-festival-saga-sheds-light-how-malaysia-governs-islam>

²⁷ Zaman, Dina. Enabling Extremism: Malay Women, Jihad For Malay(Sia). Malay Women At The Forefront Of Malay Interest Movements. IMAN Research. October 2021. Available at <https://www.imanresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/202110-Brief-October.pdf>. Also see ICERD in Malaysian online news reports: Analysis of rhetoric and public opinion by Jalli, Nuurryanti, Nuurrianti Jalli, Siti Aeisha Joharry and Sabariah Mohamed Salleh, Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590291122000729>.

on racial supremacy, outlawing acts of violence or inciting violence against persons of another colour or ethnic origin and promoting understanding among all races. The Malay Mail²⁸ noted that the protest sent a strong signal to the world that Malay privileges and Islamic superiority must remain in the new Malaysia. For Malay ethnonationalists, this meant that the special rights they enjoyed may be stripped, and they did not want non-Malays to be equal as they. Malaysia's 'social contract' was a pact made by the leaders of the Malay, and minority Chinese and Indian ethnic groups regarding their rights and privileges as citizens, prior to independence from Britain in 1957. Islam, Malay rulers, and the special privileges Malays enjoy cannot be touched, as far as the Malays are concerned. This has been institutionalised in Article 153, Malaysia's Constitution.

The country adopted an affirmative economic action policy that benefits the Malays after deadly race riots in the late 1960s, who form 60 percent of a population of about 32 million.

While this rhetoric is not new, what is fascinating to note is that in 2020 onwards and during the pandemic, activists and researchers noticed the appropriation of human rights, its language and principles by Malay interest groups such as Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (ISMA) and its purported progressive human rights alliance, the Malaysian Alliance of Civil Society Organisations (MACSA).

ISMA is a pro-Malay non governmental organisation (NGO), fronted by moneyed professionals who were educated overseas, many in secular Western countries. Its roots began from a now defunct Islamist group, Jamaah Islam Malaysia (JIM), the precursor to Islamist NGO movements, before JIM split up into two groups, ISMA and IKRAM, a progressive Islamist NGO.

MACSA, an alliance of Malaysian NGOs²⁹ formed to strengthen human rights in Malaysia has a membership of many Malay members which are pro-Malay interest groups. It has close ties with ISMA. MACSA is a group to watch as they have made inroads with human rights groups in Geneva and Europe.



(Source: Twitter, May 12, 2019)

MACSA has worked with a multiracial coalition, Gabungan Bertindak Malaysia (GBM), submitting a report on Freedom of Religion and Belief on Eliminating Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) to the UN Human Rights, Office of The High Commissioner since 2021. The report was "... to address the problems and difficulties faced by Muslims in Malaysia to profess and practise their religion in certain instances and cases. These problems and difficulties represent patterns and examples of discrimination against religious or belief communities in Malaysia in terms of restriction to freely manifest one's religion, religious inequality and the denial of religious and spiritual well-being of Muslims."³⁰

MACSA has also been consistent in furnishing the Universal Periodic Review and Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights reports, one of them being its Mid-Term Report On Malaysian 3rd Cycle Upr Process.³¹ MACSA and its supporters and counterparts have mastered the language of human rights, as the reader can see in the attached reports. This is where many liberal, human rights NGOS fail: due to lack of resources and time, they have never been able to be diligent enough in submitting reports per se to such organisations, which in turn lessens their power base and presence. In addition, there is a strong case of liberal, progressive groups not engaging with conservatives and traditionalists, which in turn worsens the situation. As of September 2023, MACSA launched their fourth cycle of the UPR report.³²

²⁸ Boo, Su-Lyn. *Unexpected Winners And Losers Of Anti-Icerd Rally*. Malay Mail Online. December 8, 2018.

Available at <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2018/12/08/unexpected-winners-and-losers-of-anti-icerd-rally/1701436>

²⁹ MACSA. Available at <https://macsa.com.my/macsa-formed-to-strengthen-human-rights-in-malaysia/>

³⁰ Malaysian Alliance of Civil Society Organisations in the UPR Process (MACSA) & GBM Coalition. *Joint Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief on Eliminating Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16)*. OHCHR. Undated. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Religion/Submissions/CSOs/48.macsa-gbmcoalition.pdf>

³¹ Ibid. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/MACSA-Mid-Term-Report-Malaysia-3rd-cycle.pdf>

³² The launch was featured on MACSA's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/100044284761414/posts/pfbid0uHsr3YK3CjuYznBot2dx7si2p91RZWisYFW67GEKq1zSeudahpSsi4o7TCdmXrgl/?mibextid=NifSoz>

One must applaud these interest groups, even grudgingly, for they certainly have captured the attention of the public. These interest groups have been able to adopt the language and intellect of progressive human rights, but only for a *chosen community*: the majority Malay Muslim community.³³ Non-Malays are not part of the equation.

Silencing and banning such groups may not be the best way for progressive politics and freedom of speech, but knowing that these actors enjoy the support of politicians and power brokers, multicultural Malaysia may see its demise sooner than we think. These actors also have social and financial capital, and are not in desperate need of funding like many Malaysian human rights NGOs do. English speaking liberal groups appeal only to a select few, which truthfully do not represent mostly Malay-Muslim Malaysia.

As of August 2023, we see the Malay nationalists marching assuredly into Malaysian politics. The state elections have proven that. In the past six months, we have seen our politics becoming more fractured and Anwar taking a more populist approach to appease his Islamist and pro-Malay supporters. This does not bode well for non-Malay Malaysians who are already on the edge, observing a country that is sidelining them openly more and more. For instance, at the time of writing, a national brouhaha materialised: the Malaysian Ministry of Education announced the intention to introduce the teachings of the Hadiths (the collected traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, based on his sayings and actions) to students in government schools. The Malaysian unity government has assured that the lessons will be taught to *Muslim students only*, but the matter blew up in the media and caused misunderstanding among many Malaysians. This issue has been picked up by far right groups and Islamist NGOs who stood their ground and said non-Muslims had no say in the matter. Interestingly enough, my Malay nationalist contacts were as concerned as they felt that this new approach to religious classes, would obliterate Malay culture and traditions, as narrated below verbatim:

"... that Anwar is not appeasing the islamists but is breeding and has been breeding islamism with founding of ABIM in 70's. No I am not anwarist. I am nationalist of the 1946 UMNO brand. I have founded a new term there: Islamism."

³³ Chan, Nicholas. 'Human Rights...But for the Majority': The Appropriation and Subversion of the Human Rights Agenda by Right-Wing NGOs in Malaysia. Cambridge University Press. February 16, 2023

³⁴ Merdeka Centre. September 2022. Highlights Of Muslim Youth Survey. Available at <https://merdeka.org/v2/highlights-of-muslim-youth-survey/>

³⁵ Ministry of Home Affairs, Singapore. Singapore Terrorism Threat Assessment Report 2019. January 2019. Available at <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/press-releases/singapore-terrorism-threat-assessment-report-2019/>.

"My concern is hadith is good as an additional matter on guiding ethics. But it should be additional to, not removing traditional Malay ethical education in the forms of perbilangan, peribahasa, pantun, lyrics in traditional songs including kiddy rhymes. These are ethnic cultures breeding good values and should stay around and fresh. God also created ethnicities. Cultures should not be exterminated."



(Source: My presentation on Right Wing Extremism; photos sourced from Internet)

Malays under Siege?

It may sound shocking to the non Malay/Muslim and foreign reader to read that a Malay-Muslim majority country believes it is under siege. This narrative, an imagined fear or not, has been in the minds of many Malays who feel that they are being pushed back financially, religiously and culturally. For example, in 2016, IMAN conducted a nationwide study on youths and violent extremism to understand why Malay youths supported groups like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and wanted sharia law practised in the country. We were informed by our participants that they felt that the Malay-Muslims were under constant attack by quarters that saw them as lazy and corrupt, and the only way out was to have an Islamic state or a country governed by Islamic rule. The narrative that was exemplified in the visual above is still being repeated until today. The Malays are under attack. Studies undertaken by Merdeka Centre, a polling centre, shared the same findings.³⁴ These concerns are monitored by the region, such as Singapore, in case of terror attacks.³⁵

While linking such findings to possible violent extremism and terror attacks may be extreme, groups such as MACSA, ISMA, decried such accusations and news articles, citing Islamophobia. In 2020, MACSA published a report on Islamophobia in Malaysia, citing western news media (and English language Malaysian media) employing a bigoted approach when reporting about Muslims and Islam. The report documented how Islamophobic incidents were not reported by web-based media, and that when movements such as the introduction of 'Khat' (calligraphy) were mooted, they were seen as racist and non-inclusive. Khat (stylised Jawi writing) was a subject in government schools until it was abolished in the 1980s due to lack of interest. "When Chinese interest groups launched a petition against (this), alleging it was an attempt to proselytise non Muslim students into Islam," the report said. This movement against Jawi in schools caused a public furor, with many Malaysians of all races saying that such a subject was a non-issue as many grew up writing in Jawi. But the damage was done - it made many Malays question the sincerity of non-Malays/Muslims.

Such arguments are not recent: many Malay/Islamic interest groups have complained about the treatment of Muslims in the media or at forums in Malaysia whereby the perception of Islam and Muslims in the country are skewed by the liberal English-speaking Malaysians. Columnists touting human rights who are Malay-Muslims are branded as liberals and the antithesis of Malayness and being Muslim. What is worrying is the narrative has truly captured the Malay public.

Green is Here to Stay

At the present time of writing, Malaysia will see state elections in key locations such as Selangor, Kelantan, Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, Kedah and Penang. They are key states such as Selangor, Penang, and Terengganu, that are wealthy in resources and much of the manufacturing and technology sectors are based here. In addition to the other states, these six locations are also vital for the survival of the Anwar Ibrahim government and Pakatan Harapan's hold over Malaysia. Not only would this be the country's first-ever national

"midterm" election in six decades,³⁶ the elections serve as an important barometer to gauge support for Mr Anwar's administration, less than a year after he took power. PH expects to retain all the three states it currently leads, while also aiming to take over Kedah from the PN.³⁷ These elections will also determine Anwar's reign in Malaysia.³⁸

The elections worry many non-Malay/Muslim Malaysians, as there is a fear that Malaysia may turn like Afghanistan, whereby women, young and old are prohibited from working and schooling, and are forced to wear the burqa. The Taliban government itself elicits fear among many Malaysians, whereby they see/perceive that Westernised social practices like drinking alcohol, going to nightclubs, would be outlawed, and that one cannot be vocal. This may seem superficial to the non-Malaysian reader, but the fears are real. The Green Wave in 2022 frightened many. To understand this phenomenon, the below is a brief explanation of the movement.

The Green Wave that came along with the latest General Elections in November 2022 caught many by surprise. PH may have won again, but it was obvious that the power base lay in the hands of Islamists and PAS, the National Islamic Party of Malaysia. PAS, working hand in hand with PN, a coalition of political parties made up of the Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU), the aforementioned PAS, and Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (GERAKAN). It is the second largest political coalition in Dewan Rakyat with 74 seats. If before there was a sentiment that PAS and like-minded groups controlled the heartland - rural and semi urban areas of Malaysia - and would stay there, seeing them enter and making their presence felt in Klang Valley confirmed Malaysians' fears that Malaysia would end up like Afghanistan or Iran, which is being discussed in many media columns.

To understand The Green Wave, one needs to understand why the Malays voted for the PN. In my interviews³⁹ with Malays living in urban and rural areas, the main reasons they voted for PN and wanted an Islamic rule was because they did not want UMNO.⁴⁰ For Islamists such as PAS, UMNO has strayed from Islam, by upholding

³⁶ *The Malaysian Reserve*. Six state elections are expected to be called by July. May 17, 2023.

Available at <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2023/05/17/six-state-elections-expected-to-be-called-by-july/>

³⁷ Anand, Ram. Elections in six Malaysian states are expected to be held by July. *The Straits Times Singapore*. April 23, 2023.

Available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/state-polls-in-six-malaysian-states-expected-to-be-held-by-july>

³⁸ Shukry, Anisah. Malaysia's Anwar Faces Key Test as First State Polls Loom. *Bloomberg News*. June 22, 2023.

Available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-06-22/malaysia-s-anwar-faces-key-test-as-first-state-polls-loom#xj4y7vzkg>

³⁹ Zaman, Dina. Understanding Malayness (post-GE15). *Malay Mail Online*. December 8, 2022. Available at <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2022/12/08/understanding-malayness-post-ge15-dina-zaman/44207>. Also refer to *Understanding Malay voters*. *The Star Malaysia*. January 15, 2023.

Available at <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2023/01/15/understanding-malay-voters>

⁴⁰ Zaman, Dina. Seeking the Malay DNA. *The Star*. May 28, 2023. Available at <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/focus/2023/05/28/seeking-the-malay-dna>

Malayness instead and undermining religion. Then the issue of corruption and greed within UMNO. In the green states, there was little choice. "It was either PAS or another party, and PAS has been working on the ground for years. They know the hearts of the Malays, their dreams and tears."

These sentiments were confirmed in an earlier study conducted by IMAN Research in October and November 2022, who went to the ground to understand the needs and desires of people regarding the 15th General Elections.⁴¹ Malaysians in general, even the new voters, took democratic elections seriously. The Malays voting patterns were the most diverse. "This is not surprising since there were multiple Malay political parties vying for the same vote base."

"However, the anti-DAP sentiment was prevalent. The assumption that new young voters would vote Pakatan Harapan was a myth.⁴² Instead, geography played a more defining influence on voting patterns. The Green Wave - the rise of PAS in the northern states and the east coast but this is not a surprise since the investment to win over the Malays had taken place as far back as 2004."

These findings were further confirmed by a Malaysiakini report on July 20, 2023, GE15: Was The 'Green Wave' Powered By Young Voters?⁴³ In Gombak, the average age of voters was 20.1 years old at the Wira Damai polling district which had 10 polling streams. PN received 57 percent of the votes in this stream, followed by Harapan with 33 percent.

Political pundits have stated in the media that they do not think that PN will take over Malaysia overnight, but warned that the support for PN, Islamist-Malay sentiments, will only grow, even among the educated professionals. Some of the reasons being are that Anwar and PKR have teamed up with UMNO, a morally bankrupt political party, and while PN has a long history of using religious and racially-tinged rhetoric, they have now pivoted to seduce non-Malay voters, using graft and how it impacted everyone in Malaysia. A short discussion

with a few researcher friends which can be considered an anecdote is that in Penang, where the livelihoods of local fishermen are impacted by sand-reclamation and development, demonstrated that PN is using this issue to gain the trust even among the more suspicious non Malay voters.

Young voters are being courted by political parties, but PN is a winner when it comes to their youth savvy social media campaigns. Tiktok is their playground, and the videos are snappy, shrewd and funny. They also have fans who are also Tiktok influencers such as Faiz Aizif, a young man based in Langkawi, Kedah, who sells cosmetics and is renowned for his love of dogs. His videos show him feeding stray dogs around the island, and this has been a hit in Muslim majority Malaysia who are fearful of the animals. He is also a staunch supporter of Kedah's MB, Sanusi Mohd Nor.

There is the argument that PN and PAS cannot be the source of the Tiktok propaganda and had contributed to the Green Wave, as many of the users who uploaded videos are young Malays who had probably attended the talks and agreed with the narrative.⁴⁴ As said earlier, the Green Wave was a long time in coming, and Tiktok videos only just emphasised their presence and influence. However, seeing the power of Tiktok and social media platforms, PN has invested in their campaigns targeting our youths - the South China Morning Post⁴⁵ reported that PAS has invested heavily in Tiktok to take down Anwar's PH government.

However, as of September 2023, it has become obvious that the Green Wave is more than just about the "Islamisation" of Malaysia. Political scientists and writer-researchers such as I have been observing that it is Malay Muslim majoritarianism⁴⁶ that we have now. I quote Dr Hew Wai Weng, "PAS itself changed from 'PAS for all' to 'Malay Muslim first', which demonstrates the change in political direction." This political direction is class based and yes, can be seen as a battle between the Islamists and Malay nationalists.

⁴¹ IMAN Research. *Election Sentiments Analysis of Malaysia's 15th General Elections (GE-15)*. January 18, 2023.

Available at <https://www.imanresearch.com/2023/01/18/election-sentiments-analysis-of-malaysias-15th-general-elections-ge-15/>

⁴² In a report published by the Open Society Foundation, *Open Society Barometer: Can Democracy Deliver?, it is found that authoritarianism appeals to some, especially the young. Just 57 percent of 18-35-year-olds they interviewed think democracy is preferable to any other form of government, compared to 71 percent of older respondents.* Available at <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/focus/open-society-barometer>.

⁴³ Malaysiakini team. *Ge15: Was The 'Green Wave' Powered By Young Voters?* Malaysiakini.com. July 20, 2023.

Available at <https://news18.malaysiakini.com/greenwave-generational-gap/en/>

⁴⁴ Focus M. *The TikTok trigger that pushed the green wave surge*. Focus Malaysia. December 14, 2022.

Available at <https://focusmalaysia.my/the-tiktok-trigger-that-pushed-the-green-wave-surge/>

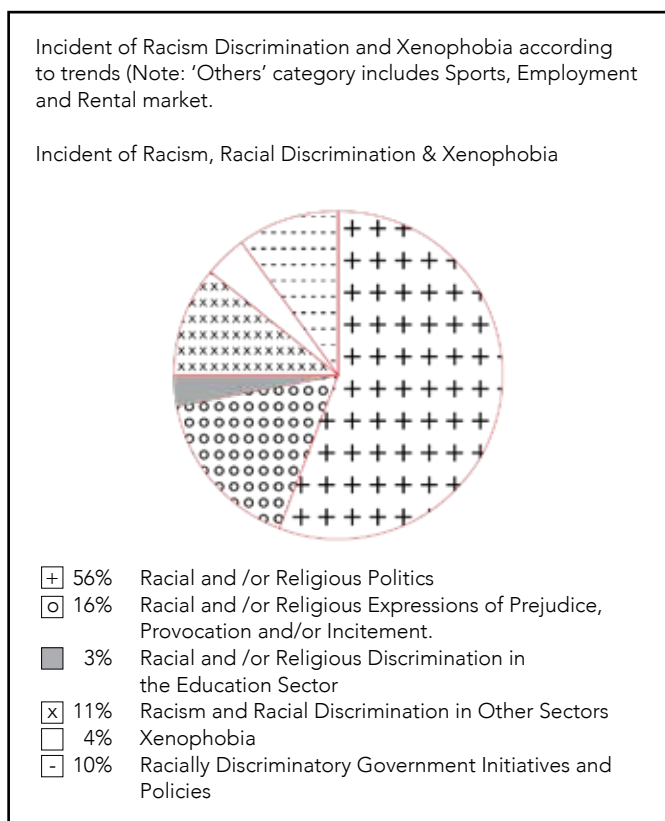
⁴⁵ Sipalan, Joseph and Hadi Azmi. *Malaysia's PAS takes to TikTok as it seeks a repeat of general election success in state polls*. South China Morning Post. July 10, 2023. Available at <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3226948/malaysias-pas-takes-tiktok-repeat-its-general-election-success-state-polls>

⁴⁶ Ahmad, Nik, Nik Nazmi. *The real issue is intra-Malay economic inequality*. Malaysiakini. September 18, 2019.

Available at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/492357>

Racism and hate on the rise

Pusat KOMAS, a Malaysian human rights NGO, which advocates for democracy and equality, and fights against racism and racial discrimination, has been reporting on hate, racism and xenophobia over the last 15 years. In its latest 2022 report⁴⁷ KOMAS noted that in the past eight years, 2022 saw the highest number of racial incidents. There were about 82 reported hate incidents while there were 74 reported cases of combating racism and hate. While this seems to be balanced, it is still worrying. All Malaysians experienced the mentioned crimes and the breakdown is as follows: the largest percentage of incidents identified belonged to Racial and/or Religious Politics (56%), followed by Racial and/or Religious Expressions of Prejudice, Provocation and/or Incitement (16%), and Racially Discriminatory Government Initiatives and Policies (9%).



In the chart above you will see that racism and discrimination impact employment and housing matters. There are many reports on how Malaysians face rejection from real estate agents and landlords for being the wrong race and religion. This is a serious matter, with lawmakers debating in Parliament about rental discrimination.⁴⁸

Sadly, Malaysian politics contribute to much racialisation of policies and discrimination Malaysians face. Politicians of all stripes make insensitive remarks, and drum up racist sentiments, in the hopes of getting support, which can be seen in the table below:

9 January 2022	DAP Perak Chief, Nga Kor Ming racialising Perak's evacuation order due to unauthorised temple development risking public safety as an unfair treatment towards racial minorities ¹³
11 February 2022	Claims by SENator Khairil Nizam, PAS Communications Chief that the collaboration of Malay parties will not increase racism ¹⁴
5 April 2022	Wan Fahysal claiming that liberal Pakatan Harapan cannot provide Malays with the 'protection' they need ¹⁵
7 April 2022	Wan Fahysal claiming that the Chinese community votes for DAP due to communal protector mentality ¹⁶
11 April 2022	Putra President Ibrahim Ali claiming that Malays will lose their land in 20 years without proper guard and preservation ¹⁷
1 May 2022	Putra President Ibrahim Ali reminding Malay-Muslim of their colonised history and warned them of a future where the Malay race falls ¹⁸
11 May 2022	PAS Communications Chief Khairil Nizam advocating the Ummah Unity agenda and emphasising that Malaysia's leader must be Malay-Muslim ¹⁹
15 May 2022	UMNO President Zahid Hamidi calling for the Malay and Bumiputera agenda to be the main priority of the government ²⁰
3 July 2022	PEJUANG aiming to reduce the poverty gap among Malays ²¹

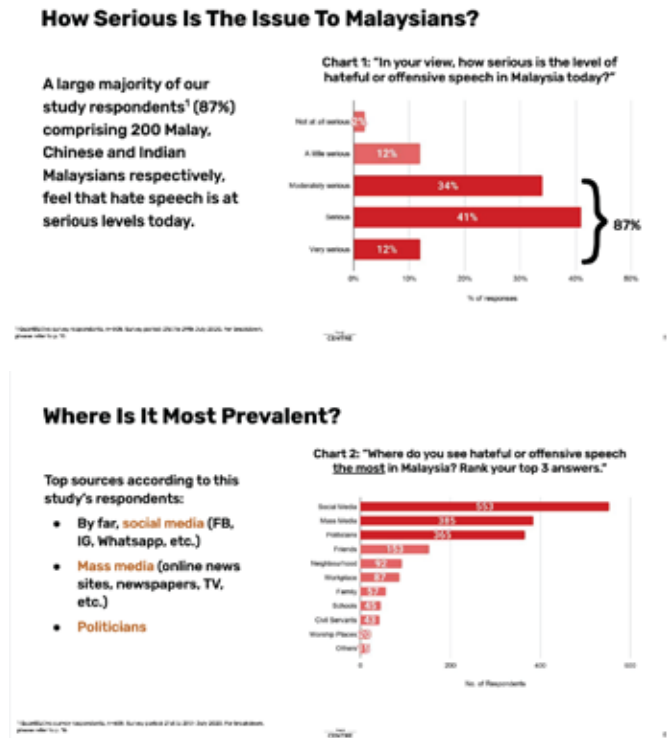
(Source: Malaysian Racism Report 2022, Pusat KOMAS. Above is some of the sentiments spouted in the media.)

⁴⁷ Pusat KOMAS. MALAYSIA RACISM REPORT 2022. January 2023. Available at <https://komas.org/malaysia-racial-discrimination-report/>

⁴⁸ Free Malaysia Today. Racism, landlords and tenants: two views on new law. 20 April, 2022.

Available at <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/04/20/racism-landlords-and-tenants-two-views-on-new-law/>

The KOMAS report is a detailed one, and there are many more organisations in Malaysia which do similar work. One is the now defunct The Centre, whose work on the death penalty overturned it, and hate crimes which have caught the eye of the public. Their work since 2020 on tracking online hate and fake news have demonstrated that these are existing problems in Malaysian society, as seen in a presentation below:



(The Centre Malaysia, Hateful to Whom, and How? A study of responses to Malaysian hate speech samples, towards developing a framework for hate speech categorisation & response. November 2020)

As seen in the above graphs, 87% of Malaysians feel that the level of VE in the form of speech has reached worrying levels. The Centre⁴⁹ reported that in Malaysia, overly broad provisions describing harmful content have contributed to an overly punitive approach towards content as well as limiting legitimate criticism. That was in 2020. Since then, hate speech has spiked up.

The Merdeka Centre, a Malaysian polling organisation, conducted a regional study on Tolerance and Religious Extremism in SouthEast Asia in 2017, cited the following:

"We can only tolerate practices, or values, or beliefs of other people when these differ from our own. If we do not find them objectionable then our attitude would be one of indifference or approval. If the difference of view does matter, a person stands in opposition to the different practice or value. This opposition may mean we want to suppress it, but toleration means that we do not try to do so. Tolerance is defined as the attitude that allows for the peaceful co-existence of conflicting views and ways of life within the same society."

However, the study showed that when it came to Muslims accepting fellow Muslims and non-Muslims in Malaysia, across the board, Muslims expressed strong preference for their own group. Buddhists in Malaysia have a higher preference for Christians than Muslims. The Christians however, expressed higher preference for their group and expressed more positive feelings towards the Muslims compared to others.

The drivers of extremism, which Merdeka Centre and other local think tanks have reiterated from time to time, are politics, religious and political elites using religion to mobilise support for political gains, growing inequality (intra-and inter-ethnic inequality) which could generate widespread anomie, anxiety and anger. Ignorance of other religions and perceptions that Muslims around the world are being mistreated is another reason.

Architects of Diversity (AOD) has been around less than five years, and they are building a reputation as trainers and promoters of inclusivity. On September 14, 2023, they released their study, State of Discrimination 2023, which shows the following: Please refer next page.

It is obvious from the report above that racism in Malaysia is an equal opportunity 'game', and that all Malaysians have been attacked in one way or another.

Racism and hate are so pervasive in Malaysian society that the Malay rulers, watchdog groups are speaking up. Even think tanks like IDEAS Malaysia, known for neo-liberalism and free market stance, are looking into stemming hate in schools.⁵⁰ Hate in Malaysia is not an isolated case - it is already being mainstreamed.

⁴⁹ Tham, Jia Vern and Khairil Ahmad. Too Much? Not Enough? Drawing the Line When Monitoring Harmful Online Content. The Centre. September 27, 2021. Available at <https://www.centre.my/post/too-much-not-enough-drawing-the-line-when-monitoring-harmful-online-content>

⁵⁰ Subramaniam, Latha. Fighting Racial Discrimination in Malaysian Schools. IDEAS Malaysia. September 9, 2022. Available at <https://www.ideas.org.my/fighting-racial-discrimination-in-malaysian-schools/>

Main Findings

The majority of Malaysians (64%) reported having experienced some form of discrimination in the past 12 months.

- Malaysians primarily reported having experienced discrimination in the past 12 months related to socio-economic status (38%), age (33%) and ethnicity (32%).
- Gen Z (18-24) were more likely to report having experienced ethnicity-related discrimination (43%) than their older peers (22% for 60+ and 23% for 40-59).
- Hindus were more likely to report having experienced religious-based discrimination in the past 12 months (40%), compared to their Muslim (20%), Christian (26%) and Buddhist (22%) peers.
- Both men and women reported having experienced gender-related discrimination in the past 12 months at similar rates - 21% and 27% respectively.

Discrimination was primarily experienced on social media (32%), and at the workplace while looking for jobs (30%) and at work (29%).

Indians reported having experienced higher levels of discrimination than their peers when applying for jobs (51%), when looking for housing (35%) and when dealing with the police (21%).

Among those who reported having experienced discrimination at work, work conditions (62%) and pay (53%) were the related domains.

- East Malaysians were more likely to experience discrimination related to work conditions (72%).
- Malay (56%) and Indians (60%) were more likely to report having experience pay-related discrimination than Chinese (41%) and Other Bumiputera (51%) peers.

Among those who reported having experienced discrimination, the majority (55%) did not report it.

- Among those who did report their experience, employers (14%) or law enforcement (11%) were the most popular reporting lines.
- Among those who did not report their experience, respondents said they chose not to report mainly due to having no evidence or difficulty producing evidence (32%) and high barriers in terms of time or money (32%).

Among major religious groups - Muslims, Christians, Buddhists and Hindus - each felt that members of their own groups experienced the most amount of discrimination.

- 59% of Muslim respondents felt members of their own religious group experienced a lot or some discrimination, with that figure being 63% among Buddhist respondents, 76% among Christian respondents, and 81% among Hindu respondents.
- Most were unaware about discrimination relating to animists (beliefs of many indigenous groups), with 44% opting to respond with "don't know".

Discrimination literacy and agreement is generally low.

- For instance, less than half (49%) of respondents felt that being forced to not wear religious clothing at work is considered discrimination, while 37% felt it was not considered discrimination.
- Forms of behaviour with the highest rating in being considered discrimination were being called a racial slur online or physically (63%) and being unable to apply for a job due to specific language preferences (63%).

Malaysians were generally split when asked about their satisfaction with the current government's initiatives to solve discrimination. 45% said they were very satisfied or slightly satisfied, while 40% said they were slightly dissatisfied or not satisfied at all.

- When asked what the government should do to solve discrimination, answers included creating a law for discrimination and raising awareness on discrimination.

(AOD Launch of State of Discrimination Survey 2023, September 2023).

SECTION TWO: The Drivers of Hate and Extremism in Malaysia

The non Malays will continue (to be) demanding, the Malays will continue their racial superiority attitude.. tak ke mana jugak (not going anywhere). Add LGBTQ community lagilah the Malay Muslims will continue to spew hatred n discrimination.

America (has) 200 years of independence and is still struggling. We are 60 years old. Only the youth of the nation can change this with a more progressive mentality. You can see this happening. They are more chill and unperturbed by racial, religious and class differences. Lil by lil... maybe by hari kiamat (maybe by Doomsday) we'll get there." (Indian, male, identifies as homosexual, successful professional, 60)

The above quote came from a respondent in a Whatsapp message. I began these discussions with Malaysians from all backgrounds and ethnicities, and what I found was that many, if not most, were tired of focus group discussions, interviews on race, multiculturalism and inclusivity. A good number refused to entertain my requests for interviews. These conversations have been had for over two decades, with little to show for. That a number did not turn up on designated dates for interviews was telling: Malaysians were fed up with such discourse.

Type of Source	Source - Groups or Individuals	Purpose	Data collection method
Baseline Informant	Malay Interest Group Chinese Interest Group Indian Interest Group	An assessment of what they think of multiculturalism	Series of interviews and discussions Recordings from previous years (unused!)
Civil Society	KOMAS and SUARAM	Questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the drivers of hate and extremism in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak? • What are we to fear and acknowledge post-State Elections? • How can this new government leave a positive legacy when it comes to multiculturalism in the country? 	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On social media, a few members of the LGBTQ community have defended Malay rights. Is this a matter of a racial identity more than sexual/gender? • When it comes to the Allah issue, it would seem that many Malays, whatever gender they identify with, the Allah matter is the purview of Malay Muslims only. Do you agree, and what have you observed? • You are part of the LGBTQ community, of course you have seen and suffered from discrimination. Do you see any space for your community, and is multiculturalism in Malaysia only for the select few or a certain ethnic race? 	

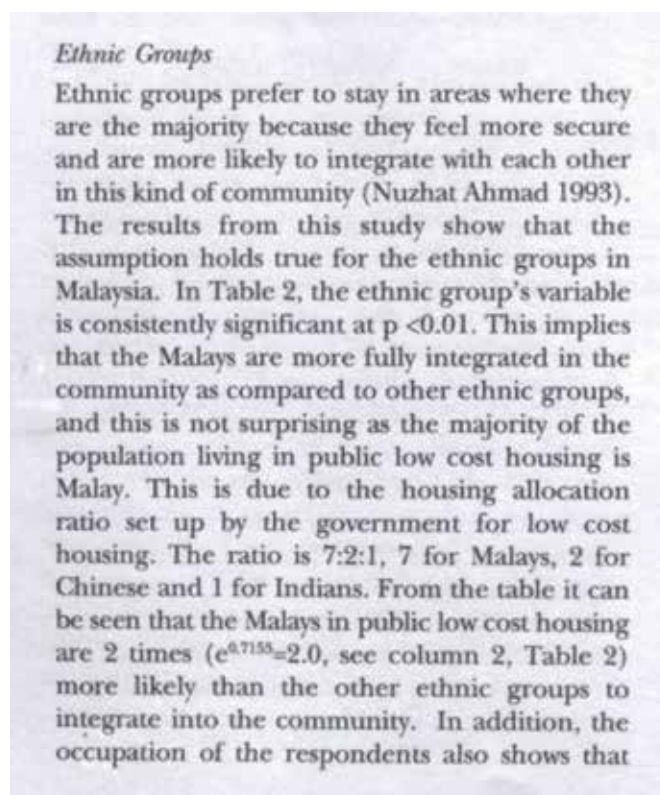
LGBTQ	Gay men and transwomen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On social media, a few members of the LGBTQ community have defended Malay rights. Is this a matter of a racial identity more than sexual/gender? • When it comes to the Allah issue, it would seem that many Malays, whatever gender they identify with, the Allah matter is the purview of Malay Muslims only. Do you agree, and what have you observed? • You are part of the LGBTQ community, of course you have seen and suffered from discrimination. Do you see any space for your community, and is multiculturalism in Malaysia only for the select few or a certain ethnic race? 	
Researchers	Local universities and independent researchers	<p>Questions asked were: As researchers, specialists on digital language, social media, to study hate online and offline, what do you think are the drivers of hate and extremism in Malaysia?</p> <p>How bad/comparable is the above to other countries and should we worry?</p> <p>Do Malaysians/observers online take online hate and extremism seriously? Malaysia's multiculturalism is at stake. How do the above impact it?</p> <p>What can we do to stop this? policies aside? Are we doing enough?</p>	

My group discussions varied from one to three persons in total, due to the fact that I began them right before Malaysia's state elections and that my respondents preferred a more intimate setting to allow them to express their true thoughts. I interviewed several groups face-to-face, over What'sApp, and Zoom. For reasons of safety, I will not be using their names here, preferring to categorise them by their profession. Here I post salient points from my discussions with these groups.

Activists and researchers

This group of participants had two distinct backgrounds: either they came from a multicultural background and in adulthood, entered a homogenous environment or the opposite. The irony is not lost on them as they navigated racism at work and in personal lives. Participants urged us to look at our housing policy and how residential areas are segregated by race.

The 2003 study still holds true until today; while more urbanised areas see communities integrating better than rural towns, "... (Malays) *Ethnic groups prefer to stay in areas where they are the majority because they feel more secure and are more likely to integrate with*



(Source: Ahmad Hariza Hashim, Residential Satisfaction and Social Integration In Public Low Cost Housing in Malaysia, 2003. Shared by a participant)

each other." This is prevalent among the Malays as they tend to live in low cost housing areas, due to the housing allocation ratio setup by the government. The Malays can more easily accept other ethnic groups with their communities compared to Chinese or Indians, though they would prefer to live in an all-Malay enclave. This is due to the societal nature of the Malays - religious activities at the mosque, communal programmes - and for the non Malays, the residential aspect is not an important factor determining their behaviour for social integration.

Most residential areas are still dominated by one ethnic race today, and schools are far from these residences, worsening racial ties. Hence, interracial neighbourliness is almost non-existent in many housing areas. Even in Kuching, Sarawak, many housing areas were divided into racial (tribal) lines. *"This even impacted how COVID-19 aid was distributed,"* a participant said. At the time of this discussion, the state elections were discussed, and one anecdote that was based on on the ground sentiments was that certain parties may delineate certain locales. *"Of course, this could be just a rumour."* The key word was 'Bumiputera'. If a group was categorised as that, it would be easier to get benefits.

At the same time, housing in Malaysia also came with a clause: for many owners of homes, race was an important matter, citing religion, cultural differences, and income as deterrents to leasing their homes.

The respondents who participated in the group discussion unanimously agreed that education was mainly to blame for the ethnic cleavages among the races in Malaysia. That too depends on the class of families and where they studied: wealth does not equate to inclusivity as many private and international schools catered to only the rich and a certain demographic.

They observed that religious and political ideologies among Malay Muslims of Malaysia could be hard to read. Many professionals were the beneficiaries of the New Economic Policy and scholarships, and while they were not against the government of the day, those from Kelantan for example would still vote for PAS. This was because of a simple reason: their families had always voted for the Islamist party. They may not be outwardly racist, but would still want their rights as Malays and Muslims upheld. Sometimes overseas education was not enough to deter them from conservatism; as one participant observed, *"In fact, many came back from stellar universities like the London School of Economics and became more conservative."*

Respondents also noted that even at work, areas of power were divided into ethnic lines. The Chinese would be at one corner, dominating a segment of the work, while the other races stayed in their own professional enclaves. In fact, as one participant recollected, the areas of power were also bound to the geography of the organisation's branches.

"A branch of a (bank) would be the Chinese area because the location was predominantly Chinese, while the other, Malay." Housing integration was one thing, but seeing these lines drawn at work was another. Unity was not easy.

Another comment:

"Even the accent or colloquial language of a person could be judged not suitable for a certain branch of an organisation."

This group was also in agreement that many Malaysians have never really befriended Malaysians of other faiths and races. If there were friendships, they tended to be superficial.

A participant who works with an Islamist group as well as an anti-racism ngo expressed concerns over right-wing extremism, whereby certain groups would take a *hadith* and twist the teachings of the *hadiths* towards hate to appeal to young people. For the average Malay who does not have an Islamic studies background, it would be easy to fall for the narrative.

The issue of citizenship cropped up as well. For many Malays, the country was the land of the Malays.. But for non-Malays, citizenship was based on the constitution and they had a right to be in the country. This puzzled the participants.

What this group did do, to contribute to anti-racism, is educate their families and relatives first. But this has not been easy for them as older relatives and parents fought back and resisted.

The LGBTQ community

Many of the LGBTQ community I reached out to declined to be interviewed as they wanted to safeguard their privacy. There was also the fact that the interviews they had participated in the past did not change their lives, and in some cases, worsened their plight.

The few who were transwomen, who agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity, said that the Woke and Cancel culture made things worse for them.

"(Our) neighbours have known us for a long time and do not mind us, as long as we do not prostitute ourselves and conduct ourselves badly in the flat we live in," one said.

With LGBTQ becoming the bogeyman of the far right and extremists, things have worsened for them and their friends. If the LGBTQ activist community in Malaysia had not taken up the cause the way the Western world has, it would not be as hard for them.

"Human rights the Western way has brought much grief to us, and it really is not our (Asian) culture. Now the spotlight is on us (trans women) and our friends. How can multiculturalism even be protected if we are being attacked? There is no inclusivity."

When I showed them a Tiktok video of a young male influencer supporting PN and holding ethnonationalist views, they said that a person's gender and sexuality has nothing to do with ethnic and religious identities. There were many members of the LGBTQ community who were staunch Malays and Muslims. The issue of 'Allah' where there is constant debate on whether non-Muslims could use the word Allah, was taboo for a good number of Malay gay men and women.

At the beginning of this section, I had quoted a respondent who identified himself as a gay Indian-Malaysian man in his early 60s, who messaged to say that there was no hope of diversity in Malaysia. The races would continue the fight and demand for their rights. The Malay Muslims would continue to spew hatred and discrimination towards the LGBTQ community. But he was hopeful about Malaysia's youth who are unperturbed by racial, religious and class differences.

Terengganu - The New Wave of Islamists

As part of a Peninsular study on Malay youths and democracy, IMAN Research went to Terengganu, the East Coast of Malaysia which has always been an enigma to those outside the state, trying to understand the political bogeyman that is Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). The fieldwork explored the dynamics of new politics in PAS, and how it has taken over the state. It's a fascinating study on how the youth have changed and matured politically, unlike their forefathers who were regarded as village despots.

The participants were part of the Islamist network active on the East Coast and active members of organisations such as PAS, Amanah, and other NGOs. Most of the participants were male, and the sampling method was snowball sampling. They had to be: 1) tertiary-level educated, i.e., university, 2) had religious education when they were younger, and 3) lived in urban areas, although some were from rural or suburban areas.

All the participants were exposed to Islamism around Form 3 to Form 5, during their secondary school years and this came from their religious teachers. They were involved in university Muslim student movements, mainly those organised by PAS. All of them, even those who were sympathetic towards UMNO, Pakatan Harapan, believed Islam was a deeply embedded part of public and private life. They also believed that Islamic principles must guide politics.

Unlike their fathers, uncles and the older generation of PAS members of yore, these new *Muslimats* were more attuned to politics and less sentiment based. Many of the young men interviewed had completed tertiary education, spoke English well and worked in the oil and gas industry. If before, such professionals were quiet about their political affiliation, our participants were out and proud about their affiliation with PAS.

Like the liberals and progressives of Malaysia, they saw no problem with multiculturalism. In fact, they raised the issues of racial polarisation and the lack of interaction among the races. They discussed how non-Malays didn't seem to want assimilation and speak Bahasa Malaysia, and preferred attending vernacular schools. How best could these be addressed then?

What they saw as problematic was the current treatment of Islam - Anwar's new government seems to be falling short of protecting the religion, rendering Islam's position shaky. For example, the recent KEPCI concert which celebrated KFC's⁵¹ 50th anniversary in Malaysia saw a group of religious school students attending it, which raised an uproar among conservative Muslims. Liberal Malaysians were challenging syariah laws, with strategic litigation being used to undermine Islamic laws. All these were worrying to them, even as they upheld multiculturalism in the country.

They also expressed concerns over the following issues:

- Non-Muslims monopolising the economy
- Non-Muslims interfering in Islamic matters because they do not want the religion to flourish.
- "We are a tolerant race, but we feel that we are being stigmatised by non Muslims, who demand more and more rights."
- Non-Muslims must understand the social contract of Malaysia, pre-independence, and need to integrate more with the Malays. How is it that they can't even speak Bahasa Malaysia, and yet claim to be Malaysians?
- Non-Muslims must accept the Federal Constitution and not challenge the monarchy and Malay rights.

The sentiments expressed by the Islamist network are similar to Malay ethno-nationalists.

The Nationalists

Malay nationalists

My interview with Malay nationalists was an eye-opener. Contrary to some public opinion that these Malays were undereducated and spoke little English, the ones I met spoke very good English and were well-versed in the country's political dynamics.

The resurgence of Malay consciousness and nationalism was due to the fact that many Malays had given up on the government, and looked upon all these roadshows and media appearances as a marketing gimmick. As far as they were concerned, the Green Wave was never really about the heartland/rural votes. Many I met who voted for PN were professionals, retired civil servants, spoke English and were highly educated. They were just fed up. They protested by voting for PAS. (Next are snippets from my interviews which I also used for an article for Malaysia's English Daily, The Star.)

"All these Malay politicians since 1957, they have let us down without fail."

"(We) Malays are turning to ulama and religious people because they know politics can't do anything."

"We don't like PAS but we voted for them to teach (you) a lesson."

"Well if the country sinks, at least we have Allah."

When it comes to multiculturalism, they have nothing against the non-Malays. They enjoy the diversity. But one echoed the sentiments of many. *"Now, this land has made many of them wealthy. They are outsiders (pendatang) and want more despite their wealth. All (we) ask is that they don't question the Constitution. This is the land of the Malays and the official religion is Islam. Non-negotiable!"*

I interviewed a young man whose mother is well-known among Malay history enthusiasts and pro-Malay groups. Diversity has always been a part of Islam and the Malay land, they said. Again like the others, they had no issue with multiculturalism. In fact the young man was articulate in his thoughts, which he expressed in a WhatsApp message after the interview: *"(The current situation) is a reaction towards modern living; you see people, especially the younger generation live miserable lives. We (Gen Y and Z) are a poor, depressed and miserable lot. The prosperity that has been enjoyed by the Gen Xs are largely gone now. Inflation, recession, the breakdown of social structures and the failing of moral authority is the norm these days (esp, in the West. See Catholic sexual abuse coverups, Islamic terrorism, and even the Dalai lama has been mired in controversy)."*

He continued, *"Young people seek spirituality and religion as solutions for their problems, the thing is, their traditional religious institutions have largely failed them (especially Christianity). so you see a lot of these people who claimed to be spiritual and not religious. and whom in the absence of a religious body that traditionally defined key concepts and roles are breaking them down In the name inclusivity. So you have terms that are now redefined: gender, sexuality, profanity, etc. That being said, true peace, happiness, and contentment are still out there. For, amidst all these dark clouds there are still rays of sunshine still. you just have to find them."*

⁵¹ KFC - Kentucky Fried Chicken

What about the current rise of ethno-nationalism, I asked. In any case this is not new, he said. During the 70s, the West, especially the Americans, had a crisis of conscience. It was the coat tail of the Civil Rights Movement when the reality of Vietnam really hit home and the Oil crisis happened. You have people looking towards religion and the spiritual for guidance; it was the age of flower-power, free love, new age spirituality. Buddhism and Hinduism were popular for these frustrated young people. Hence, what is happening in Malaysia is a reaction to the lack of governance, employment and hope. Multiculturalism is a happenstance for now, as young Malays scramble to find economic and social footing.

An older Malay woman who agreed to be interviewed on account of anonymity, echoed what many Malays I met: how can there be unity when non-Malays themselves view the Malays with great suspicion, and express their hate for Malaysia openly while reaping the country's wealth and opportunities? Not all Malays benefited from projects and deals like other well-connected Malays, and while it is true that non-Malays do not benefit the same just like they, they have been able to economically empower themselves. "The fault lies with our non-Malay friends who want to view the country and us negatively. There can be no unity if this goes on."

The non-Malays I spoke to and were slotted in this category as they identified by their ethnicity first, came

off as apologists at certain points of the interview. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they were being careful and not wanting to be seen as anti-Malay, despite their grievances. Perhaps it is also because of the nature of the interviews - multiculturalism and hate - that was also why they were wary. What was apparent was that all of the non-Malay participants were adamant that they wanted multiculturalism and respected Malay-Muslims, even bending over backwards to appease the Malays.

However, they did raise the prickly details of living as a non-Malay/Muslim Malaysian, such as leaving their faiths to become Muslim, conversion to Islam to marry a Muslim. Changing one's beliefs to Islam had little impact on their faiths, but acclimatising to Islam and wanting to leave it was a different kettle of fish. Why couldn't Muslims change to other faiths, and why are interfaith marriages illegal in Malaysia? They asked. Since their faiths accepted others into the fold, why couldn't Malaysian Islam do the same?

"If (interfaith marriages) were allowed, we would have a truly multicultural country."

A non-Malay respondent did observe that Islam in Malaysia was political and that having more people enter the faith felt like a competition of gathering more Muslim converts (!).



Case Study: Indian Malaysians

For the Indian Malaysians who participated in the interviews, the session felt that they, a class of Malaysian so often invisible, were being embraced. How could there be multiculturalism and unity in Malaysia if their race was always blindsided, they agreed unanimously.

They asserted that a Hindu temple is demolished almost every week in Malaysia by municipal councils. Post-2018 when PH won, things worsened for them. A total of 96 Hindu temples in Selangor were demolished between 2004 and 2007. Temples that were hundreds of years old were also demolished, for example, the Malaimel Sri Selva Kaliyamman Temple in Kuala Lumpur was demolished for violating construction laws in Malaysia. The Maha Mariyaman Temple in Shah Alam was also demolished and sparked protests led by HINDRAF (Hindu Rights Action Force). The way the authorities have dealt with Hindu protests has often been seen as demonstrating the lack of tolerance and sensitivity of the Malaysian government towards the religious sentiments of the Indian community.

Issues related to religious conversion also became fodder for controversy. In 2008, an Indian teenager had converted to Islam without the knowledge of his parents. Later, as an adult, he wanted to change his religious status back to Hindu because he had only lived as a Hindu, but he was unsuccessful. In 2014, an Indian woman who was getting married according to the Hindu religion was harassed by JAIS officials who insisted that she was a Muslim. Although she has made various efforts to leave Islam such as taking her case to the Shariah Court to change her religious status, she is still considered a Muslim.

A series of hate crimes took place in Malaysia in 2016. Several Hindu temples were reported to have been vandalised by irresponsible parties. Among these temples was Muthu Mariamman temple, Sri Madurai Veeran temple, Sri Muniswarar temple, and Sri Veera Muniswarar Alayam temple. Most of the idols in the temples were damaged and destroyed. Yet in each temple, no loss of goods was reported. This seemed to indicate that the damage done stemmed from hatred towards the Hindu community. Then in November 2018, there was a riot in the Sri Maha Mariamman Hindu temple, Subang Jaya, Selangor. A total of 200 masked individuals were said to have been hired by the developer to evict Hindus from the temple area. However, the developer denied the allegations. A total of 12 people were injured, and a total of 20 vehicles were set on fire during the riots, and a firefighter died from injuries sustained during the riot.

SECTION THREE: RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Social Cohesion in Malaysia

Encouraging multiculturalism is a whole of society effort and Malaysia can only do so by working on social cohesion.

The concept of social cohesion is broad, and discussions about the thinking, debates and descriptions that support discussions of its definition, characteristics and contribution to peace and development are ongoing. UNDP's *Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual framing and programming implications*, describes social cohesion as the extent of trust in government and within society and the willingness to participate collectively toward a shared vision of sustainable peace and common development goals.

The measurement of social cohesion is based on: how involved the government is in ensuring a healthy Malaysia, what is the social capital of the ethnic races in the country, how efficient public transportation is, and also whether enforcement agencies are truly equipped to handle security issues. It's very complex and multi dimensional, and requires agility and creativity, and also a critical look at the country's problems.

Some of the measurements to be considered are as follows:

- Social capital: the accumulation of trust and willingness to cooperate in a society, based on past experiences of cooperative interactions, networks and ties, and mutually beneficial economic exchange. Social capital is an asset held by both individuals and communities.
- Vertical dimension: trust between a government and its society. How much can a community trust its government to enable societal well-being and security?
- Horizontal dimension: trust, relationships and interactions among people in a society

across divisions such as identity or other social constructs, including race or class. This involves cohesion among citizens, civil society, social organisations and institutions working towards a common goal. This (trust) usually is built up over time based on proof of work and peer-sanctioned.

Social cohesion takes time, and the best route would be to work on this organically. Some of the factors to consider are:

- Values and commonalities: what are the similarities and common goals the involved parties share, and want to proceed on? Do mind that in certain situations, shared values can be dangerous, in the case of ethno-nationalists building bridges with sympathetic parties, who aim to achieve a common goal.
- Objectives: what does society want to achieve and how will it do so?
- Transparency: dialogue between stakeholders has to be honest, clear and address problems critically. Only then can the parties move towards their goals.
- Stakeholder involvement: even before the beginning of the discussion, stakeholders should already have their arguments ready, and amplify their voice on the concepts as they define the situation. Preparation is key.
- Evolving and constant: social cohesion does not have a fixed endpoint. Instead, it is constantly evolving as a community's people grow up, and their politics change. Global and regional current affairs that may impact them also influence a country's and its people's directions.
- Uniting differences: recognising differences between rhetoric and realities and engaging in evidence-based analysis of society, networks and relationships will actually solidify the commitment to a tight, cohesive society. The need to understand local drivers and identify conflict vulnerabilities is the push to creating community resilience.

Our governments, realising the complexity of our diverse makeup, have been consistent in addressing the issue. It has been challenging for them, as they navigate the changes in leadership and government in the past four years. Some of the policies they have instated are as follows:

1. 12th Malaysia Plan 2021-2025: The country has speed-tracked itself to become an upper-income country since the 1970s, and acknowledges that Malaysia’s multiculturalism and diversity are two very important assets in its success. Social cohesion and unity are even more important now, as the country recovers from a global pandemic, and adapts to changes in governance since 2018. The government is focusing on three thrusts which are to build a patriotic and democratic society, develop a national identity and strengthen the unity ecosystem.
2. National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030: The Government of Malaysia’s National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030 which serves as an umbrella policy that outlines continuous efforts to foster, strengthen and preserve unity among the people. The concept of Unity in Diversity is used to preserve the harmony of the plural society in the country. This policy sets the direction of national unity and acts as a catalyst for Malaysia’s achievement as a united, harmonious and prosperous nation. The blueprint is the first national policy that is dedicated to the strengthening of national unity and integration
3. The new government has implemented a new framework which embraces unity and diversity but not much is known about yet. The Ministry of National Unity has not posted a written document at the time of writing.

While it is true that the government has been actively involved with civil society on various projects focusing on unity, more can be done. There is still great wariness from civil servants working with NGOs, and they tend to work with state aligned organisations such as public universities. Some of them are:

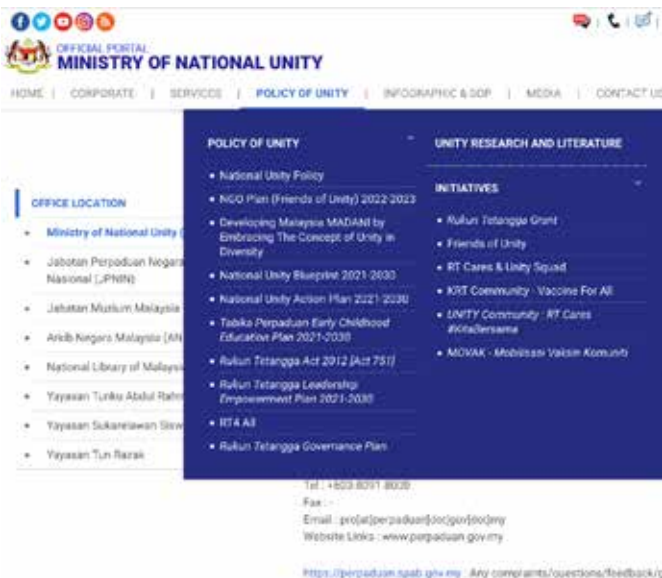
- The Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism (SEARCCT), has worked extensively on reaching out to youth.
- The Ministry of Home Affairs had also conducted a town hall with Universiti Teknologi MARA Malaysia.
- The Ministry of Education Malaysia has worked with research outfits, such as IMAN Research.
- The Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia has been active in its research on youth radicalisation and hate.

These efforts are laudable, but more needs to be done. Civil society also tends to work in silos, and NGOs working on hate and extremism are few and stretched for resources.

Suggested Best Practices

Applying the UN Sustainable Development Goals: Implement the SDG goals into all educational and professional activities. In a racially charged country like Malaysia, it is important that the SDG goals are implemented at school and workplace. Some of the goals are: Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Treating racism as a public health problem: For so long, Malaysia and other like-minded countries have applied policy, community programmes and worked with civil society and community leaders to stem racism. Perhaps another approach that can be used is to treat community violence such as hate and extremism as a public health problem. In a paper titled, Community Violence as a Population Health Issue: Proceedings of a Workshop demonstrated how researchers approached violence. Page 31 of the report stated how The Cure Violence Health Model, developed by Gary Slutkin of the University of Illinois



at Chicago recognised violence as a contagious disease and a public health crisis.

“The Cure Violence disease model has three major components. The first component aims to interrupt transmission to stop violent events before they happen, primarily by interrupting conflict to prevent retaliation. One important role for outreach workers is to not only get violent individuals to change their behaviours and quit the lifestyle that exposes them to violence, but also change the mindset of individuals who want to join the violent gang subculture before they do. A critical aspect of the Cure Violence program is that the outreach workers are always out canvassing their neighbourhoods, which means that program participants do not have to go to an office or wait until the next day to talk to someone. Instead of mulling over and getting angry about a recent argument with some perceived enemy, these individuals can find their outreach workers, who can then de-escalate the situation. The key to stopping gun violence is to engage directly with and be informed by those individuals who are suspected to be the most lethal active firearm offenders and who have avoided sustained criminal consequences.”

“The second component involves identifying and changing the thinking of the highest potential transmitters of violence, largely those involved in the gang lifestyle, to reduce the number of violent individuals in the community. The third component works to change community norms to create social pressure to stop violence, which ... requires engaging community leaders, residents, business owners, and faith leaders to bring awareness to the devastation gun violence has on communities and to change attitudes so that community members reject violence in the community.”

The KAICIID Model: The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), is a unique intergovernmental organisation, made up of a Council of Parties made of States, and a Board of Directors made up of religious leaders, bringing together followers of different religious traditions, religious leaders and policymakers. They have done substantial work on social media such as training for facilitators and peacemakers, and in 2021, created the Social Media Regional Network which

brings together a diverse group of young activists and influencers from across the Arab Region.⁵² The Network has launched numerous digital campaigns which are dedicated to promoting peaceful coexistence, upholding the values of pluralism and common citizenship, contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and building partnerships with policymakers.

The Network also uses interreligious and intercultural dialogue to promote peace online and celebrate religious, ethnic and cultural diversity from across the Arab region. Their efforts have additionally strengthened the resilience of faith-based and community groups to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16.

The above are some of the many examples of initiatives that international organisations have applied.

Efforts in creating a united Malaysia

There have been many efforts to do so such as:

- **Malaysia Madani:** Today, with Anwar helming the premiership, Malaysia Madani has become the way forward for Malaysia as well as its multiracial and multicultural society. How impactful Madani will be towards Malaysia’s diversity and inclusivity remains to be seen. Malaysians suffer from slogan fatigue. At the moment, as pointed earlier, the Malaysia Madani policy on unity and diversity seems to be a public relations campaign. There has been much talk in the media, but the said website above has not published any formal report and framework. For Malaysians (and this researcher herself), due to the fact that we have had so many prime ministers and governments in the past four years, which also came with many slogans, propaganda, it remains to be seen if this new policy is effective. It is highly recommended that the government create an action-oriented steering committee that sees through policy becoming practice.
- **SDG Voluntary Review:** The Malaysian government is committed to achieving these goals as evidenced by their second submission of the SDG Voluntary

⁵² KAICIID. 2014. Pilot TRAINING SPEAK UP: Social Media and Communications training FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE PRACTITIONERS Report. Available at https://www.kaiciid.org/sites/default/files/kaiciid_sml_low.pdf

National Review, as part of the follow up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since the submission of the first report in 2017, Malaysia has made significant progress in mainstreaming the UN's SDGs into national development planning. This is in line with the UN's SDG16 goal: to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.⁵³

- **12th Malaysia Plan 2021-2025:** The country has speed-tracked itself to become an upper-income country since the 1970s, and acknowledges that Malaysia's multiculturalism and diversity are two very important assets in its success. Social cohesion and unity are even more important now, as the country recovers from a global pandemic, and adapts to changes in governance since 2018. The government is focussing on three thrusts which are to build a patriotic and democratic society, develop a national identity and strengthen the unity ecosystem.⁵⁴
- **National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030:** The Government of Malaysia's National Unity Blueprint 2021-2030 which serves as an umbrella policy that outlines continuous efforts to foster, strengthen and preserve unity among the people. The concept of *Unity in Diversity* is used to preserve the harmony of the plural society in the country. This policy sets the direction of national unity and acts as a catalyst for Malaysia's achievement as a united, harmonious and prosperous nation. The blueprint is the first national policy that is dedicated to the strengthening of national unity and integration.⁵⁵

Malaysians have also come together under the umbrella of business, and many NGOs have joined together with corporates in public-private partnerships to create programmes which enrich and empower society. Concerned citizens come together to form entities or projects with an end in view: to ensure Malaysians are happy, secure and feel that they are important stakeholders in the country's progress.

Civil Society

Civil society remains and will continue to be integral towards Malaysia's unity. An example of how Malaysians have come together would be interfaith dialogues. They are challenging to organise, but have provided interesting and encouraging results. Malaysia has seen more than its share of inter-faith tensions, and relationships between all relevant parties have been strengthened via the leaders' ties with each other, and commitment to making the country safe and peaceful. Religious leaders play an important role in community-building, and their congregation follow suit when they are confident of their leaders' goals.

ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia) has conducted harmony walks with churches in Sarawak, and interfaith buka puasa and open days in local mosques so non-Muslim friends can see how Muslims practise their faith. A Unity Walk, organised by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), met with success. While such activities could be done on a more consistent basis, their impact has met enthusiasm, and is embraced by the public who have been fearful of friends and neighbours professing faiths different to theirs. These programmes have tightened communities, and because they are led by local community leaders, are even more effective. However, we need to note that many Muslim groups are leery of such dialogues. Trust building is important.

Some of the other programmes are:

- **Think City:** Community-focussed urban rejuvenation that seeks to create more liveable and sustainable cities in Malaysia. Since its inception in 2009, the organisation works with locals in the cities they have programmes in, and gets their participation in making their cities liveable and inclusive, and they work with the city government and local councils, local business and the cities' movers and shakers in the arts, small businesses, education, and leadership. These initiatives have instilled pride and resilience in local communities, and have made these cities attractive to all Malaysians and tourists, and also contributed to community unity. This is aligned with many

⁵³ Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department. Available at Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.epu.gov.my/en/sustainable-development-goals> (November 10, 2021)

⁵⁴ Bernama. 27 September 2021. Govt to introduce national policy to strengthen unity. Malaysia. Available at <https://www.thesundaily.my/local/govt-to-introduce-national-policy-to-strengthen-unity-AD8401763> (November 10, 2021)

⁵⁵ Prime Minister's Office. National Unity Blueprint Malaysia 2021-2030.. https://www.perpaduan.gov.my/images/document/penerbitan/Rangka_Tindakan_

international organisations' goals of creating strong, resilient communities.

- **George Town Literary Festival:** Arts festivals play an important role in community social capital, and done well, achieve international standing. Activities such as dance, theatre, book launches and readings, performance art, attract people from all walks of life to come together. Festivals also enrich local businesses; local governments also will find that these activities boost the economy and the reputation of a country. The George Town Literary Festival was awarded The Literary Festival Award by the London Book Fair in 2018 as a programme that celebrated freedom of speech, Malaysia's diversity and talent. The multilingual festival which showcased Malaysia's national literary talents

writing in all languages, saw international visitors flying in to participate in the event. The festival has sparked mini-festivals in the smaller towns of Malaysia, which has an ardent community of readers and writers. This in line with a policy brief Hedayah Center and the Global Centre on Cooperative Security wrote, on how *"...the use of sports, arts, and culture is sometimes considered by policymakers and practitioners as too peripheral to security issues and yet extremist groups effectively utilise them in their narratives and recruitment strategies. Efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism have sought increasingly to engage youth, communities, and marginalised groups, including women, and sports, arts, and culture offer many underutilised platforms to address the ideologies and root causes of violent extremism."*

CASE STUDY: Architects of Diversity (<https://www.aodmalaysia.org/>)

Architects of Diversity is a non-profit that aims to bridge communities and identity groups among youth in Malaysia for justice, peace and a sustainable future. They build spaces that facilitate interpersonal understanding and intergroup relationships through empathy, vulnerability and non-violent communication.

They run programmes for secondary school, college and university students that equip them with the experiences and knowledge necessary to navigate issues of identity, discrimination and conflict. Their activities use deliberate diverse, engaged and motivated communities in order to create a transformative experience for participants. They are innovating the ways educational spaces and communities can be more inclusive of students from different backgrounds. By working together with strategic partners, they are building a movement to ensure pedagogy and curricula work for every Malaysian.

AOD conducts primary research, trains youth champions and conducts advocacy for the greater understanding and adoption of anti-discrimination policies in education. Discrimination is a root cause of segregation and self-segregation that inhibits quality interactions among Malaysians from various groups. Some of the courses they have conducted are Bridging Past Present and Future which explored pre- and post-colonial narratives as well as their relationship with our current political reality and equipped our youth participants with the necessary tools to question pre-existing narratives, construct alternative discourse and devise solution-based approaches to identity-based differences in our communities and society.

Another is Sekolah Diversiti (Diversity School) where students and young Malaysians learn about each other, whatever their backgrounds are.

There have been rave reviews from parents and schools, and of course students, who found the courses helping them connect and build multiracial friendships.

For marginalised groups such as the non-Malays, and minority Muslims such as the Shiite, and the LGBTQ community, there needs to be more integrated inclusion of these communities in discussions. They cannot be invited as the token Chinese, Ahmadiyya, trans men and women, for example - they need to be constantly at the table. In my years of attending civil society workshops and events, there is a lot of pussyfooting and walking on eggshells. It is time to really put the cards on the table however disturbing it will be, and all communities must negotiate and discuss parameters. Malaysia, as I remind friends, is a predominantly Muslim country with the Malays as the majority. Knowing these sentiments will be our framework towards not reconciliation, but

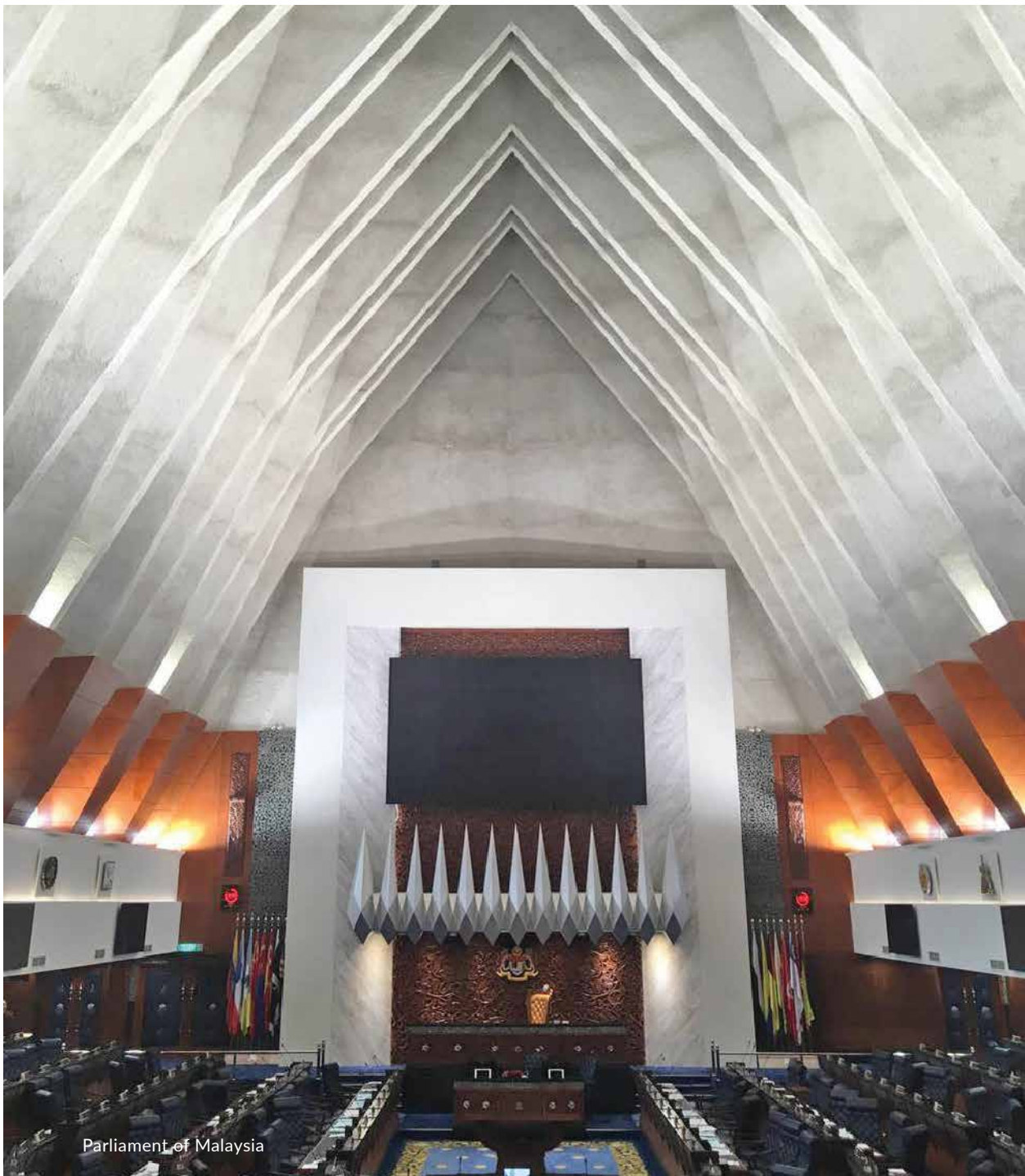
an understanding of each other. This would be the first step towards some form of peace. Like everywhere else, Malaysians live in their own bubbles, not daring to venture beyond, and this is reflected even among the CSOs in Malaysia - the PCVE community is in one corner, while faith based organisations are in another. Human rights and ethnic based organisations are in another two sections of society. Many have said that right wing groups should be exorcised from such dialogue, but I disagree. We do not know each other enough.

I had mentioned earlier, Architects of Diversity. Their model works, and if we can scale this up for adults, there may be some traction.



CONCLUSION

This project is a never-ending research endeavour for all researchers on Malaysian politics. Seeking multiculturalism may seem to be a far-off destination for activists and concerned Malaysians, and with nationalism and Islamist politics asserting themselves more into the national psyche, the situation looks hopeless. However, it is heartening to see how private organisations and civil society are proactive in determining Malaysia's social fabric will not fray.



REFERENCES

The Pillars of Malaysia

The Rukun Negara and Malaysian Constitution should be at the back of each researcher's mind as he or she sets to writing about extremism and social injustice in Malaysia. This is not meant to colour and influence his or her writing, but the writer must be mindful of Malaysia's foundation as a multicultural country, and how the piece will generate debate and also encourage cohesion.

Rukun Negara Malaysia

The National Principles of Malaysia came about after a national tragedy on May 13, 1969, which saw hundreds killed and attacked in a racial riot that is quoted until today.

The Principles are:

- Ketuhanan (Belief in God or Supreme Being)
- Kesetiaan (Loyalty)
- Keadilan (Justice)
- Kewarganegaraan (Citizenship)
- Keutuhan (Integrity of the Nation)
- Kebahagiaan (Well-being)
- Kesopanan (Canons of Decency)

These are the foundations of unity and development of our country and people. The riots spurred the Malaysian government to create and sustain unity amidst a multicultural Malaysia so Malaysians can live in harmony.

The Malaysian Constitution

The media must also take into account the Malaysian Constitution, on the following matters:

"Article 3 (1) of the Malaysian Constitution provides that Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions can be practised safely and peacefully in all parts of the Federation."

As an official religion, Islam plays a central role in everyday life in Malaysia, including the political and legal realms. For instance, Islamic affairs are administered at the Federal level by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), established by the Government of Malaysia on the 1st of January 1997. It is also important to note that Islam falls under the States' administration and not under the Federal government. The Malay Rulers and the Muftis in each State wield much power when it comes to Islam. Yet despite being guaranteed in the Federal Constitution, freedom of religion is capped by many restrictions in Malaysia. Shi'ism, for instance, is considered a deviation from 'true Islam' and Shia Muslims are not allowed to freely practice their faith and religious rituals. Shia Islam was banned in 1984, and later, a 1996 Fatwa declared Shi'ism as deviant teachings.

Article 10 of the Constitution of Malaysia guarantees Malaysian citizens the right to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.

Article 11 provides that every person has the right to profess and to practise his or her religion and (subject to applicable laws restricting the propagation of other religions to Muslims) to propagate it. Secondly, the Constitution also provides that Islam is the religion of the country but other religions

may be practised in peace and harmony (Article 3). The law allows for citizens and organisations to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom. The constitution provides that federal law has precedence over state law. It also states that issues of Islamic law are state, rather than federal, matters. The Constitution establishes the power of the federal judiciary under Section 121(1) by creating two high courts of equal and independent authority – one in Peninsular Malaysia and one in Eastern Malaysia. However, in June 1988 Parliament amended the constitution, adding section 121(1A), which provides, “the Courts referred to in Clause (1) shall have no jurisdiction in respect to any matter within the jurisdiction of the [Sharia] courts.” This amendment introduced ambiguity about Sharia versus civil law that has not been resolved clearly.

Article 153 of the Constitution of Malaysia grants the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (King of Malaysia) responsibility for “safeguard[ing] the special position of the ‘Malays’ (see note) and natives of any of the States of Sabah and Sarawak and the legitimate interests of other communities” and goes on to specify ways to do this, such as establishing quotas for entry into the civil service, public scholarships and public education.

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Media links

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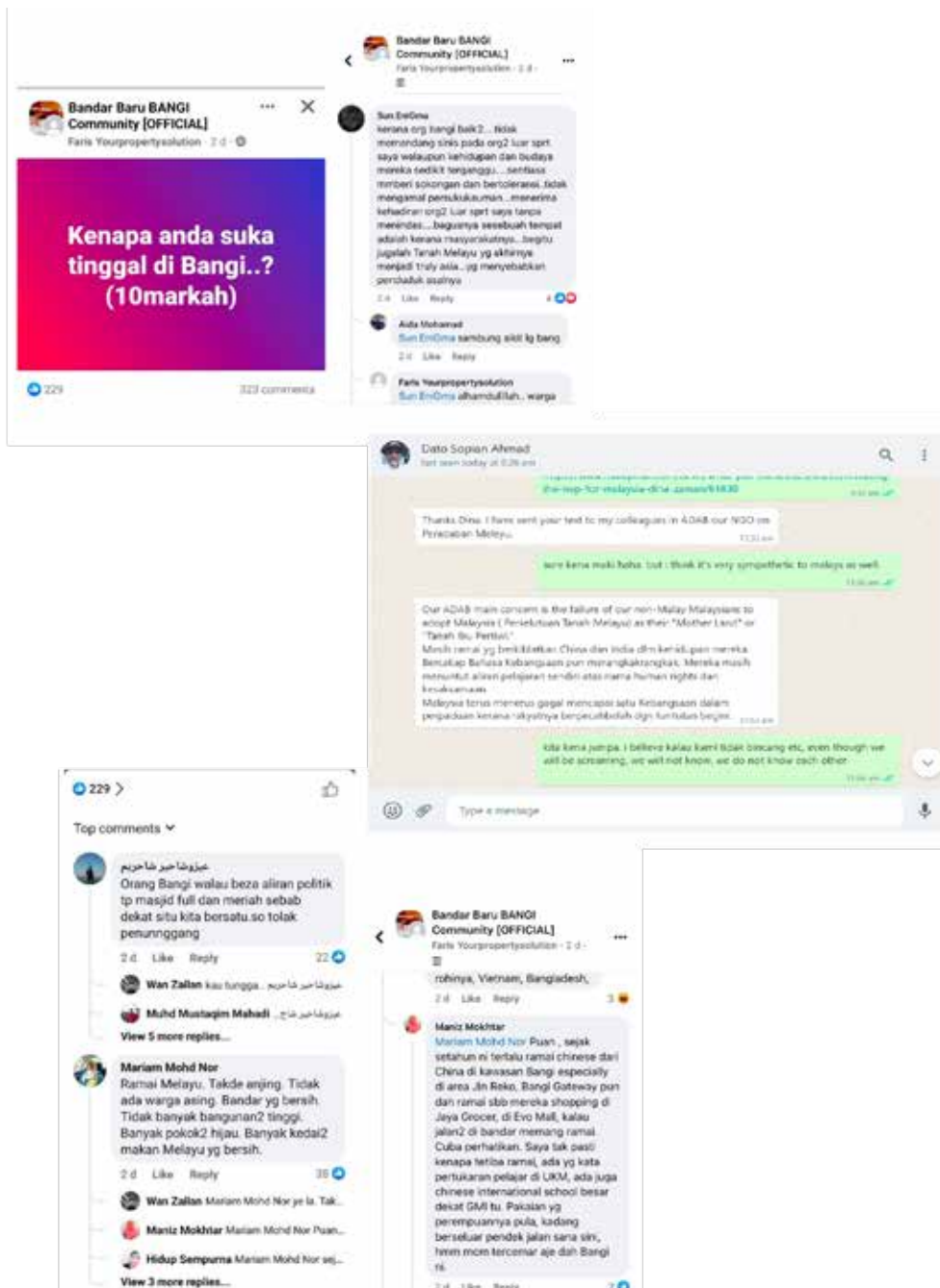
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Social Media Screenshots

Screenshots of hate speech are shown here. Again this is not an exhaustive list as these occur on an almost daily basis.

- These screenshots of a public Facebook Group were compiled in the month of July 2023. The community in this group live in Bangi, a middle class neighbourhood populated by academics and professionals. Bangi itself is renowned for its academic institutions such as the National University of Malaysia. Members of the group are asked why they love living in Bangi.
- While a member of the group – Sun EniGma – alludes to how welcoming the community is and how multicultural and accepting they are, the same cannot be said for the other members of the group. The bottom two screenshots remark on how it's good that Bangi had mostly Malays living there and there were few foreigners (migrant workers) and non-Malays. In addition, no dogs were in the area as well. The last screenshot shows a complaint by a member of the group citing that there were too many Chinese people in the area and they were not properly dressed, instead wearing shorts.



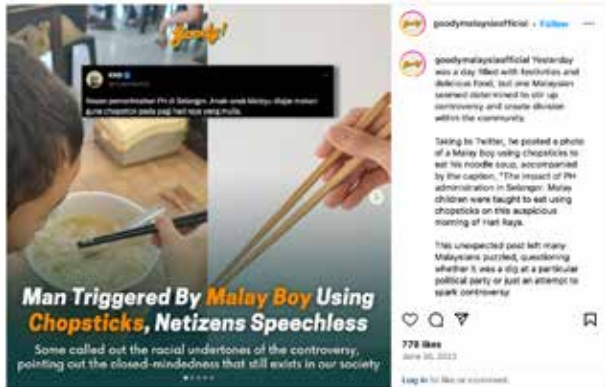
- Here, the writer of this report would like to pose a question: when is modesty wrong, especially for those living in a conservative location, and when is dress an aspect of human rights? In Malaysia, this question crops up again on an almost daily basis. Below is a post by Sinar Harian's Instagram account, dated June 26, 2023, reported that a non-Muslim woman was fined for entering a shop, wearing shorts.



- This appeared on Facebook a few days ago. It is assumed that the person behind the post is a PAS supporter. His post says now that the holidays are here, should we slaughter Anwar supporters (walanon)?



- This was published sometime in June, 2023, when a Malaysian attacked a young boy for eating with chopsticks. These are some of the many news pieces that have appeared in the mainstream media, online websites and social media platforms.



OTHER READINGS

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