# Managing Ethnic Relations in Malaysia: Policies, Practices, and Prospects for National Cohesion

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes Malaysia's management of ethnic relations through the integration of policy frameworks, institutional practices, and quotidian social dynamics to maintain national cohesion. This paper contextualizes Malaysia's experience within wider comparative discussions by utilizing both historical and modern academic perspectives from Furnivall's concept of the plural society to Anderson's imagined communities and also revisited the Barth's ethnic boundary theory, social identity theory, and intergroup contact theory. It then examines the development of Malaysia's policy framework (constitutional provisions, redistributive policies, education and language policies, community cohesion programs), emphasizes practices in schools, universities, workplaces, and civil society, and identifies new challenges in the digital age. The article contends that Malaysia's model is optimally comprehended as a stratified initiative by integrating state-directed redistribution, consociational negotiation, and micro-level interaction that necessitates constant revision to combat inequality, polarization, and online detriments. Suggestions are made for policies that will make the management of ethnic relations in Malaysia stronger, more evidence-based, more inclusive, and more prepared for the future.

**Keywords:** Ethnic relations; Malaysia; social cohesion; nation-building; plural society; intergroup contact; public policy.

## INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a postcolonial, multiethnic society where the handling of ethnic relations is essential for political stability and socio-economic progress. State-building focuses on institutions and administrative capacity, while managing ethnic relations is part of the larger goal of nation-building, which includes building a shared identity, civic norms, and social trust ([2], [15]). Malaysia is often referenced for its integration of state-driven redistribution, consociational power-sharing, and pragmatic community initiatives to alleviate ethnic discord and promote daily collaboration.

This article integrates theoretical frameworks and Malaysian scholarship to elucidate the management of ethnic relations across policy, practice, and lived experience. It examines the historical transition from a colonial plural society, investigates the post-1969 policy shift towards redistribution and restructuring, and evaluates current practices in education, workplaces, and civil society. It also outlines evidence-based policy recommendations and maps out new problems, such as economic inequality, identity politics, digital polarization, and regional differences.

## THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the context of plural society and colonial legacies, Furnivall (1948) famously described Southeast Asian colonies as "plural societies," in which different communities were economically interdependent but socially segregated along ethnic lines. This insight has remained highly relevant for Malaysia, where colonial economic arrangements entrenched ethnic specialization and deepened communal divisions. Hirschman further elucidated

how colonial classifications shaped not only the lived experiences of ethnic groups but also the very categories through which ethnicity was conceptualized and measured in official statistics [8]. These legacies left enduring imprints on postcolonial policymaking, influencing constitutional arrangements, economic redistribution strategies, and the political bargains that defined the early years of independence.

Theorisations of nationalism provide another important lens for understanding Malaysia's experience. Renan famously defined a nation as a "daily plebiscite," emphasizing its continuous and voluntary reproduction, while Anderson characterized nations as "imagined communities" sustained by print capitalism, education, and shared symbols ([15], [2]). Applied to Malaysia, these perspectives illuminate how national identity has never been singular but instead multi-vocal, shaped by Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Bumiputera communities negotiating their place within the polity. This negotiation has been mediated by state institutions, party coalitions, and developmental frameworks that attempt to balance competing claims while promoting unity.

Scholars of ethnicity have also shifted attention from static cultural traits to the dynamics of boundary-making. Barth's classic work on Ethnic Groups and Boundaries highlighted that what defines an ethnic group is less its cultural content than the maintenance of its social boundaries [3]. Building on this, social psychology has contributed powerful insights into how group boundaries can be reproduced or transcended. Social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner demonstrated how individuals derive self-concept from group membership, while Allport's contact hypothesis argued that prejudice could be reduced when intergroup encounters are structured under conditions of equality, cooperation, and authoritative support ([19], [1]). Pettigrew and Tropp's meta-analysis provided empirical confirmation of this hypothesis, showing that meaningful contact not only diminishes prejudice but can also foster lasting norms of tolerance and respect [13].

Within the Malaysian context, these theoretical perspectives have been further elaborated by local scholars. Shamsul A. B. ([16], [17], [18]) conceptualizes Malaysian nationhood through the idea of "two social realities": the authority-defined reality, which is produced through state policies and official discourse, and the everyday-defined reality, which is lived and negotiated by citizens in their daily interactions. He also introduces the notion of "nations-of-intent," emphasizing that different communities hold divergent visions of the nation's future, which coexist and sometimes compete within the broader national project. Abdul Rahman Embong extends this discussion by examining the nation-state project and highlighting the role of the expanding middle class, shaped by state-led modernization, as a key carrier of civic values and integrative norms ([4], [5]). Meanwhile, Mansor Mohd Noor ([11], [12]) contributes empirical insights by showing how frequent and routine interactions in educational institutions, workplaces, and local communities contribute to the gradual erosion of rigid ethnic boundaries. His findings suggest that sustained intergroup collaboration can give rise to a more inclusive national ethos rooted in everyday practices rather than merely symbolic rhetoric.

Together, these perspectives provide a rich theoretical foundation for analyzing Malaysia's trajectory of ethnic relations and social cohesion. They reveal that nation-building in a plural society is not only about institutional design and policy frameworks but also about the lived realities of interaction, negotiation, and adaptation across generations.

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MANAGING ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MALAYSIA

To begin with, the origins of Malaysia's ethnic relations can be traced to the colonial period, when the British introduced a system of economic specialization that reinforced communal boundaries. Malays were largely confined to subsistence agriculture, while Chinese immigrants dominated the tin mining and commercial sectors, and Indians were recruited into the plantation economy. This arrangement institutionalized a form of ethnic compartmentalization, producing what Furnivall described as a plural society [6]. Migration from China, India, the Arab world, and the Malay Archipelago in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries further diversified the population. By the eve of independence in 1957, Malaya had already become a multiethnic society whose political stability depended upon negotiated compromises among its communities

Subsequently, the immediate post-war period highlighted the fragility of ethnic relations. In 1946, the British proposed the Malayan Union, which would have centralized governance and granted liberal citizenship rights to

non-Malays. The plan was met with fierce resistance from the Malays, who perceived it as a threat to their political primacy, the sovereignty of the Malay rulers, and the special status of Islam and Malay culture. The widespread mobilization against the Malayan Union eventually led to its replacement with the Federation of Malaya in 1948, which restored the position of the Malay rulers while also incorporating pathways for non-Malay citizenship. This struggle set the tone for independence politics, where ethnic bargaining became central to nation-building

In addition to constitutional debates, the period between 1948 and 1960 was marked by the Communist insurgency, commonly referred to as the Malayan Emergency. The Communist Party of Malaya, whose membership was predominantly Chinese, launched an armed rebellion against the colonial state, escalating ethnic tensions and fostering mistrust among communities. The government's counterinsurgency campaign emphasized security, while at the same time encouraging interethnic cooperation through shared opposition to communist violence. The Emergency thus reinforced the importance of stability and security in shaping Malaysia's approach to managing ethnic relations

Following these developments, the road to independence highlighted how interethnic relations were managed through dialogue and elite bargaining. The Communities Liaison Committee of 1949, which brought together Malay, Chinese, and Indian leaders, became a platform for resolving sensitive issues such as citizenship, education, and language. These negotiations culminated in the constitutional framework of 1957, which established Malay political primacy through the recognition of Islam, the Malay rulers, and Article 153, while simultaneously granting citizenship and cultural rights to the Chinese and Indian communities. In this way, independence was secured not only through the rejection of the Malayan Union but also through the creation of a consociational model that balanced Malay hegemony with minority inclusion.

In 1963, Malaya expanded into a larger federation with the inclusion of Sabah, Sarawak, and initially Singapore, forming the new nation of Malaysia. The merger was intended to strengthen political and economic resilience, but it also brought new challenges in managing ethnic diversity. The "Malaysian Malaysia" campaign promoted by Singapore's People's Action Party was perceived by Malay leaders as undermining Malay political primacy, leading to tensions that culminated in Singapore's expulsion from the federation in 1965. The experience underscored both the possibilities and limits of interethnic accommodation, as well as the centrality of ethnic politics in shaping Malaysia's early trajectory

However, this fragile balance was again severely tested by the May 13, 1969 riots, which underscored the dangers of unresolved socio-economic inequalities. In response, the government introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971, with the twin objectives of eradicating poverty regardless of race and restructuring society to eliminate the identification of ethnicity with economic function. In practical terms, this involved redistributive measures in education, employment, and asset ownership. More importantly, the NEP explicitly placed national unity as its ultimate aim, signifying that socio-economic engineering was regarded as a necessary instrument for long-term social cohesion ([7],; Faaland, Parkinson & Rais Saniman, 1990)

In the decades that followed, the conclusion of the NEP in 1990 led to the National Development Policy (NDP), which maintained the commitment to growth with equity while shifting the national agenda toward industrialization, globalization, and knowledge-based development. This transformation accelerated urbanization and created a multiethnic middle class, particularly in urban centers, where everyday interactions among Malaysians became increasingly common in schools, workplaces, residential areas, and recreational spaces. As a result, ethnic boundaries began to soften in social practice, even though ethnic and religious identities continued to remain politically salient during moments of contestation (Leete, 2007; [12])

At the same time, successive governments sought to strengthen national identity through a variety of unity initiatives. The Rukun Negara, proclaimed in 1970, provided a moral compass for Malaysian society, emphasizing shared values of faith, loyalty, constitutional supremacy, rule of law, and good behavior. Later projects such as Bangsa Malaysia under Vision 2020, 1Malaysia, and the reformist narrative of a "New Malaysia" after the 2018 general election each represented different attempts to define a civic national identity amidst ethnic pluralism. Yet, as Shamsul ([16], [18]) has argued, Malaysia's nationhood remains a "work in progress," continually shaped by shifting elite bargains and contested by competing "nations-of-intent" that reflect divergent ethnic, religious, and civic aspirations

In conclusion, the historical trajectory of ethnic relations in Malaysia reveals a consistent pattern of negotiation, crisis, and recalibration. From the colonial period to the compromises of independence, from the corrective measures of the NEP to the pluralistic narratives of more recent decades, the management of diversity has always been central to the nation's political and developmental agenda. While economic growth and modernization have fostered greater opportunities for cross-ethnic engagement, political contestations continue to reveal the enduring salience of ethnicity and religion. Malaysia's experience therefore demonstrates both the possibilities of integration and the challenges of sustaining unity in a deeply diverse society.

## POLICY ARCHITECTURE: LAWS, PROGRAMS, AND INSTITUTIONS

To begin with, the Federal Constitution provides the foundational framework for managing ethnic relations and national identity in Malaysia. It designates Bahasa Melayu as the national language, affirms the special position of the Malays as well as the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, and simultaneously safeguards the legitimate interests of other communities. In addition, it recognizes religious and cultural liberties, thereby ensuring that Malaysia's diversity is given institutional protection. These provisions reflect not only the historical realities of colonial pluralism and the compromises made at independence but also the continuing governance challenges of balancing equity, cultural recognition, and inclusion in a multiethnic society [8].

Building upon this constitutional foundation, the New Economic Policy (NEP) and subsequent development frameworks introduced after 1971 sought to restructure society and eradicate poverty in order to reduce interethnic inequalities. These policies expanded access to education, widened employment opportunities, and facilitated entrepreneurship, thereby enabling a broader segment of the population to participate in national development. Although critics have pointed to instances of cronyism and elite capture , many scholars argue that these redistributive measures were crucial in narrowing socio-economic disparities and stabilizing intergroup expectations [7]. More importantly, they contributed to the rise of a multiethnic middle class, which has since played a significant role in strengthening Malaysia's social cohesion and developmental trajectory [5].

Closely related to redistribution efforts, the education system has also been a central arena for managing diversity. Malaysia's unique model incorporates national schools, vernacular schools, and Islamic education streams, reflecting the accommodation of linguistic and cultural pluralism. To foster better intercultural understanding among the younger generation, the government has also institutionalized initiatives such as the Ethnic Relations module in public universities, alongside numerous inter-campus and cross-cultural programs that encourage interaction among students of different backgrounds. In this respect, the national language continues to function as a unifying civic bridge, while English strengthens global competitiveness and provides Malaysians with access to international knowledge and opportunities ([11], [12]).

Furthermore, community-based initiatives have complemented constitutional and policy measures in sustaining interethnic harmony. Neighborhood watch programs, dialogue platforms, cultural exchanges, and intercultural festivals have all played an important role in creating spaces where Malaysians from different ethnic and religious groups can meet, interact, and collaborate. These initiatives are consistent with the principles of the contact hypothesis, which stresses that sustained interaction under conditions of equality, shared objectives, and supportive authority structures helps to reduce prejudice and build mutual respect ([1], Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In practice, such organized encounters provide ritualized opportunities for communities to cultivate trust and solidarity, thereby strengthening the fabric of Malaysian society.

In recent years, however, the challenge of maintaining unity has expanded into the digital sphere. The rapid growth of social media has created unprecedented opportunities for Malaysians to connect across boundaries, yet it has also amplified the risks of misinformation, echo chambers, and the spread of hate speech. Recognizing these dual dynamics, policy responses have increasingly emphasized the promotion of media literacy, the encouragement of counter-speech, and the strengthening of legal protections. At the same time, these measures must be carefully balanced with the preservation of civil liberties to avoid overreach. Moving forward, the state and society alike share the responsibility of cultivating a resilient and inclusive information ecosystem that can both harness the benefits of digital connectivity and mitigate its risks.

Taken together, the constitutional framework, redistributive economic policies, educational strategies, community-based initiatives, and media governance reforms illustrate the layered and evolving nature of

Malaysia's efforts to manage ethnic relations. Each of these domains addresses different dimensions of unity, from institutional guarantees to everyday practices, yet they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The historical legacy of pluralism continues to pose challenges, but Malaysia's experience also demonstrates the capacity of law, policy, and civic initiatives to sustain cohesion in a deeply diverse society.

## PRACTICES IN THE FIELD: SCHOOLS, COLLEGES, JOBS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

First of all, the education sector has long been recognized as a critical space for shaping interethnic understanding. Research highlights that repeated and cooperative contact, particularly through mixed classrooms, group assignments, and residential colleges, gradually builds trust and weakens entrenched stereotypes ([1], [11]). Beyond this, university initiatives such as the Ethnic Relations module provide structured opportunities for reflection on cultural diversity and national identity. When such formal instruction is complemented by experiential programs including service learning, volunteerism, and community engagement, the lessons move beyond theory and are internalized as social norms. As a result, schools and universities function as both intellectual and practical laboratories for cultivating inclusive values among the younger generation.

Moving from the classroom to the workplace, organizations increasingly serve as arenas where interethnic collaboration is normalized. Both public and private institutions have adopted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices, often linking them with broader organizational goals. Initiatives such as open recruitment, mixed project teams, and structured mentoring not only diversify the workforce but also foster a culture of interdependence. Moreover, when employees are evaluated through shared performance metrics and collaborative outcomes, ethnic distinctions lose their salience in everyday cooperation. In this context, bridging and bonding forms of social capital are strengthened, ensuring that professional collaboration translates into a deeper sense of trust across communities [14].

At the societal level, civil society organizations and religious bodies play an equally influential role in sustaining cohesion. Faith-based initiatives, humanitarian projects, and interfaith dialogues bring individuals together around common concerns that transcend ethnicity and religion. By creating crosscutting networks of obligation, these efforts reinforce the resilience of communities. Indeed, as Varshney observes, civic ties that span across group boundaries can protect societies from the outbreak of ethnic conflict [20]. Malaysia's experience with dialogue platforms, charity networks, and youth-driven NGOs reflects this principle, demonstrating how civil society channels can serve as mediating structures in contexts of diversity [21].

Equally significant are patterns of settlement and urban development, which profoundly shape the everyday conditions of interethnic interaction. When residential areas remain segregated and city services unevenly distributed, parallel lives become the norm, limiting opportunities for meaningful contact. Conversely, integrated housing schemes, inclusive public amenities, and reliable transportation systems foster frequent encounters among diverse groups, especially among youth. These planned interactions in parks, markets, and community centers gradually nurture mutual familiarity and shared belonging. Hence, housing and urban planning policies must be understood not merely as technical exercises in infrastructure but as crucial instruments for social cohesion.

In summary, the interconnections between education, employment, civil society, and urban living illustrate that managing diversity requires more than symbolic rhetoric. It demands systemic and sustained interventions across multiple domains. Where opportunities for inclusive interaction are institutionalized, ethnic differences become less divisive, allowing cooperation and trust to flourish. On the other hand, when parallel structures persist, the risks of estrangement and polarization remain. Malaysia's historical and contemporary experience shows that the long-term project of national unity must integrate legal, economic, social, and spatial dimensions into a cohesive strategy for building social cohesion.

## MODERN PROBLEMS AND RISK FACTORS

At the outset, persistent class-based inequalities remain one of the most pressing challenges in Malaysian society. These disparities, often correlated with ethnicity, reinforce perceptions of structural injustice and undermine efforts to foster a cohesive national identity. Although national development policies have sought to improve

access to education, employment, and asset ownership, unequal distribution continues to create gaps in life chances between communities. Addressing these imbalances therefore requires policies that are attentive not only to present needs but also to the historical legacies that produced them. As Embong notes, bridging the gap between structural inequalities and social mobility is critical for ensuring that progress translates into shared prosperity and sustainable social cohesion [5].

Moreover, the dynamics of electoral competition frequently shape how ethnicity and religion are mobilized in politics. In highly competitive environments, political actors may resort to ethnic or religious "outbidding," framing their platforms in ways that appeal to communal anxieties rather than collective aspirations. Malaysia's model of consociational bargaining has provided a measure of stability by distributing power among major ethnic groups, yet scholars such as Lijphart and Horowitz caution that this form of accommodation, if left unaccompanied by integrative policies, can also entrench identity boundaries ([9], [10]). Hence, the challenge lies not only in balancing group representation but also in fostering cross-ethnic trust and shared policy agendas that transcend communal divides.

In the contemporary period, the digital environment has introduced new risks to interethnic relations. Algorithm-driven social media feeds often amplify polarizing narratives, creating echo chambers that reinforce prejudice and facilitate the spread of hate speech. Left unchecked, these dynamics can escalate tensions and erode the fragile bonds of trust between groups. Effective responses must therefore include evidence-based content moderation, widespread digital literacy initiatives, and rapid response mechanisms that can counter disinformation without undermining civil liberties. In doing so, Malaysia can strengthen its information ecosystem while safeguarding the principles of free expression and democratic participation.

Equally significant are the regional and demographic complexities that shape Malaysia's social landscape. East Malaysia, with its indigenous diversity, presents unique cultural and political realities that differ from those of Peninsular Malaysia. At the same time, the presence of large numbers of migrant workers adds further layers of vulnerability and complexity. These groups often face precarious living conditions, limited protections, and social marginalization, which can generate tensions with local populations. Policy frameworks must therefore be sensitive to these regional and demographic variations by ensuring that local communities are engaged in decision-making processes while also extending adequate protections to migrants and other vulnerable groups. Such an inclusive approach helps prevent the formation of parallel societies and strengthens the integrity of Malaysia's multicultural project.

In sum, the challenges of economic disparity, political polarization, digital fragmentation, and regional diversity underscore the multifaceted nature of managing ethnic relations in Malaysia. Each dimension, if left unaddressed, risks reinforcing divisions and destabilizing social cohesion. However, when policies combine redistributive justice with inclusive governance, digital safeguards, and regionally sensitive strategies, the prospects for building a more equitable and united society become far stronger.

## PROSPECT AND POLICY SUGGESTION

Looking ahead, reforming the education sector remains central to Malaysia's unity agenda. Broadening the availability of mixed-residential colleges, strengthening cooperative learning frameworks, and expanding exchange initiatives across institutions can foster sustained interethnic contact among students. These measures should not only provide opportunities for interaction but also ensure that outcomes are properly evaluated. The Ethnic Relations module, for instance, could be assessed through validated tools that measure changes in attitudes and behaviors over time, thereby transforming classroom encounters into measurable progress toward cohesion [13].

In tandem with educational reforms, inclusive economic growth and robust social protection systems are equally essential. Policies must combine need-based assistance with mechanisms that command legitimacy across all communities, thereby avoiding the perception of ethnic favoritism. Expanding pathways in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as well as tertiary education is particularly crucial for leveling opportunities and enabling upward mobility. As Embong emphasizes, only when growth translates into shared access to skills and resources can economic progress serve as a genuine foundation for social cohesion [5].

Another important avenue lies in deepening deliberative democracy and community-based forums. Institutionalizing local mediation panels and interfaith councils, supported by both resources and authority, would create structured platforms for communities to resolve disputes and negotiate shared interests. When designed with measurable goals and accountability mechanisms, such initiatives can translate social contact into genuine problem-solving capacity. In this sense, the logic of the contact hypothesis Allport converges with Varshney's argument that civic networks across group boundaries reduce the risks of conflict by embedding dialogue in institutional routines ([1], [20].

Equally important is the development of a robust data and evaluation infrastructure. The systematic publication of disaggregated yet privacy-respecting data on education, employment, and mobility would allow policymakers and scholars to monitor inequalities and assess the impact of interventions. Longitudinal studies, funded and coordinated at the national level, could track changes in social cohesion across generations, thereby providing evidence-based guidance for future reforms. As Hirschman reminds us, policy design without accurate data risks reinforcing rather than alleviating disparities [8].

At the same time, building resilience in the digital sphere has become unavoidable in an era of pervasive social media. Scaling up digital literacy programs, establishing early-warning monitoring for hate speech, and implementing rapid counter-messaging that highlights shared national values are all vital measures. These initiatives should be complemented by frameworks that encourage platform accountability while remaining consistent with civil liberties. In this way, Malaysia can strengthen its information ecosystem, ensuring that technology becomes a tool for integration rather than division.

Finally, prospects for national unity depend heavily on coordination across different levels of governance. Providing flexible toolkits to state and local authorities would allow unity policies to be adapted to diverse demographic contexts, especially in East Malaysia and in densely mixed urban wards. Moreover, rewarding initiatives that demonstrate sustained bridging outcomes could incentivize innovative local practices that complement national frameworks. A federal system that values local participation, while maintaining a shared national vision, offers the best chance of balancing diversity with cohesion.

Taken together, these prospects and policies illustrate that sustaining unity in Malaysia requires an integrated strategy that spans education, economic growth, deliberative democracy, data infrastructure, digital resilience, and multilevel governance. Each dimension reinforces the others, ensuring that unity is not treated as a symbolic aspiration but as a lived reality embedded in institutions, communities, and everyday practices.

## CONCLUSION

Malaysia's management of ethnic relations can best be understood as an evolving, multi-layered project that intertwines institutional design, redistributive policy, and micro-level contact across everyday life. Historically, the legacies of colonial pluralism, the compromises of independence, and the restructuring thrust of the New Economic Policy have together shaped a trajectory of negotiation, crisis, and recalibration. These foundations have provided significant stability and avenues for social mobility, while at the same time leaving unresolved challenges that continue to influence contemporary debates.

Theoretically, the Malaysian case illustrates how Furnivall's plural society thesis, Anderson's idea of imagined communities, and Shamsul's notion of "two social realities" converge in practice: authority-defined policies and everyday-defined interactions must continually be aligned to sustain national cohesion ([6], [2]. Social identity theory and intergroup contact theory further underscore that formal policies cannot succeed in isolation; they require reinforcement through structured encounters in schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and civil society where trust and shared norms are actively cultivated.

At the same time, new and complex pressures have emerged. Economic disparity continues to intersect with ethnicity, political competition risks reinforcing identity cleavages, and digital platforms amplify polarization. Regional diversities in East Malaysia and the vulnerability of migrant workers add further layers of complexity. These risk factors remind us that unity is not a static achievement but a continuous process that requires adaptive policies, civic innovation, and institutional resilience.

Moving forward, the prospects for a cohesive Malaysia depend on how effectively education reforms, inclusive economic strategies, community dialogue mechanisms, data-driven policymaking, digital resilience, and federal–state–local coordination can be integrated into a coherent agenda. As Mansor argues, unity must be carried not only by institutions but also by the lived practices of a middle class that embodies civic norms across ethnic lines [12]. In this sense, Malaysia's unity project remains unfinished, yet it also demonstrates a capacity for adaptation and reinvention.

In conclusion, the Malaysian experience affirms that peace and cohesion in a diverse society are never permanently secured but are continuously renegotiated through law, policy, and everyday interaction. The future of ethnic relations in Malaysia therefore depends on the nation's ability to innovate by reducing inequality, depolarizing political incentives, and strengthening digital-era resilience, so that daily cooperation among citizens can be transformed into a robust, inclusive, and enduring national ethos ([18], [12]).

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