

Building a Consensus and Social Cohesion Model in Governance: Insights from Malaysia's Madani Approach

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia's "Madani" framework presents a unique governance model for addressing the complexities of a multiethnic and multicultural society. The Madani approach emphasizes inclusivity, mutual respect, and equity, aiming to achieve political consensus and social cohesion as critical pillars of governance. However, Malaysia faces significant challenges, including political polarization, socio-economic inequalities, and the fragmentation of ethnic-based political alignments, which hinder the formation of a unified governance structure. This study aims to develop a governance model that integrates consensus-building mechanisms and social cohesion principles, fostering national unity while ensuring equitable representation. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a content and thematic analysis to explore the role of governance structures, powersharing frameworks, and social policies in promoting inclusivity. Key findings highlight the effectiveness of the Madani framework in fostering collaboration across ethnic and political divides, though challenges remain in addressing socio-economic disparities and ensuring sustainable consensus amidst shifting political coalitions. The study identifies the necessity of balancing inclusivity with efficiency in decision-making and the importance of adapting governance structures to align with evolving societal needs. By proposing an adaptable governance model rooted in theories of consociationalism, governance, and social cohesion, the research provides practical insights for policymakers in Malaysia and other pluralistic nations. The findings underscore the Madani concept's potential as a replicable framework for promoting stability and unity in diverse societies, contributing to the broader discourse on inclusive governance and its role in managing diversity.

Keywords: Madani Governance; Political Consensus; Social Cohesion; Power-sharing; Multi-ethnic Society

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, as a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious nation, presents a unique case for studying governance that integrates diverse societal groups within a single political framework. Since its independence, the country has grappled with balancing ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity, necessitating governance that accommodates plurality while fostering national unity. The recent adoption of the "Madani" (Civil) governance model introduced to emphasize inclusivity, mutual respect, and equality aims to address these complexities through frameworks for both political consensus and social cohesion. A well-established democratic process supports this approach; however, inherent ethnic divisions and historical political frictions have continued to challenge the stability and unity of governance in Malaysia.

The concept of governance in Malaysia has traditionally focused on accommodating diversity through power-sharing mechanisms and consociationalism democracy. Building on Lijphart's (1977) theory of consociationalism, which highlights power-sharing in segmented societies, the Madani model emphasizes harmony and integration across political frictions and ethnic communities. In this context, the Madani model envisions a state that can evolve through the input and collaboration of various political entities and ethnic groups, leveraging consensus-building as a path to sustainable national cohesion. The study of such a governance model offers valuable insights, particularly in the current global environment where managing diversity has become an essential element of statecraft.

The challenge in achieving sustainable governance within the Madani framework lies in effectively fostering both political consensus and social cohesion amid Malaysia's fragmented political landscape. While Malaysia

has a history of accommodating diversity, recent years have seen heightened political polarization and instances of socio-political tension that threaten to undermine these gains. The multiethnic structure of Malaysia often means that political parties tend to align along ethnic lines, creating a complex environment where achieving political consensus becomes challenging. The underlying problem is not only maintaining a stable coalition government but also ensuring that such a government genuinely addresses the needs and aspirations of all communities in an equitable manner. Without a strong model for fostering consensus and social cohesion, the stability and effectiveness of governance may remain vulnerable to shifts in political allegiance and sociocultural tensions.

This issue is further complicated by the expectation that governance should be adaptable enough to address contemporary socio-political concerns, such as economic inequality, social inclusion, and equitable representation. Within Malaysia's Madani framework, achieving a unified approach to governance that can transcend ethnic, and party divisions is critical. However, no comprehensive governance model has been developed specifically for this purpose, creating a gap in both theoretical and applied research. The primary aim of this study is to develop and propose a model of governance that incorporates both consensus and social cohesion, aligning with the Madani concept of governance in Malaysia. The study will contribute to a more understanding of how governance models can be tailored to support pluralistic societies and maintain stability through shared governance practices.

Practically, the proposed model has substantial implications for policymakers and leaders in Malaysia, as well as in other multiethnic nations. As Malaysia continues to navigate its political landscape within the Madani framework, this study's model can serve as a guide for fostering political collaboration, reducing ethnic tensions, and promoting social stability. Furthermore, by aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions this research contributes to global efforts to create inclusive governance structures that prioritize social equality and long-term cohesion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The formation of governance for any nation is a lengthy process requiring consensus from all ethnic groups. Achieving consensus or compromise among diverse ethnic groups is challenging due to differences in culture and beliefs that influence their perspectives and actions in daily life. These differences make it difficult to find common ground and agreement to achieve consensus. This consensus, referred to as social cohesion, requires the integration of differing viewpoints and ideas into a broader process to achieve national unity. The process of unity-building in a nation is measured by its ability to construct a cohesive state, often referred to as nationbuilding. In a multiethnic country, nation-building necessitates cooperation from all groups, especially representatives of various ethnicities, typically involved in political parties.

The role of these representatives extends beyond merely finding common ground; it involves the capacity to "agree to disagree" to achieve consensus. This consensus must consider the interests and needs of all ethnic groups, ensuring that the outcomes benefit all parties. Historically, many nations have experienced racial conflicts stemming from political changes, economic instability, or the aftermath of wars.

A. Governance

The discussion of governance in this study refers to the management of political development. From a sociological perspective, governance encompasses network or systemic theories. The term "governance," often explored in the fields of international relations and political science, is distinguished from "government." "Government" refers to institutions of power established to make decisions within a state, equated with the concept of rule or authority (Witteck, 2007: 73). In contrast, governance is understood as a collective programming framework related to communities (Conrad & Stange, 2011: 39).

Governance, according to scholarly reviews, signifies transformation and change. Rhodes (1996: 521) describes governance as "a change in the meaning of government, referring to new processes of governing, changed conditions of ordered rule, or new methods by which society is governed." Governance inherently requires consensus as a mechanism for change, transition, and transformation. Levi-Faur (2012: 555) categorizes governance into four key definitions: structure, process, mechanism, and strategy. Structure refers to the design

of formal or informal institutions. Social science conceptual definitions view structure as systems of rules (Rose, 1995: 13), encompassing laws, judicial decisions, and administrative practices (Lynn, Heinrich, & Hill, 2001: 7), as well as institutions managing society (Risse, 2011: 39). This definition often relates to alternative governmental institutions, such as networks, markets, and privatization initiatives. Process focuses on the dynamics of guiding functions for policymaking, which are continuous. This approach highlights interactions rather than governmental structures, emphasizing the generation of norms and values (Humrich & Zangi, 2010: 343). Mechanism refers to the importance of institutional procedures in decision-making, control, and enforcement. Strategy concerns the actions and efforts of actors to administer and manipulate institutional forms and methods to establish and select priorities.

Wittek (2007) further categorizes governance into three sociological approaches: rationalism, culture, and structuralism. Scholars generally agree that historical context is crucial for understanding governance patterns and practices. For instance, Risse (2011: 41) highlights two colonial governance characteristics: the role of negotiation and regulation in early state formation and conflict resolution methods emphasizing consultation and legislation. Colonial governance practices have left enduring legacies, including the introduction of formal legal and administrative institutions in countries like Malaysia. These historical influences have shaped the governance structures and societal frameworks observed today, including the emphasis on negotiation, demands, and mediation as vital tools for fostering consensus and cohesion (Nurshuhada Mohamed, 2021).

B. Consensus

Consociationalism is a form of consensus democracy associated with governing ethnically divided multinational states, where two or more ethnic groups co-govern (Schneckener, 2002: 204). The primary concept of powersharing involves these groups collectively administering the state through consensus in decision-making processes (Schneckener, 2002: 203). This concept, introduced by Lijphart in the 1970s, evolved alongside the second wave of democratization (1940–1962) and gained momentum during the third wave (1974–1990), which significantly influenced countries in Southern Europe, Latin America, and East Asia. In the Malaysian context, the concept of consociationalism aligns with historical efforts, such as the establishment of the Communities Liaison Committee (CLC) in 1948, which sought to foster dialogue and consensus among elite representatives of different ethnic groups. Fernando (2012) describes the CLC as "an attempt to achieve national consensus and state development" and an early model of elite power-sharing within a democratic framework. Nurshuhada (2018) emphasizes that the CLC implemented consociationalism and social cohesion instruments. These instruments are used as tools to analyze the role and function of the CLC as a model of power-sharing in politics. Lijphart (1999) elaborates on consociationalism institutions, emphasizing their role in ensuring broad representation and participation, reducing conflict, and fostering collaboration. Mechanisms such as negotiation and institutional guarantees form the basis of this consensus-driven governance, reflecting the Malaysian experience in managing its multiethnic society.

C. Social Cohesion

Social cohesion has been defined broadly as requiring stability, intergroup cooperation, shared identity, and a sense of belonging (Chan et al., 2006). McCracken (1998) emphasizes social cohesion as the connection between individuals, groups, and the government, underlining that daily interactions often hold greater significance than formal structures in fostering unity. In Malaysia, social cohesion focuses on systemic processes and institutions that promote equality and shared values. Berger-Schmitt (2000) divides social cohesion into two analytical dimensions: Inequality Dimension advocates reducing social inequality and exclusion while promoting equal opportunities for all. Social Capital Dimension emphasizes strengthening social interactions and bonds within the community. These dimensions are critical in addressing Malaysia's ethnic diversity, as social cohesion efforts aim to mitigate disparities and enhance collective identity.

Political Development and Governance in Malaysia

Malaysia's political governance reflects a delicate balancing act between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. As highlighted by Cheah Boon Kheng (2001), the dominance of Malay nationalism shapes the country's agenda while accommodating other ethnic groups through territorial civic nationalism. This dynamic has often placed Malaysia at the intersection of ethnic sensitivities and national unity, necessitating inclusive

governance strategies to balance competing interests. Policies that overly favour one group risk alienating others, while overly multicultural policies may erode support from majority groups. Governance in Malaysia must thus navigate these tensions to maintain legitimacy, stability, and unity, as exemplified by its adherence to consociationalism and social cohesion principles.

Conceptual Relationship

This mapping will visually summarize how each theoretical domain interrelates within the context of Malaysia's Madani governance framework. This mapping allows us to see the convergence of governance theories, powersharing, social cohesion, and local political philosophy within Malaysia's Madani model, offering a comprehensive and integrated approach to managing a multi-ethnic super diversity society. The integration of governance theories, social cohesion, consociationalism, and Malaysia's unique Madani concept significantly influences the governance landscape in Malaysia today. These theories provide a structured approach to understanding Malaysia's strategies for creating an inclusive, stable, and effective governance model within its multi-ethnic super diversity society.

Table 1.0: Significance of Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Domain	Core Theories and Concepts	Significance in Study
Governance and Social Cohesion	Levi-Faur's governance framework (2012); Rhodes (1996)	Emphasizes governance as a structure, process, and mechanism for achieving social cohesion by addressing socio-political stability within pluralistic societies.
Consociationalism and Power Sharing	Lijphart's Consociational Democracy Theory (1977, 1999); Schneckener (2002)	Power-sharing models are essential for diverse societies, where multiple ethnic and political groups require inclusive governance that ensures representation and stability.
Social Cohesion in Multiethnic Super Diversity Societies	Chan et al. (2006); McCracken (1998); Berger-Schmitt (2000)	Focuses on reducing social inequalities and fostering unity in diverse societies by encouraging shared values and collective identity, essential for peaceful coexistence.
Madani Concept in Malaysian Politics	Anwar Ibrahim (2023); Malaysian Unity Framework (2024)	Integrates principles of mutual respect, inclusivity, and civil governance in Malaysia, aiming to address Malaysia's unique socio-political challenges through a framework rooted in local context.

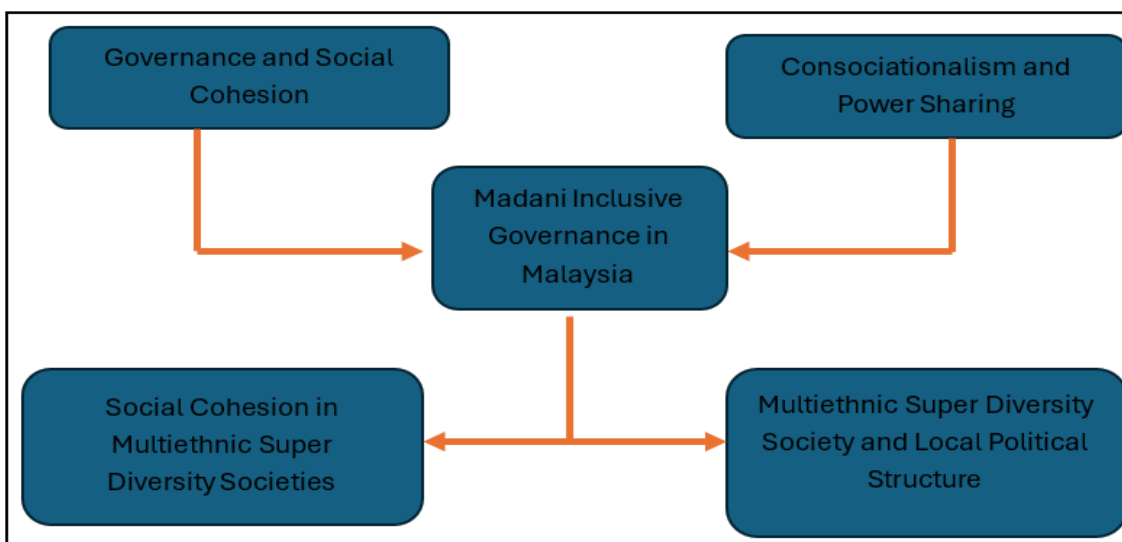


Diagram 1.0: Theoretical domain interrelates within Malaysia's Madani governance framework.

Governance and Social Cohesion

Governance theories, such as those by Levi-Faur (2012) and Rhodes (1996), establish governance as a combination of structures, processes, mechanisms, and strategies that collectively enable governments to achieve political, economic, and social objectives. In Malaysia, this governance framework underscores the importance of an inclusive and adaptable administrative system, especially considering the country's diverse social composition. Malaysia has adapted its governance structures to account for socio-political stability. Institutions are crafted to encourage inclusivity and a shared sense of purpose among the various ethnic groups. Through consultative governance, Malaysia aims to engage a wide array of voices, from political representatives to community leaders, in decision-making processes. This approach mitigates potential social divisions by promoting shared values, as seen in the consultative councils and federal institutions that aim to balance interests among ethnic communities.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain, such as political polarization and ethnic divides, which can weaken social cohesion. The theory highlights the importance of sustainable governance practices that build public trust and foster an environment of mutual respect. In Malaysia, achieving these outcomes is complex, given the ethnic and political diversity; however, governance theories encourage continuous reform in institutional structures to support greater social cohesion and equity.

Consociationalism and Power Sharing

Arend Lijphart's (1977, 1999) theory of consociationalism democracy, or power-sharing, is particularly relevant for Malaysia. Consociationalism advocates for power-sharing among segmented groups in society, suggesting that cooperation between ethnic and political groups is vital for stability in diverse societies. Power-sharing Mechanisms in Malaysia can be showed in Malaysia's political structure reflects consociationalism principles through coalition-based governance. The main political alliances such as Barisan Nasional (BN) historically and the more recent Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalitions have sought to represent various ethnic groups and ensure shared governance. Each coalition includes parties representing major ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous), fostering a power-sharing dynamic intended to create a balanced representation in government decisions.

Significance of Power-sharing for Governance Stability by the power-sharing model reduces interethnic tensions by ensuring that no single group dominates the political system. It also allows for mutual respect and negotiation in policymaking, which aligns with the Madani model's objectives of building trust and cooperation among political parties. This approach has fostered political stability in Malaysia, even amid recent shifts and realignments in political coalitions following the 2018 and 2022 elections.

Social Cohesion in Multiethnic Super Diversity Societies

Social cohesion theories, particularly from Chan et al. (2006) and Berger-Schmitt (2000), focus on the importance of reducing social inequalities, fostering shared identity, and enhancing collaboration across diverse groups. In a multicultural society like Malaysia, these theories underscore the need for a governance model that promotes unity without erasing cultural diversity. Application to Malaysian Policies and Programs can see in concept of social cohesion in Malaysia is actively pursued through policies that promote unity while acknowledging diversity. Programs like the Rukun Negara (National Principles) and various ethnic-based development initiatives aim to cultivate a sense of shared identity. Education policies and national holidays often emphasize multiculturalism and respect for diversity, which align with social cohesion theories' emphasis on inclusive identity and equal opportunities.

Social cohesion initiatives help reduce socio-economic disparities and reinforce a national identity. However, the balance between ethnic-specific policies and broader national policies remains challenging. The social cohesion theories highlight that maintaining unity requires ongoing efforts to address inequalities and recognize each community's contributions, something Malaysia continues to strive for through targeted economic policies and affirmative actions for underrepresented groups.

The Madani Concept in Malaysian Politics

The Madani concept, recently emphasized by Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's current Prime Minister, is inspired by ideas of inclusivity, mutual respect, and civil governance, with the aim to create a governance model that upholds social justice and national unity. This concept integrates the theories of governance, social cohesion, and consociationalism, making it uniquely adapted to Malaysia's political and social landscape. Principles and Practices of Madani Governance will explain by the Madani model is built on principles such as diversity within unity, social equity, and consensus-based governance. It calls for policies that bridge ethnic divides and emphasize the collective good while respecting individual community identities. This approach aligns with the principles of power-sharing and social cohesion by integrating governance with an inclusive ethos aimed at national unity and political stability.

Madani's Role in Modern Malaysian Governance refers as a guiding philosophy, Madani has influenced government initiatives aimed at fostering political collaboration, economic equity, and social inclusion. It builds on the legacy of consociationalism democracy and social cohesion theories, translating them into a practical framework for Malaysia. For example, policies are increasingly designed with a view toward transparency and accountability to create a trusted governance system, especially after recent political crises and coalition shifts. The Madani concept encourages dialogue, equitable resource distribution, and participation across ethnic lines, aiming for a stable and prosperous society.

The interplay between governance theories, consociationalism, social cohesion, and the Madani concept shapes Malaysia's current approach to governance. The government actively leverages these theories to balance the diverse needs of its population while striving for political stability and national unity. Key policies rooted in these theories include coalition governance, affirmative action for minority groups, and inclusive national identity programs. Collectively, these theories provide a comprehensive framework to support Malaysia's efforts toward effective, equitable, and cohesive governance amidst its diversity. However, challenges remain in translating these ideals into practice, especially in areas like economic equality and interethnic representation in the political sphere. Ultimately, these theories are foundational in guiding Malaysia's approach to managing its multicultural reality, with the Madani model serving as a contemporary adaptation of these principles for today's socio-political landscape.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section focuses on analyzing the theoretical findings within the framework of the governance theories and concepts outlined, including governance and social cohesion, consociationalism, social cohesion in multi-ethnic societies, and the Madani concept in Malaysian politics. Each finding sheds light on how these theories operate within Malaysia's complex socio-political environment and reveals the strengths and challenges of the Madani governance model.

Political Consensus in the Madani Model

The Madani governance model encourages a system of power-sharing among political parties with diverse ethnic bases, facilitating political consensus. The findings indicate that Madani governance promotes a form of "deliberative governance," where political representatives engage in continuous negotiation and compromise to address community-specific concerns without undermining the unity of the coalition. This approach aligns closely with consociationalism theory, particularly Lijphart's concept of elite cooperation in segmented societies. Power-sharing reduces ethnic tension by ensuring representation for each community, creating an environment conducive to stable governance. However, Malaysia's political environment remains prone to polarization, especially when coalition alliances shift. Political consensus under the Madani model can be challenging to maintain, as frequent realignments (e.g., in 2018 and 2022) disrupt collaborative efforts. The findings suggest that while Madani attempts to institutionalize consensus, these efforts are often counteracted by Malaysia's dynamic political landscape, highlighting the limitations of consociationalism in a highly competitive political environment.

The concept of Malaysia Madani was introduced by the Unity Government in January 2023 as a national governance framework grounded in moral values, social harmony, and sustainable development. The Madani

concept is structured around six core values: sustainability, well-being, creativity, respect, trust, and compassion, which serve as guiding principles for all government policies and administrative practices (Prime Minister's Department, 2023). Each ministry is expected to internalise and operationalise these values within its governance structures and policy implementation.

The central emphasis of the Madani framework is the pursuit of national progress that is aligned with ethical and moral development. Within the context of statehood, material advancement is not viewed as an end in itself but must progress in tandem with a humanistic philosophy. Society is envisioned as possessing a liberated civic consciousness, characterised by peace, harmony, and collective well-being. This normative orientation reflects the Madani commitment to balancing economic growth with social responsibility and moral integrity.

The practical application of this concept is evidenced through the implementation of the Madani Rakyat Programme, which was initiated in 2024 as a platform for political leaders to engage directly with the public, listen to grassroots concerns, and respond to local needs. Notably, the programme involves all state governments, including those governed by political coalitions outside the federal alignment, thereby demonstrating a commitment to inclusive and consensus-oriented governance (Anwar Ibrahim, 2025). Among the projects implemented under this initiative are the upgrading of facilities at the Negeri Sembilan Miniature Culture Village, the construction of the Machang Water Treatment Plant in Kelantan, the resolution of water supply issues in Labuan, the development of the Pulau Perhentian Health Clinic in Terengganu, and the construction of an additional building for Kulim Hospital in Kedah (Emalisa Othman, 2025). Collectively, these initiatives illustrate how the Madani framework is translated into tangible development outcomes that prioritise public welfare, equitable access to essential services, and intergovernmental cooperation across political boundaries.

Conceptually, this programme is not merely a political slogan but has substantively influenced ministerial strategic planning and national development frameworks. This is evident in policy documents such as the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Local Government Development 2021–2025, in which Madani values are explicitly integrated into objectives related to social development and fair, inclusive governance (Ministry of Local Government Development, 2023). The incorporation of these values has also facilitated the promotion of consensus across multiple stakeholders, including state governments governed by opposing political coalitions. Such cross-jurisdictional cooperation demonstrates that the Madani framework functions beyond partisan boundaries. The implementation of this Strategic Plan addresses normative limitations by translating principles into operational policy measures, thereby illustrating that national development strategies have been deliberately structured to strengthen political consensus and institutional collaboration.

Social Cohesion as a Governing Principle

The Madani model prioritizes social cohesion, aiming to unify diverse communities within a framework of shared values. Social programs, such as the Rukun Negara principles and inclusive national holidays, are seen as essential tools to instil a sense of belonging among Malaysia's multiethnic population. The government promotes values of respect, tolerance, and mutual benefit to counteract intergroup disparities. This finding reflects social cohesion theory in multicultural societies, which emphasizes shared identity and reduced socioeconomic disparities as foundations for social stability (Chan et al., 2006). In practice, social cohesion within the Madani framework is a double-edged sword: while it fosters unity, it also raises concerns about "top-down" assimilation policies. Certain ethnic groups may feel marginalized if the national identity promoted is perceived as overly homogenizing. The study findings underscore the need for a balanced approach—social cohesion efforts should celebrate cultural diversity within a unified national identity. This approach can help Malaysia maintain harmony, but the government must be sensitive to the ways social cohesion policies impact distinct ethnic identities, ensuring they are inclusive rather than erasing cultural differences.

The Madani Government emphasises that its policies are inclusive of all ethnic and religious groups. The Prime Minister has stated that Malaysia Madani does not reject the identity of any community but instead upholds shared values of humanity, justice, and patriotism as the basis of national unity (Bernama, 2023). In line with this approach, the Ministry of National Unity promotes the principle of *unity in diversity* by working with the Ministry of Education and other institutions. These efforts aim to strengthen social cohesion in schools and higher education institutions through the appreciation of the Rukun Negara and structured social interaction programmes (The Star, 2025).

At the higher education level, courses such as Aspirasi Pembinaan Negara Bangsa and Falsafah Pemikiran Kontemporari are listed as compulsory General Studies subjects (MPU). These courses expose students to key issues related to federalism, regional diversity between Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak, and the foundations of national integration. This educational approach helps reduce misunderstandings and social tensions related to citizenship and national identity (Suzalina Halid, 2025). Together, these initiatives serve as a practical case of how the *unity in diversity* policy is implemented in higher education. They demonstrate how national policies are translated into concrete actions within a multiethnic society.

Challenges to Equitable Development and Representation

Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, socio-economic disparities remain significant among ethnic groups, particularly between the Malay majority and other groups, such as the Chinese and Indian minorities. The Madani model, which incorporates affirmative policies and targeted development programs, aims to bridge these economic gaps. However, findings show that economic inequality continues to impact political representation and social stability. These findings align with governance and social cohesion theories, particularly Levi-Faur's emphasis on the role of governance in managing inequalities and ensuring fair representation. Economic policies under the Madani framework attempt to create equitable access to resources and opportunities across communities, yet these policies often face criticism for prioritizing certain groups. For instance, affirmative action policies benefiting the Bumiputera (Malay and indigenous communities) have raised concerns about fairness from minority groups, highlighting an ongoing tension within the Madani model. Addressing these disparities is crucial, as socio-economic inequalities can hinder efforts toward cohesive governance. The findings suggest that economic reforms should aim for broader inclusivity to ensure that all communities feel adequately represented in Malaysia's political and economic systems.

Economic governance outcomes further demonstrate the link between Madani policies and social harmony. Official statistics indicate that the minimum wage was increased twice, alongside efforts to strengthen Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) income pathways. These measures have contributed to reducing socio-economic gaps and the risk of social tension. Notably, 95.6 percent of TVET graduates secured employment within six months of completing their training, with a minimum salary level of RM1,700 (Anwar Ibrahim, 2025).

Targeted welfare programmes, such as Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah (STR), have also produced direct positive effects on public well-being. By supporting low-income households across Malaysia, STR has strengthened public perceptions of fairness and inclusive governance. In addition, the Budi Madani RON95 subsidy programme extends fuel subsidies to all citizens holding a valid driving licence. Approved public and commercial vehicles are also eligible under this scheme. This broad-based subsidy approach reflects an equitable distribution of state assistance beyond selective welfare programmes. Taken together, these initiatives indicate that inclusive economic policies under the Madani framework play a significant role in reinforcing national cohesion.

Effectiveness of Consensus-driven Decision-Making

The Madani model's emphasis on consensus-driven decision-making has been moderately effective in fostering collaboration across political divides. The study shows that consensus-building processes, such as roundtable discussions and focus groups, are instrumental in formulating policies that accommodate diverse viewpoints. However, consensus-based decision-making can be time-intensive and may lack decisiveness, especially in times of crisis. Therefore, the consensus may require bargaining, negotiation (Shamsul AB, 2011) and moderation (Saravanamttu 2016; Nurshuhada Mohamed, 2018). Consensus-driven decision-making reflects consociationalism and governance theories by emphasizing inclusive and participatory governance. However, while consensus-building allows for representation of multiple interests, it can hinder efficiency, especially when swift action is required. The Madani model's reliance on consultation and negotiation often leads to delayed decision-making, which may frustrate stakeholders seeking rapid responses to pressing issues. In a diverse society like Malaysia, balancing inclusivity with efficiency is challenging, and the findings suggest that while consensus-building enhances political stability, there may be trade-offs in terms of governance speed and responsiveness.

Recent studies have examined how Malaysia Madani addresses sensitivities related to the 3R issues of race, religion, and royalty by strengthening the Rukun Negara as a shared foundation of national values (Mohd Sabree Nasri & Abd Aziz A'zmi, 2025). This perspective provides a critical basis for arguing that consensus does not imply the absence of conflict. Instead, it involves the effective and inclusive management of value-based differences through shared national symbols. Within the Madani framework, the Rukun Negara functions as a unifying mechanism that mediates value conflicts without marginalising diverse identities. This approach represents an important theoretical contribution to social cohesion studies, as it demonstrates how national cohesion can be sustained through symbolic integration and value-based governance rather than through enforced uniformity.

Impact of the Madani Concept on National Identity

The Madani model has reshaped the Malaysian governance landscape by promoting a unique concept of civil governance that emphasizes values such as respect, inclusivity, and unity. The findings indicate that the Madani concept has contributed to an evolving national identity that includes a diverse yet cohesive population, moving away from a rigid ethnic-based identity framework to a more integrated national identity. The Madani concept reflects the multi-ethnic and social cohesion theories, supporting the idea that national identity in a diverse society must embrace pluralism rather than enforce assimilation. This approach is particularly significant in the Malaysian context, where ethnic divisions have historically defined political identities. By promoting shared values and inclusivity, the Madani model seeks to transcend ethnic boundaries, cultivating a sense of shared identity without erasing distinct cultural backgrounds. However, the study findings indicate that the success of this approach depends on continued commitment to policies that are sensitive to all cultural identities, as overly centralized identity-building efforts could be perceived as marginalizing specific groups.

The Madani model's application of governance, consociationalism, and social cohesion theories reveals both strengths and areas of improvement in the Malaysian governance system. The model's commitment to power-sharing, consensus-building, and social cohesion underscores its potential for fostering stability in a diverse society. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding socio-economic inequalities, political polarization, and the complexities of implementing an inclusive national identity. The Madani concept, while promising in theory, requires continuous adjustment to maintain the delicate balance between unity and diversity, especially given Malaysia's dynamic political and ethnic landscape. The findings underscore that effective governance in Malaysia must be flexible enough to address these evolving challenges, with the Madani model serving as a foundational but adaptable framework.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the strengths and challenges of Malaysia's Madani governance model in addressing the complexities of governing a diverse, multiethnic society. By emphasizing political consensus, social cohesion, and equitable representation, the Madani framework fosters inclusivity and stability through mechanisms such as power-sharing, consensus-driven decision-making, and social cohesion policies. However, persistent issues such as socio-economic disparities, political polarization, and inefficiencies in decision-making processes present obstacles to fully realizing these objectives. The findings reveal that while the Madani model contributes to unity and the development of a shared national identity, achieving balance between inclusivity and efficiency remains critical for long-term success. The study underscores the importance of continuous reforms and adaptive policies to ensure fair representation and sustainable governance amidst Malaysia's dynamic political and social landscape. These insights offer a replicable framework for other pluralistic societies striving to manage diversity and foster social cohesion.

Future studies should focus on quantitatively analyzing the impact of the Madani governance model on socio-economic equity, political stability, and national unity to provide measurable insights into its effectiveness. Comparative research examining similar governance models in other multiethnic societies could identify best practices and lessons that can be adapted to Malaysia. Additionally, investigating public perceptions of the Madani model across different ethnic groups could offer valuable insights into the inclusivity and fairness of its policies. Furthermore, research on the role of digital tools and platforms in enhancing participatory governance and consensus-building processes would contribute to understanding how technology can support the objectives of the Madani framework.

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