

# Effects of General Election-14 on the Social Well-Being of the People of Malay Race in Malaysia

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## Abstract

The 14th General Election (GE-14) which was held on May 9, 2018, had surprising results that changed the political climate of the country. The alliance Pakatan Harapan, which adopts the PKR logo and includes the Parti Warisan Sabah, beat the Parti Barisan Nasional (BN) and won 122 seats in parliament. The remaining 79 parliamentary seats were won by BN, and the 18 seats gained by PAS, which opted to run unopposed, were won by BN.

After the 14th General Election, disagreements arose about the Sultan's authority, the specific rights of the Malays, Islam's status as the Federation of Malaysia's official religion, and the Malay language's status as its official language. This change is particularly noticeable among journalists of Malay ancestry who have reported the issue to the police more frequently than before following the 14th GE. The social well-being of the Malay community is seen as being threatened by this issue.

This article investigates the social well-being of the Malay community in the wake of the 14th GE. It employed both document analysis and interviews to collect data for a qualitative investigation. The data prior to and following the 14th GE were examined using comparative analysis.

The study's findings show that following the 14th General Election, the harmony between the Malay community and other race groups has encountered disruptions. This disruption stems from the actions of non-Malay individuals who frequently challenged the privileged status of Malays and engaged in derogatory remarks about the Sultan and the Islamic faith. As a result, any governing party must align with the sentiments of the Malay community and refrain from disregarding their emotions and the delicate subjects that concern them. This stance is crucial to ensure the security and enduring well-being of the Malay community, who are the indigenous people of Malaysia.

**Keywords:** 14th General Election; Malay community; Social Well-Being; Sensitive Issues; Security Aspect.

## Introduction

Sensitive issues involving the special rights of Malays and Bumiputeras are increasingly widely and openly debated through social media such as Facebook and Twitter after General Election 2014. Those who challenge these special rights do not only belong to non-Malays, but there are also even Malays themselves who are influenced by an understanding that projects hatred towards the institution of the monarchy and Islam as the official religion of the country. In addition, the rise of parties or movements such as the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and HINDRAF which are based on race and aim to fight for equality rights are increasingly having a voice in challenging the social well-being of Malays and Bumiputeras. For example, the DAP leadership called on the people to stand in solidarity as a protest against the extension of jail sentence to one year by the Shah Alam High Court Judge against Wan Ji for insulting the Sultan. Wan Ji was imprisoned after the Shah Alam High Court rejected an appeal against his conviction and sentence of nine months in prison for publishing seditious words against Sultan Sharafuddin. As such, this will influence the Chinese and Indian communities, in particular, to voice their dissatisfaction with the existing system, especially those involving the dispute over Malay and Bumiputera privileges.

Article 153 in the constitution is now being mocked, Islam is insulted, and the royal institution is belittled on the grounds that the new Malaysia after the transition of power from BN to PH needs to be based on the concept of equality between all races. Recently, there are a number of social media users, especially from the Indian and Chinese communities, who have started to make accusations that Malaysia is a country that practices discrimination or racism and often oppresses minorities following their solidarity with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the United States (Holt & Sweitzer, 2018). The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is "the largest movement in US history" that emerged in 2013 in a massive social media reaction to the acquittal of George Zimmerman who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American. This movement gained significant momentum with the rise of right-wing movements that condemned racist elements and the involvement of the police in the fatal shooting of a black American citizen in the Trump era (2017-2021).

This action is a big challenge to the social well-being of the Malays. The attitude of some parties that do not respect the special rights of the Malays can invite disputes among the people in Malaysia. There is no doubt that there are more people in Malaysia who support peace and strongly reject any conflict that may occur, but as a result of provocation, political interference, and superficial knowledge involving important issues in this country have resulted in tensions between the races either between Malays and Chinese or Malays and Indians. Disputes that can result in loss of life are so worrying that there is a sense of trauma among the community indirectly. The negative effects that can be seen by Malaysians have occurred abroad as a result of inter-racial strife and has become a benchmark for Malaysians, because if a fight or riot breaks out, then the effect will certainly be more or less the same as what has been seen before. Therefore, relevant measures need to be implemented so that the harmony of the pluralistic society in Malaysia is maintained without disturbing the special status of the Malays and Bumiputeras who fought with all their might to protect Malaysia from colonial threats in the past.

In this context, this paper examines the effects of social well-being of the Malay race after the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election during the Pakatan Harapan administration. Its objectives are:

- To analyse the implications of the 14th General Election on the social well-being of Malays from the aspect of security.
- To explore the actions of the Pakatan Harapan government that have led to the endangerment of the social welfare rights of Malays in terms of security

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Well-Being

People are social creatures and almost everything they do in life is related to other people (Goodman et al., 2018). The state of well-being usually refers to the term social well-

being as a condition to meet the material and non-material needs of people. According to Pinto et al. (2017), social well-being is a state of human existence where a person's life is peaceful and happy because the basic needs for nutrition, health, education, shelter, and income has been met; and when people get protection from the main risks that threaten their lives.

Social well-being is divided into three groups, namely social well-being as a condition, social well-being as an activity or a service, and social well-being as a science (Jetten et al., 2017). According to Goodman et al. (2018), social well-being is also stated as a process or planned effort carried out by individuals, social institutions, communities, or government agencies to improve the quality of life through the provision of social services and social benefits (Goodman et al., 2018). Therefore, social well-being can be measured in terms of standard of living, fulfilment of basic needs, quality of life, and human development.

Social well-being is a goal and a core element to the development of a community. It is achieved by a community and is described by the position or condition of it at a certain time. The position or state of the community is also described by the level and standard of living of the individual, family, and the community concerned. Level refers to what a community feels, enjoys or suffers (Birciaková et al., 2015), while standard refers to what the community wants to achieve (Madzík et al., 2015). The level and standard of living of individuals, families, and communities can be assessed based on the indicators of social well-being.

According to Tov (2018), the social well-being of a community is determined by three aspects, namely: the management of social problems, the fulfilment of life needs and opportunities for social mobility in the community. The existence of these three elements of social well-being will provide the society with a safe environment, complete satisfaction of basic needs, and maximized opportunities for social mobility. With that, community members are free to develop their potential, be actively involved in the activities carried out, and contribute to the community as a whole (Birciaková et al., 2015).

There are various approaches practiced by a country in achieving the goal of social well-being of its people. They are social development approach, social administration approach, social donation approach, and social work approach. Traditionally, the practice of the social well-being approach aims to eradicate and control the social problems that occur (Tov, 2018). In addition, the social well-being approach is also practiced as an effort to develop self-ability to improve the quality of life (Madzík et al., 2015). However, the efforts practiced through social well-being approaches need to be supported by other services so that the quality of life of community members is more effective.

## **Security**

Security is a concept based on humanitarian aspects. This concept refers to a state of being protected or protected from danger, disaster or disturbance that can cause an accident (Ahsan, 2016). According to Hama (2017), security is a matter or step that needs to be taken to prevent unwanted events such as injury or loss of life. Security also can be defined as a response to the cause of threats that can threaten the well-being of individual lives (Fighel, 2020). The objective of security is to measure the absence of threats to values obtained, whereas in a subjective sense it means there is fear that the value would be attacked (Buzan, 2007). In this context, security is seen in terms of the disputes of other races against the special rights of the Malays, including the special rights of Islam as the official religion and the right to administer the country through the institution of the monarchy.

## **Review of Literature**

Social well-being and quality of life in fact is a difficult concept to explain and complex (Pinto et.al, 2017; Kelley et.al, 2017). At the meantime, the concept of well-being has witnessed a surge of academic interest with significantly critical implications for life, work, and productivity according to Achour et.al (2014). While Tov (2018) listed three aspects as indicator to determine the well-being concept, the management of social problems,

the fulfilment of life needs and opportunities for social mobility in the community. His idea is agreed by Birciakova et al. (2015) who added the existence of these three elements of social well-being will provide society with safe environmental conditions, complete satisfaction of basic needs and maximize opportunities for social mobility. This is in line with the perspective by Madzik, Pitekova and Dankova, (2015) and Diener (2015) that asserts the concept of social well-being as a fundamental factor in community and country development planning even though Diener (2015) and Goodman (2018) applied the different method in assessing social well-being. All the view completing each other in defining the broad concepts and indicators of well-being. However, when focusing on definition, indicator and situation happened in certain area, views from local researchers are needed. In that way, the results of social well-being studies will be more accurate depending on the scope of the research.

This research is conducted by local perspective regarding the concept of social well-being of the Malays race which is closely related to security aspects. As for Malaysia, the government uses the well-being index compiled by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) as indicator in assessing the well-being of Malaysian society. According to Well-Being Report 2013 (MWI, 2013) the social progress of Malaysia is examined under eight Social Well-Being components and by 2021 the Well-Being Report 2021 (MYWI, 2021) comprises nine components namely housing, entertainment and recreation, public safety, social participation, governance, culture, health, environment and family. There are fortyone indicators covered in this sub-composite. One sub-composite indicator that related to this study is Public Safety which is examined by two sub indicators.

However, Aisyah (2017) writes, EPU admitted that the reports cannot cover all aspects of well-being (MQLR 2004; MQLR 2011). These refer to the nonquantifiable aspects such as the harmony of the country, work ethics, and communal values. Therefore, on June 2014 according Aisyah (2017), EPU inquired researchers to discover what matter most to the citizens. In the present research review, we attempted to address research limitations by evaluating the interviews and Royal Malaysia Police report done by the Malays citizen to evaluate well-being from security aspects from perspective of Malays race.

Past research on the well-being of Malays race in Malaysia is quite limited. Most of the research conducted focusing on the well-being in general scope of Malaysia or examining one component in the Malaysia Well-Being Index. For example, Zaim et.al (2020) analyzing the social well-being of Malays in terms of family institutions. Meanwhile Yahaya (2017) using the method of qualitative and descriptive explanation underlines the need for the house for the family institution, the importance of housing, and housing in Malaysia and the neighbouring countries, which is one of the Malaysia Well-Being Index component. As for the research conducted by Rahman et.al (2021) has investigating the relationship between financial literacy, financial behaviour, financial stress, and financial well-being of B40 group in Malaysia, one of the component evaluated in social well-being context. While Achour et.al (2015) research seeks to measure religiosity in an Islamic context and to assess its effects on the personal well-being of Muslims. The results of his study show that there exists a positive yet significant correlation between personal well-being and religiosity. The well-being also shows significant positive correlations with beliefs and worship and prayer.

Discussing on social media as a rapid communication instrument in disseminating information to the public in Malaysia, Afi et.al highlight the situation Post GE-14 that shows the existence of negative elements such as prejudice, angry, disappointed that is targeted at the elements of the traditional in the Federal Constitution Malaysia (2021). He analyze the content of several issues and incidents that occur especially from social media platforms regarding the issues discussed as well as looking from the security angle. Constructive and forward discussions are made to see acceptance Malaysian society in respecting the element of the traditional. The study found that there are elements negative, prejudiced and influenced by irrational feelings in this issue. The term watan or native in his study related to the Malays race in this present study as stated in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia.

On the part of the Malays, the increase in disputes over these traditional elements is seen to threaten the social well-being of the Malays from the aspect of security. Thus, this study seeks to discuss the concept and definition of the social well-being of the Malays from the aspect of security as well as its relationship with traditional elements such as the special rights of the Malays (Article 153), the status of the Malay language as the national language (Article 152), Islam as the official religion (Article 3) and the position of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong as the head of state (Article 32) in general which has been raised and disputed hence the end of the 14th General Election on 9 May 2018.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses a case study method within the descriptive qualitative paradigm. It focuses on the existing situation and reveals details of issues from the security aspect. The specific design of this study is a case study where the researchers analysed the content of documents on the topic of security and well-being of the Malays. The security issue here is focused on Section 298A of the Penal Code, Section 504 of the Penal Code and Section 233(3) of the Communications and Multimedia Act states 'improper use of network facilities or network services'.

Primary data was obtained through an interview several informants who were related to incidents of Malay social well-being. There were five main informants selected, namely Johor Police Chief, Security Division Police Enforcer (Informant 1), case complainant (Informant 2), an academician (Informant 3), chief officer of Bukit Aman Special Branch Office (Informant 4) and NGO representative (Informant 5) who had relevant information. The interview involved list of oral questions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by asking open-ended questions. These interviews are conducted from August 15 to August 30, 2023 in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor area. The question asked is related to the threat to the well-being of the Malays, especially in terms of security. The answers to the questions are then divided according to theme.

The second primary data was also obtained from the official reports of the Royal Malaysia Police. This report pertains to cases involving threats to the security of Malay community, which indirectly can jeopardize the well-being of Malays, particularly in terms of security. Among these cases are instances of religious insults against Malays and insults directed at Malay Royal Institutions.

Meanwhile, secondary data is gathered through a literature review method, utilizing reputable sources such as books, journals, newspapers, televisyen news and the internet. Secondary data is required to support and complement the primary data that has been collected, to strengthen and solidify the findings of this study. The places visited to obtain the secondary data are the PTTA (Pustaka Tunku Tun Aminah) library, the Information Resource Technology Branch office, and the Police Logistics and Technology Department.

### **Analytical Methods**

The data was compiled and evaluated in various forms such as text, dates, and illustrations. They were coded and thematic methods were used. The researchers started the coding method by breaking the data through the coding process to manage the data such as the process of coding the words in the report and matching them with the provisions of the sections in the law book of the Penal Code. Following the coding, the data was rearranged according to the themes built based on the provisions of the relevant sections. In addition, qualitative data analysis was employed by synthesizing previous studies and applying comparative analysis methods regarding the issue of Malay social well-being before and after GE-14. Synthesis is an interpretation of data from a summary of various reference sources that present concepts, definitions, and opinions regarding the social well-being of the Malays-

## Findings

### The State of Social Well-Being of the Malay Community Before GE-14

Prior to the setting of the 2012 election date, several high-profile issues or events had occurred such as demonstrations by BERSIH, demonstrations by HINDRAF, and the investigation of the Linggam video case (Mstar, 2010; Mstar, 2011; Suarapakatandaily, 2011). These events had brought issues such as marginalization of races in development, unequal treatment of races, Malay dominance, protection of human rights, power of ISA, transparency in the judiciary. These issues were the main agenda that were discussed both in the mainstream media and alternative media such as forums and blogs on the internet (Ghani, 2016).

The issue of the increase in world oil prices since 2006 also affected various service and food costs that had directly and indirectly burdened consumers. Although the rate of economic growth was considered good, this macro-economic performance cannot be translated into more comfortable living conditions for a large number of people, especially those with low incomes. People felt that the increase in the price of goods had burdened their daily lives. In order to convince voters, Pakatan Rakyat in the GE-12 campaign promised practical and quick things simply to fulfil immediate gratifications among voters such as lower oil prices and promised annual remuneration from the government.

Pillai (2015) in a study of 300 respondents covering urban, suburban and rural areas in Selangor recorded several basic problems in people's lives that eventually led to the victory of the opposition coalition in Selangor such as the issue of rising cost of living, subsidy reduction, the rights of the Malays and social problems. All these matters were given high attention by the voters in Selangor compared to the promise of physical development brought by BN. Lyndon et al. (2013) have found that respondents were confident in the leadership of the state government but were not confident in the policies practiced by the existing Selangor state government which were seen as more beneficial to a certain party.

Parties that fought for development and poverty issues were their main choice (75.3 percent). The majority of respondents supported, appreciated, and manifested the concept of "1 Malaysia: People First, Performance Now" and stated that the Federal Government's leadership performance was at a satisfactory level.

### The State of Social Well-Being of the Malay Community After GE-14

After the Pakatan Harapan government began to rule the country, there were several sensitive issues that arose in the pluralistic society in Malaysia. Malaysians began to follow the development of the country's politics seriously. This could be seen through various perceptions and issues raised by the community regarding political issues, especially in the social media. It is clear that various sensitive issues arose as a warning to the behaviour and activities of the government in order not to deviate from the path of good leadership and administration. However, in the new Malaysian political face after GE-14, there was a change in the pattern of relationship between the races in Malaysia which crossed the religious and ethnic boundaries.

Before GE-14, each race defended their own race and religion, but now, each race joined together in a bloc expressing support and rejection of other parties. There were even those who tried to play with the fire of religion and race by creating provocations that could affect the harmony between religion and race. This is because religion and race were easy commodities to attract negative emotions and cause anger in society. Various special rights of the Malays were questioned by ultra-pluralist groups; among them, the issue of the position of Islam as the official religion, the Malay language, the role of the royal institution, and Malay privileges. This is because for them the provision was not fair. The fact is that this demand is not new. Previously, it was fought for by certain races.

Kukathas (1992) claims that non-Malays insisted that their rights be increased because they adhered to the principle of equality. While the Malays held firm by referring to the history of Bumiputera rights must be defended and given special privileges. In fact, these

privileges were enacted in the formation of the Federal Constitution by taking into account the voices of various parties (Muslim et al., 2013). In addition, the reforms brought by the PH government related to religious “viewpoints” (paradigms), especially in understanding Islam as *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* and *Maqasid Syariah* among academics and Muslim religious leaders, have caused concern and anxiety (Ramli et al., 2019).

This can be seen with the emergence of various issues that touched the sensitivity of Muslims in this country. In fact, the solution was less liked because it was more in favour of certain groups such as the liberal, secular, and anti-Islamic groups (Ramli et al., 2019). In public opinion, people see the government today as practicing extreme openness and tolerance towards certain groups without caring about the sensitivity and restlessness of the majority of the Muslims.

### Interview Outcomes

This section discusses the analysis of interviews involving four individuals related to the well-being of the Malays after the 14<sup>th</sup> election. This section presents their respective views on the change of government from Barisan Nasional to Pakatan Harapan giving implications to the well-being of the Malays in terms of special rights, the position of the King and Sultan, the integrity of the Islamic religion, and issues related to the country’s constitution. It is hoped that this study will be an example for future studies involving the well-being of the Malays.

Based on the code and verbatim in Fig. 4.1, it can be seen that the social well-being of the Malays after the General Election in terms of safety is divided into three aspects, namely the dispute over the Special Rights of the Malays, Affronting Islam, and Affronting His Majesty the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. Malays and Bumiputeras are the core races that have become the axis of Malaysia’s national identity. For this reason, Islam is the Federal Religion, Malay is the National Language, and Bumiputera socio-economics are given privileges through Article 153 of the Federal Constitution.

The core races in Malaysia are Muslims, Malays, and Bumiputeras in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak who have inhabited the archipelago or the Malay World for ages. The Malays in Malaysia in the era after GE-14 seem to be in danger because the status of Islam and Malays as the axis of national identity may be eliminated. On average, all informants agreed with this opinion. This was explained by the informant through the following:

“The concept of social well-being is that life includes economic, social, and physical aspects to provide and meet the basic needs of the society. The concept of social well-being from the understanding of the Malays is more about life needs such as economy, social, health, and education. GE-14 was held on 9 May 2018 where the Barisan Nasional party lost to a coalition of opposition political parties called Pakatan Harapan. The people were not satisfied with the Pakatan Harapan manifesto because before PH took over the government. The people chose the Pakatan Harapan party in GE-14 based on the promised manifesto. After governing for 100 days, the coalition government failed to implement some of the promised manifesto. An example is the abolition of PTPTN where there was no deferral of PTPTN loan repayments for borrowers who earned less than RM 4000. The people were angry at the failure of Pakatan Harapan to fulfil the promised manifesto. When Pakatan Harapan became the government, races other than Malays always disputed the special rights of Malays and Bumiputeras. Other races disputed the position of Islam and the authority of the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong. The Federal Constitution is the highest legal authority and everyone must respect it. MARA was established for the development of the Malays and Bumiputeras; therefore, it is not appropriate for other races to request the opening of MARA for them.”

Interview with informant 1, August 15, 2021.

He added,

“Most Malays belong to the B40 group and assistance in terms of finance and education should be given to this group so that they can get out of poverty. In the meantime, other races should not dispute the help given. The well-being of the Malays will exist on its own if other races do not dispute matters that touch the position of the Malays in the federal constitution, insult Islam, and the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong.”

Interview with informant 1, August 15, 2021

The Pakatan Harapan government initially supported ICERD but withdrew its pledge to support the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), amid criticism from critics who voiced concerns that the move could diminish the privileges of the Malays. Non-Malays were increasingly questioning the rights of Malay privileges during the Pakatan Harapan Government. DAP was one of the component parties of Pakatan Harapan and wanted the government to end the practice of prioritizing Bumiputera students for the pre-university matriculation program because it was considered to be against the guarantee of the Federal Constitution that there is no discrimination against every citizen. The same party argued that the quota of only 10% for non-Bumiputera students in 15 matriculation centres nationwide was unfair because the centres were funded by taxpayers' money.

UEC (Unified Examination Certificate) cannot be equated with any certificate under the Malaysian Ministry of Education (KPM) which is equivalent such as the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM), SMA or SMU, and so on that are managed by the government. SPM, SMA or SMU are managed by the government with strict procedures, in line with the National Education Policy and Philosophy. While UEC is a private school built by a Chinese NGO, of which they themselves are the board members and managers. It can be said that there is no such system in the world, where education is managed by the NGOs, except for private education. In the UEC, the Chinese NGO itself drafted it without referring to the authority, such as other certification processes managed by the government. For that reason, the comparison of these two certificates is completely inappropriate (Utusan Malaysia, 2022; Sinar Harian, 2023).

The same goes for the qualifications of the teachers, especially in the subjects of Malay and History and many more. The syllabus of Malay and History is so different from the same subjects at the SPM level. UEC Malay is much easier compared to BM in SPM, SMA or SMU. Same with the subject of History, it is a long way to explain the history of Malaysia according to the true perspective. In fact, the history of Mainland China is given more attention than the history of the homeland itself. UEC is against the National Education Policy and Philosophy as well as the Education Act 1996. UEC needs to follow the National Education Policy if it wants to be considered as a solution by the government in the future. UEC is a Chinese private school syllabus whose syllabus is not only aimed at Taiwan, but also determined by the Chinese Association. This is clearly against the National Education Policy and the Education Act 1996. The recognition of UEC is not only unfair to the national policy, but also to the Chinese students who are in the national stream, including those who are in Chinese National Type Secondary Schools (SMJKC), who work hard to study together in the national stream (Utusan Malaysia, 2022; Sinar Harian, 2023).

The Malays were disappointed with the attitude of a few Muslim leaders in Pakatan Harapan (PH) who had taken a silent stance on the issue of affronting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad SAW on social media. The situation showed that the leaders were trying to guard the hearts of and fear their friends, especially DAP, and the party was said to dispute the court's decision to sentence the insulter of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as excessive. Pakatan Harapan Government leaders were afraid when people wanted to talk about Islam and use liberals to criticize Islam. Next, the appointment of a non-Muslim attorney general was definitely something that was very worrying because how would he advise the Council of Rulers about Islamic religious affairs in this country if he did not understand it himself. This



happened in the ICERD issue where it clearly affected the position of Islam when it allowed religious freedom and the failure of the attorney general to resolve this issue further fuelled the Malays' concerns.

The concept of *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* brought by the government was clearly very contrary to the true meaning that it seemed as if the Sharia law was no longer meaningful. As a result, law enforcers were no longer taking action against all the wrongdoings that had happened because the minister had said that it is a "Private Sphere". This is completely against Islam. The minister also criticized when the people gathered against insulting the Prophet S.A.W, whereas in other Muslim countries, a mass wave of protests from the people would have easily erupted. There was criticism of learning Islam in schools and higher education institutions where it was considered too much. However, it is known that the social problems that occurred among the young generation and teenagers were becoming more widespread. The flogging punishment that had been carried out was strongly criticized by the liberal faction but the government was seen to be silent. This was supported by the statement below:

“DAP had brazenly asked in writing in the Dewan Negara the rationale for mosques and suraus to be built in every housing area, Melaka Central, and other areas in Melaka, including not recognizing Islam as the federal religion and in Melaka. Muslims in this country were so disappointed with the attitude of the government leadership, especially the minister of religion who kept silence when the Prophet Muhammad SAW was insulted. The concept of ‘*Rahmatan Lil Alamin*’ which was chanted by New Malaysia was clearly full of falsehood and failed to defend Islam when the religion was insulted and despised. The Muslim leaders of PH who supposedly fought for religion were all weak and afraid when DAP threatened. Since the rule of the Pakatan Harapan government, acts of insulting Islam and the Prophet Muhammad were said to be more boldly done by non-Muslims which not only had hurt the feelings but also fuelled the anger of Muslims in Malaysia. Followers of other religions will definitely not care about Islam but rather will try to strengthen their respective religions. This is very logical and easy to understand. It is impossible that followers of other religions will defend and fight for Islam.”

Interview with informant 2, August 17, 2021

The issue of learning Jawi in vernacular schools continued to rise when Chinese and Indian leaders objected to the learning. The rejection seemed to challenge the ‘supremacy’ of Jawi script as one of the Malay languages (the national language) as enshrined in the Federal Constitution. Jawi is a script for the Malay language. In the constitution, Article 152 states that Malay is the national language of this country. The national language means Malay as the main and official language that must be used in government affairs and public statements. There are two writings in the Malay language, Jawi and Rumi. These two writings are used together. Jawi script was used earlier for the Malay language because when this language was developed as a language of knowledge, the first script that was introduced was Jawi script. This script developed along with the development of Islam. In fact, it is not true to say that Jawi writing is a writing that can influence non-Malay students to embrace Islam. The Constitution does not prevent the learning of any language whose letters happen to also be the letters of the scriptures of any religion. This matter was also agreed by Informant 3 as follows:

“The rise of people who wanted to make changes in GE-14 has had an impact on the social well-being of the Malay community. Even Jawi writing of only three pages was demonstrated. All this time, Chinese children and students have learned Jawi writing before and no issues have arisen that threatened unity. Because they know that Malaysia is indeed Malaya. On the other hand, three pages of Jawi writing were stressed. Even our money has

Jawi script printed by Bank Negara Malaysia, not an issue. Coupled with the proposal to repeal the apostasy law, it means freedom for Muslims to apostatize themselves. After that, transgender people are recognized where this group violates the rules of Islam.”

Interview with informant 3, August 23, 2021

He added again,

“The Pakatan Harapan government also supported LGBT groups by recommending that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are entitled to enjoy equal rights as citizens and should not be discriminated against in any form including at work. In fact, one of Pakatan Harapan’s representatives, Maria Chin Abdullah is an active individual in a human rights NGO that strongly support Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) transsexuals.

Interview with informant 3, August 23, 2021

During the Pakatan Harapan administration, there were many insults to the royal institutions and this should not have happened because Malaysia has a rule or a system which is the System of Constitutional Monarchy that places the king as the highest authority, especially in matters of Islamic religion. The act deserves strict action according to the law to ensure the dignity of the institution of the king continues to be respected by all parties. This is an action that goes beyond the limits and the society needs to remember the principle of Rukun Negara which is Loyalty to Kings. Although as citizens, people are given a lot of freedom, but it has limits and it is still subject to the law and normal life. This matter was agreed by informant 4 which reads as follows:

“The case of insulting the institution of the King, especially the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah needs to be taken seriously. Based on the information, a total of 209 reports were received by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) regarding insults against the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. Strict action will be taken to ensure that the irresponsible party is brought to justice based on existing laws such as the Sedition Act 1948, the Penal Code, and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (AKM 1998) are among the legal instruments used by the government. It aims to regulate and deal with offenses on social media, especially for the misuse that triggers provocation, insult, or incitement to instil hatred against the royal institution. In particular, the misuse of social media involving insulting the institution of the King is subject to the Sedition Act 1948.”

Interview with informant 4, August 26, 2021

After the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election, the people seemed to have lost respect and loyalty to the country with the installation of the Jalur Gemilang upside down which is not appropriate to be accepted and easily forgiven because the action seemed to insult and make a mockery of the sovereignty of the independent nation of Malaysia. Superficial reasons such as forgetting how to install it, installing it incorrectly, or having it installed by a foreigner were not rational to be accepted given that Malaysia has been independent for 62 years.

The flag is about the dignity, sovereignty, and image of the country and if it is installed upside down, it is considered an insult and disobedience to the sovereignty of the country. The implicit message behind the installation of this upside-down flag was to challenge the national sovereignty and majesty of Malaysia as an independent country. The usual reason given for installing the flag upside down was that foreigners installed it when they were arrested by the authorities.

In war, the flag becomes a banner where if the right hand is cut off, the left hand hails it. If both hands are cut off, it must be lifted with the teeth. For sure, we don't let the flag fall.

Flags are not new. The flag was there before the nation state was built. In other words, the flag existed before the modern countries that we can see on the world map. History is never empty, there must be arrogant people who are ignorant about their land and water.

Jalur Gemilang as a national flag has been installed in the wrong way and did not follow the government protocol set by some parties several times. When they believed the Jalur Gemilang is just a piece of cloth, and patriotism is just a faded spirit where the individual is blind to the sign and meaning. When the Jalur Gemilang was installed upside down, for whatever reason, many of the citizens of Malaysia became blind to the history of it.

“Furthermore, the actions of a few individuals who deliberately turned the Malaysian flag upside down caused this group to no longer obey this beloved country. The installation of the Malaysian flag upside down is a deliberate move by those who wanted to make fun of it as well as an open betrayal of our beloved country. It is well known that the flag is a symbol of the greatness and sovereignty of the country. Therefore, let’s not take it lightly when installing the flag, especially during the month of the country’s independence celebration. The people should be sensitive and aware that the installation of this flag is a proof of our love and pride for the country. I condemn the actions of some parties who hung the flag upside down. Do you all know that when someone hangs the flag upside down, in my opinion, it is someone who does not respect the Malaysian nation. The act of flipping the Malaysian flag that was installed on premises, vehicles, and companies was displayed on social media ahead of the country’s 62<sup>nd</sup> independence celebration. As a government, Pakatan Harapan (PH) should have protected the dignity of the country, it is not appropriate to allow the sovereignty of the country to be ridden as it has been recently. Government agencies should have sued the few irresponsible individuals who allowed the Malaysian flag to be flown upside down like that. This act cannot be forgiven; it is a matter of national dignity. As Malaysians, their actions were clearly irresponsible to the country, making a mockery of dignity and it is a huge insult. He said that the installation of the upside-down flag caused it to be politicized and turned into a racial issue. They are traitors to the country and should be punished. All suspects were arrested, their statements were taken, and they were investigated in accordance with Section 504 of the Penal Code, which if found guilty could be jailed for a period of two years or fined or both, in addition to being investigated in accordance with Section 14 of the Petty Offenses Act 1955 which, if convicted, could be fined not more than RM100.”

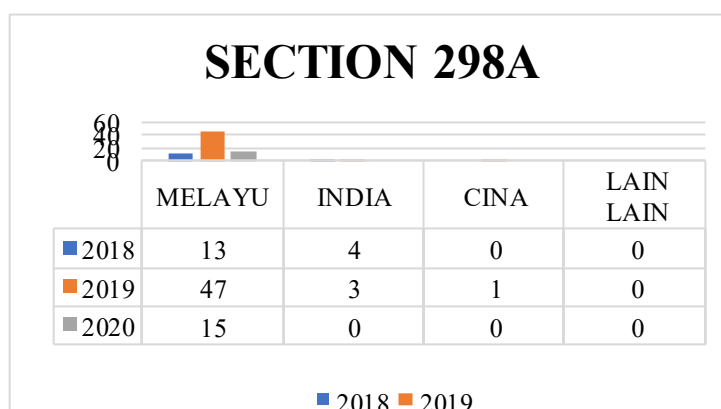
Interview with informant 5, August 30, 2021

### **Section 298A of the Penal Code**

Section 298A of the Penal Code deals with racial or religious enmity to prevent enmity between different groups on the grounds of religion or race or committing acts that harm the harmony. An offense under section 298A has stated the offense of disturbing harmony between different religious or racial groups. Actions that are expressions of thoughts that offend other people’s feelings and the second is doing actions that offend other people’s feelings. With regard to the first, which is the expression of offensive thoughts, the knowledge of the effect of the expression here is a lower bar than the intention required in section 298 A. The government can act more harshly against religious blasphemers by imposing severe punishment on them.

In 2018, a total of 13 complainants of Malay descent made a police report regarding misconduct under this section. This was followed by Indians who also made reports under this section. While the Chinese and others have not made any reports. The following year in 2019, Malay complainants who made police reports about religious insults were 47 compared to Indians (3) and Chinese (1). In 2020, there were only 15 reports made by Malay complainants

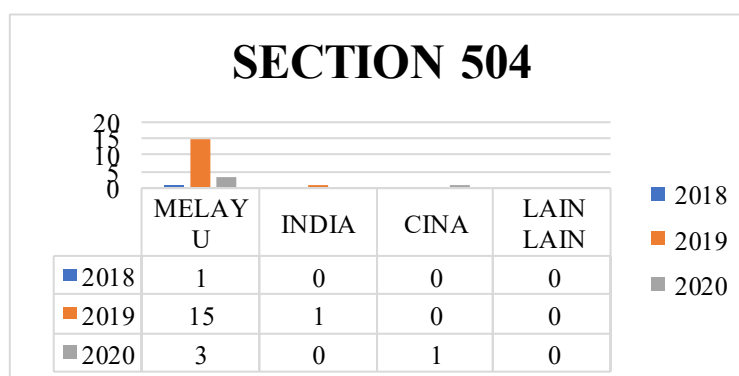
involving misconduct under Section 298A. While no reports were made by other races such as Chinese and Indians in that year.



**Fig. 1:** Breakdown of police reports section 298A of the penal code by ethnic groups

Source: Authors

### Section 504 of the Penal Code



**Fig. 2:** Breakdown of criminal code section 504 police reports by ethnic group

Source: Authors

This section deals with the issue of section 504 of the Penal Code, which is that whoever intentionally insults, and gives provocation to any person, intending or knowing that the provocation will cause him to disturb public peace, or commit any other offence, shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term which can extend up to two years or a fine or both. In 2018, there was only one police report made by a Malay complainant. The following year in 2019, there were 15 Malay complainants who made reports due to misconduct under this section and only one Indian complainant who made a police report. In 2020, there were three police reports made by Malay complainants and one police report from a Chinese complainant.

### Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, it is found that the social well-being of the Malays was threatened by a series of post-GE-14 effects. Racial tensions and issues have greatly coloured the administration of the PH government. The issues were not dealt with properly causing a gap of tension between the races such as the riot issue at a temple in Seafield Subang Jaya, resulting in the death of a firefighter. In addition to racial issues, issues related

to education have also been hotly debated such as the acceptance of the UEC and also the introduction of calligraphy and Jawi writing in the fourth standard Malay language subject. The actions of some politicians from DAP who issued racist statements claiming that the attack on the temple was orchestrated by Islamic groups has created a less harmonious atmosphere. In addition, the actions of the Attorney General who released several suspects linked to the death of the fireman also fuelled racial tension.

The uncontrolled transmission of racial issues is clearly agitating the Malay community and also the position of Islam. The uncontrolled communal political ecosystem in the era of PH's rule has increased the support of the Malay community for political parties based on the Malay-Islamic struggle, namely UMNO and PAS. The open rejection by the Chauvinist Movement of the implementation of Khat and Jawi writing has eroded the Malay community's support for PH. The image of PH laden with racial issues has caused the party to lose a series of by-elections after the 14<sup>th</sup> GE. PH also failed to ward off the fear of the Malay community who often see DAP as controlling the government.

The issues such as the LGBT gathering, ICERD, the display of the cross symbol as high as a building, the exposure of a video related to the Christianization movement after the defeat of BN, and the organization of October Fest were among the issues that threatened Malay-Muslim interests. The rule of PH reached its peak when several senior leaders of PKR and BERSATU acted to leave the alliance and then together with UMNO, PAS, and several other coalition parties in Sarawak formed a new coalition government without going through an election on the grounds of strengthening the Malay-Islamic politics.

Since independence, the dominant narrative of Malaysia's national identity has been for the Malays who are the largest ethnic group in the country comprising 50.8 percent of the population. Other communities, the Malaysian Chinese and Indians, who have migrated to the country before independence, and including most of the smaller indigenous ethnic groups on the island of Borneo. In general, the Malays dominate Malaysian politics. When voters rejected Barisan Nasional in May 2018, there were high expectations that the new government would finally bring real reforms to the country. However, the Pakatan Harapan government, for the reasons stated above, could not carry out reforms. Major reforms have been left out, or even not able to be handled properly. The Malaysian public service is the main service delivery agent to the people and it directly reflects the country's power structure. Currently, more than 80 percent of civil servants in Malaysia are Malay ethnic. When the Pakatan Harapan Government wanted to shrink the public service sector, it worried most Malays who worked as government employees. The four informants along with the Police report data confirmed the existence of this issue.

The special position of the Malays is contained in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution. The essence of Article 153 states that there are three main things related to the special position of Malays and Bumiputeras that are given priority, namely, employment in the public service, scholarships and educational assistance, permits and business licenses. In reality, many civil servants in the public service are from the Malay race. The provisions of Article 153 clearly empower the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (YDPA) to give general instructions regarding the special position of the Malays. This means that matters related to this special position should not be manipulated by politicians because it is under the auspices of the YDPA.

Before the 14<sup>th</sup> general election, UMNO was the only political party that looked after the interests of the Malays and the Malay King. Nevertheless, the victory of Pakatan Harapan to some extent have caused annoyance to the Malays through the actions of one of the components of the Pakatan Harapan party which has challenged the position of the Malays. The acceptance of PH by the Malays have begun to collapse within six months of coming to power with PH's move to ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and subsequently the Rome Statute. DAP with Chinese majority in the PH administration caused further concern among the Malays where most of them grew up believing that DAP is a Chinese chauvinist party. The Malays were also disappointed with the

Pakatan Harapan government's lack of firmness in implementing the introduction of khat in the school syllabus.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has addressed the research question and has achieved the research objectives set at the beginning. After the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election, the unity between the Malays and other races have been affected. This is due to the actions of non-Malays who often disputed the special position of the Malays and often insulted the Sultan and the Islamic religion. Therefore, some steps need to be taken by any party that forms the government. The Malaysian population can be roughly divided into 55 percent Malays, 25 percent Chinese, 7 percent Indians, and the rest are mostly Borneo natives. Since independence, there has been political tension between the Malays and non-Malays. When Malaysia saw its first change of government on 9 May 2018, the news was welcomed by many around the world as a triumph of democracy. Nevertheless, UMNO ruled Malaysia based on the concept of Malay supremacy. The Malay-first ideology, called "Malay privilege", in practice means that the Malay community is the beneficiary of an extensive affirmative action policy because the Malays are the original and majority population in Malaysia.

The benefits received include quotas in business licenses, discounts for new homes, priority in getting government jobs, and so on. Therefore, Pakatan Harapan's failure to maintain Malay supremacy have led to the downfall of the government because most Malays thought that the Pakatan Harapan Government had no initiative to protect the special rights of the Malays.

The findings demonstrate that any political party that rules Malaysia will need to maintain the supremacy of the Malays. It is not easy to change the special rights of the Malays and the position of the Malay King. It requires the approval of 2/3 members of Parliament and the support of the Malay Rulers as stipulated in the Federal Constitution. Therefore, this research concludes that any party that forms the government should comply with the sentiments of the Malays and not violate the feelings and sensitive issues of the Malays. Only then the support and participation among the Malays in development and the social well-being of the people will prevail.

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