Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations

Viewpoints On:
Ethnic Relations: Experience, Perception and Expectations
21-26 Feb 2006 & 2-4 March 2006

MERDEKA CENTER
Introduction
Survey Objectives
Methodology

Main Findings
I. Perception and Expectation on Ethnic Relation
II. Understanding and Trust
III. Personal Experience and Social Interaction
IV. Perception on Citizenship, Equality and Solidarity

Conclusions
Background

First in the series of surveys to be undertaken in 2006

Sponsored by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, these surveys have the following objectives:

1. Continued tracking of public opinion on salient issues affecting political and social debate
2. Increase awareness and acceptance of opinion research in public discourse
3. Increase the usage of factual research and statistics in matters of public debate

Methodology

Survey Methodology

Structured sampling according to:

- ethnicity, gender and state of residence
- Telephone interviews
- Randomized selection of respondents
- Interviews conducted between: 9am – 9pm
- Total number interviews completed:
  - Survey 1: 1,113 respondents aged 20 and above;
  - Survey 2: 1,024 respondents aged 20 and above
- Survey period:
  - Survey 1: 21 – 26 Feb 2006
  - Survey 2: 2 - 4 March 2006
- Margin of error: ± 3.05% (95% confidence interval)
I consider my self to be first:

Malaysians are still generally split in their views on identity. Nearly half of Malaysians view themselves as members of their ethnic groups first. The survey finds better educated and higher earning respondents more likely to see themselves as Malaysian first.
How would you describe ethnic relations in Malaysia today?

Overall most respondents feel that ethnic relations are good. This feeling is widespread across most demographic variables.

How would you describe ethnic solidarity in Malaysia today?

There is distinct ethnic differentiation with respect to this finding. The survey also found a slightly higher prevalence of superficial unity amongst higher earning respondents.
In general, do you think Malaysians from different ethnic groups are getting closer together or further apart?

- Malay: 67% closer, 23% further
- Chinese: 56% closer, 31% further
- Indian: 41% closer, 16% further

In the next 10 years, do you think ethnic relations will...

- Malay: 48% improve, 34% remain the same, 18% worse
- Chinese: 34% improve, 14% remain the same, 17% worse
- Indian: 28% improve, 26% remain the same, 20% worse
Do you think it is important to have more interaction amongst the ethnic groups?

Greater interaction amongst the ethnic groups
- Important
- Not important
- Don't know/no response

97%

Why do you say it is important to have more interaction amongst the ethnic groups?

The reasons why greater interaction amongst the ethnic groups is important (Based on 1079 respondents)

- To maintain peace and stability: 18%
- To prevent chaos/fighting: 16%
- For national unity: 14%
- Better interaction/friendship: 14%
- Better understanding: 7%
- Help each others' exchange idea/cooperation: 6%
- For national development: 6%
- We are Malaysians & living in the same country: 6%
- Malaysia is a multi-ethnic society: 4%
- For the good of the country & people: 2%
- For business & economic reasons: 2%
- Islam promote inter-ethnic harmony: 1%
How well would you describe your knowledge of the culture and customs of the …?

The finding shows that only 1 in every 5 or 1 in every 3 Malaysians claim to understand the culture and customs of the three principal ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia.

Cursory as it is, this finding indicates that more can be done to promote awareness and mutual understanding.
According to your understanding, please tell me whether the following statements are true or false.

**Understanding and Trust**

### Perceived meaning of festivals (% saying "true")

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Religion</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hari Raya Puasa</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese New Year</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepavali</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding and Trust**

### Perceived meaning of festivals (% saying "true")

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event/Religion</th>
<th>No formal</th>
<th>Primary education</th>
<th>Secondary education</th>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hari Raya Puasa</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese New Year</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepavali</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much do you trust or do not trust the... in general?

The trust in Malay/Chinese/Indians in general (% saying "trust")

Findings indicate that less than half of Malaysians trust fellow citizens of different ethnic backgrounds. In some ways, this finding can be explained by the earlier result which indicate low levels of understanding and knowledge about each other's cultures.

Survey also finds strong adherence to prevailing negative racial stereotypes. Further analysis reveals that such views are lower amongst higher educated respondents. Indicative of how deep rooted such stereotypes are, the survey finds that a majority of members of particular ethnic groups agree to the negative views of themselves.
Please tell whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

**Agreement with the stereotype statements (% saying “agree”)**

- **“In general, most Malays are lazy”**
  - No formal education: 69%
  - Primary education: 64%
  - Secondary education: 58%
  - Diploma: 61%
  - Degree: 52%

- **“In general, most Chinese are greedy”**
  - No formal education: 70%
  - Primary education: 63%
  - Secondary education: 67%
  - Diploma: 65%
  - Degree: 55%

- **“In general, most Indians cannot be trusted”**
  - No formal education: 67%
  - Primary education: 60%
  - Secondary education: 57%
  - Diploma: 55%
  - Degree: 47%

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**PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND SOCIAL INTERACTION**
Do you have any friends from different ethnic groups?

The more educated respondents are, the more likely that they will have friends from other groups. Younger people are more likely to have a wider mix of friends that older Malaysians.

What is the setting of the friendship?

The setting of the friendship
How often do you have meals with them in the last 3 months?

The frequency of having meals together in the last 3 months
- Often: 34%
- Sometimes: 28%
- Rarely: 26%
- Never: 11%

Please tell me why you do not have friends other than your own ethnic groups? (amongst those who indicated that they do not have friends other than their own ethnic groups)

Location is a great barrier for increasing inter-ethnic interaction. Given that a very large majority of Malaysians (75%) live in areas where they are ethnically dominant, the chances for them to mix in the social and community setting are low. Thus people are more likely to engage each other in commercial transactions.
Personal Experience and Social Interaction

Please tell whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Agreement with the statements (% saying “agree”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One’s responsibility should first begin by helping members of one’s ethnic group before helping others in society</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay/Chinese/Indian values and culture are better when compared to others</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity is an important consideration when you vote in an election</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you were to vote for the next Malaysian Idol, the performer’s ethnicity be an important consideration</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you proud to be a Malaysian?

- **Yes**: 90%
- **No**: 10%

**Proud to be a Malaysian**

- **Malay**: 98%
- **Chinese**: 98%
- **Indian**: 73%

- **Yes**: 1%
- **No**: 26%
Why do say so? (Proud to be a Malaysian)

Reasons for pride in being Malaysian (Based on 996 respondents)

- Peace and stability/no war and conflicts: 47%
- Because I was born here: 14%
- Multicultural/national unity: 7%
- Economic development/working opportunities: 5%
- Free from natural disasters: 4%
- Malaysia is a good place to live: 2%
- Better than other countries: 2%
- Friendly people/good values: 2%
- Malay leadership/Islamic development: 1%
- Good facilities/well-equipped: 1%
- Good leadership/ governance: 1%
- Malaysia is famous/recognised by the world: 1%

Why do say so? (Not proud to be a Malaysian)

Reasons given for not being proud as Malaysian (N = 106 respondents)

- Nothing to be proud of: 40%
- Don’t know/ will not tell: 31%
- Ethnic inequality: 11%
- Less developed: 8%
- Malaysia is not so good: 3%
- Corruption: 3%
Have you ever thought of leaving Malaysia and emigrating to another country?

Why have you thought of leaving Malaysia and emigrate to another country?

The reasons why emigrating to another country (Based on 74 respondents)

- Economic in Malaysia is weak: 14%
- Better job/ higher income elsewhere: 14%
- Seek a new environment/lifestyle: 12%
- Ethnic inequality in Malaysia: 11%
- Better development/ facilities elsewhere: 7%
- Cultural and religious affiliation: 7%
- Better quality of education elsewhere: 7%
- Family/relatives/ friends abroad: 8%
- No future in Malaysia: 4%
Which country do you think to emigrate to? [please name one country only]

The favorite countries for emigration (Based on 74 respondents)

- Australia: 22%
- Singapore: 11%
- United Kingdom: 10%
- United States: 7%
- China: 6%
- India: 6%
- New Zealand: 4%
- Japan: 4%
- Arab Saudi/Mekah: 4%
- Europe: 4%
- Brunei: 3%
- Thailand: 1%

Do you consider yourself to be a second class citizen? (For Chinese and Indian respondents only)

- Perceived as a second class citizen (Chinese and Indians only)
- Yes: 46%
- No: 39%
- Don't know/ no response: 5%

- Perceived as a second class citizen

Chinese: 57%
Indians: 48%
Which statement is closer to your view about Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society?

**Perception about Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society**
- I am happy to live in Malaysia because we get to enjoy different cultures (92%)
- I feel stressed to live in Malaysia because we have to always be tolerant (6%)
- Don't know/no response (2%)

In what direction do you hope Malaysia will move towards in the future?

**The expectation of Malaysia’s future on cultural and religious equality**
- Malay: 38% (All cultures and religions given equal rights), 1% (Malay-dominant country), 0% (More Islamic country)
- Chinese: 97% (All cultures and religions given equal rights), 16% (Malay-dominant country), 43% (More Islamic country)
- Indian: 98% (All cultures and religions given equal rights), 9% (Malay-dominant country), 24% (More Islamic country)
- Total: 64% (All cultures and religions given equal rights), 1% (Malay-dominant country), 0% (More Islamic country)
What kind of cultural interaction do you hope for the future in Malaysia?

The expectation of Malaysia’s future on cultural interaction

- Each ethnic group maintains their own cultural identity: 69% (Malay), 66% (Chinese), 63% (Indian), 67% (Total)
- All people practice the Malay culture: 10% (Malay), 0% (Chinese), 0% (Indian), 6% (Total)
- The mixing of different cultures into something new: 20% (Malay), 32% (Chinese), 36% (Indian), 25% (Total)

Which statement is closer to your view?

- Perception towards racial and religious issues
  - Our society is mature enough to discuss racial and religious issues openly now: 61% (Malay), 24% (Chinese), 38% (Indian), 46% (Total)
  - Racial and religious issues are very sensitive, therefore we cannot discuss it openly: 36% (Malay), 36% (Chinese), 57% (Indian), 49% (Total)
Which is more important to you about government policies?

The focus of government policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government policies that promote ethnic interests</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government policies that promote common interests</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both are equal important</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, do you think that the government’s policies are improving ethnic integration or increasing racial polarization?

Perception towards government’s policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malay</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Indian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve integration</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase polarization</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither one</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t know/no response | 7% | 7% | 7% |

Percentage: Malay (90%), Chinese (73%), Indian (53%).
Do you agree that local politicians in Malaysia should be blamed for segregating the people by playing racial politics?

Local politicians in Malaysia should be blamed for segregating the people by playing racial politics

- Agree: 39%
- Disagree: 78%
- Don’t know/ no response: 10%

Local politicians in Malaysia should be blamed for segregating the people by playing racial politics

- Malay: 54%
- Chinese: 73%
- Indian: 24%

Do you agree that the different streams of primary education according to the mother tongue at the primary school will negatively affect ethnic relations in the long run?

Agreement that the vernacular primary education will negatively affect ethnic relations

- Malay: 50%
- Chinese: 42%
- Indian: 37%
- Total: 68%

- Agree: 50%
- Disagree: 42%
In your opinion, which is the best method to improve ethnic relationship in Malaysia?

The best method to improve ethnic relationship in Malaysia

- More open houses: Malay 27%, Chinese 22%, Indian 12%, Total 17%
- More programs such as National Service, Rukun Tetangga: Malay 28%, Chinese 25%, Indian 22%, Total 21%
- One education system: Malay 17%, Chinese 6%, Indian 12%, Total 9%
- Just and fair government policies: Malay 18%, Chinese 19%, Indian 5%, Total 15%
- Abolish race-based parties: Malay 4%, Chinese 5%, Indian 5%, Total 5%

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the view that “No matter how difficult ethnic relationship sometimes get, you still should consider yourself lucky to live in Malaysia”?

Agreement with the view that “No matter how difficult ethnic relationship sometimes get, you still should consider yourself lucky to live in Malaysia”?

- Agree 94%
- Disagree 4%
- Don’t know/no response 2%
In general, Malaysians are quite happy with the ethnic relation. They are also optimistic about its future. Nevertheless, the survey found Chinese respondents to be more guarded compared to other ethnic groups.

On the other hand, mistrust and misunderstanding remains quite prevalent. Although the survey provides only a cursory view, it is likely that Malaysians’ views of each others’ religion, ethnicity and culture are confused.

The survey also finds that negative racial stereotypes remain deep seated and ingrained amongst a majority of Malaysians. The silver lining is that such views diminish with improved education.

In terms of friendships, most Malaysians have friends from other ethnic groups. Yet, their relations are limiter largely to work and social events, with only a small proportion (11%) of them having frequent meals together. One factor could be the mono-ethnic residential areas that many of them live in.
• “Ethnic-centric” and “cultural superiority” views appear quite prevalent. However in the context of popular culture, tested in this survey as how people would choose the next Malaysian Idol, ethnicity is less important.

• Most Malaysians are proud to be Malaysia, and a large majority are happy to live in this country. Only a small fraction felt the need to emigrate.

• Government policies are generally seen by many Malaysians as contributive towards integration but the sentiments are less pronounced among Chinese respondents.

• The public is split on whether ethnic issues can be discussed publicly. The survey finds Malay respondents more open to discuss but non-Malays generally feel that society still needs more time before such matters can be debated in the open.

• The role of politicians is also the subject of interest – the notion of “divide and rule” is more prominent among non-Malays and a third of Malays.

• In terms of steps that could be taken to improve integration, the survey found that while Malay and Indian respondents had split views on how it could be achieved, Chinese respondents on the other hand were clear in stating that “just government policies” to be a primary foundation for solidarity.

• On cultural interaction a large plurality of Malaysians prefer maintaining their different cultural heritage through the process of multiculturalism than the through assimilation or the melting pot process.