

Confronting 3R (Race, Religion, Royalty) Sentiments in the Malaysia Madani Era: Revitalising the *Rukun Negara* for National Harmony

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Abstract

The 3R issues (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) play a pivotal role in shaping social relations and political stability in Malaysia. However, the sensitivity surrounding these issues often presents challenges to sustaining national harmony, particularly within a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. This article aims to analyse government policies and approaches within the *Malaysia Madani* framework in addressing the challenges and sentiments associated with the 3Rs, and the need to reinvigorate the *Rukun Negara* as the foundation of national cohesion. This study adopts a qualitative approach through the analysis of legal documents, official government reports and policies, as well as relevant scholarly literature, to assess the relationship between the values of *Malaysia Madani* and the principles of the *Rukun Negara*. The findings indicate that core values of *Malaysia Madani*, such as compassion (ihsan), respect, and trust are aligned with the *Rukun Negara's* principles in promoting unity and mutual understanding across ethnic and religious lines. Nevertheless, challenges such as declining sensitivity and the manipulation of 3R sentiments for narrow political gain call for strategic control measures, including effective civic education and robust legal enforcement. This article proposes a holistic approach that integrates *Malaysia Madani* values and *Rukun Negara* principles to cultivate lasting national harmony.

Keywords: 3R, Race, Religion, Royalty, Malaysia Madani, *Rukun Negara*, National Harmony

Introduction

The 3R issues (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) have become increasingly prominent in Malaysia's socio-political discourse, particularly in the context of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society. The emergence of these issues is often accompanied by hate speech and polarising narratives that contribute to intergroup tensions. Such developments not only threaten social cohesion but also destabilise the political landscape. According to the Royal Malaysia Police

(PDRM), the number of 3R-related cases rose by 123% in the first quarter of 2024, with 47 incidents reported compared to 21 during the same period in the previous year (Sinar Harian, 2024). In addition, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported that 1,454 pieces of 3R-related content were removed from social media between January and 31 March 2024, including 588 cases of racial hate speech, 727 cases involving religious hate, and 139 targeting the royal institution (Bernama, 2024). This alarming trend highlights the urgent need for integrated, inclusive solutions that are grounded in the foundational values of the *Rukun Negara* to reinforce national unity.

Previous studies on the 3R discourse can be broadly categorised into three major themes. First, research examining the relationship between ethnic diversity and social harmony has shown that discrimination and negative stereotypes are primary sources of conflict (Meerangani et al., 2024; Meerangani et al., 2020; A'zmi et al., 2017; Hefner, 2001). Second, studies focused on the role of religion in nation-building indicate that religious tolerance is often undermined by fanaticism and inter-religious misunderstandings (Zulkarnain, 2020; Ismail & Kamaruddin, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2016; Nasri & Shiddeq, 2016; Ab Majid, 2003). Third, scholarship on the monarchy as a symbol of national unity highlights the declining respect for royal institutions, particularly among younger generations, often driven by derogatory content on social media platforms (Yusof & Hassan, 2020; Wan Mahmud & Pitchan, 2017; Omar & Wan Mahmud, 2017). However, these studies have not offered a comprehensive framework that links the 3R narrative with the principles of the *Rukun Negara* within the contemporary context of *Malaysia Madani*. This research gap underlines the need for deeper academic inquiry and a more integrated analytical approach.

In light of this, the present article seeks to fill that gap by exploring how 3R-related challenges can be addressed through the lens of *Malaysia Madani* by reinvigorating the values and principles embedded in the *Rukun Negara*. Specifically, the article aims to address three central research questions: First, how can the principles of the *Rukun Negara* be applied to mitigate tensions arising from 3R-related issues? Second, what are the key challenges in promoting *Malaysia Madani* values in the context of managing 3R sentiments? Third, what holistic strategies can be implemented to foster sustainable national harmony in a pluralistic society?

This study is motivated by the increasing misuse of 3R sentiments in political and social discourse, especially in digital spaces, which poses a growing threat to national harmony. Given the lack of a unified analytical framework that connects these issues with national philosophies such as the *Rukun Negara* and emerging policy frameworks like *Malaysia Madani*, this research seeks to bridge that critical gap. The key contribution of this article lies in its integrated analytical approach that synthesises the principles of the *Rukun Negara* with the core values of *Malaysia Madani* to address 3R-related tensions. Unlike prior studies that treat race, religion, and royalty as separate variables, this study positions them within a holistic civic and legal context, thereby offering a novel framework for policymakers, educators, and civil society actors to foster national unity.

Accordingly, the article is structured around three core arguments. First, addressing 3R issues requires a deep internalisation of the *Rukun Negara*'s objectives and principles as a moral and ideological foundation for national unity. Second, the erosion of civic awareness and the

failure of the education system to promote inclusive values are contributing factors to the persistence of 3R-related tensions. Third, the integration of *Malaysia Madani* values, such as “compassion (ihsan), mutual respect, and trust” offers a constructive and pragmatic approach to strengthening national harmony. These arguments are not presented in isolation; rather, they support the need for a robust legal framework and strategic governance to ensure the effective management of 3R issues through coordinated and inclusive implementation.

Literature Review

3R (Race, Religion, Royalty)

The 3R concept (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) refers to three key elements that play a significant role in Malaysia’s socio-political structure. These elements serve as either foundations for national harmony or sources of conflict in a pluralistic society (Meerangani et al., 2024; Meerangani et al., 2020). *Race* concerns interethnic relations among major communities such as Malays, Chinese, and Indians, while *Religion* encompasses religious freedom and the status of Islam as the official religion of the federation. *Royalty*, meanwhile, represents the constitutional monarchy as a symbol of national unity. A study by Selamat and Safarudin (2019) found that interethnic tensions are frequently triggered by political and social issues, as well as ethnic-based economic disparities (Zakaria et al., 2023). In addition, Yasin and Adam (2017), along with Abdul Rahman and Muhammad Shah (2020), highlighted that a lack of sensitivity and understanding of religious differences often contributes to conflict. However, these studies have not examined the interconnectedness of all three elements within the context of national policy.

The key sentiments surrounding 3R issues involve cultural differences, religious beliefs, and the monarchy’s role in fostering unity. Aboo Talib, Abd. Gapar, and Ismail (2019), as well as Abdullah (2010), argued that extreme racial and religious sentiments are often exploited for political gain. The manipulation of 3R narratives, particularly on social media, has become a major factor in the rise of ethnic and religious tensions. Additionally, the royal institution is increasingly perceived to be disrespected, especially by younger generations who lack a proper understanding of its constitutional function. According to Kambol (2023), the legal framework currently in place is still inadequate in addressing 3R issues comprehensively. A major gap in the existing literature is the absence of a holistic approach that integrates all three components within a cohesive national framework such as *Malaysia Madani*.

Rukun Negara

The *Rukun Negara*, introduced in 1970, serves as Malaysia’s national philosophy in the aftermath of the May 13, 1969 racial riots. It aims to foster unity and political stability and consists of five core principles: Belief in God, Loyalty to King and Country, Supremacy of the Constitution, Rule of Law, and Courtesy and Morality (Ministry of National Unity, 2023). Studies by Hanniffa, Mohamad & Ahmad Shatir (2021) and Zambri et al. (2024) concluded that the *Rukun Negara* has been instrumental in promoting religious tolerance and legal compliance. However, in the digital age, the internalisation of these values is weakening, particularly among younger generations. One of the critical gaps identified in the literature is the lack of alignment between educational policies and the dissemination of *Rukun Negara* values.

Each principle of the *Rukun Negara* contributes significantly to the promotion of social unity. For example, the principle of “Belief in God” fosters interfaith tolerance, while “Courtesy and Morality” emphasises ethical and respectful interactions in daily life. Zambri et al. (2024) argue that the values of the *Rukun Negara* must be instilled from early education onwards. Furthermore, Hanniffa, Mohamad & Ahmad Shatir (2021) observed that insufficient emphasis is placed on these principles in policy formulation. Civic education is also ineffective in transmitting these values to students. Previous research has failed to link the principles of the *Rukun Negara* to contemporary national frameworks such as *Malaysia Madani*, particularly in addressing growing social tensions related to 3R issues.

Malaysia Madani

Malaysia Madani is a national development framework introduced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in 2023. It is based on six core pillars: Sustainability, Well-being, Innovation, Respect, Trust, and Compassion (Ihsan). This framework seeks to build a more inclusive and harmonious society (Ministry of National Unity, 2023). According to Mohammad (2023), *Malaysia Madani* is a holistic model that integrates humanistic values and justice in the nation’s development agenda. However, this study does not directly link *Malaysia Madani* to contemporary challenges related to 3R sentiments, nor does it examine how the framework can contribute to reinforcing national harmony.

Key elements of *Malaysia Madani*, such as *ihsan*, respect, and trust, emphasise the importance of unity and social justice. A study by Garai, Abdullah, and Mersat (2024) found that *Malaysia Madani* has the potential to serve as a national framework capable of addressing racial and religious polarisation. Nonetheless, there remains a lack of public understanding, particularly in rural areas, about the meaning and objectives of *Malaysia Madani*. Moreover, the implementation of its values requires more concrete strategies, especially in education and public administration. A significant gap in the literature is the lack of integration between *Malaysia Madani*, the *Rukun Negara*, and the 3R discourse as a comprehensive national approach.

Methodology

This study focuses on 3R issues (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) within the context of Malaysia’s multi-ethnic society, with particular emphasis on the roles of various institutions and regions that are central to addressing these challenges. The unit of analysis includes key government bodies such as the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC), the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM), and institutions of higher learning. The study also examines incidents related to 3R issues that have gained traction on social media and in news coverage. Public figures or individuals involved in making controversial 3R-related statements are also analysed. The objective is to identify patterns of social tension emerging from 3R discourses and to explore how the principles of the *Rukun Negara* and the values of *Malaysia Madani* can be applied to reinforce national cohesion.

This research adopts a qualitative methodology with a document analysis design to examine the 3R phenomenon within the *Malaysia Madani* framework. This design was chosen to enable an in-depth analysis of texts, official documents, and other data sources relevant to the issue. The analysis centres on government policies and reports, media articles, and legal statutes associated with 3R matters. The study is grounded in a “grounded research”

approach, which allows for the practical application of *Rukun Negara* principles and *Malaysia Madani* values to real-world 3R challenges.

Data for this article were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official government policies and documents, such as MCMC reports on 3R-related content on social media, case statistics from PDRM, and relevant legal statutes. Secondary sources involve scholarly journal articles, media reports, books, and selected legal cases. These sources provide a broader context for understanding patterns of social tension and the roles played by various institutions. Particular focus is given to textual and narrative data that illustrate the interaction between institutions and the public in managing sensitive 3R-related issues.

Data collection was conducted in several phases, with document analysis serving as the primary method. In the initial phase, official documents such as government policies, MCMC and PDRM reports were examined to identify statistical trends related to 3R issues. The second phase involved content analysis of textual sources such as media articles and public statements by key figures. Additionally, relevant statutory provisions were thematically analysed. All data were filtered to ensure only information relevant to the research objectives was included. This process ensured a comprehensive and focused dataset, suitable for in-depth and holistic analysis.

Data analysis followed the three-step model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2008): data reduction, data display, and data verification. In the first stage, irrelevant data were eliminated to focus solely on significant patterns. The data were then presented in the form of tables and narrative summaries to help identify linkages between the 3R elements, the *Rukun Negara*, and *Malaysia Madani*. Verification was conducted through triangulation, whereby the results were compared with existing literature to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This analytical approach enabled a rigorous and multidimensional exploration of the issues under investigation.

Findings

Government Policies and Approaches to Addressing 3R Issues

The Malaysian government has taken proactive steps to address sensitive issues related to **Race, Religion, and Royalty** (commonly referred to as the 3Rs) in order to preserve national harmony and political stability. This study identifies four major policy approaches undertaken by the government to regulate and respond to the 3R discourse. The first initiative is the establishment of the 3R Task Force by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA). In 2024, MOHA introduced this strategic body to address cases involving offensive or inflammatory remarks pertaining to race, religion, and the royal institution. The task force was formed in response to a surge in social tensions, largely driven by the misuse of social media platforms to spread hate speech and provocation. While its primary function is investigative, the task force also plays a crucial role in promoting public awareness of responsible digital communication. Although enforcement is a key component, the task force emphasises the protection of freedom of expression within the legal boundaries (Royal Malaysia Police, 2024). This initiative reflects the government's effort to strike a balance between human rights and law enforcement, while maintaining social cohesion and national stability.

The second approach focuses on the enforcement of existing legislation. The government maintains that current laws, such as the Sedition Act 1948 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, are adequate for addressing 3R-related issues (Sinar Harian, 2023). The Sedition Act is used to suppress speech or actions that may incite hatred or discord related to race, religion, or royalty. Meanwhile, the Communications and Multimedia Act regulates provocative or hateful digital content (Kambol, 2023). At this stage, the government does not view new legislation as urgently necessary, as current legal instruments are seen as sufficient to handle ongoing provocations. This approach also seeks to avoid legislative overreach that could infringe on civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression. Instead, the government prioritises stronger and more consistent enforcement of existing statutes to ensure that social harmony and political stability are preserved. This policy stance illustrates the government's confidence in the current legal framework and its preference for practical and balanced enforcement strategies.

However, the government has also undertaken efforts to review and reassess relevant laws (Sinar Harian, 2023). A comprehensive evaluation is underway to assess the relevance of key legal instruments (including the Sedition Act 1948, the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998) in managing 3R-related challenges in today's digital landscape. These laws have historically contributed to national stability, but the evolving nature of technology and societal dynamics calls for a more adaptive and forward-looking legal approach. The aim of this review is to identify opportunities for legislative improvement without undermining constitutional freedoms. The government is also considering the development of specific guidelines or amendments to strengthen enforcement capabilities. This reflects an effort to strike a balanced approach between protecting national harmony and upholding individual rights within a more inclusive and progressive governance framework.

Finally, the government is considering the enactment of new legislation specifically targeting 3R-related provocations (Sinar Harian, 2023). A proposed law, potentially titled the National Unity Act, is currently under consideration. According to the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform), Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said, the new legislation aims to address racial, religious, and royal sensitivities with greater legal clarity and stronger punitive measures. The act is expected to draw inspiration from Singapore's *Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act*, which has proven effective in curbing societal polarisation. This legislative plan demonstrates the government's commitment to preventing national unity from being undermined by hate speech or digital provocation. It is also intended to complement existing legislation—such as the Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act—which may require additional support to address emerging threats. The draft law is expected to be presented to the Cabinet for further deliberation, with the objective of establishing a more effective legal mechanism to protect national harmony without compromising the right to freedom of expression.

Table 1

Government Policies and Approaches to Addressing 3R Issues

Policy/Approach	Brief Description	Significance
Establishment of the 3R Task Force	The Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) established the 3R Task Force in 2024 to investigate cases involving insults against religion, race, and royalty. The task force also promotes responsible social media use.	Helps prevent the spread of hate speech and provocation on social media, while raising public awareness on the importance of national harmony. Reduces tensions involving race, religion, and the royal institution.
Enforcement of Existing Legislation	The government has affirmed that laws such as the Sedition Act 1948 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 are sufficient to address 3R issues. This approach focuses on consistent and firm enforcement.	Provides a strong legal foundation for addressing 3R issues without infringing on freedom of expression. Minimises the risk of social conflict through consistent and decisive application of existing legal provisions.
Review of Existing Legislation	A review was conducted on the Sedition Act 1948, the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 to ensure legal relevance in addressing emerging challenges.	Allows for the adaptation of laws to current contexts, enhancing the effectiveness of enforcement against provocation and hate speech. Reinforces public trust in the national legal framework.
Planned Enactment of New Legislation	The government plans to introduce new legislation such as the proposed "National Unity Act," which is expected to adopt a more punitive stance against 3R-related provocation, inspired by Singapore's harmony laws.	Provides a stricter legal mechanism to curb provocation involving race, religion, and royalty. Aims to protect national harmony holistically and prevent the political or personal exploitation of 3R-related issues.

Table 1 illustrates the government's commitment to effectively addressing sensitive issues related to race, religion, and royalty (3R), in order to safeguard national harmony and unity. These approaches are not only intended to respond to current challenges, but also to foster a more harmonious social environment underpinned by a heightened legal awareness among the public.

Objectives and Principles of the Rukun Negara

The *Rukun Negara* comprises two fundamental components: objectives and principles. The first objective is to foster greater unity among the people. In the aftermath of the May 13, 1969 incident, national unity became a critical priority for ensuring political stability. Malaysia's diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, and culture is a national strength; however, if not managed wisely, it can become a source of division. This objective urges citizens to live harmoniously by embracing mutual respect for differences. Another key objective is the preservation of a democratic way of life. Democracy is the cornerstone of Malaysia's governance and serves to protect fundamental human rights and freedom of expression. A democratic approach ensures that citizens can actively participate in national development while sustaining peace and stability.

In addition, the objective of creating a just society is central to the *Rukun Negara*. It aims to ensure social justice through the fair distribution of national wealth, so that no group (especially those less privileged) is left behind. The commitment to guaranteeing a liberal way of life also forms a core pillar of cultural pluralism in Malaysia. This objective affirms the right of individuals to freely practise their respective cultural traditions, as long as they do not contradict the rule of law. Finally, the objective of building a progressive society through science and technology reflects the country's aspiration to achieve global development, with innovation positioned as the main driver of national prosperity.

The first principle of the *Rukun Negara* is Belief in God, which recognises religion as a vital component of both individual and societal life. While Islam is the official religion of the federation, this principle affirms the freedom of religion for all Malaysians. Tolerance and mutual respect among different religious groups are fundamental to national harmony. The second principle, Loyalty to King and Country, underscores the monarchy's role as a unifying symbol. This loyalty extends beyond reverence for the monarch to include respect for the nation's legal and administrative systems, ensuring the people's unity under a common structure of governance.

The third principle, Supremacy of the Constitution, stresses the importance of the Federal Constitution as the highest law of the land, which must be upheld by all citizens. Constitutional supremacy guarantees legal stability and the protection of human rights within a lawful framework. The fourth principle, Rule of Law, ensures that justice is administered fairly to all individuals, regardless of status or position. Lastly, the fifth principle, Courtesy and Morality, promotes virtuous values in everyday life. This principle is essential for cultivating a responsible, ethical, and harmonious society, values that are foundational to healthy social interaction (Ministry of National Unity, 2023). Together, these five principles serve as moral and ethical guidelines for building a progressive and harmonious Malaysian society.

Table 2

Objectives and Principles of the Rukun Negara

Component	Aspect	Description
Objective 1	Achieving greater unity	Calls upon Malaysians to live harmoniously by respecting differences in race, religion, and culture, particularly after the May 13, 1969 incident, to ensure social and political stability.
Objective 2	Preserving a democratic way of life	Ensures that human rights and freedom of expression are upheld through a fair and just democratic system, enabling citizens to actively participate in national development.
Objective 3	Creating a just society	Promotes social justice through the equitable distribution of national wealth, ensuring that no community—particularly the underprivileged—is marginalised.
Objective 4	Guaranteeing a liberal way of life	Recognises and respects Malaysia's cultural diversity by allowing citizens to freely practise their respective traditions as long as they do not conflict with the law.
Objective 5	Building a progressive society	Emphasises national development through science and technology, with innovation as a key driver of global competitiveness and national prosperity.
Principle 1	Belief in God	Recognises religion as an essential element of individual and societal life, ensuring tolerance and mutual respect among various faiths in Malaysia.

Principle 2	Loyalty to King and Country	Emphasises the role of the monarchy as a symbol of national unity, and promotes respect for the law and the structure of governance.
Principle 3	Supremacy of the Constitution	Ensures that the Federal Constitution is respected as the supreme law of the nation, guaranteeing legal stability and the protection of fundamental human rights.
Principle 4	Rule of Law	Guarantees the fair and equal administration of justice regardless of status or position, thereby maintaining the integrity and credibility of the legal system.
Principle 5	Courtesy and Morality	Encourages noble values such as politeness, decency, and ethics in daily life, which are essential to forming a harmonious, responsible, and respectful society.

Table 2 outlines the *Rukun Negara*, which comprises two key components: the objectives, which provide direction toward national unity and development, and the principles, which serve as moral and ethical guidelines for shaping a harmonious, just, and progressive society. Together, these components complement one another in building a peaceful and stable Malaysia.

Restructuring of National Civic Training

Agencies responsible for national civic training play a vital role in delivering knowledge of national history and civic values to the public. Such institutions are tasked with implementing training programmes that are both holistic and comprehensive, while also providing advisory services and consultation on civic education. In addition, these agencies are expected to develop training modules that respond to contemporary needs, stakeholder expectations, and client demands, while also cultivating human capital with the necessary expertise to deliver high-quality programmes (Sinar Harian, 27 February 2024). In light of these objectives, the Malaysian Academy of Nationhood (*Akademi Kenegaraan Malaysia*) was established with the primary aim of strengthening patriotic spirit grounded in the Federal Constitution and the Rukun Negara.

The government initiated a structural reform of national civic training agencies beginning in 2023. The establishment of the Malaysian Academy of Nationhood represents a restructuring initiative that involved the transformation of the Institute for Leadership Excellence and Development (i-LEAD). Previously under the Ministry of Youth and Sports, i-LEAD's original mandate was to provide leadership and civic training for Malaysian youth. However, as of 1 January 2023, i-LEAD was transferred to the Prime Minister's Department with the intention of centralising and coordinating all civic and leadership training under a key government agency.

With the rebranding of i-LEAD as the Malaysian Academy of Nationhood, the agency has been entrusted with a broader and more strategic mandate, focusing on nation-building, leadership development, and the design of targeted training modules for a more diverse range of stakeholders. The national civic training now covers various levels of society, including top leadership, civil servants, youth, and local communities marking a significant expansion from its previous focus solely on youth. This restructuring allows the agency to strengthen inter-ministerial and cross-agency coordination, made possible by placing the Academy directly under the authority of the Prime Minister (Astro Awani, 25 March 2024). The Malaysian

Academy of Nationhood will collaborate with stakeholders across sectors to ensure the success of the newly introduced Malaysia Madani National Civic Training Programme.

Legal Cases and Statutory Provisions Related to 3R Issues

Several legal cases related to 3R issues (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) have been investigated under various statutory provisions, reflecting the government's commitment to curbing provocative acts that threaten racial, religious, and royal sensitivities. One notable case involves Muhammad Sanusi Md Nor, who was investigated under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. He was alleged to have made derogatory remarks about the Sultan of Selangor during a political speech comments which were deemed to tarnish the image of the monarchy and disrupt societal harmony.

In a separate case, Fahmi Fadzil filed a defamation suit under Section 499 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. The accusation involved claims that he had delivered a political speech in a mosque, an allegation seen as potentially inciting religious tensions and damaging his public reputation. Meanwhile, Wan Saiful Wan Jan was investigated under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, following claims that he was involved in displaying racially provocative banners with the potential to divide society.

Additionally, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was investigated under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 for making public statements that allegedly insulted the monarchy and triggered public concern. Lastly, Lim Guan Eng was investigated under Section 505(c) of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 for remarks related to the so-called "green wave," which were considered religiously sensitive and potentially inflammatory (Kambol, 2023). These cases highlight the importance of strict legal enforcement to address provocations tied to 3R issues. Consistent and fair application of the law is essential to preserving both social harmony and political stability in a pluralistic society such as Malaysia.

In addition to these high-profile cases, several statutory provisions have been identified and analysed to assess their relevance and application to 3R-related issues. These provisions are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Legislation Related to 3R Issues

Legislation	Relevant Provisions	Relevance to 3R Issues
Sedition Act 1948 (Act 15)	Section 4(1): Addresses speech, publications, or acts that incite hatred towards race, religion, or the royal institution.	Prevents speech or actions that could incite hatred or insult race, religion, or the monarchy.
Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Act 588)	Section 233: Criminalises the use of network services to transmit offensive, false, threatening, or obscene content.	Regulates the misuse of social media or electronic communication to spread provocative content related to race, religion, or royalty.
Penal Code (Act 574)	- Section 298A: Addresses acts that cause disharmony or hatred on religious grounds. - Section 505: Penalises statements that incite public fear or social division. - Section 499: Defamation involving race, religion, or royalty.	Used to investigate and prosecute statements or actions that disrupt social harmony or incite fear or division.
Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (Act 301)	Regulates publications that may threaten public order.	Controls printed materials that insult or provoke sensitivities related to race, religion, or the monarchy.
Election Offences Act 1954 (Act 5)	Regulates statements or actions containing provocative elements during election campaigns.	Prevents the exploitation of 3R issues for political purposes during elections.
Peaceful Assembly Act 2012 (Act 736)	Regulates public gatherings that could lead to tensions involving race, religion, or royalty.	Prevents assemblies that may escalate 3R-related sentiments.
Federal Constitution	- Article 3(1): Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony. - Article 153: Special rights of Malays and Bumiputera. - Article 181(1): Sovereignty and prerogatives of the Malay Rulers.	Provides the constitutional framework for protecting racial, religious, and royal sensitivities in Malaysia.

The table above outlines the key legislative instruments related to 3R issues, including specific provisions used to regulate speech, actions, or assemblies that may disrupt racial, religious, or royal harmony in Malaysia. These laws play a crucial role in maintaining the country's social cohesion and political stability.

Discussion

The Rukun Negara as a Safeguard Against the Misuse of 3R Sentiments

The internalisation of the *Rukun Negara* is a critical foundation in fostering harmony within Malaysia's multicultural society. Its significance lies not merely in the memorisation of its five principles, but in the deep understanding of its objectives, such as the pursuit of national unity and social justice. Formal education in schools should serve as a primary platform for instilling these values in younger generations. The daily recitation of the *Rukun Negara* should be

complemented by learning assessments that encourage students to reflect on how these principles are applied in everyday life. Civic education programmes should incorporate contemporary issues, including 3R-related challenges, and adopt interactive approaches that promote critical thinking about students' roles in a pluralistic society. Without such meaningful engagement, principles like justice and constitutional supremacy risk being reduced to rhetorical slogans.

Beyond education, the government must demonstrate a strong commitment to anchoring its national policies in the values of the *Rukun Negara*. For instance, all initiatives (particularly those dealing with inter-ethnic or inter-religious relations) should be grounded in the principles of unity and social equity. Internalising these principles must involve all levels of society, from policymakers to ordinary citizens, to ensure that the *Rukun Negara* genuinely functions as a moral compass. While these principles hold the potential to curb 3R sentiments, they require a comprehensive approach, supported by media, educational institutions, and civil society organisations. Without holistic implementation, the true potential of these principles in countering 3R provocations may remain unrealised.

In support of this goal, the Ministry of National Unity introduced the Kembara Perpaduan Malaysia Madani Flagship Programme, including the *Eksplorasi Rukun Negara* initiative in 2023. This programme aims to revitalise the culture of civic values by promoting the *Rukun Negara* across all levels of society. At the school level, the establishment of Rukun Negara Clubs, and at the tertiary level, Rukun Negara Secretariats, serve as platforms to nurture civic understanding and are supervised by the Department of National Unity at the state level. The Ministry also allocates special activity grants to schools and higher education institutions that implement approved nation-building programmes.

Furthermore, the government has developed the Malaysia Madani Development Framework, which underscores the importance of fostering well-being through values rooted in *Malaysia Madani*, anchored by the *Rukun Negara* and the Federal Constitution. This framework is presented in a comprehensive visual model encompassing various levels and segments of society. In this model, the *Rukun Negara* and the Constitution are placed in the outermost layer, symbolising their role as the overarching foundation of a peaceful and inclusive society. A strong understanding of these foundational documents is essential for achieving national unity, as they encapsulate key national elements “the Constitution, the rule of law, religion, and the monarchy” that collectively define the aspirations of nationhood. Hence, the misuse of 3R sentiments is neither a legitimate option nor a constructive act; it undermines the goal of building a progressive and cohesive society.

Through these efforts, it is evident that the government seeks to restore the *Rukun Negara* to a prominent position, reviving its original purpose and ensuring its relevance in modern Malaysian life. Admittedly, such initiatives require substantial financial investment without immediate tangible returns. However, this is the price that must be paid for the long-term cultivation of civic understanding across generations, necessary to sustain national harmony in the years to come.

Ambiguity in the Interpretation of 3R Offences

The manipulation of 3R issues (**Race**, **Religion**, and **Royalty**) for political advantage is a recurring challenge in Malaysia, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as general elections. Such exploitation not only heightens social tensions but also undermines public confidence in the integrity of the country's legal and political systems. Several cases suggest that the enforcement of laws related to 3R offences may be biased, with stricter action seemingly directed at opposition figures, while similar statements by those aligned with the government are left unchecked. This inconsistency creates the perception that laws intended to safeguard national unity are instead weaponised for political ends. In order to uphold the principle of justice, it is imperative to develop a clear and standardised legal interpretation of what constitutes a 3R offence, thus ensuring impartial enforcement and reinforcing public trust in the rule of law.

A clear legal interpretation must also define the scope and boundaries of what constitutes hate speech and provocation in the context of race, religion, and the monarchy. Such definitions must be bipartisan, consistently enforced, and protected from political interference. Without a universally accepted legal framework, public sensitivities may continue to be exploited, further polarising society. Transparent legal boundaries can serve as a safeguard against selective prosecution and contribute to the development of a more responsible, rights-conscious society. Most importantly, fair and consistent enforcement of these laws will not only preserve national harmony but also restore confidence in Malaysia's legal institutions as impartial and protective guardians of social stability.

Enactment of New Legislation to Address 3R Issues

The proposed enactment of a new law, such as the "National Unity Act" (*Akta Negara Bangsa*), is a government initiative aimed at addressing 3R issues (**Race**, **Religion**, and **Royalty**) through a more punitive legal framework. However, the effectiveness of such legislation depends largely on its ability to address the root causes of 3R sentiment, which often stem from a lack of understanding and respect for the sensitivities surrounding ethnicity, religion, and the monarchy. While legislation is a vital tool for regulating conduct, it should ideally function as a last resort. Greater emphasis must be placed on civic education, beginning from the school level, to instil values of unity, justice, and constitutional supremacy. Through education, individuals can develop a deeper understanding of their roles in upholding social harmony and coexistence.

Although a new law may prove effective in curbing overtly provocative acts related to 3R issues, its success depends on consistent and impartial enforcement free from political influence. The legislation must also be carefully crafted to protect legitimate freedom of expression, so long as it does not violate the sensitivities of race, religion, or royalty. Moreover, its implementation should be synergised with educational programmes, awareness campaigns, and active engagement with civil society. Without a holistic approach, such a law risks being merely reactive, failing to address the deeper sociocultural roots of the problem. Therefore, a balanced strategy that integrates legal enforcement, education, and community support is essential for effectively addressing 3R issues in a comprehensive and sustainable manner.

Conclusion

This paper highlights that the 3R issues (**Race, Religion, and Royalty**) play a crucial role in shaping national harmony in Malaysia, but when misused, they can ignite social and political tensions. The internalisation of Rukun Negara values and the application of Malaysia Madani elements, such as compassion (*ihsan*) and mutual respect (*hormat*), represent a holistic approach to curbing 3R-related provocations. While existing laws such as the Sedition Act 1948 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 are instrumental in addressing 3R sentiments, civic education from an early age must be strengthened to address root causes. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for clear and consistent interpretation of 3R issues to prevent political manipulation that could undermine public trust in the integrity of national governance.

The strength of this article lies in its contribution to proposing an integrated approach between the principles of Rukun Negara and the values of Malaysia Madani to address challenges surrounding 3R. It stresses the importance of synergy between education, legal enforcement, and social awareness in mitigating tensions arising from ethnic, religious, and monarchical differences. This approach offers a new perspective on the interconnected roles of law, education, and social morality in safeguarding national harmony. The proposal for a more inclusive regulatory mechanism, such as the proposed National Unity Act, reflects the need to protect social sensitivities comprehensively without compromising freedom of expression.

However, a key limitation of this paper is the lack of broader quantitative data and diverse case samples related to 3R issues, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. In addition, the focus on legal and official document analysis restricts the representation of public voices directly affected by 3R sentiments. Future research should adopt mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative and qualitative data while engaging diverse community groups to gain more holistic insights. Expanding the study to evaluate the effectiveness of civic education programmes and the real impact of legal enforcement on reducing 3R-related provocations would also be beneficial. Such approaches can provide a stronger foundation for recommending more relevant policies and strategies, thereby reinforcing national unity in Malaysia.

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