

# Removing the Race Section in Official Documents used by Government and Private Sectors as a Gesture for Sustaining National Harmony: A Malaysian's Perspective

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## Abstract

This paper examines the perception of Malaysian on the proposed removal of race section in official documents used by government and private organizations. The paper employed mixed method research paradigm. A total sample of 1513 Malaysian residents in Peninsular Malaysia was randomly selected from the whole population and data was collected using structured set of instruments, focus group interview and document analysis. The data was analysed using IBM SPSS software version 24 for both descriptive and inferential analysis. The findings shows that majority of Peninsular Malaysians did not support the proposal to remove race section in the official government and private documents. However, the findings revealed that Chinese and Indian communities are keen to support the proposal of removing the race section in the official government and private documents compared to the Malays, so also Sabah/Sarawak Bumiputera living here in Peninsular. Moreover, Gen Z also support the proposal, which contradict from the Baby Boomer, Gen X and Gen Y. Based on the findings of this paper, the removal of the race section in the official government and private documents, can spark race sensitivity and polemic among the multiple race of Malaysia. The paper, however recommends allowing the race section in the official government and private documents in Malaysia.

**Keyword:** National Unity, Diversity, Race, Official documents, Peninsular Malaysia

## 1. Introduction

The significance of both government and private documents carrying universal section cannot be ignored in official transactions of day to day activities. However, some scholars argue that, use of identity that can create suspicion or doubt among citizens is liable to creating tension

and reduce mutual harmony. In recognition of the above, the Minister of Prime Minister Department Tan Sri Joseph Kurup asserts that:

*“When will Malaysian’s rise to see themselves as Malaysian and not by race, and too see me as Joseph Kurup and not as Kadazan Dusun, but as a Malaysian. Even after 50 years of independence, it is sad to see we are still identified by the race and religion. Maybe it is time for us to annul the requirement to state our race in any documents in this country. Maybe this is a beginning.” (JPNIN, 2014)*

From his speech, he did not put any pressure to the National Unity Consultation Committee Member to accept the idea for the removal or annul race section from any documents, but to allow the committee members to discuss the matter thoroughly. His speech has raised reaction from many people. Even though, there are people who support the proposal (Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, 2014)<sup>1</sup>, there are few oppositions from the Malay rooted NGO and political leaders. According to Vice President II, Ikatan Muslimim Malaysia (ISMA), the proposal really show that Joseph Kurup agreed to the race equality and elimination of special Malay rights as stated in the Constitution (Sinar Harian, 2014). A statement that Malays will not support UMNO if Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Najib Abdul Razak decided to accept Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, Minister at the Prime Minister Department proposal to annul/remove race section in official documents of both government and private organizations, was another threat rose<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, the proposal to annul race section in government and private forms except for census and statistic purposes has been touted years ago before it is been brought up again by Tan Sri Joseph Kurup in February, 2014. It is actually an excerpt from the proposal paper of Government Transformation Program Roadmap to encourage 1Malaysia Government (Kerajaan Malaysia, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, what is very interesting to know is that, this proposal is part of the Government Transformation Program Roadmap was not a hot debatable topic among the citizens. The dispute occurred several years later, then YAB Prime Minister announced an official statement that cabinet has not make any decision to annul the race section in government official forms (The Malaysian Insider, 2014)

Moreover, whenever people see themselves from the perspective of race in Malaysia, feelings and discussions about loyalty and racism comes to play; to make it worse is when this debate relates to religion, language and culture which are highly emotional and very sensitive. Consequently, some of the main questions are what is the perception of majority Malaysian on this issue? What will be the prediction Malaysian to foresee the impact if the proposal to

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Article “Hapus Nama Bangsa dalam Borang: Lee Lam Thye Setuju Cadangan Joseph Kurup”. Online: <http://www.astroawani.com/news/show/hapus-nama-bangsa-dalam-borang-lee-lam-thye-setuju-cadangan-joseph-kurup-30596?cp>

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Article “Negara Tidak Akan Maju Jika Ramai Berfikir Macam Ibrahim Ali”. Online: <http://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2014/02/27/negara-tidak-akan-maju-jika-ramai-berfikir-macam-ibrahim-ali/>

<sup>3</sup> Refer Government Transformation Program Roadmap, Part “Ke Arah Kerajaan 1Malaysia”, page 90-91



are 7 slots for race information as in Figure 2. However, based on the observations, both forms in the UK and US, does not make it as a requirement to fill in the race section.

**SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**  
 Application for a Social Security Card

Form Approved  
 OMB No. 5900-0048

1 NAME (Last, first, middle initial)  
 2 Social Security number previously assigned to the person listed in item 1

3 PLACE OF BIRTH (If born in the United States, list city, state, and country. If born in a foreign country, list country and city.)  
 4 DATE OF BIRTH (MM/DD/YYYY)

5 CITIZENSHIP (If born in the United States, list state. If born in a foreign country, list country and city.)  
 U.S. Citizen  Legal Alien  Legal Alien Not Admitted  Other (List on Page 2)  
 U.S. Citizen  Legal Alien  Legal Alien Not Admitted  Other (List on Page 2)

6 ETHNICITY (Are you Hispanic or Latino? (Your response is voluntary))  
 Yes  No

7 RACE (Check one)  
 Male (White)  Male (Black)  Male (Hispanic)  Male (Asian)  Male (Pacific Islander)  Male (American Indian or Alaska Native)  Male (Other)

8 SEX  Male  Female

9 A. PARENT/MOTHER'S NAME AT HER BIRTH  
 B. PARENT/MOTHER'S SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (Use instructions for 3 on Page 2)

10 A. PARENT/FATHER'S NAME  
 B. PARENT/FATHER'S SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (Use instructions for 3 on Page 2)

11 Has the person listed in item 1 or anyone acting on their behalf ever filed for or received a Social Security number card before?  
 Yes (List Social Security number(s) on Page 2)  No  Don't know (If "Don't know," add to question 11.)

12 Name shown on the most recent Social Security card issued for the person listed in item 1

13 Enter any 3-digit date of birth if used on an earlier application for a card

14 TODAY'S DATE (MM/DD/YYYY) 15 DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER (Area Code) (Number)

16 MAILING ADDRESS (Street Address, Apt. No., PO Box, Rural Route No., City, State, Zip Code)

17 YOUR SIGNATURE 18 YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON IN ITEM 1 IS: (List on Page 2)

DO NOT WRITE IN THESE SPACES (FOR SSA USE ONLY)

Form 5900-0048-0111 (Rev. 09/2011) Quality Print Edition Page 1

Figure 2: Example of United Kingdom Official Government Form  
 Source: Social Security Administration USA

However, in Malaysia it is compulsory to fill in the race information in the official government forms as compared to UK and USA. In addition, for online transaction, without information on race, the transaction cannot be submitted as in Figure 3<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to the example of online official government form in Malaysia :  
[http://imej.spa.gov.my/dev/pdf/BORANG\\_PEMERIKSAAN\\_KESIHATAN.pdf](http://imej.spa.gov.my/dev/pdf/BORANG_PEMERIKSAAN_KESIHATAN.pdf)



for internal consistency. Based on the above, focus group discussion was employed to measure the respondents' "not sure" responses which is quite high for the main construct variables, which leads to a low value of Cronbach Alpha for the pilot test. Through measured variables, findings of the qualitative showed that respondents having difficulties to foresee the implication based from the certain parties allegation and discussion on the issue of proposal to annul race section in the government and private official forms. Moreover, the researchers observed that the list of measured variables may cause multiple polemic and definition on this topic.

Researchers has decided in order to measure the perception of the multi-racial community on this issue should not be based on the variables developed from the previous studies. In addition, researchers believed that multi-racial community must be given a chance to express their opinion on this issue without having any influences from any allegation made by any parties. Thus, the research main construct will only required respondents to answer either "yes" or "no" to the questions on the proposal to annul race section in the official government and private forms. For every questions, respondents are required to express their opinions or reasons.

In addition, sample of the study was drawn through simple random sampling technique, and 1153 respondents were involved. With the confident level of 95% and margin of error of 5%, the number of respondent should be around 384 (Raosoft, 2009). Thus, with 1513 respondents, the number of respondents is sufficient to represent the population of Peninsular Malaysia. Sampling criteria is to represent the race/ethnicity, age and generation with a ratio of Malaysia main race/ethnic which is 6 (Malay); 3 (Chinese); 1(Indian). The respondents were divided into four main zones such as Northern (Pulau Pinang); Southern (Johor); Eastern (Pahang) and Central (Selangor). The field study was conducted between June and September 2015.

Furthermore, since the responses of "agree" or "not-agree" were labelled as non-categorical, then the research data to be categorized into specific themes so their summary views can be developed. Specifically, there are six category of summary view developed for an analysis purpose for those who were agree to the proposal to annul the race section, such as : 1) Justice to all / avoid discrimination; 2) Foster unity; 3) Eliminate racial disparities; 4) Creation of one race/Malaysian race; 5) No need/This section is not important; 6) Simplify formalities. Moreover, there are seven category of summary view developed for an analysis purpose for those who were not-agree to the proposal to annul the race section, such as : 1) Celebrate diversity; 2) Multi-racial is Malaysian identity; 3) To preserve Malays/Bumiputera privileges; 4) Identification/Statistic documentation purpose; 5) No unity implication; 6) For recruitment/organizational structure; and 7) Can thicken racism.

## **5. Findings**

### ***Respondent profile***

Descriptive statistics was used in analysis of the respondents' demographic characteristics. Table 1 show more than half of the respondent (65.4%) are female, while 34.6% are male. Race distribution are as follow, 58.7% are Malays, followed by Chinese at 23.9%, Indian at 23.9%, Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak at 5.3% and other races at 0.2%. Gen Z is the majority of the generation category with 61.5%, followed by Gen Y (18.9%), Gen X (16.2%) and The Baby

Boomers (3.4%). About 50.3% of the respondents' lives in the urban area, 20.6% lives in rural areas, 15.2% lives in town and the rest lives in sub-urban area. Majority of the respondent (80%) lives in a multi-racial residential area and 16% live in a same race residential area. About 4% is not sure about their community profile in their residential area.

Table 1:  
Respondent Demographic Profile (n=1513)

<b>Background</b>		<b>Percentage</b>
Gender		
Male		34.6
Female		65.4
Race		
Malay		58.7
Chinese		23.9
Indian		11.9
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak		5.3
Others		0.2
Generation Category		
<i>The Baby Boomers</i>		3.4
Gen X		16.2
Gen Y		18.9
Gen Z		61.5
Residential Location		
Rural		20.6
Urban		50.3
Sub-Urban		13.9
Town		15.2
Residential areas community profile		
Multi-racial		80.0
Same Race		16.0
Not Sure		4.0

### ***Respondent Perception on the Proposal to Annul Race Section***

The findings show that 56.6% of the respondents did not agree on the proposal to annul race section in the official documents used by government or private organizations. On the other hand, 43.3% of the respondent chooses to agree with the proposal as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2:  
Agreement on Annulment of Race Section (n=1513)

<b>Propose to annul</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	43.4
Not Agree	56.6

Accordingly, Table 3 shows analysis on the reasons of respondents agreeing to the proposal to annul the race section in the official government and private sector forms. The findings shows the three highest reasons why the respondents agreed to the proposal, which are

'Creation of one race/Malaysian race' (27.9%); 'Justice to all / avoid discrimination; (27.2%); and 'Foster unity' (25.3%). Other reasons by the respondents are, annulment of race section can eliminate racial disparities' (13.3%); about 5.1% feels that this section is not important, and 1.2% believes this can simplify formalities.

Table 3:

Reasons Respondents Agree to the Proposal to Annul the Race Section (n=1513)

Reason to Agree	Percentage
Simplify formalities	1.2
No need/This section is not important	5.1
Creation of one race/Malaysia race	27.9
Eliminate racial disparities	13.3
Foster unity	25.3
Justice to all / Avoid discrimination	27.2

Moreover, Table 4 indicates the reasons respondents not agreed to the proposal to annul the race section in the official documents of government and private organizations. About half of the respondents (46.7%) did not agree on the proposal because of race is important for identification/statistic documentation purpose. Between 10 – 20% respondents believed that race should remain to preserve Malay/Bumiputera privileges and multi-racial are a Malaysian identity. Less than 10% of the respondents did not agree on the proposal because there will be no unity implication (if annul), to celebrate diversity, can thicken racism and important for job recruitment/organizational structure.

Table 4:

Reasons Respondents Not Agree to Annul the Race Section (n=1513)

Reasons to Not-Agree	Percentage
Can thicken racism	3.0
For recruitment/organizational structure	2.6
No unity implication	9.0
For identification/statistic documentation	46.7
To preserve Melayu/Bumiputera privilege	17.5
Multi-racial is a Malaysian identity	12.8
Celebrate diversity	8.4

In addition, the findings also indicate that Chinese (82%), Indian (80.6%) and Others (100%) respondents are keen to agree on the annulment of the race section in the official documents used government and private sectors. On the other hand, Malays and Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak (reside in Peninsular Malaysia) did not agree to the proposal, with score of 78.3% and 77.5% respectively as depicted in Table 5.

Table 5:

Agreement to Annual based on Race (n=1513)

Race	Agree/Not-Agree	Percent
Malay	Agree	21.7
	Not Agree	78.3
Chinese	Agree	82.0
	Not Agree	18.0
Indian	Agree	80.6
	Not Agree	19.4
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	Agree	22.5
	Not Agree	77.5
Others	Agree	100.0
	Not Agree	0.0

One-way ANOVA analysis was used to determine significant different on respondents' perception towards the proposal to annul race section across ethnic/race. The analysis shows that there is a significant different on respondents' perception across ethnic/race [ $F(1513)=191.230, p < .05$ ]. This shows that each race has their own interpretation towards the proposal to annul race section in the official documents of government and private sector as depicted in the summary presented in Table 6.

Table 6:

Perception Difference across Race (n=1513)

Race	N	Mean	SP	F	P
Malay	888	1.78	.413	191.230	.000
Chinese	362	1.18	.384		
Indian	180	1.19	.397		
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	80	1.78	.420		
Othes	3	1.00	.000		

The findings also show that Malay (32.2%) and Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak (41.2%) agreed to the annulment of the race section from the official documents because it can foster unity among all races. Indian (37.0%) and others (100%) respondents agreed to annul race section with a reason to create one race/Malaysian race. Only Chinese respondents believe that by the annulment of the race section, it can bring justice to all races/avoid discrimination as depicted Table 7.

Table 7:

Agreed reasons to annul race section in the official forms across the race (n=1513)

Race	Agreed reasons to annul race section	Percentage
Malay	Simplify formalities	3.6
	No need/This section is not important	9.0
	Creation of one race/Malaysian race	24.6
	Eliminate racial disparities	15.6
	Foster unity	32.2
	Justice for all/Avoid discrimination	15.0
Chinese	Simplify formalities	0.0
	No need/This section is not important	4.5
	Creation of one race/Malaysian race	25.3
	Eliminate racial disparities	12.6
	Foster unity	24.2
	Justice for all/Avoid discrimination	33.4
Indian	Simplify formalities	0.7
	No need/This section is not important	2.2
	Creation of one race/Malaysian race	37.0
	Eliminate racial disparities	13.0
	Foster unity	17.4
	Justice for all/Avoid discrimination	29.7
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	Simplify formalities	0.0
	No need/This section is not important	0.0
	Creation of one race/Malaysian race	17.6
	Eliminate racial disparities	5.9
	Foster unity	41.2
	Justice for all/Avoid discrimination	35.3
Others	Simplify formalities	0.0
	No need/This section is not important	0.0
	Creation of one race/Malaysian race	100.0
	Eliminate racial disparities	0.0
	Foster unity	0.0
	Justice for all/Avoid discrimination	0.0

However, the respondent's regardless of their race did not agree on the proposal to annul race section in the official documents, because they believe race section is vital and crucial for identification and statistic purposes. Malay and Sabah/Sarawak Bumiputera respondents also did not agree on the basis to preserve Malay/Bumiputera privilege with a relatively high score, where this reason is not in favour for Chinese and Indian respondents as shown in the summary presented in Table 8.

Table 8:

Not Agreed reasons to annul race section in the official forms across the race (n=1513)

Race	Not-agreed reasons to annul race section	Percent
Malay	Celebrate diversity	7.6
	Multi race is a Malaysian identity	12.6
	To preserve Malay/Bumiputera privilege	20.7
	For identification/statistic documentation	46.6
	No unity implication	6.6
	For recruitment/organizational structure	3.0
	Can thicken racism	2.9
Chinese	Celebrate diversity	10.2
	Multi race is a Malaysian identity	11.9
	To preserve Malay/Bumiputera privilege	0.0
	For identification/statistic documentation	39.0
	No unity implication	37.3
	For recruitment/organizational structure	0.0
	Can thicken racism	1.6
Indian	Celebrate diversity	19.2
	Multi race is a Malaysian identity	7.7
	To preserve Malay/Bumiputera privilege	0.0
	For identification/statistic documentation	57.7
	No unity implication	7.7
	For recruitment/organizational structure	0.0
	Can thicken racism	7.7
Bumiputera Sabah/Sarawak	Celebrate diversity	12.3
	Multi race is a Malaysian identity	17.5
	To preserve Malay/Bumiputera privilege	10.5
	For identification/statistic documentation	50.9
	No unity implication	5.3
	For recruitment/organizational structure	0.0
	Can thicken racism	3.5

Interestingly, Table 9 shows the respondents' summary on perception towards the proposal to annul the race section in the official documents across the generation. The Findings shows that majority of the respondents across generation from The Baby Boomers (58.2%), Generation X (79.2%) to Generation Y (72.7%) did not agree with the proposal of annulling race section in the official documents and more than Gen Z (54.4%) agreed to this proposal.

**Table 9:**

Agreement to Annul Race Section across Generation (n=1513)

Generation	Agree/Not Agree	Percent
<i>The baby boomers</i>	Agree	41.2
	Not Agree	58.8
Gen X	Agree	20.8
	Not Agree	79.2
Gen Y	Agree	27.3
	Not Agree	72.7
Gen Z	Agree	54.4
	Not Agree	45.6

Table 10 is to identify any significant different on the respondent's' perception towards the proposal to annul race section in the official forms across generation. From the analysis, the findings shows that there is a significant different on the respondents' perception across generation [ $F(1513)=45.982, p < .05$ ]. This means each generation has different opinions and view towards this proposal.

Table 10:

Perception Difference across Generation (n=1513)

Generation	N	Mean	SP	F	P
<i>The Baby Boomers</i>	51	1.59	.497	45.982	.000
Generation X	245	1.79	.407		
Generation Y	286	1.73	.446		
Generation Z	931	1.46	.498		

Lastly, based on the residential areas, majority of the respondent from the rural area (67.2%) has the highest score did not agree with the proposal to annul race section in the official documents. Followed by those who are from the town area and sub-urban with 64.9% and 58.1% respectively. On the other hand, those who are in urban area tend to agree with this proposal with a score of 50.6%. However, the score is not high compared to those who did not agree (49.4%) with the proposal.

Table 11:

Agreement to Annul Race Section across Residential Areas (n=1513)

Residential Areas	Agree/Not Agree	Percentage
Urban	Agree	50.6
	Not Agree	49.4
Town	Agree	35.1
	Not Agree	64.9
Sub Urban	Agree	41.9
	Not Agree	58.1
Rural	Agree	32.8
	Not Agree	67.2

## 6. Discussion

This study shows that majority of Peninsular Malaysian did not agree with the proposal to annul race section in the official documents used by government and private sectors because race section is important for identification and statistic documentation purpose. By majority, Chinese and Indian respondent in Peninsular Malaysia agree with the proposal to annul race section in the official forms, however some of them who did not agree with the proposal as they believe race section is relevant and important for identification and statistic documentation purpose. The above findings are consistent with the assertion of Datuk Joseph Entulu Belaun, where he asserted that, information on race and ethnic identity is needed and required in some of the government official documents in this country because of the judicial provisions and as a requirement under the Article 153, Federal Constitution (Berita Harian, 2015). Interestingly, same opinion was expressed by the leader of a Malay-rooted NGO (Sinar Harian, 2014). The information regarding race or ethnicity of citizens provides them with unique identification apart from being Malaysian and this segmentation can be able to portray unity in diversity among the multi-racial citizens.

Meanwhile, for those Peninsular Malaysians who agree for the annulment of the race section sees this proposal as a good chance to create one race or Malaysia Race for the country. This opinion is quite aligned with the contexts of Tan Sri Joseph Kurup's speech during the launching of Unity Dialogue National Unity Consultation Council on 22 February 2014 where he claimed that Malaysian are still divided by the race and religion even after 50 years of independence (JPNIN, 2014). In principle, the view of the Peninsular Malaysian who agrees with the proposal to annul the race section in the official documents cannot be interpreted as to have an implicit meaning. This is because the generic design of the qualitative research in this study did not capture the whole concept of specific triangulation especially in understanding the community's perception on the research subject. Analysis of the open-ended questions was conducted on-surface to see the themes view of society in general. Therefore, the views from some of the Peninsular Malaysian across race that agree with the proposal to annul the race section in the official forms cannot be declared as prejudice, racism or having an implicit meaning except there is an empirical proof to support such claims.

Interestingly, observation from the findings shows that some of Peninsular Malaysian across race who agree with the proposal to annul the race section because of the unity. This is different from the Chinese respondents who believe that justice for all races or avoid discrimination by annulment of the race section. However, findings showed that only about 33% of the Peninsular Chinese agree to this view. General observations found indeed there are a handful of the Chinese community in Malaysia continue to challenge the government to annul the race section in the official documents on the ground to create a nation of justice and to prevent discrimination (Malaysiakini, 2016). Moreover, community in Peninsular across generation like The Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y did not agree with the proposal to annul race section in the government and private sector official forms. Only Gen Z agreed to the proposal. But, the difference view on agree and not-agree among the Gen Z are not so significant, less than 10% only. In addition, the Gen Z from the Peninsular Malaysia Chinese community has the highest score agreed to the proposal to annul race section in the official documents to create justice for all and to avoid discrimination. On the other hand, the other race of Gen Z (Malay, Indian, Sabah/Sarawak Bumiputera and Others) agreed to the proposal to annul race section because to create national unity.

Furthermore, findings also show that communities in Peninsular live in rural, town and sub-urban did not agree with the proposal to annul race section in the official documents. Only those who live in urban area agree with the proposal, but the ratio between those that agree and those that did not agree has low score. These findings also are consistent with the findings previously based on the geographical population in Malaysia. Rural area is dominated by Bumiputera especially Malays compared to Chinese impacted from the divide and rule policy of the British colonial era (Sulaiman et al., 2013). In-depth analysis also indicates that Malay in Peninsular Malaysia did not agree with the proposal to annul race section in the official documents.

## **7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, annulment of race section in official documents used by government and private sectors has generated a lot of discussion among the Malaysian citizens. The discussion has led to diverse opinions, however the controversies have generated calls for action and scholars from different angles answered such call to address the key issues. Based on the findings, therefore this paper concludes that communities in Peninsular Malaysia are diverse across race, generation and selected demography profile. There is significant difference in terms of view towards the proposal to annulling race section in the official documents used by government and private sectors. Implementation of this proposal has the potential to sparking polemic and race sensitivity in the multi-racial environment like our country. Moreover, the implementation of the proposal if any requires comprehensive justification until the difference of opinion in the multi-racial community across generation is cleared. This study also confirmed that race polarization issue especially in Peninsular Malaysia is still not solved and put the country continuously in stable tension state. In the context of present findings, this study recommends that race section in the official documents of government and private sectors should remained and with no selection of ethnic/race selections for an applicant to choose; in addition, to place “for equality chances” next to the race section.

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