

Societal Perception on the Government Role in Governing Development and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia

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Abstract

This article discusses the perception of the society on the role played by the government in implementing the governance responsibilities of the country's development, particularly in the context of managing and organizing social differences in the Malaysian society. The diversity in Malaysia is not only generates a dynamic social composition, but has brought significant challenges to the government in managing the country's governance more effectively. In addition, the civic consciousness among the current Malaysian society has claimed various demands such as for a fair, transparent and equitable government, society's interests, as well as generating good economic development and sustaining social well-being in society. This study explores the perceptions of the community towards the role of the government in the context of economic governance, holistic development, community management, establishment of government services, program implementation, political, media, criminal governance and social problems. This study indicates each ethnic group presented different feedbacks in every aspect. However, there is no negative dimension that shows the failure of the government in implementing a good governance, but still need some improvement based on the perception of the respondents. Implementation of development, governance is important in the context of promoting good ethnic relations between the diversity of societies in Malaysia. Thus, good ethnic relations are the substance for the formation of social cohesion and the continued assurance of national stability in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Development, Ethnic Relations, Governance, Role Of Government, Unity*

Introduction

The societal relationship with the government is important to ensure a social cohesion in a society. This relationship happens in various aspects either through politic, economic or socio-cultural, including administrative affairs. The main roles and responsibilities of the government are to carry out governance in a fair and equitable manner, enacting the policies of the nation to achieve goals, providing the people's needs and protect the welfare of the society as a whole. In upholding these responsibilities, the governance element is the key that determines the effectiveness of every action played by the government. Basically, the term governance includes a broad aspect that involves nation and societal affairs, in the particular context of public management and development, economic growth as well as policy formation and implementation (Heywood 2007). The concept of governance indicates a way or technique in which governments use their authority in managing the social and economic resources in the country (Johnson 1997). More specifically, the concept of governance focuses on 'governmental capacity' to carry out governmental responsibilities in a country (Johnson 1997), and also the government's ability to create and implement policies and lead the society (Kjar 2004). Based on the stated definition, governance is a concept that applies on the role of the government to uphold its responsibilities in the affairs of government and societal management that involves the use of certain powers in accordance with recognized procedures and rules.

In this regard, this study aims to assess the societal perception on the role of the government in implementing the governance responsibilities of the country's development, specifically in the context of managing and organizing social differences in the Malaysian multiethnic society. Multi-ethnic society, it is an enormous challenge for the Malaysian government to govern the country effectively due to the emergence of conflicts across ethnics, competition in various dimensions of life and raising of sensitive issues (Mohd Noor et al. 2006). Moreover, the civic consciousness among the current Malaysian society has claimed various demands such as for a fair, transparent and equitable government, society's interests, as well as generating good economic development and sustaining social well-being in society (Ismail 2000). Such development is in line with the modernization and globalization that has not only affected the world today, but has had a remarkable impact on the Malaysian government. Thus, governance action will determine the continuity and sustainability of the country's future.

The modernization has conveyed a great transformation shift in Malaysian society. For instance, the backward society has become an advanced society, the traditional society becomes a modern society, and from a simple society to a complex society. This modernization becomes a process that brings a change in the society to enjoy a more perfect life. From this fact, the theory of modernization from the Chicago School of America can be used as a foundation for Malaysian planning and development. Modernization projects in Malaysia have developed individuals in the aspect of education, health, quality of life, security, human resources and so forth. So far, the government has successfully accomplished the basic human needs through public infrastructure and facilities such as roads and highways, public transportations and telecommunications. Furthermore, modernization projects have constructed essential institutions such as legislative, judicial, education, religious and so on. The fundamental element of modernization is 'governance', an approach reinforced by British culture in focusing on the country's administration and development. The three main features of modernization include rational, legal and institution.

Modernization projects in Malaysia were initiated with the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) which has the two-pronged goals, namely, to eradicate poverty regardless of ethnics and restructure the society in order to form a good integration and ethnic relationship. As the results of modernization projects, this study was considered specifically to identify the perceptions of various ethnic groups in Malaysia on the role of governance, particularly in the context of realization of never ending modernization projects and globalization challenges. Due to many constraints, this study only emphasizes on the four major and dominant ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely Malays, Chinese, Indian and Bumiputeras. The four ethnic groups are the dominant ethnic groups in the country which created multiethnic society.

Methods

This study discusses the societal perception on the government role in governing development and ethnic relations in Malaysia. Survey was conducted on 554 business community and hawkers of various ethnics in Malaysia by using a purposive sampling method. The data collection was conducted on 2015.

Findings and Discussion

Overall, the findings indicate that respondents' perceptions on the governance in ensuring social cohesion among multiethnic societies in Malaysia is at a moderate level. The proof can be seen through the eight measured dimensions, including perceptions on economics, development, community, government service, program, politic, media as well as criminal and social problems governance.

Referring to Table 1. (a) perception on economic governance, the results show that 56.3% of the Malay respondents viewed that the government managed to restore the economic problems in the country and 54.5% of the Indian respondents disagreed with that statement. Meanwhile, 55% of Malay respondents think that the nation's wealth has been fairly and equally distributed through national development policy while 56.5% of Chinese respondents disagreed. The results also show that 58.5% of the Malay respondents think that the government has managed to control the price of groceries in the market but 59.7% of the Chinese ethnic group respondents disagreed. This indicates that Malay ethnic groups have a better perception on the governance of the national economy compared with the other ethnic groups.

In the context of development governance, the perception of the Malays on the development governance is positive as opposed to the perceptions of Indians which are less positive. Table 1. (b) perception on development governance show 67.8% of the Malay respondents believed that the quality of education of the all population has been improved by the government, but 50% of Indian respondents disagreed with that view, and the other 50% of Indian respondents agreed. In addition, 58.4% of Malay respondent views that the government has provided a better public services, but 68.2% of Indian respondents disagreed. It was found that 53.8% of the Malay respondents viewed that the government has provided good transportation system, but instead 68.2% of the Indian respondents disagreed.

Table 1

The perceptions on eight measured dimensions - economics, development, community, government service, program, politic, media, criminal and social problems governance

| Item | Ethnic | | | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|------------|
| | Malay | Chinese | Indian | Bumiputera |
| (a) Perception on Economic Governance | | | | |
| i. Economic problems have been improved. | 56.3% | 46.8% | 45.5% | 48.4% |
| ii. State prosperity is distributed fairly and equally. | 55.0% | 43.5% | 45.5% | 46.8% |
| iii. The government controls the price of groceries. | 58.5% | 40.3% | 50.0% | 54.3% |
| (b) Perception on Development Governance | | | | |
| i. The government improved the quality of education in the society. | 67.8% | 66.1% | 50.0% | 64.2% |
| ii. The government provides various public services. | 58.4% | 37.1% | 31.8% | 44.7% |
| iii. The public transport system is very good. | 53.8% | 44.3% | 31.8% | 53.2% |
| (c) Perception on Community Governance | | | | |
| i. People with variety of religions, cultures, languages and ethnicities was managed successfully. | 69.8% | 69.4% | 59.1% | 65.3% |
| ii. All Malaysians are given equal rights and conducts. | 64.4% | 37.1% | 36.4% | 58.1% |
| iii. The government employees are balanced in their ethnic groups. | 73.2% | 75.8% | 77.3% | 68.4% |
| (d) Perception on Government Service Governance | | | | |
| i. People receive good service from government offices. | 66.6% | 59.7% | 40.9% | 58.9% |
| ii. A variety of loan services is available to young entrepreneurs. | 76.8% | 80.6% | 40.9% | 63.8% |
| iii. The problem in my area was successfully and immediately resolved by the government. | 46.3% | 35.5% | 27.3% | 38.9% |
| iv. The welfare of the low income group is sustained by the government. | 51.5% | 40.3% | 31.8% | 51.6% |
| (e) Perception on Program Governance | | | | |
| i. The government organizes various programs | 63.4% | 74.2% | 68.2% | 56.8% |
| ii. Many young entrepreneurs are trained through state entrepreneurial programs. | 78.2% | 72.6% | 36.4% | 65.3% |
| (f) Perception on Politic Governance | | | | |
| i. Democracy in Malaysia works well. | 62.9% | 59.0% | 36.4% | 55.8% |
| ii. The people's representatives are put much effort to serve the people. | 51.4% | 38.7% | 36.4% | 44.2% |
| iii. State leaders drastically react on the extremists of the racial politics. | 53.8% | 45.2% | 18.2% | 53.7% |
| (g) Perception on Media Governance | | | | |
| i. Mass media in various languages is growing rapidly. | 76.7% | 59.0% | 45.5% | 66.3% |
| ii. Social media is free to report on the issue of government governance. | 58.1% | 40.3% | 45.5% | 54.7% |
| (h) Perception on Criminal and Social Problems Governance | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| i. The number of crimes has decreased | 51.9% | 48.4% | 40.9% | 51.6% |
| ii. Social problems are decreasing | 51.4% | 45.0% | 38.1% | 47.9% |
| iii. Corruptions are being eradicated | 57.4% | 34.4% | 18.2% | 48.4% |

Table 1. (c) perception on community governance shows that 69.8% of the Malay respondents agreed that the people of various religions, cultures, languages and ethnicities had been successfully managed by the government while 40.9% of Indian respondents disagreed. In addition, there are 64.4% of the Malay respondents believed that all Malaysians were given equal rights and conducts by the government but 63.6% of the Indian respondents disagreed. In the meantime, 77.3% of Indian respondents agreed that the government employees must be balanced with various ethnics while 31.6% of Bumiputera ethnic respondents disagreed. The findings indicate that Malays and Chinese perceived that the government has been successfully performed in a good governance of multi-ethnic society in Malaysia but only did not provide equal services to all ethnic groups especially Chinese and Indians.

Further, in the context of government service governance, the perception of the Malays is averagely better than the perception of other ethnic groups, especially Indians (Table 1. (d) perception on government service governance). The Chinese have a very positive perception in the matter of their economic interests. The findings in Table 4 show that 66.6% of the Malay respondents view that the society enjoyed good services from the government offices but 59.1% of Indian respondents disagreed. In addition, 80.6% of Chinese respondents agreed that various loan services for young entrepreneurs have been implemented by the government and 59.1% of Indian respondents disagreed. The findings also show that 46.3% of the Malay respondents think that the problems in their residential area have been successfully fixed by the government but 72.7% of the Indian respondents disagreed. 51.6% of Bumiputera respondents and 51.5% of Malay respondents view that the welfare of the low income groups is improved by the government while 68.2% of Indian respondents disagreed.

In the context of program governance, the results show that 74.2% of Chinese respondents agreed that various programs which were organized by the government have been conducted in their area while 43.2% of Bumiputera respondents disagreed. On the other hand, 78.2% of the Malay respondents viewed that many young entrepreneurs have been trained through the national entrepreneurship program while 63.6% of Indian respondents disagreed. This concludes that Chinese and Malay ethnic groups have a positive perception on the governance programs organized by the government compared to other Indian and Bumiputera ethnic groups who assumed that government programs are still less implemented in their area.

In the context of politics governance, the results show that 62.9% of the Malay respondents' views that the practice of democracy in Malaysia is very good but 63.6% of Indian respondents disagreed. Meanwhile, 51.4% of Malay respondents agreed that the politician representatives are persistent to serve the people while 63.6% of Indian respondents disagreed. The findings also show that 53.8% of the Malay respondents and 53.7% of Bumiputera respondents see that the national leaders are drastically taking action on political extremists but 81.8% of Indian respondents disagreed. Therefore, Malay ethnic groups have a positive perception on the political governance undertaken by the government compared to the negative perceptions among the Indians.

In the context of media governance, the results show that 76.7% of Malay respondents believe that the mass media in various languages are growing rapidly in this country while 54.5% of Indian respondents disagreed. Meanwhile, 58.1% of Malay respondents and 54.7% of Bumiputera respondents agreed that the social media is free to report on government governance problems in the country but 59.7% of Chinese respondents disagreed. This finding suggests that the other Malays and Bumiputeras have a good perception on media governance compared to the Chinese and Indians that are less favorable to this issue.

Table 1. (h) perception on criminal and social problems governance shows that 51.9% of the Malay respondents and 51.6% of Bumiputera respondents agreed that the number of crimes had been decreased substantially in their area but 59.1% of the Indian respondents disagreed. In addition, 51.4% of the Malay respondents viewed that social problems are also decreasing in their area but 61.9% of Indian respondents disagreed. 57.4 per cent of Malay respondents think that corruption is being eradicated by the government, but 81.8% of Indian respondents disagreed. Thus, the perception of the Malays on the criminal and social problems governance played by the government is much better than the Indians.

In summary, the findings of this study showed the perception of multi-ethnic society in Malaysia on the governance of development played by the government was entirely 'moderate'. This means there is still more aspects to be improved by the government in strengthening their governance. Although the role of governance is depending on the level and structure of government which are applied to a country (Pierra 2000), each level of the government has specialized jurisdiction as set forth in the national legislation. Failure in implementing effective governance will undoubtedly raise different perceptions and become a factor for less promising perceptions. If the government's governance is effective and efficient in safeguarding the interests of the people, then it will certainly bring a better perception of the government.

As for the perception of ethnic groups, the Malay community has the significant perceptions on government governance in most dimensions as measured than other ethnic groups. There are various significant factors that can be attributed to the developments, namely, the political background and state governments held by the Malays. Thus, the governance approach taken by the government may be more coherent and fulfilled the interests of the Malays (Ismail 2015) even at moderate levels only. The other relevant factors are that most civil servants who responsible for implementing this governance aspect at the grassroots level are the Malays. On top of that, the Malay ethnic group is said to enjoy certain advantage and privilege of implementing the government's governance.

The Indian community is seen as the lowest perceptions on the government governance due to its group which is quite left behind from the current development in the country. They feel discriminated of the country's development and possess unequal rights of the government's governance. Statistics in 2014 proved that 0.6% of Indians are at a hard poverty level compared to the Chinese with only 0.1%. The hard poverty among Malays is about 0.8%. The current poor Indians are more than Malays based on the ratio of the population. Many of those who are feeling discriminated with modernization are those who previously stayed at the estate and the poor group between generations of migrants to the city (Mohd Noor 2012). The group is said to inherit the poverty of the their previous generations and failed to change their lives. This condition also leads to the establishment of a group named Hindraf who is trying to fight and defend the fate of such marginalized groups.

The perception of Chinese ethnic groups on government governance is good in the inclusive matters that involve their economic importance and medium to low aspects. This

can be clearly seen in matters such as entrepreneur loaning and economic empowerment programs. These elements are seen to bring profits to their economies, and therefore they have a good perception. Due to their commercial beliefs (Ismail 2015). In the meantime, the Chinese community still feels the implementation of government governance does not give equal rights to the diversity of ethnic groups in Malaysia. They think that the Malays and Bumiputeras have more privileges from the government than any other ethnic groups. The Bumiputera group have the average and moderate perception, not too good nor too low. What is most noticeable is that government governance is seen as less effective in solving the problems that exist in their area because Sabah and Sarawak are slightly neglected in the modernization of the country.

Therefore, the study found that the perceptions towards government governance on development carried out by the government had a clear association with different ethnic groups. This is an evident where different ethnic groups see government governance from different perspectives, even though the role of governance played by the government is the same. Some ethnic groups believed that only certain ethnic groups enjoyed the advantages and disadvantages of today's government's governance. Other ethnic groups are claimed to be marginalized and continue to be discriminated. This 'negative' perceptions should be properly administered by governments to avoid any ethnic conflicts, and establishing good ethnic relations as well as strengthening the social cohesion that existed in Malaysia since years back. Social cohesion in Malaysia is not born naturally, but it is the result of the efforts of all ethnics in maintaining the harmony inherent in Malaysia over the years (Shamsul 2012).

This study also revealed the impact of development on the formation of the perception among Malaysian multiethnic society. This is because the society sees the government's delivery system to be the determinant factor in the successful development (Ismail et al. 2017). A development project can succeed if there is no corruption, abuse of power, or excessive bureaucracy. Thus, the majority of the ethnic groups in Malaysia wish to see the enhancement of government governance, avoid corruption, transparency, equality and continue to defend the interests of the people. If these elements were taken seriously by the government, it would certainly encourage for a better societal perception.

Conclusion

The multiethnic in Malaysia have different perceptions on the role of governance played by the government. There is a perception that sees government governance played well, while others see many other weaknesses in the governance aspect of government. This is an evidence that the Malay ethnic group has a fair and positive perception towards the role of government governance in all dimensions measured, while Chinese ethnic groups have a good perception in matters involving their economic interests. Perceptions of Indian ethnic groups are considered low on the governments in most dimensions measured. Based on these results, this study found that there were still a lot of the governance aspects need to be improved by the government to maintain the stability of the country, especially in establishing good ethnic relations. This is because the perceptions on governance have a very significant relationship with ethnic group differences in Malaysia. Good ethnic relations can ensure a harmonious social cohesion (Abdullah et al. 2016). Hence, social cohesion cannot be harmonized if the government fails to properly govern all the social dimensions in Malaysian multiethnic society (Shamsul 2012).

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