

A Comparative Study on the Socioeconomic and Political Conditions of Indian and Chinese Communities in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the socioeconomic and political status of the Indian and Chinese populations residing in Malaysia. The focus of this investigation has been limited to specifically analyse three domains: education, employment, and political representation. The variation in criteria employed for analysing the given circumstance might be attributed to the distinct perspectives of each group. According to Darin-Mattsson, Fors, and Kåreholt (2017), various approaches have been utilised to operationalize the concept of socioeconomic position. Education, social class, and income have been identified as the key determinants among these several factors. Hence, this study investigates the conditions of Indian and Chinese communities, taking into consideration the specific criteria outlined earlier. The analysis suggests that the Indian and Chinese groups are engaged in a situation of competition with the Malay majority. The Chinese community exhibits a significant presence and prominence in the realm of commerce and wealth accumulation, surpassing that of the Malay and Indian groups. The Indian community exhibits a higher prevalence of poverty in comparison to the Chinese community. Nevertheless, despite the implementation of the Malay reservation policy, both communities have demonstrated commendable progress in the areas of education, employment, and political engagement. Additionally, the government has shown a proactive approach in addressing the challenges and disadvantages faced by these communities.

Keywords: *Malaysia, Indian, Chinese, Minority, Malaysian Government, Education, Employment, Political Participation*

Background

The Chinese community has established a presence in Malaysia since the 15th century, particularly in Malacca. However, a significant influx of Chinese immigrants occurred during

the early 19th century due to the implementation of British policies. Before returning to their homes with their earnings, it was strongly encouraged for young Chinese men to dedicate a number of years to working as labourers in the mining industry in Malaysia. During the early twentieth century, there was a notable increase in the number of Chinese women engaging in travel, consequently leading to the establishment and subsequent growth of Chinese communities. As the population progressed, the community demonstrated its capacity to construct temples, educational institutions, and civic and political establishments. The Chinese Malays and other indigenous groups in China had limited interaction with the broader Chinese populace primarily due to their predominant residence in rural regions. The phenomenon of Chinese migration exhibited a comparable pattern in both the regions of Sabah and Sarawak.

According to Zakaria and Ibrahim (2022), Malaysia has experienced three significant waves of Chinese immigration. The historical origins of the settlement in the vicinity of Melaka can be traced back to over five centuries ago, during a period when Chinese merchants and young nobles associated with an imperial enterprise initiated their migration to this region. As a consequence of intermarriage with local inhabitants, a distinct community of Straits-born Chinese emerged. According to the historical account '*Sejarah Melayu*' by Tun Seri Lanang, it is documented that Hang Li Po, a princess from the Ming Dynasty, was transported from China to wed Sultan Mansur Shah of Melaka in the year 1459 CE. Upon the princess's arrival in Bukit Cina, a retinue of approximately 500 distinguished individuals, along with a contingent of two to three hundred handmaidens, were in attendance. The Chinese Peranakan community, alternatively referred to as Baba-Nyonya, is widely believed to have emerged through intermarriage between Chinese immigrants and the local populace (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022).

The second wave of Chinese migration to British-ruled Malaya occurred during the period spanning from the mid-19th century to the 1930s, as individuals sought improved living conditions and opportunities for advancement. The majority of contemporary Malaysian Chinese individuals can potentially trace their lineage to this particular influx of migration. During the period of British administration, a significant number of Chinese individuals migrated to Malaya, predominantly originating from the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong situated on the southeastern coast of mainland China. These individuals sought refuge in Malaya as a means to alleviate themselves from impoverished conditions. The presence of labour shortages in tin mines, elastic estates, and railway construction led to a significant influx of Chinese and Indian immigrants. The wave of migration to Malaysia was characterised by the arrival of numerous distinct Chinese subgroups, including Hokkien, Cantonese, and Hakka peoples. This particular wave is widely acknowledged as the largest in terms of migration. Although it was not uncommon for individuals sharing linguistic backgrounds to establish associations, it was more customary during that era for people to collaborate irrespective of their initial settlement or ultimate place of residence. Individuals who do not conform to or belong to a particular group, or who originate from a distinct geographical location, are commonly labelled as outcasts (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022).

The contemporary phenomenon observed in Malaysia involves the emergence of a third wave comprising individuals fluent in Mandarin from China. This wave is characterised by an increasing prevalence of individuals who are either married to Malaysian Chinese or belong to the affluent and white-collar segments of society. Since the mid-2000s, there has

been a noticeable increase in the number of Malaysian Chinese men entering into marital unions with non-Malaysian Chinese women originating from mainland China and Vietnam. In response to increasing political constraints and environmental pollution in China, affluent elites and white-collar households from the country have commenced relocating to Malaysia. Indeed, the majority of MM2H residents residing outside of Malaysia consist predominantly of Chinese nationals (Zakaria & Ibrahim, 2022).

In contrast, Indian immigrants who came in Malaysia more than a millennium ago introduced Hinduism and Islam to the region. The presence of 'Indianized' kingdoms in the region can be traced back 1,500 years (Hatin, et al., 2011), but a large inflow of Indian immigration began during the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth, corresponding with the rise of plantation economies under British administration. Furthermore, there was a large influx of forced labourers from India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh who were transferred to Malaysia particularly to work in the rubber plantations. The Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam groups from South India represented the majority of Indian migrants to Malaysia until the mid-nineteenth century, owing to Malaya's geographical proximity to South India. Additional people were hired to fill specific economic jobs, such as the construction and maintenance of railway networks. Malaysia has faced a difficult economic condition, with a major section of its population working in plantation labour vocations with no access to formal schooling (Teo, 2018).

According to Teo (2018), European planters in Malaya actively advertised and attempted to attract Indian individuals, which contributed significantly to the region's huge increase in Indian immigration. According to the findings of the study, untouchable or low caste Madrasi folks were regarded as the most satisfactory type of employees. The level of motivation displayed by these workers was lower than that of persons from the Northern Indian and Chinese cultures. The Indian labour shown tenacity in the face of low pay and difficult working conditions in the estates and plantations. The British colonial authorities considered them as obedient and well-behaved as well. Furthermore, the economic status and malnourishment of these Indian people of lower castes were issues. As a result, scholars and historians have argued that the workers in question lacked agency in the face of British dominance (Manickam, 2009); (Belle, 2015). Having such, the aforementioned labourers were viewed as lacking agency in protecting their own interests, particularly in light of recruiting difficulties and charges of mistreatment by European plantation owners and managers (Arasaratnam, 1979); (Chanderbali, 2008).

Population

Prior to independence from British colonial rule in 1957, Malaysia's demographic makeup, consisting of 6.3 million people, was as follows: Malays made up 49.8 percent of the population, Chinese made up 37.2 percent, and Indians made up 11.3 percent (Singh & Mukherjee, 1993). According to the 2020 census results, Malaysia's population has grown significantly, reaching an anticipated amount of roughly 32.4 million people. This indicates a significant increase above the recorded population of 28.3 million people in the 2010 census (www.mycensus.gov.my). According to the demographic analysis of the population under consideration, bumiputeras account for 69.4 percent of the available dataset, while those of Chinese and Indian origin account for less than 30 percent. This is in contrast to the findings of the 2010 census, which found that bumiputeras made up 67.4 percent of the entire

population, while Chinese and Indians made up around 32 percent. As a result, an average growth rate of 1.7 percent over a ten-year period is anticipated. Males account for 52.3 percent of the population, while females account for 47.4 percent, according to census data. In terms of ethnic composition, the bumiputera population accounts for 69.4 percent, while the Chinese community accounts for 23.2 percent, the Indian community accounts for 6.7 percent, and other ethnic groups account for 0.7 percent. According to the 2010 census figures, the bumiputera accounted for 67.4 percent of the total population, which totaled to 28.3 million people at the time. The Chinese population made up 24.6 percent of the total, while the Indian population made up 7.3 percent. Individuals from various ethnic backgrounds made up the population, with 0.7 percent belonging to unidentified ethnic groups (Mahmood, 2022). According to the results of the 2020 census, the demographic mix of non-Malaysian residents in the country stands at 2.6 million people, accounting for around 8.3 percent of the total population. Figure 1 elucidates the population distribution pattern in Malaysia across different parameters.

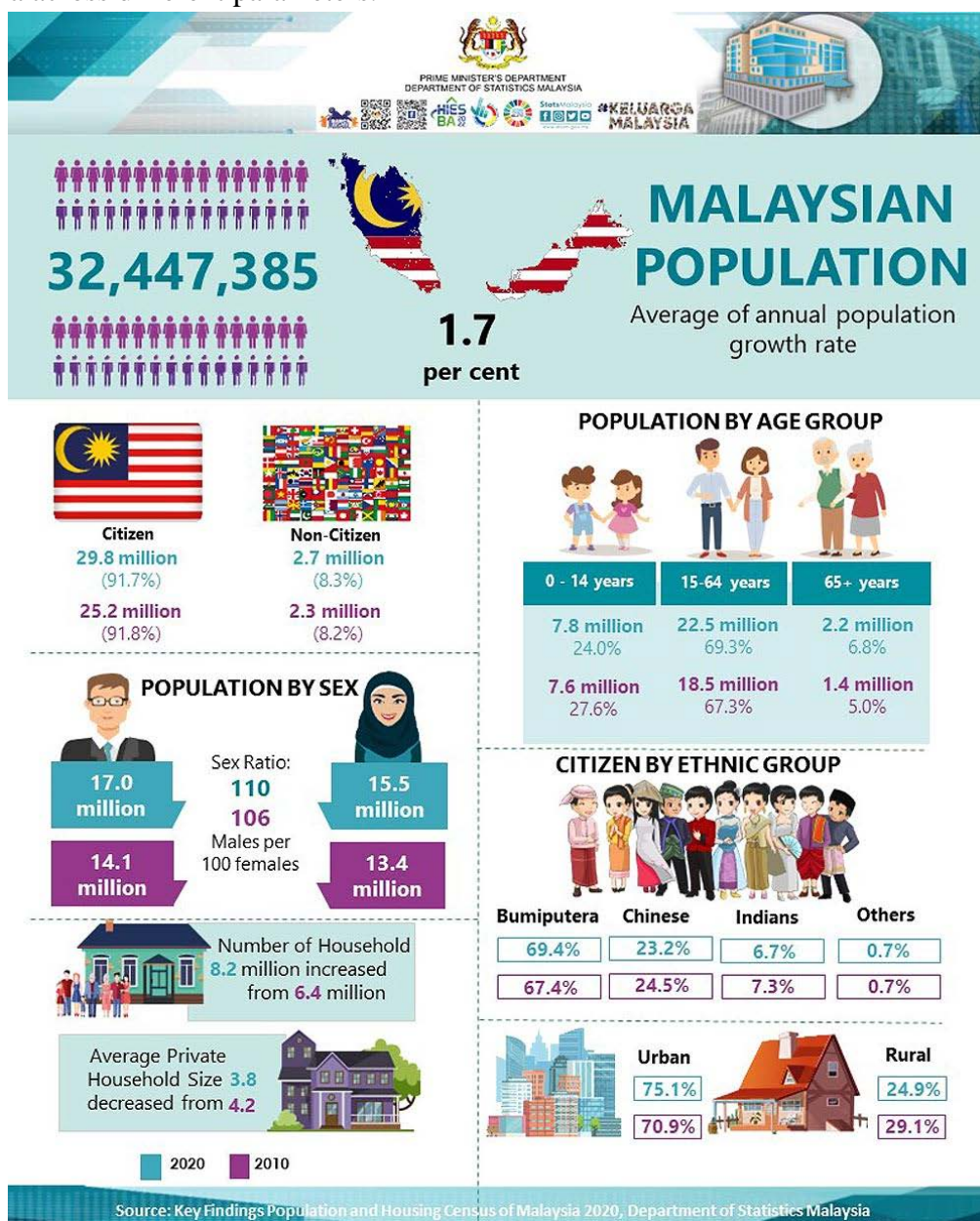


Figure 1: Malaysian Population Distribution and Ratio

According to the 2010 Census data, the population of East Malaysia was 5.72 million people, whereas the population of Peninsular Malaysia was 22.5 million people. Peninsular Malaysia is home to around 33% of Malaysia's population, although covering less than 40% of the country's total land mass and housing 79% of its citizens. Peninsular Malaysia spans 131,598 square kilometres (50,810.27 square miles). Since 1957, when the Chinese population constituted around 40% of the overall population, the proportion of the Chinese population in Malaya has decreased. In absolute terms, however, the Chinese population has more than quadrupled over this time, rising from 2.4 million in 1957 to 6.6 million in 2017, comprising both East and West Malaysia. Nonetheless, this expansion has been overshadowed by a fivefold increase in the Malaysian Malay population, which has risen from around 3.1 million in 1957 to 15.5 million in 2017. The Chinese ethnic community accounts for almost one-third of Malaysia's overall population. Hakka, Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, Mandarin, and Hokchui are the most often spoken languages in the context of language and religion. Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, and Confucianism are the most common religions observed. Despite the availability of Mandarin education in private Chinese schools, the majority of the Chinese people in the country speaks Hakka, Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese, and Hokchui. The Hokkien dialect is frequently spoken in Penang, although Cantonese and Hakka dialects are more generally spoken in Kuala Lumpur. Hakka is also used as a spoken language in the southern peninsula, as well as in Sabah and Sarawak, where Mandarin is also widely used.

According to the 2020 Census data, Muslims make for 63.5% of the entire population, while Buddhism accounted for 18.7%. Christians account for 9.0% of the population, Hindus for 6.1%, while Confucianism and Taoism account for 0.9%. Furthermore, 1.8% of people identify as atheists or have opted not to reveal their religious affiliation. The religious composition of the population in 2010 was as follows: Muslims made up 61.3% of the population, Buddhism 19.7%, Christians 9.2%, Hindus 6.3%, Confucians and Taoists 1.7% each, while the other 1.7% either classified as atheists or did not state their religious affiliation (www.mycensus.gov.my).

Sandhu (1969) estimates that at the time of Malaya's independence in 1957, the Indian population accounted for approximately 11% of the overall population, with Hindus accounting for roughly 80% of this demography. The composition of Indian communities has remained stable up to the present day. Following Malaya's independence in 1957, a considerable proportion of people of Indian heritage either departed or refused to become citizens, bringing the country's Indian minority population to an all-time high. According to Sandhu (1969), it is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of Indian immigrants who came in Malaya between 1824 and 1924, and more than 80 percent between 1925 and 1957, took the decision to return home. Malaysian population census data from 1957 to 1991 regularly documented the presence of Indian Hindu communities from many sub-categories, including but not limited to Tamil, Malayali, Telegu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Bengali, and others (Sandhu, 1969); (Loh, 2003). Since the Malaysian population census in 2000, the aforementioned categorisation has been discontinued. Since that time, Hindu subcategories in India have been classed as "Indian." Despite their inclusion as a merged category, the Malaysian population census from 2000 does not show the convergence of the Indian Hindu communities into a single collective. Endogamous marriage systems, occupational classes, caste structures, and religious practises are all contributing to the fragmentation of Indian Hindu communities

(Kent, 2005). According to Lee and Rajoo (1987), Malaysia has at least 53 officially registered caste associations (Lee & Rajoo, 1987). Ramasamy (1984) performed research in the mid-1980s that found that the majority of Indian participants believed Malaysia exhibited caste consciousness. Parental transmission perpetuates preconceived views, which include biases based on ethnicity, social level, and cultural background (Ramasamy, 1984).

In Malaysia, the fertility rates of Malay women are 40% higher than those of Indian women and 56% higher than those of Chinese women (Mahari, Othman, Khalili, Esa, & Miskiman, 2011). According to the CIA Factbook, the demographic composition of Malaysia has undergone substantial transformations since the 1960s, primarily due to the decrease in fertility and mortality rates. The total fertility rate (TFR) of Malaysia has experienced a decline over the years. In 1970, the TFR stood at 5 children per woman, which decreased to 3 in 1998, and further dropped to 2.1 in 2015. This decline can be attributed to various factors including enhanced educational achievements and greater involvement of women in the workforce, delayed marriages, increased adoption of contraceptive methods, and shifts in urbanization-related preferences regarding family size. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) exhibits higher levels within the Malay ethnic group, rural populations (predominantly consisting of Malays), individuals with lower socioeconomic status, and those with limited educational attainment. Malaysia's population is projected to experience continued growth over the next few decades, albeit at a declining rate, due to the substantial proportion of women of reproductive age, despite the observed decrease in fertility rates (The World Factbook, 2023).

According to Nor (2019), the average birth rate in Malaysia has decreased significantly since 2016. In particular, the rate has fallen from 18.5 per 1000 people in 2009 to 16.6 per 1000 population today. Since the beginning of 2019, there has been a perceptible decrease in female fertility rates, falling below the replacement criterion of 2.1 children per woman between the ages of 15 and 49, particularly among the Chinese and Indian ethnic minorities. According to a study conducted in 2014, the total fertility rate among Chinese ethnic and Indian groups was established at 1.4 children per woman. Based on 2015 statistics, it was discovered that the Malay ethnic group had a total fertility rate of 2.6 children per woman, specifically between the ages of 15 and 49. This particular event has highlighted the growing significance of the issue of the ageing population. In 2010, the shares of senior people in Malaysia's Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Bumiputera ethnic groupings were 12.2 percent, 7.9 percent, 7.3 percent, and 6.2 percent, respectively. Due to the conclusion, the key issues that require attention are social support, which encompasses characteristics such as senior people's living arrangements, healthcare services, health condition, and money (Nor, 2019).

Education

Education has always played an important part in the progress of every community. As a result, the Malaysian government has made enormous investments in education, resulting in a commendable overall literacy rate of 95 percent in 2021, as reported by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (uis.unesco.org). According to the institute, the educational rate for individuals aged 15 to 24 in 2019 is 96.8%. This statistic is further broken down by gender, indicating that males have an educational rate of 96.6%, while females have an educational rate of 97%. Similarly, the overall educational attainment rate among people aged

15 and up is 95%. Specifically, during the same period, the educational rate for males is 96.2%, while it is 93.6% for females. Similarly, the overall educational attainment rate for people aged 65 and older is 77.2%. Males have an educational attainment rate of 86.8%, while females have an educational attainment rate of 68.4%.

According to *globaleconomy.com*, Malaysia's literacy rate has averaged 89.25% from 1980 to the present, with a range ranging from 69.52% in 1980 to 95.08% in 2017. The male literacy rate is 95.8 percent, which is higher than the female literacy rate of 91.1 percent. Malaysians aged 20 and over who have finished some sort of tertiary education have increased from 16.1% in 2000 to 21.6% in 2010. Between 2000 and 2010, the Bumiputra community's population share increased significantly, rising from 16.1% to 22.1%. Similarly, the Chinese community had an increase in their population share, which increased from 16.5% to 21.1% before falling slightly to 19.3%. Females aged 15 and above have a higher proportion of individuals with certifications, diplomas, and degrees than their male counterparts. This discrepancy is 1.6% among Bumiputeras, 3.2% among Chinese, and 0.4% among Indians. According to the 2010 Report on Education and Social Characteristics of the Population, there existed a gender disparity among men in all main ethnic groups prior to the year 2000. It is crucial to highlight, however, that this disparity no longer exists.

According to Dr. Radzi's estimates, Malay students will make up around 93% to 94% of the student population in public schools by 2020. In contrast, the enrollment of Chinese students in government-run schools has decreased from 1.17 percent in 2010 to 0.73 percent in 2020. As a result, Chinese parents are less likely to enrol their children in public educational institutions. According to 2020 data, the proportion of Chinese pupils in private schools countrywide was 65.88 percent. Malays, including those from Sabah and Sarawak, made up 26.96 percent of the population, followed by Indians at 4 percent and other races at 3.17 percent, placing them second, third, and fourth, respectively (The Straits Times, 2020). During the 1970s, the Malaysian government launched a campaign calling for the development of public schools solely for the Malay community. As a result, a sizable number of Chinese parents choose to enrol their children in privately run Mandarin-language schools. However, according to the figures provided, Malaysia's minority educational ratio is relatively satisfactory.

Employment

According to the World Bank, Malaysia's unemployment rate in 2020 is projected to be 4.55%, up 1.24% from 2019. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia's official figures from January 2022, the unemployment rate was 3.1% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Based on a report published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, it was found that the poverty rate among the ethnic Chinese population in Malaysia was approximately 2.3% in the year 2016. This figure is comparatively lower than the national poverty rate of approximately 3.8%. Based on the report mentioned above, it is evident that the median income of households belonging to the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia was approximately \$2,000 in the year 2016. This figure surpasses the national median income, which stood at approximately \$1,800. Based on a report published by the New Straits Times, it has been observed that individuals of Chinese ethnicity exhibit a higher proportion of representation within the private sector and occupations that offer higher

remuneration. Conversely, there is a relatively lower representation of individuals of Chinese ethnicity within the public sector and occupations that offer lower levels of compensation.

According to Brown (1994), in 1957, the vast majority of Malays, 97.5%, were engaged in agriculture, primarily rice farming. The Chinese community, on the other hand, had a considerable presence in commerce and business operations, with around 66% of their people involved in such undertakings. Furthermore, the Chinese community accounted for 72% of the country's miners and manufacturers (Brown, 1994). According to 1969 data, the ownership distribution of firms was as follows: Malays held 2%, Chinese owned 22.8%, and foreigners owned 62%. The Chinese impact on the country's economy grew significantly in the years following independence. Following the May 13th race riots, revisions to the Constitution's "special rights" section and the New Economic Policy were made. As a result, the rate of growth has moderated slightly. Nonetheless, it is clear that the Chinese population remains the most prosperous and privileged community in modern times (Jomo, 2011).

In contrast, it is worth noting that before to Malaysia's independence in 1957, a substantial number of Indians were employed in the cultivation of rubber on plantations. Overall, the non-Chinese group's economic progress was restricted in compared to the Chinese community. This is due to the implementation of Bumiputera schemes and the closure of several rubber plantations. Anbalakan (2003) considers the government's decision to classify Indians with the more economically favoured Chinese minority to be inequitable. The paucity of resources and the concentration of low-wage occupations among Indians were cited as barriers to their advancement (Anbalakan, 2003). Despite the Malaysian government's transfer of 40% of national wealth to non-Bumiputera, Indian groups accounted for 1% of total wealth distribution. Based on data provided by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, it was observed that the poverty rate among the ethnic Indian population in Malaysia was approximately 4.9% in the year 2016. This figure surpasses the national poverty rate of approximately 3.8%. Based on the aforementioned report, it was found that the median income of ethnic Indian households in Malaysia in 2016 was approximately \$1,800, which aligns with the national median income of approximately \$1,800. According to Kuppuswamy's (2010) research, the proportion of Indians employed in the civil service has decreased significantly, falling from nearly 40% in 1957 to a mere 2% by 2007 (Singh K. , 2013). According to Ramakrishnan (2011), nearly 90% of persons serving in the armed forces identify as Malay. The Malay population accounts for 78% of the government workforce, whereas the Indian population accounts for a far lesser fraction of 4% (Singh K. , 2013).

According to the findings of the Malaysian Indian Congress's (MIC) social welfare unit, the Yayasan Pemulihan Social (YPS) indicates a significant level of success among the top quintile of Malaysian Indians as compared to the other sections of the community. Indigenous peoples in Malaysia have effectively worked with existing society structures, whether governmental or private, to gain access to help, improve their financial situation, and improve their overall well-being. The top quintile and the middle two quintiles have achieved upward social mobility. The Indian population has the greatest income discrepancy in comparison to other ethnic groups, which is exacerbated by the prevalence of a violent and gang-affiliated lifestyle. The Yayasan Pemulihan Social (YPS) identifies Indian marginalisation and the prevalence of fractured homes as important contributory causes (Malay Mail, 2015). In addition, the household income data by ethnicity represented in the

figure 2 shows that both ethnic minority groups in Malaysia have a respectable socioeconomic level inside the country.

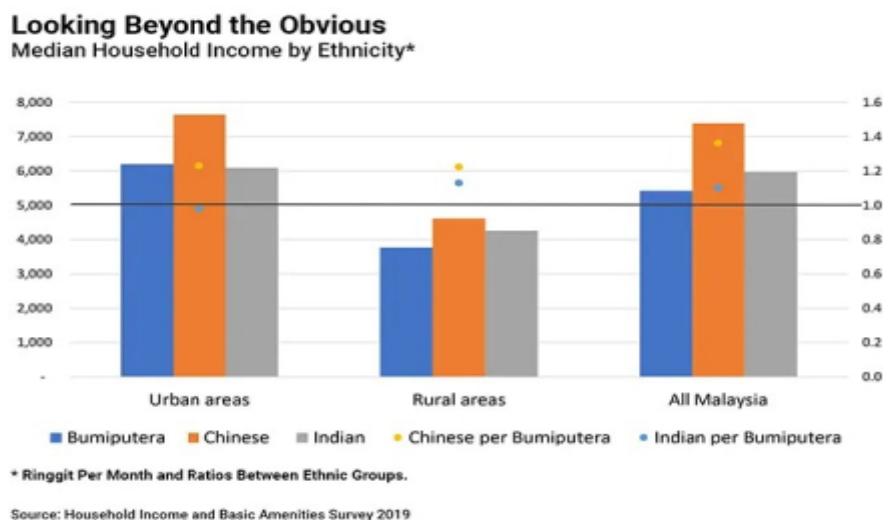


Figure 2: Household Income Data by Ethnicity

Chinese and Indian people are underrepresented in the public sector, particularly in the civil service, police, and military. The utilisation of the public service as a means to foster the development of a Malay professional and administrative elite has been observed over an extended period, dating back to the era of British colonial rule. However, these endeavours experienced a notable escalation following the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 (Khoo, 2005). The civil service has faced persistent criticism for its perceived inclination towards preferring Malays, whether through the implementation of quotas or other types of preferential treatment. Consequently, the level of non-Malay representation within the civil service exhibited a consistent decline. According to Woo (2015), there has been a decline in the representation of Chinese and Indians in the workforce from 18.8 percent and 15.7 percent in 1969-70 to 6.0 percent and 4.3 percent in 2009, respectively (Woo, 2015). This decline is believed to be influenced by the view that ethnicity has a role in determining recruitment and promotion opportunities (Aun, 2023). Based on the data obtained in 2022, it is evident that Malays constituted the predominant demographic within the public service, excluding the police and military, with around 77.5 percent of the total composition. The Bumiputera population of Sabah and Sarawak accounted for 12.1 percent, whereas the Chinese, Indian, and Orang Asli populations formed 5.7 percent, 3.8 percent, and 0.2 percent respectively (Aun, 2023). Both informal observations and scholarly surveys have identified these views as a significant factor influencing the preference of minority groups for private sector employment over public sector careers. This preference is influenced by various factors, including disparities in income (Wool, 2018). In research released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it is shown that only a small percentage of persons with Indian and Chinese ancestry have high-paying employment, with 10% of Chinese people and 5% of Indians, respectively.

Despite the fact that Malaysian Indians confront numerous hurdles, Lyngkaran and Kunaletchumy believe they are still in a favourable position. Based on available

data, they are currently in a relatively fortunate position in comparison to other Indian diasporas around the world. There are numerous registered Indian non-profit organisations, Hindu temples, government-funded Tamil radio and television stations, and various political parties with Indian representation at both the federal and state levels in Malaysia. It's also worth noting that the University of Malaya has established a prominent chair dedicated to Indian studies. In addition, there are a large number of officially registered non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Malaysia that are concerned with Indian issues. It is our job to embrace this opportunity and assume worldwide leadership of the Indian diaspora. The Malaysian Indian community has a unique chance to fill this position (Iyngkaran & Kunaletchumy, n.d.).

Malaysia's National Economic Policy (NEP) has been heavily criticised by academics and minority populations. The New Economic Policy (NEP) has considerably contributed to Malaysia's dramatic drop-in poverty rates, as proven by the various comments made in this regard. The graph below depicts Malaysia's poverty rate's significant drop from 1970 to 2009. In 1970, roughly half of Malaysia's population was classed as impoverished. The poverty rate has decreased significantly, falling from 52.4 percent in 1970 to 3.8 percent in 2009. Nonetheless, Bumiputera and other indigenous ethnic groups continue to have the highest poverty rate, while the Chinese ethnic group has the lowest poverty rate. Poverty among the Chinese people was recorded to be less than one percent in the mid-2000s.

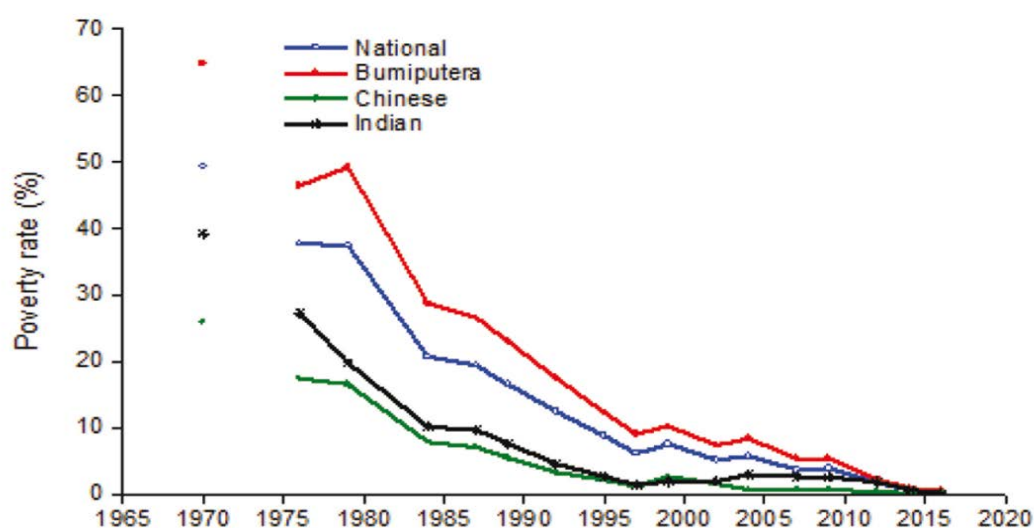


Figure 3: Ethnic-Based Poverty Reduction in Malaysia

Source: (Daud, 2021)

Political Participation

Malaysia adopted a confederal style of governance as soon as it earned independence in 1957. The British colonial government ceded authority to the country's ruling elite in 1957, and this practise was later reinforced by the post-independence federative alliance. The Alliance was formed as a political coalition by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) to represent Malaysia's three major ethnic groupings. According to an unwritten yet widely recognised consensus, people of Malay-Muslim heritage affiliated with UMNO, the main

party in the multiethnic consociational framework, should occupy the higher echelons of governmental power (Welsh, 2020). In the early 1970s, it was succeeded by the National Front, a larger organisation. Since its defeat in the most recent general election in 2018, the political party has maintained its position of dominance (Abdul-Hamid & Zawawi, 2023). Following the end of British colonial control, the Malay elite emerged as the dominating force in Malaysian politics, while elites from the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups established prominent roles as intermediaries for their respective communities. As a result, this system resulted in the formation of power hierarchies within the country.

Nonetheless, throughout the last three general elections, specifically in 2008, 2013, and 2018, there has been a distinct shift in mindset and tactics among the Chinese and Indian groups. Currently, voters prefer to support opposition parties rather than the BN (Barisan Nasional), despite the fact that the BN still includes the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) and MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association), which were traditionally supported by these voters. Annatury, Othman and Farzana (2018), have stated that the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) have failed to appropriately meet the concerns and interests of their respective populations. These political parties, on the other hand, have been noted to prioritise their own personal growth and development. Malaysian politics currently indicate a schism within the Malay community, whereas minority populations appear to be establishing a more united front (Annatury, Othman, & Farzana, 2018). With the exception of the 1969 general election, this is a departure from past electoral cycles. Political unification, often known as monopartism, is the process of combining all of the votes in a community into a single political party or bloc. This method is regarded as a sensible decision in highly politicised fights centred on ethical concerns. An ethnic group's cohesion is hampered by division or fragmentation, reducing its ability to engage in collective action and negotiate successfully (Huat & Chin, 2012).

The political quandary confronting the ethnic Chinese population centres around two competing goals: inclusion into the government and influence over the government. These two goals commonly intersect in a well-functioning democratic democracy. The extent to which an ethnic group is represented inside a coalition government closely correlates with the amount of influence that group has on the coalition as a whole. If the ethnic minority decides to withdraw its support, it has the ability to disrupt the government and eventually lead to its demise. The aforementioned occurrences, however, did not occur in Malaysia. Following the 1969 election, the MCA decided to leave the government, resulting in a substantial electoral setback for the ruling Alliance coalition. This result heightened existing racial tensions and worries, culminating in ethnic riots on the very day the party announced its withdrawal (Means, 1976). The occurrence of this event has created fear among the Chinese population. Following the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) march in 2007, Chinese Malaysians developed an awareness comparable to Indian Malaysians. They have realised that voting against the BN (Barisan Nasional) is more conducive to attaining their goals. To put it another way, reducing their community's influence within a government geared towards the Barisan Nasional (BN) would be more beneficial to their interests.

When the Chinese community unwaveringly supported the BN (Barisan Nasional), the BN's political strength increased, allowing UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) to endure the loss of support from ethnic minority groups. If the BN loses the Chinese people's support, it must recognise and address their concerns. In 1982, the Chinese education

organisation Dong Jiao Zong pledged its support to Gerakan, hoping that the latter would engage in more effective education policy negotiations with the BN administration. When the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration refused to change its education policies, the movement shifted to campaigning for a "two-coalition system." The goal was to form a second multi-ethnic coalition that would put pressure on the BN government and, if necessary, overthrow it (Gomez, 1996; Thock, 1994). Following the internal schism within the UMNO in 1987-1988, opposition parties banded together and won significant support from the majority of Chinese voters, led by former UMNO Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh (Khong, 1991). Although the united opposition was unable to deprive the BN of its two-thirds parliamentary majority, the outcome prompted the ruling coalition to address the ethnic minority's issues. As a result, Prime Minister Mahathir undertook "Vision 2020," an inclusive nation-building project, as well as various liberalisation measures in the fields of culture, education, and the economy (Loh, 2000; Gomez, 1996). Similarly, the Chinese community has successfully negotiated a variety of problems, such as lack of representation, uncertainty, and incidences of ethnic violence. It is worth noting that these difficulties are most prevalent when they are limited to the BN (Barisan Nasional) alliance. However, by embracing alternative political parties like as the PKR, PAS, and other Malay parties, the Chinese minority discovered a cooperative environment, driving a shift in objectives.

The Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) are the two main political parties in Malaysia that primarily represent the Chinese minority. The table that follows details their representation in Malaysia up to this point following their establishment. Lee Yok Fee contends that the narrative of Malay dominance has a substantial impact on the extent of Chinese involvement and reactions in Malaysia's political environment. Political participation of Malaysian Chinese people in Malaysia from 1970 to 1990 revealed a mix of persistent patterns and emerging dynamics. Voting patterns among Chinese voters show a clear trend towards backing opposition candidates. It is worth noting, however, that the political parties that comprise the Barisan Nasional administration continue to enjoy strong support from both the elite and Malay communities. Meanwhile, on March 8, 2008, Malaysia's political landscape saw a crucial turning point with the occurrence of what became known as the "political tsunami." Politics, it is believed, has switched its emphasis from communal centrality to a more multiethnic orientation.

Table 1: Chinese Representation in Malaysian Parliament

Year	Seats Won by MCA	Seats Won by DAP
1955	15	X
1959	19	X
1964	27	1
1969	13	13
1974	19	9
1978	17	16
1982	24	9
1986	17	24
1990	18	20
1995	30	9
1999	28	10
2004	31	12
2008	15	28
2013	7	38
2018	1	42

According to Denison Jayasooria, the Indian population in Malaysia has demonstrated strong political engagement, actively participating in both ruling parties and opposition factions. According to Jayasooria (2008), the political consciousness of the Indian population in Malaysia is noticeably elevated, as evidenced by Malaysians of Indian descent holding leadership positions in prominent civil society organisations such as NGOs, labour unions, human rights organisations, and women's rights campaigns.

According to Datu Seri Najib Rajak, Malaysia's former prime minister, while Malaysian Indians do not have a majority in any state or parliamentary seat, they do have the ability to have significant influence in the country's electoral processes. According to his argument, the proportion of Indians in the majority of constituencies might potentially serve as the deciding factor, giving them a significant role to play. Malaysia's political environment is distinguished by its ethnic-based political culture, which has resulted in the formation of around nine political parties with roots in the Malaysian Indian population. The aforementioned political parties are actively working to achieve their specific goals of protecting the rights of their different communities. However, in order to have a significant impact on the legislative system, ethnic parties that fight for minority groups frequently form coalitions with other minority parties that have similar interests or aims. The MIC has been viewed as an aristocratic body that has ignored the political interests of the bulk of Indian labourers since its inception (Supenor, 1983; Ampalavanar, 1981). Despite the government's predominance of Malay Muslims, Willford (2007) contends that Malaysian Tamils are feeling increasingly marginalised and are not actively rallying to solve this situation collectively. Because of the potential for major losses, there is a significant disincentive to organise working-class Tamils against the BN alliance, particularly among the middle-class demographic. As a result, the inequities between the various Hindu castes widened. As a result, despite the involvement of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in the Alliance cabinet, lower caste Indian groups continued to face political underrepresentation. As Lian (2002) points out, this scenario remained particularly over the significant period spanning the 1950s to the 1970s.

Currently, Malaysians of Indian heritage have chosen to abandon the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) in favour of joining multiracial political parties that they believe will better represent their interests within the parliamentary system. Denison Jayasooria emphasised the significance of this transition, noting that it marks a significant divergence from the traditional method of engaging in political party involvement based on racial considerations. According to the author, the number of Indian members of Parliament has increased following the 14th general election (GE14) compared to the total of 11 after the 2013 election. It is worth noting that only two of the 16 individuals are members of the MIC, an ethnic alliance that is a vital part of the Barisan Nasional (BN) administration. Denison (year) emphasised that the 14 Members of Parliament (MPs) represented the two main political parties in the Pakatan Harapan (PH) alliance, which now forms the newly established federal government. There are seven Members of Parliament from India who are members of the political parties PKR and DAP. Visnu (2013) identifies the absence of effective leadership inside the MIC as the key factor contributing to the development and expansion of political parties such as Hindraf, Human Rights Party (HRP), Indian Progressive Front (IPF), and People Progressive Party (PPP). According to Visnu (2013), there is a need for a revolution in this country's Indian

leadership's leadership mindset. The table below depicts the numerical representation of Indian-origin politicians.

Table 2: Indian Representation in Malaysian Parliament

Year	Number of Members
1955	9
1959	9
1964	7
2nd (after 1965)	6
1969	10
1974	6
1978	7
1982	4
1986	7
1990	10
1995	7
1999	8
2004	12
2008	12
2013	13
2018	16
2018 (after 2018)	15

The political transition noticed in the Chinese and Indian groups is consistent with the findings of a 2012 Asian Foundation survey on Malaysia's younger generation's political opinions. When it comes to political issues, a sizable section of the youth population appears to use a non-religious or non-ethnic viewpoint. According to the findings of Aristo's (2020) study, a majority of 71% of young voters prefer to support political candidates affiliated with parties that they perceive as representing the collective interests of all Malaysians, rather than being motivated by sentiments associated with a specific ethnicity or religion. Furthermore, the younger demographic is more aware of and concerned about the overall state of the economy, including issues such as unemployment, inflation, and related difficulties. Nonetheless, cronyism and corruption within the ruling body remain a source of concern for around 60% of the younger generation (Sudin, 2017).

Conclusion

The above assessment of minorities' advancement in Malaysia in terms of education, employment, and political representation reveals both positive and negative developments. The socioeconomic position of Malaysia's Indian and Chinese communities varies significantly. Indian Malaysians come from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and work in a wide range of professions including engineering, computer technology, healthcare, and numerous trades and services. It is important to recognise the presence of wealthy individuals and economically prospering parts of Malaysia's Indian population. Chinese Malaysians, on the other hand, have outperformed other ethnic groups in Malaysia in terms of socioeconomic metrics. They frequently work in a variety of industries such as business, trade, manufacturing, and services. Chinese Malaysians have a substantial presence in the

private sector, which includes multinational firms, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and family-owned businesses. When compared to the Malay population, the underrepresentation of Indians and Chinese in political leadership and decision-making positions may have ramifications for their ability to effectively advocate for their interests, but still the data presented above has positivity since these group have ability to communicate and negotiate their rights from different means.

The condition of Indians and Chinese in Malaysia has been marked by historical inequities and problems faced by specific groups. However, it is recognised that these communities have achieved noteworthy successes and economic prosperity in a variety of sectors. The one topic that is frequently brought up in Malaysia is the government's Affirmative Action Plan, which was implemented to improve the socioeconomic standing of Malays particularly. It is pertinent to provide a concise overview in order to elucidate the socioeconomic and political conditions of Indian and Chinese communities in Malaysia. The poverty rate among Malays was 70.5 percent in 1957, whereas the rates for Chinese and Indians were 27.4 percent and 35.7 percent, respectively. The discrepancy lasted until 1970, but with a narrower margin, as Malays (64.8 percent) were more likely to be poor (39.2 percent) than Chinese (26 percent) and Indians (0.4 percent). In 1967, the household incomes of Chinese-Malays and Indian-Malays in Peninsular Malaysia were recorded as 2.47 and 1.95, respectively. Even after affirmative action measures were implemented, significant divisions in higher education, high-level employment, and property ownership persisted. The University of Malaya, Malaysia's sole school of higher learning in 1970, displayed an ethnic diversity that mirrored the country's general population. The student body was made up of 40.2% Malays, 48.9% Chinese, and 7.3% Indians. However, it is worth mentioning that certain academic fields at the university had a disproportionately low enrollment of Malay students. A breakdown of the distribution of Malay students across various fields of study among the 493 graduates reveals that 22 studied sciences, 1 pursued medical study, 1 pursued engineering, and 15 pursued agricultural studies. Higher-level occupations were similarly impacted by racial disparities. Malays made up 52.7% of the overall population in 1970, but their participation in managerial and administrative posts was just 22.4%. Malays made up 39.3 percent of the civil service workforce.

According to the data, Malays were underrepresented in positions of high authority, and their possibilities for promotion were mostly dependent on work in the public sector. In 1970, Malay ownership in limited companies based in Peninsular Malaysia accounted for only 1.5 percent of total share capital ownership. Individuals of Chinese and Indian heritage, on the other hand, owned 23.7 percent of the share capital, while foreign interests owned the majority (62.1 percent). The country's socioeconomic gaps affected the design of Malaysia's affirmative action policy. The implementation of affirmative action in Malaysia coincided with the development of numerous new educational institutions, which was spurred by the country's current lack of higher education facilities. As a result of the aforementioned advancements, university administrations were consolidated, admissions quotas specifically targeting Bumiputera students were implemented from the start, and educational institutions exclusively catering to the Bumiputera community were established at both the tertiary and postsecondary levels. The second factor to consider is that, unlike apartheid-era South Africa or India, Malaysia's labour markets did not exhibit a systematic tendency to foster intergroup

conflict, despite the fact that certain groups faced disadvantages or restrictions in terms of employment opportunities.

In order to better effectively handle the socioeconomic concerns that are experienced by Malaysia's Indian and Chinese populations, it has been recommended that Malaysia should explore introducing merit-based development plans in addition to the target-based approach that is already in place. This would be done in order to combat the challenges that are currently being faced. There has been some progress made towards the goal of achieving equilibrium and parity among the various racial and ethnic groupings. At this juncture, it is of the utmost importance to encourage every group to work hard in order to get the benefits that are rightfully theirs. The maintenance of the quota system cannot be rationalised from either an international or an Islamic point of view because it violates universally accepted rules.

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