

Policy Fairness in National Integration: Reactions of the New Generation

Sulaiman Md. Yassin¹, Dzuhailmi Dahalan^{1*}, Haslinda Abdullah¹, Ismi Arif Ismail¹, Azimi Hamzah¹,
Nobaya Ahmad¹, Fazilah Idris², Wendy Yee Mei Tien³ and Serit Banyan⁴

¹Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

²Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

³Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

⁴Taylor University College, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the reactions of the Malaysian youth regarding fairness of the national policy towards the inculcation of national integration. The extent to which national policy adopted for the sake of social harmony and multi-ethnic youth's points of view were measured using a survey instrument with alpha value of .831. A total of 600 respondents were involved in this study. Students from secondary schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Klang Valley were selected at random. The study found a positive reaction shown among the youth in Malaysia in relation to the practice of a fair policy towards strengthening national integration. The study also found that respondents' propensity to assess positively or otherwise of fairness in terms of the practice of policy towards national integration had no direct relationship with a number of selected demographic variables studied. In sum, the reaction of the new generation in Malaysia to conduct of public policy needs to be scrutinized by the government so that the objective to strengthen national integration can be achieved.

KEYWORDS: Policy, Justice policy, National integration, Reaction of the youth, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Implementation of a policy is very attractive to all levels in the community. Ahmad Atory (2008) stressed that policy development is a process or series of actions or decisions by the government that is designed to solve public problems, whether real or imaginary. Scholars like David Easton, regards the policy as a result of government activities. Anderson (2000) also describes the implementation and development of public policy associated with the knowledge of political behavior and government action. Essentially, the policy is designed with a specific agenda and goal. Thomas (2007) saw public policy as whatever the government preferred to do something or does not want to do something. Thus, public policy is a series of actions enacted by political actors as the Prime Minister, Cabinet ministers, political elites and administrators (Ahmad Atory, 1998).

Goals in Policy Development

Government plays an important role in determining the national development policy. Musgrave (1973) highlighted three main functions of government, namely the function of the provision, distribution and providing stability. In enhancing national integration, the government needs a policy framework (public policy) that is ideal. Policies designed should be cognizant of the needs of majority, without alienating the minority needs, but it can be considered as belonging and highly regarded by all (Dzuhailmi, et al., 2011). Ahmad Atory and Malike Ahmad Brahim (2004) describes the implementation of public policy is for the purpose of unity, racial integration in the economics, social, education and development.

The Government has formulated and given emphasis on some policy or policies in the field of socio-economic development leading to national unity and integration such as the New Economic Policy, National Education Policy, the National Cultural Policy, the National Development Policy, National Vision Policy and the National Social Policy (Dzuhailmi, et al., 2009). The New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1971, for example, had explicit goals to achieve national unity and national integration through two strategies. First, reduce and eventually eradicate poverty by raising incomes and increasing employment opportunities for all Malaysians regardless of race. Second, is to restructure society to create economic balance between the races in Malaysia and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function.

The policies, national development strategies and objectives are clearly stated in the Long Term, Medium Term and Short Term Plans. For example, the NEP (1971-1990) was embodied in the First Outline Perspective Plan (OPP1), the National Development Policy (1991-2000) in the Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2), while the

*Corresponding Author: Dzuhailmi Dahalan, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia,
e-mail:dzuhailmi@gmail.com

National Vision Policy (2001-2010) was stated in the Plan Long Term Perspective Plan (OPP3). Although there are pessimists who possess the view that public policy like the NEP, for example, failed to meet its target, but in general, the content and the implementation of this policy and other public policies previously implemented contributed to the prosperity and harmony of a multiracial society in Malaysia.

Reaction of the New Generation: Problem Statement

Implementation of laissez-fair policies were introduced by the British, then continued government after independence, has been seen to successfully contribute to the advancement of the economy, but the social imbalances that can not be solved in a multiracial society through this policy had dragged the country to the race riots of May 13, 1969. According to Ahmad Atory (2008), a problematic policy often leads to a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction of a segment of society that requires correction or clarification.

Inadvertently, the implementation of policies does have a substantial impact on social balance. According to Mohd Noor Mansor (2005) racial conflicts that occurred in May 13, 1969, the Kampung Rawa and Kampung Medan incidents in 1977 and 2001, were due to imbalances in development and governance, inequality between races and regions, urban poverty and the exclusion of people from government service. Lately, what is worrying, opposition to government policy is seen more predominantly in the younger generation. They are the majority, and bear a significant influence in the success of government policy or policies.

Asnarulkhadi (2009) stated in demographics, youth who are categorized as individuals who are in the 15-40 year age group is significant in terms of numbers and if translated into a source of energy, youth positively influence the development of the country both in terms of politics (voters), social (unity) and economic (human capital). Since youth are the majority population of Malaysia (Mohd. Jamil, 1994), the impact of the implementation of a policy remains close to their hearts. The Statistics Department of Statistics Malaysia showed in 2008 out of 27.2 million population of Malaysia, a total of 11.26 million (40.6%) were youth (Malaysia, 2008). The youth has increased at an average rate of 2.4 per year from 9.85 million in 2000 to 11.10 million in 2005.

When a public policy is formulated, the effects of its implementation would be focused on the youth in the near future, although not necessarily at the present time. In a national survey involving 1,508 respondents, there is a positive development, which found that 36 percent of the youths in Malaysia confirmed that they “sometimes” discuss current issues and government policies and 11 percent say that they talk about current issues “all the time”. The study also found that young people aged 30-35 years showed a high awareness of current issues and development of public policy as compared to others of younger age (National Youth Survey, 2007).

Dzuhailmi *et al.*, (2009) stated that the Hindraf group riots in the capital Kuala Lumpur in 2008 felt that there was discrimination of minority ethnic groups. Besides the incident, the dispute between the races in Kampung Medan in 2001, are some unhealthy examples that involved the youth in Malaysia. Recently, a national issue that also involved dissatisfaction among the younger generation is the University College Act 1971 (AUKU 1971), the Government Education Loan Fund (PTPTN) and the Solidarity (*Bersih*) assembly. Issues that received wide coverage in the media indicate signs that a new generation do react against the implementation of policies and decisions perceived as negatively affecting the youth.

Ahmad Atory and Malike study (2004) found that the national government had failed in the fair distribution of national wealth among the people regardless of race, religion and region. Assessment on specific variables under the study involving civil servants (52.6 per cent of respondents) disagreed with the statement that the government of Malaysia today has managed to distribute national wealth fairly, regardless of race, religion and region compared to 47 percent among respondents who agreed. The survey, conducted between the years 2003-2004 involved most of the civil servants who had served less than six years, which if evaluated based on employment trends in the current year are likely to be respondents in the study youth group.

Random analysis of current issues in recent years reflects the reactions among the new generation towards the conduct of public policy in Malaysia. The crucial question and main focus is how does the new generation view current government policy? Ahmad Atory (2008) concluded that the policy reviews in Malaysia are more descriptive, centered on the history and the cause and effect, as well as rarely holistic in nature, and more focused to specific areas. He took samples such as economic policy is viewed from the perspective of the economy, education policy is seen from a political perspective, as well as other policies such as social policy, science, environment and so on. However, researchers interests in policy studies are different from each other. Some assess the formulation of the policies themselves, while the rest examine the effects of a policy.

METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative methods. Data was collected using questionnaires that were filled by the respondents. A purposive sampling was used in selecting respondents, involving a total of 600 respondents. Two categories of youths were involved from selected secondary schools and higher educational institutions around the

Klang Valley. Sample selection criteria took into account demographic factors such as location of educational institutions. The field studies took six months, between October to March 2011. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to measure the extent to which the adoption of national policies in the eyes of youth. Independent t-test and one-way ANOVA, were used to see whether there were significant differences on the fairness of national policy based on a number of selected demographic variables.

SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

Selected demographic profile of the respondents were explained by gender, age, ethnicity, religion, residence when raised and parents' educational background. Of the total, 40.2 percent of respondents were males while the rest (59.8%) were female. Respondents were divided into two age categories. The majority of respondents (52.5%) were early youth and the rest (47.5%) in the mid-aged youth group. The percentage of ethnic sample by Bumiputera and non Bumiputera categories was nearly balanced under which was represented a 58.0 percent Bumiputera and 42.0 percent of non-Bumiputera. Respondents' religious profiles represented the religion of Islam (58.0%), Buddhists (19.7%), Hindu (10.3%), Christians (9.0%) and other (3.0%). Place of residence response showed that 55.3 percent of the respondents grew up in urban areas while 44.7 per cent were raised in rural areas. Meanwhile, parents' educational background of the respondents showed that the majority of their parents had educational background at the secondary level. Table 1 summarizes the findings of the demographic profile of respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=600)

Background		Percentage
Gender	Man	40.2
	Female	59.8
Age	Early youth (14-19 years)	52.5
	Mid-age youth (20-25)	47.5
Ethnic	Bumiputera	58.0
	Non-Bumiputera	42.0
Religion	Islam	58.0
	Buddha	19.7
	Hindu	10.3
	Christian	9.0
	Other	3.0
Place grew up	City	55.3
	Rural	44.7
Education the highest maternal	Higher education	16.9
	Secondary education	61.5
	Primary education	21.6
Education highest parental	Higher education	23.8
	Secondary education	57.3
	Primary education	18.9

Youth Perception of the National Policy Fairness

Level of respondents' views on fairness of the policy was measured using a Likert scale, (5) Strongly Disagree, (4) Disagree, 3 (Not Sure), (2) Agree and (1) Strongly Agree. This perception was further divided into low, medium and high mean scores of each variable of the fairness of the policy as in Table 2.

Table 2: The Determination of the Perception of the Policy Fairness

Level	Mean
Low	1.00-2.33
Medium	2.34-3.66
High	3.67-5.00
<i>The maximum scale – a scale of minimum</i>	
<i>3 class intervals =1.33</i>	

A total of 10 items related to policy fairness had been presented to the respondents. Descriptive analysis (Table 3) found that the majority of respondents gave a positive response to the national policy of fair practice. Nine items that measured positive policy fairness showed high mean scores between 3.67- 5.00. The positive response of the respondents to policy fairness was evidenced by low mean scores (1:00 to 2:33) on a negative item on the “government to ensure that the economic gap between ethnic groups is not significant” [$M = 1.9867$]. The majority of respondents had denied the statement referring to the lack of commitment in the government’s policy to reduce economic disparities between ethnic groups.

The findings of the studies are consistent with studies by Mohd Fuad and Junaidi (2012) who found that youths want their needs to be met in all aspects, especially the economic, social, spiritual, political freedom and the right-to-be heard. Their studies of youth views on socio-economic development in selected Kuala Lumpur parliamentary constituencies supports the aspirations the government and found that the majority of respondents appreciated the 1Malaysia concept espoused by the administration of Prime Minister Dato’ Seri Najib Tun Razak. Past research also indicated a positive perception of the policies adopted in the government being recognized among minority youth in Malaysia that representing the 8 percent of Malaysia’s population of 28 million (Sarjit *et al.*, 2011).

In this study, the adoption of a just national policy has been and is being felt among the young. The majority of respondents acknowledged that fair opportunity is provided by the government to multi-ethnic society in Malaysia especially among the young. Fair policy and practice is recognized as a cause for the existence of a country’s national integration. Thus, the degree of consensus among respondents as shown in the practice of national policies also translate into harmony in inter-ethnic relations that is taking place in Malaysian society today. Table 3 summarizes the findings of the respondent’s overall perception of national policy fairness.

Table 3: Distribution of Mean and Standard Deviation of the Youth Perceptions of Fairness Policy (n=600)

Bill.	Variables	Mean	S.D
1.	Development enjoyed by all levels of the multi-ethnic groups	4.19	.898
2.	Scholarship awards should be based on merit	3.78	1.131
3.	Policies RMK-10 fair to improve the socio-economy	4.03	.854
4.	Malaysia provides a fair chance to all ethnic groups	4.06	1.030
5.	Fair distribution of wealth among all ethnic groups	3.90	1.044
6.	Employment opportunities are guaranteed in this country for all ethnic groups	3.89	1.026
7.	All basic needs are met regardless of ethnicity	4.18	.930
8.	Government policies to reduce economic disparities between ethnic groups is not significant **	1.9867	.91354
9.	Government programs to encourage the involvement of multiple ethnic groups	4.17	.872
10.	National legislation does not favour any ethnic group	4.06	.967

** Negative item

Analysis of the perceptions of respondents according to age category found significant differences between early youth with mid-age youth group, in which mid-aged youth [$M = 3.8821$, $SD = .46390$] gave a more positive perception of policy fairness in practice than early youth [$M = 3.7727$, $SD = .51415$; $t(600) = -2726$, $p = .005$]. Since the mid-age group of the youth surveyed are among the university students, researchers looked at the possibility of ethnic factors whether the environment of open competition had provided an excellent opportunity for the members to analyze the extent to which government policy against the practice of fairness toward early youth in the light of more limited opportunities. In a past study, early youth (15-19 years) was different from mid-aged youth aged 20 to 25 years in the level of emotional development, knowledge, mental development, maturity and in the way of thinking (Mohammad Rezal *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the relationship of fairness and public policy towards national integration in this study showed a more rational perception among the youth mostly caused by the set of given advantages available to them.

The findings, however, found no significant difference on respondents’ perceptions of fairness in terms of the practice of policy according to the ethnic factors Bumiputera [$M = 3.8557$, $SD = .43539$] and non-Bumiputera [$M = 3.7817$, $SD = .56221$; $t(600) = 1816$, $p = .070$] and place of residence in which the respondents grew up, in the city [$M = 3.8033$, $SD = .53727$] and rural [$M = 3.8511$, $SD = .43287$; $t(600) = -1180$, $p = .239$]. Just policy practices in this study were seen to be more rational across ethnic lines towards strengthening national integration and clearly took into account the interests of the respondents according to ethnic categories and place of residence.

Ahmad Atory (2009) defined the policy problem as a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among segments of society where corrections or clarifications are needed. In this study, comparative analysis using independent t-test across demographic factors showed that respondents positively admitted that the fair policy was not seen only as a reflection of the process towards national integration, but in practice translated well among ethnic groups. Table 4 conclude the findings of respondents’ perceptions of fairness towards national integration policy based on selected demographic factors.

Table 4: Comparison of Perception of the Policy Fairness according to Selected Demographic Factors (n=600)

Profile	n	Mean	S.D	t	p	
Age	Early youth	315	3.7727	.51415	-2.726	.005
	Youth mid	285	3.8821	.46390		
Ethnic	Bumiputera	348	3.8557	.43539	1.816	.070
	Non-Bumiputera	252	3.7817	.56221		
Place of Residence	City	332	3.8033	.53727	-1.180	.239
	Rural	268	3.8511	.43287		

One-way ANOVA were used to determine whether there were significant differences on respondents' perceptions of fairness towards national integration policy based on the profile of parents' educational backgrounds. Analysis found no significant differences on the perceptions of respondents in all three categories of education, whether based on mothers' educational background [$F(600) = 1.105, p > .05$] and fathers [$F(600) = 1.253, p > .05$]. This means that differences in parents' educational background at all levels, does not affect the pattern of differences in respondents' views on the practice of fairness policy towards national integration. Table 5 summarizes the findings of respondents' views on fairness policy toward national integration based on differences in parents' educational backgrounds.

Table 5: Comparison of Perceptions of Fairness Policy Based Educational Background of Parents (n=600)

Profile	n	Mean	S.D	F	p	
Mother's education	Higher education	101	3.8386	.47370	1.105	.332
	Secondary education	368	3.8019	.51535		
	Low education	129	3.8752	.44512		
Father's education	Higher education	141	3.8461	.44232	1.253	.287
	Secondary education	340	3.7944	.53436		
	Low education	112	3.8714	.42879		

The Association of Parental Educational Background with Respondents' Perception Patterns

Table 6 displays the results of Pearson correlation performed to understand the relationship between parents' education variable pattern with respondents' views on policy fairness towards national integration. Analysis showed no significant correlation between parents' educational background ($p > .05$) with the pattern of respondents' views on policy fairness towards national integration. The findings also indicates the tendency of respondents to assess positively or otherwise regarding the practice of fairness policy towards national integration had no direct relationship with educational backgrounds of their parents.

Table 6: Association of Parental Education Background Factors with Respondents Perceptions

Selected Demographic	r	p
Mother's education	.028**	.493
Father's education	.011**	.788

** : Significant correlation at the level of significance $< .05$

Conclusion

Measurement of policy fairness is relative in terms of the issues discussed. In the context of the study, policy fairness from the perspective of the respondents was relatively associated with the issue of national integration. The findings have shown positive support among the youth in Malaysia in relation to the practiced fairness in national integration policy. The study found at least two factors caused the prevalence of this support. First, youth have the correct information on national policy. Second, the existence of fair government policy towards ethnic integration was felt amongst them. Discussion of fairness towards national integration policies were believed to have links to the agenda of youth's thinking. Barbara (1996) stated that there are four stages in the process of evolving an agenda, they being a recognition issues, adoption of issues, priority of issues and maintenance of issues. In the context of the

study, the researchers are quite certain that the agenda of the respondents regarding their perceptions of fairness on the issue of national integration policies did involve the levels specified. A rational assessment at each stage had led to a positive perception of fairness in national integration policies across socio-demographic profiles of respondents. Overall, the study found that the adoption of national policies towards integration can be considered fair and satisfactory in the eyes of youth groups studied. In one way, this finding augurs well for national integration and the future of Malaysian society.

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