

## **Subtheme 2 *Global Citizenship and Social Resilience***

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## **Social Cohesion in the age of diversity: The Idea and Policy Challenge for Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The trauma of the ethnic riot of May 1969 has been haunting Malaysia's social psyche. The desire to rebuild the ruptured ethnic relations is expressed in 'national unity,' a concept that has become a national mantra. In the immediate post-1969 (1969-1974) intense efforts were created and implemented to achieve the singular idealized 'national unity' objective. However, the economic development and political stability Malaysia enjoyed for decades up until the new millennium brought about a rethinking of the notion of 'national unity with the establishment of a National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) in 2013. The NUCC redefined the notion of 'national unity' based on a framework of Shamsul's Tri-Concept that 'national unity' is not a singular concept but constitutes of "Unity (desired), Cohesion (achieved), Reconciliation (to pursued)." Based on this new reconceptualization, the Malaysian government began constructing a National Unity Index (IPNas) study, first in 2018 and then in 2022. This index is called unity because cohesion and reconciliation are rubrics of unity intertwined in a host society (Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China etc.) which differs from the settler's society experience (such as Australia, New Zealand, USA, and Canada). The current study was conducted in thirteen states and three federal territories with added criteria: adopting ethnic ratio according to state census population, measuring each state's cohesion level, and assessing family's perspective on unity. For a family, the definition for survey eligibility is a family with a minimum

of two or three household members; father, mother, and youth of 15 years old or a single parent with youth. IPNas 2022 maintains the Shamsul Tri-concept of Unity, Cohesion, and Reconciliation, as the framework, with each domain measuring the national ethos, social cohesion, social deficits, cross-ethnic, social relation, level of ethnicization, ethnic boundary, and governance. The Shamsul Tri-concept works in tandem with Mills's "sociological imagination" that crucially addresses the structure, history, and biography that defines a society. This study uses Partial Least Square Equation Modelling to build a model connecting the tri-concept and the domains above. Despite pandemic Covid19, the total number of respondents for this study is 28,613, with a margin of error of less than 5%. The result of IPNas 2022 reveals that the national unity level is 0.629 and shares the same moderate scale as IPNas 2018 (0.567) with a slight increment of 0.062. There are six dimensions of social cohesion results described using a descriptive statistic, and they show a significant level of cohesiveness, namely togetherness (90%), participation (88.7%), equality (83.6%), and recognition (81.6%). In contrast, legitimization (79.7%) and inclusivity (79.6%) slightly reach an 80% level of cohesiveness. Overall, the cohesion level among multiethnic societies is tolerable amidst pandemics and instability in the Executive Branch, followed by unemployment risk. The paper presents the origin, history, process, and result of the latest IPNas 2022.

*Keywords: Index study, unity, cohesion, reconciliation*