

# The Governance of a Multi-Ethnic Nation: Its Secrets to Success

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**Abstract.** The governance of a multi-ethnic country spells many challenges and difficulties. Tunku Abdul Rahman, or more popularly known as the Father of Independence in Malaysia nonetheless has managed to overcome all these challenges and difficulties in uniting the people to bring his country to independence in 1957. This paper aims to identify the secrets of his success based on several documentations such as his speeches made during his reign as the Prime Minister (PM), his personal recollection of events after retiring as the PM and people's (his close aides) opinions of him. These documents were analyzed qualitatively using Nvivo V.9. Based on the results of the analysis, it is clear that Tunku's approach was based on his firm grassroots actions and beliefs of celebrating unity in diversity.

**Keywords:** Political governance, Multi-ethnic society, Leadership.

## 1. Introduction

Looking at the history on the formation of the Independent Malaya and later Malaysia, the road to independence was not easy. The people came from different ethnic backgrounds, different parts of the world, different cultures, and had different languages, religions, socio economic backgrounds, interests, needs and want. But how did Tunku Abdul Rahman (henceforth also referred to as Tunku), manage to unite all these rainbow of differences and made independence a reality?

## 2. Nation Building

Tunku's greatest achievement lay not in what he managed to get out of the British but in the crafting of a formula to manage race relations that made independence and subsequent nation building possible. There were two mechanisms in his formula. Firstly, Tunku identified a suitable vehicle to win independence and to form the government. Although Tunku did not conceive the idea of the Alliance coalition (*Parti Perikatan*-consist of UMNO, MCA-Malaysia Chinese Association and MIC-Malaysia Indian Congress), but it was he who recognized its potential and nurtured the coalition until it acquired the strength and the authority to lead the country to independence. The initial role of the Alliance in the battle for independence was fought on behalf of the Malays but when Tunku took over, he had to unite both Malays and non-Malays with him; managing both the external challenge, the British, and also the internal challenge; the management of the Malay and Non Malay population.

Secondly, Tunku established the proper ground rules for the management of race relations. He emphasized the reality of interdependence among the different races and argued that the races stood to do better together than each on their own. From this flowed his idea for the collective sharing of power and responsibility. Although battled with critics, from both Malays as well as non-Malays, Tunku continued to manifest this view in the structure and work culture of the Alliance. Tunku institutionalized the reality of this interdependence among the races through each of his victories. Acceptance of this interdependence meant acceptance of the reality of a plural society. Tunku got the Malays to accept the transition from "*Tanah Melayu untuk Melayu*" (the Malay land for the Malays only) to "*Tanah Melayu untuk semua rakyat berbilang kaum*" (the Malay land for citizens of all races). By doing so, he changed the fundamental views and ideas of nation building especially among the Malays; from one nation for one race to one nation for multiple races.

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### 3. Research Objective

The main objective of this research is to identify Tunku's secrets to success in achieving independence for a multi-ethnic country. Specifically, this paper aims to investigate Tunku's thoughts on 'Unity' in successfully bringing the multi-ethnic groups together.

### 4. Methodology

To identify Tunku's success, firstly, the study examined Tunku's speeches during his reign as the President of the Alliance Party and later as the Prime Minister (PM). Secondly, the study then looked into some of his personal recollection of events after retiring as the PM and lastly, the opinions of his close aides about him. Several different texts were used for triangulation purposes, that is to tests the consistency of findings obtained through different documents.

The texts used in this study include published articles from six different books. There are "5 Men and Ideas: Building National Identity" (Hng, 2004), "The Untold Biography: The Great Patriot" (Shariff Ahmad, 1993), "Challenging Times" (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, 1986, 2007), "Malaysia: The Road to Independence" (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, 1984, 2007), "Of Political Bondage" (Ranjit Gill, 1990) and "As a Matter of Interest" (Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, 1981). Not all the published articles from these books were used. Only articles which are related to nation building were selected. The content of each of these articles were then analyzed to determine the presence of certain words with regards to nation building and unity within the texts.

These selected texts were then coded using NVivo V.9 to develop categories in relation to Tunku's ideas on unity. From the texts, the researcher tried to identify as many categories as possible that explain how Tunku managed the diverse ethnic groups and how he managed to unite them. Texts with similar themes were coded and were brought together in a single container called a 'node'. Each node represents a different category. Hence, based on the collection of text/s for each node, each category that emerged was defined.

In addition, 'word frequency test' was also used to identify the words that occur most often in Tunku speeches. The words that appear most frequently, to a certain extent do give an insight about Tunku's secrets in achieving a united nation. 'Text search' was another tool used to query a specific word or phrase in the texts. This tool automatically coded the texts where specific words occur - for example, find and code all the occurrences of *unity*. All texts containing the word 'unity' were then coded and extracted for further investigation.

### 5. Results and Discussion

#### 5.1. Categories for Tunku's Ideas on Unity

Based on the analyses conducted on the selected articles, six categories emerged to explain Tunku's success stories in achieving unity in the early days of nation building. The six categories that emerged from the analyses were:

- "Actions"
- "Fairness"
- "Leader for all"
- "Leadership philosophy"
- "Recognition of all races"
- "National identity"

'Actions' in this study refers to Tunku, being an action oriented person. He walked his talks and beliefs. 'Fairness' refers to Tunku being a just man in carrying out his duties where he often quoted, "Everyone has a place in this country." Texts with similar themes indicating the affection of the people for Tunku were put in the similar category, "Leader for all." The "Leadership Philosophy" category refers to Tunku's philosophy and his beliefs in building the nation as Prime Minister. Texts indicating Tunku's emphasis on the strength and contribution of all races were categorized as "Recognition of all races" while texts indicating Tunku's call for national identity in building a sense of belonging amongst the multi ethnic groups were categorized as "National identity."

## 5.2. Triangulation of Categories and Related Texts

Figure 1 summarizes the triangulation between the emerged categories and types of texts. The triangulated results indicated that there is consistency in the findings obtained where the same categories also emerged in the different type of texts.

Categories	Actions	Fairness	Leader for All	Leadership Philosophy	Recognition of all Races	National Identity
Texts						
<b>Tunku's Speeches</b>	√				√	
<b>Tunku's Personal Recollection</b>	√	√		√	√	√
<b>Opinions of Tunku's Close Aides</b>	√	√	√	√	√	

Fig. 1: Triangulation between Emerged Categories and Types of Texts.

Among the six categories that emerged, it is clear that Tunku put greater emphasis on his “Actions” and his “Recognition of all races” in order to achieve national unity. Both the “Action” and “Recognition of all races” categories appeared in all three types of texts (Tunku’s Speeches, Tunku’s Personal Recollection and Opinions of Tunku’s Close Aides). This suggest, it is through his ‘works’ and ‘words’ that he managed to unite all the different ethnic groups and made independence a reality. Example of some of the actions he took in uniting the people are by having tea parties, forming a National Goodwill Committee which he headed, travelling throughout the country to meet the people to hold dialogues, sitting down together with all the parties to trace the roots of problems faced and coming up with consensual views on how to prevent racial violence in future. His recognition of all races are reflected in some of the words he used such as, “Everyone has a place in this country,” “Malaysia prosperity is due to the good understanding existing between the races and their desire to serve Malaysia and the community they represent,” “No particular community can exist alone without the help and cooperation of the others, for Malaysia is a multiracial nation,” “The blending of these cultures might help to create a cultured Malaysian society,” and “An independent Malaya must have absolute harmony among her people, no matter what their race or creed may be so long as they are people of Malaya and loyal to the country” from all the six books analysed.

Hence it is clear through his ‘words’ and ‘actions’ that his recognition of all the various ethnic groups in Malaya made him a “leader for all” and this is discussed by his close aides. The “Leader for all” category was neither found in Tunku’s own speech nor his personal recollections, claiming himself to be a ‘leader for all.’ Nonetheless, it emerges only in the texts of ‘Opinions of his close aides’. This suggests Tunku himself did not literally emphasize that he was a leader for all but this recognition lies in his actions and his words in recognizing the strength of all races in the country.

## 5.3. Most Frequently Used Words in the Text Analyzed

Results in figure 2 highlighted the words that were used most frequently in the texts analyzed. The results from the word frequency test indicated that the most frequently used word in all the texts analyzed was ‘we.’

No.	Words Most Commonly Used	Frequency
1.	We	13
2.	I	6
3.	All	4
4.	Malaya	4
5.	Peace	4

Fig. 2: Summary of the five most frequently used words in all the texts analysed.

This finding supports the result from the triangulation of categories analysis conducted earlier as shown in table 1. Tunku chose to use the subject “we”, instead of “I”. Tunku seldom used the pronoun marker “I,” instead he used the inclusive pronoun marker “we”, repeatedly in his speeches, personal recollections and also in quotations from his close aides. This suggests Tunku is indeed an inclusive leader. Being an inclusive leader means opening oneself to a variety of people with different strengths and backgrounds and doing things with people, rather than to people. The use of the subject “we” instead of “I” will also make an outsider (or the different ethnic groups in this case) feel inclusive. This strategic use of the “we” marker may have resulted in the emerged categories such as “Leader for all,” “Leadership philosophy,” “Recognition of all races” and “National identity”. An inclusive leader provides an atmosphere that promotes fairness of input and output to all which is also reflected in one of the emerged category – “Fairness.”

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evidently clear that Tunku’s secret to success in achieving unity amongst the multi ethnic groups in the intricate early days of nation building was that he never made a game of politics for his own personal or group interest, for defending his power or for personal gains. Based on the results of the analysis, it is clear that it was Tunku’s leadership and his leadership philosophy that was the secret to his success in uniting the people to achieve independence. Tunku was a man of actions. Tunku’s approach was based on his firm grassroots actions and his philosophy in seeing the strength and benefits of a multi ethnic nation that he managed to unite all the different races under one umbrella. The fact that he recognized the contribution of all ethnic groups in nation building and celebrated strength in diversity by respecting differences and treating everyone fairly, resulted in him becoming a leader for all; a leader trusted by all. Tunku’s sharp leadership qualities and success in bringing a multi ethnic nation together were recognized not only his close aides but by people all over the world. It is evidently true that in some country, the people knew his name better than the country’s name. To them Tunku is Malaysia and Malaysia is Tunku (Shariff Ahmad, 1993). His ambition and struggles have always been more in the interest of the nation.

Although the documents used in this study were not exhaustive (only six documents were used), the research methodology of triangulation between text search, text coding, word frequency test employed were able to achieved the aim of this study; that is to identify Tunku’s secrets to success in achieving unity amongst the multi ethnic groups in the intricate early days of nation building.

## 7. References

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