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The Role of Ethnic Politics in Promoting Democratic Governance: A Case Study of Malaysia

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Abstract: It is a known fact that Malaysia has been ruled by a coalition of political parties demarcated along ethnic lines since independence more than 50 years ago. How has this affected democratic governance in a relatively young multi-ethnic nation? Some have argued that ethnic, religious, or linguistic politics threaten democracy as they leave room for the majority to abuse the minorities, which in turn disrupts democratic governance of a country. This paper will argue against this idea that consolidation of democracy is difficult in a heterogeneous society by using Malaysia's leadership and institutions after independence as an example. The approach to the problem is to account for Malaysia's relative stability and repeated experiences with elections as evidence that having multiple ethnicities do not necessarily have to lead to discord in a country, but could instead lay the foundation for democratic consolidation. This argument is appealing because the relationship between diversity and democracy is an on-going debate as racial and religious conflicts are occurring almost everywhere in the world.

Keywords: Ethnic politics, democracy, Malaysia, multi-ethnic, democratic, governance

Abstrak: Seperti yang telah diketahui ramai Malaysia telah ditadbir oleh parti-parti gabungan politik yang ditentukan dengan jelas mengikut garis etnik sejak kemerdekaannya lebih 50 tahun yang lalu. Bagaimanakah hal ini telah mempengaruhi tadbir-urus demokratik dalam negara muda yang mempunyai

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pelbagai etnik? Beberapa pengkaji telah membincangkan bahawa etnik, agama, mahupun politik linguistik telah mengancam demokrasi kerana mereka memberikan ruang untuk golongan majoriti mengancam golongan minoriti yang mana ia akan mengganggu pentadbiran demokratik sesebuah negara. Kertas kerja ini membincangkan bahawa penyatuan demokrasi adalah sukar dalam masyarakat majmuk dengan menggunakan kepimpinan dan institusi di Malaysia sebagai contoh selepas kemerdekaannya. Pendekatan terhadap permasalahan ini mengambil kira Malaysia sebagai negara yang mempunyai kestabilan relatif dan pengalaman melaksanakan pilihan raya sebagai bukti bahawa dengan mempunyai pelbagai etnik, ia tidak semestinya membawa kepada perselisihan di dalam negara. Sebaliknya ia akan membentuk dasar untuk penyatuan demokrasi. Perbincangan in adalah menarik kerana terdapat pertalian antara kepelbagaian dan demokrasi sebagai perdebatan yang berterusan yang mana konflik bangsa dan agama berlaku hampir di merata dunia.

Kata kunci: Politik etnik, demokrasi, Malaysia, pelbagai etnik, demokratik, governans (tadbir urus)

Introduction

From Japan to India, Turkey to Indonesia, the demography of most Asian countries is made up of multiple ethnicities or religious groups, a fact that is not lost on those who believe that homogeneity is an important precondition for democracy. Asia is unique because of its vast territory and the peoples inhabiting it, making the project of nation-building following the end of World War II challenging with its effects evident until today. The national boundaries that were demarcated by the departing colonial masters, unfortunately, did not take into account the ethnic, religious, or even linguistic make-up of countries. As a result, the democratic prospect of these heterogeneous countries was believed to be doomed from the outset. However, as this paper will show by using Malaysia as a case study, politics based on social diversity does not necessarily inhibit the development of democracy and can actually help enhance democratic governance with the right leadership and institutions in place. Compared to other countries with a multi-ethnic demography such as Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, Malaysia has been able to maintain peace and harmony with very little armed violence recorded over the decades. Diversity far from guarantees stability or peace in a democratic nation, but it is not impossible to help consolidate a democracy where there already is one. The first part of

the paper will disprove the notion made popular by journalists, policy makers and academics that consolidation of democracy is arduous in a heterogeneous society, while the second part will focus on Malaysia's religious and ethnic politics after independence as an example.

Theoretical Framework

Conventional wisdom on social diversity and democracy argues that countries with religious or ethnic diversity are more prone to conflict, and thus making it difficult for a democracy, where differences of opinion are celebrated, to flourish. Based on their research on economic, gender, and ethnic inequality, Merkel and Weiffen (2012) found that "cases where identity-based cleavages were politicized and escalated into violent conflict register a negative effect of heterogeneity both on democratic transition and consolidation." (p. 412) Examples can be seen across continents and over time. In Europe, a case in point is the Northern Ireland conflict that lasted for more than three decades between the Protestant loyalists who wanted Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom as opposed to the Catholic nationalists who wanted Northern Ireland to be part of the Republic of Ireland. The Sri Lankan Civil War is also a good example of a conflict between two ethnicities, the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils. A more recent case would be the Syrian Civil War, although more complicated and exacerbated, which started as a conflict between the majority Sunni Arabs who were discontented with Assad's Alawite government. On the other hand, there are many examples of multi-ethnic societies which do not descend into civil war. The difference between the two groups is the type of cleavage that divides society. Countries with cross-cutting cleavages such as the United States of America where multiple groups share some form of identity is less prone to conflict. However, in countries like Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Syria and Malaysia where there are overlapping cleavages in which a group has multiple identities that are exclusive to the group, discontent is harder to suppress and thus democracy more difficult to consolidate. Another argument relevant to the context put forth by Varshney (2001) is that conflict is more likely to occur in a society with limited interethnic civic engagement.

A seminal work on this topic is Horowitz's (1985) book "Ethnic Groups in Conflict". Horowitz defined ethnicity as "a myth of collective ancestry which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some

notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity." (p. 52) He argues that ethnic groups, which more or less relate to kinship, take advantage of the available political structure to replace weak states that are unable to provide basic services. Asia, similar to Africa and the Caribbean in this context, is an area that was colonized by the West and therefore has no cross-cutting cleavages as the colonial master implemented a strategy of divide and rule. All is not doomed however as Horowitz maintains that interethnic conflicts can be reduced when societies successfully change the structure of relations to promote conciliation. Supporting Horowitz's argument, Motalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) found that it is not ethnic fractionalization per se that causes conflict, but ethnic polarization where the biggest minority faces off with the majority that brings about a higher possibility of a conflict.

Although Horowitz views ethnic conflict as a zero-sum game that either leads to chaos or cooperation, elementary research undertaken by Fish and Brooks (2004) found that there is no statistically or substantively significant negative correlation between diversity and democracy. On the contrary, it is economic development that has a strong correlation with the political regime of a state. This finding is important, especially in the context of Asian politics, as authoritarianism has mostly been justified to prevent ethnic conflicts in the absence of a strong leader to suppress negative sentiments. If we look at the recent history of Southeast Asia, Mahathir Mohamad and Lee Kwan Yew have argued that Western-style democracy finds no home in diverse societies such as Malaysia and Singapore with very limited cross-cutting cleavages. This paper argues that the people's right and security are not jeopardised by having a diverse populace as long as there are democratic institutions in place to keep in check any person or ethnicity from imposing his/its beliefs and ideals on the minority. It is not diversity itself that has caused grievances to a polarised society, but the inability of its leadership to bring the people, all of them regardless of ethnicity or religion, out of the economic gutter and a feeling of political disenfranchisement. It is when the system is viewed to favour a particular group over the rest that it becomes hard for democracy to truly flourish in an inclusive and harmonious country.

Fearon and Laitin (2003) are two other scholars who have debunked the common view that heterogeneous societies by themselves have a

higher probability of engaging in civil war. On the contrary, ethnic fractionalisation or religious grievances are not significant variables leading to civil war once income is controlled for, a finding that is also supported by Fish and Brooks (2004). According to Fearon and Laitin (2003), most civil conflicts are caused by insurgencies, characterized by "small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas." (p. 2) Thus, factors that lead to insurgency such as per capita income, age of the state, position of the state (for instance, oil exporter) and the terrain of a country are better predictors of civil wars rather than social diversity. Although some would argue that even with available opportunity to mount an insurgency, there has to be some form of motivation for a group of people to band together against the state, and one of the motivations could be ethnic grievances. However, Fearon and Laition (2003) found that ethnic diversity, together with a multitude of other variables, are weakly correlated with the probability of violence and civil war. It is still undeniable that factors such as the level of economic growth or political repression may lead to a conflict that inadvertently drags social identity into the hostility until it is believed to be the main perpetrator. Yet, it is important to distinguish the causality of this variable as it has been shown to be less significant. Furthermore, while studies on the effect of heterogeneity on civil war have been mixed, Blimes (2006) was able to show that when the relationship is traced indirectly, there is, in fact, a link between polarization and civil war.

Another important fact pointed out by Fish and Brooks (2004) is that there is no such thing as an intermediate zone where conflict caused by ethnic diversity is most probable in a country that has a dominant social group making up 45% to 90% of the population. If this is true, Malaysia is prone to engage in ethnic conflict because the dominant race, the Malays, make up 50% of the population and Muslims make up 61% of the population by religion. Nonetheless, Malaysia has not experienced bloody ethnic conflict since 1969. Fish and Brooks (2004) confirmed that Malaysia is not an anomaly by illustrating that the scatter plots in their analysis did not show any U or J-shaped arcs that would have been expected if conflicts are prone in either highly factionalized or homogenous societies. Instead, the plots confirmed their findings that there is no significant or substantial relationship between social diversity and democracy. Fearon and Laition also discussed this idea of ethnic

cooperation in their 1996 article where they argued that peace comes about when either of two conditions, spiral equilibria and in-group policing equilibria, are met. In the case of spiral equilibria, the fear of complete breakdown in intergroup relations keeps individuals in check especially when socialising with a different group. In-group policing, on the other hand, is where one group trusts the other group to punish its own members' transgressions by taking advantage of each group's superior information on individuals in their own group. Therefore, it has been shown that if there are the right institutions and systems in place to deal with discretion from multiple groups of people, there should be no reason to expect a small scuffle to lead to a wider conflict of race or ethnicity.

Diversity is also good for participatory democracy which in Malaysia takes the form of a single-member district with plurality rule because parties would have to move towards the middle of the ideological spectrum to gain the most support (Duverger, 1972). What this means is that different ethnic groups would have to be more inclusive in order for them to be able to win seats in parliament. In Malaysia, particularly, parties of ethnic minorities recognize that it would be next to impossible for them to win in most districts since a Malay party would be more than certain to win at least a plurality of votes, manifesting in a seat in parliament. Different parties are thus encouraged to work together and practice tolerance by considering a wide variety of concerns of voters from different ethnicities through accommodating their demands and eliminating those that may cause friction. Some would argue that a single-member district system, as opposed to a proportional representation (PR) system, is more divisive. They base their argument on the fact that in a PR system, more parties are able to participate in the political system, thereby reducing grievances by specific social groups. However, in a PR system, there is less incentive for different groups to work together, further polarising the society along ideological lines. While it may appear that the relationship between various political parties in a diverse society may be superficial, there is no reason to expect that this behavioural tolerance would not turn into long-term ideological moderation. Moreover, parties rarely represent voters' preferences directly anyway. Instead, political parties shift along the moderation-extremism spectrum as they try to win more votes or to influence public policy (Warwick, 2009). As flexible entities, political

parties are able to learn and to adapt to the needs of a diverse society. Therefore, it can be said that it is not impossible for democracy to survive in a pluralistic society, but it has to have the right political and electoral institutions in place.

Finally, and most relevant to Malaysia, is the concept of consociationalism with Lijphart being the primary advocate for such arrangement in a diverse society. Lijphart (1977) stated that consociaional democracy is defined by the presence of a grand coalition, proportionality in multiple areas of governance, mutual vetoes, and segmental authority. Decades later, Andeweg (2000) opined that consociationalism has often been a temporary arrangement in a deeply divided society as it transitions towards a more majoritarian system. Though one can see that happening currently in Malaysia, it is important to note that despite being so, we have witnessed only sparing ethnic conflicts in Malaysia. Nonetheless, consociationalism may have an adverse effect on the quality of democracy as elites seem to be playing a relatively bigger role in such a system. This is also the case in Malaysia where the elites were the ones who agreed on a political alliance among the races, while the intended effects of unity barely trickled down to the masses. It should be noted here that Dahl (1971) has tackled this issue in his work on polyarchy. According to Dahl, polyarchy has two dimensions, competition and inclusiveness. Consociationalism as a concept is mostly concerned with the inclusivity of society, making countries that prescribe to consociationalism rank highly based on Dahl's measure. Even when considering competition and measures such as the right to run for office and free and fair elections, nothing about consociational regimes necessarily limits democratic competitiveness. In other words, in a highly polarised nation such as Malaysia, consociationalism may be the best method to ensure that every Malaysian citizen feels part of the system without compromising on democratic principles.

Research Method

This paper applies qualitative methodology in developing its argument, mainly using process tracing and counter-factual methodologies to discover the intervening variables responsible for the maintenance of unity in Malaysia. Process tracing is highly useful because it allows for the identification of different variables that eventually lead to the dependent variable, which is peace in a democratic country. For this

paper, process tracing is also used with historical accounts to understand the development of this specific phenomenon. Besides process tracing, this paper employs heavily the idea of counterfactual methods where causality can be explained in terms of counterfactual conditionals. In this analysis of harmony in Malaysia, for example, if the British colonial masters had not required the different races to work together for independence, there might not have been a system of ethnic-based political parties and grand coalition. Without either, Malaysia may not experience relative peace and harmony because of the absence of a mechanism to encourage understanding among the different groups. In counterfactual theories, a slight difference in time or manner would effectively create a different event altogether. Evidences such as power-sharing, strong leadership, and institutional moderation confirm the validity of the two methods applied, especially in tracing the events that lead to unity in a democratic Malaysia.

Unity in Malaysia

Malaysia may not be the best model of a democratic regime among Asian countries because of its many shortcomings, in that the country does not respect a significant number of political, economic, civil, social, and individual rights. Nonetheless, Malaysia has always had a huge number of political parties, and they are absorbed into the main National Front (BN) coalition. As such, Case (2001) calls Malaysia a pseudo-democracy, or better known as a hybrid regime, because the country allows competitive elections regardless of it having a dominant party that is unlikely to be defeated soon. In contrast to Case, Ufen (2009) observes that following the *Reformasi* period in 1997, after the then deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was fired under allegations of committing sodomy, the dominance of the main party, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), was threatened. This is evidenced by the historically unprecedented amount of votes received by the opposition coalition in 2008 and 2013. Thus, it is safe to say that Malaysia is slowly becoming more democratic with the institutionalization of opposition parties. Not satisfied with Ufen's explanation, Case (2010) suggests that the possible reason the opposition parties may be able to deny BN their usual two-thirds in parliament is because of voters' evaluation of the regime. The empowerment of the masses through opposition parties, a crucial element of a consolidated democracy, relates to the institutionalisation of bi-partism in Malaysia. No longer are Malaysians

fighting over which race should win in an election, but which ideology should be supreme. As a positive development, it may not be wrong to say that Malaysians are now working together, regardless of religion or race, to fight for a political ideology that fits society. This is the tenet of a mature democracy.

Furthermore, not unlike many countries in the region, Malaysia's democratic society has not been under threat since the late 1960s despite its racial and religious make-up due to the availability of different political parties representing different racial groups. Racially and ethnically, Malaysia is home to a multi-ethnic population of 30 million consisting primarily of Malay (50%), Chinese (23%), indigenous (12%), and Indian (7%) peoples (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). Rather than being a hindrance to democracy, ethnicity has been the basis for the country's party politics even before the country's independence from Britain. By allowing each major ethnic group, the Malays, Chinese, and Indians, to have its own political party, it enhances democracy by ensuring that Malaysian citizens are fairly represented in politics. This is a reflection of consociationalism as discussed earlier. More than allowing each ethnic group to have its own party, Malaysia is also home to a grand coalition of several ethnic-based political parties. The current government which has ruled the country since independence in 1957 is composed of UMNO, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), Chinese-based Gerakan, and other local parties in the eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak representing different indigenous groups, such as the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS), Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), and Parti Rakyat Sarawak (PRS). Although this arrangement started in 1973, Malaysia has always had ethnic-based politics with a coalition dating back to before independence. In order for Britain, as the colonial master, to be convinced that it was time for then-Malaya to be granted its independence, the three major races had to prove that they were able to live together harmoniously. So, in 1949, the Communities Liaison Committee was formed as a British arrangement where a leader from each race was appointed into a political coalition. In 1951, an informal cooperation was forged between UMNO and MCA leaders in the Kuala Lumpur Municipal Election. Its success convinced the two parties to establish a national coalition called the Alliance in 1954, which was later joined by the MIC. Malaysia is a country that has proved time and again

that democracy can withstand the odds if it has the right institutions. Bargaining is the key here, and having a political coalition may create cross-pressures that allow party supporters from different ethnicities to come together for a united purpose. While there are electorates who are more concerned with the party's ideological stances, there are also those who would rather see common issues successfully translated into beneficial policies. This is not to say that a political coalition is a sufficient precondition for democracy because its formation is ultimately a political move by the elites and its sentiments may not be necessarily shared by the masses. Lijphart (1986) acknowledges this by pointing out that skilled leadership is nevertheless important to ensure democratic stability. It does not matter how such political arrangements came about; it is more important to discover how this consociational system has led to a better Malaysia that is more inclusive than it would have been without grand coalitions.

It should be of no surprise to anyone why Malaysia has successfully practiced power sharing in its politics if one is to understand the background of the people. There are cultural and psychological attitudes that reinforce power-sharing among the various ethnic groups. The best example is the indigenous communities of Sabah and Sarawak which have a long history of giving and sharing, and of caring for one another. The Ibans of Sarawak, for example, live in longhouses, which are stilted structures with many rooms housing a whole community of families. These families work together as a community in their everyday lives from raising children to finding food. Otherwise, life in the jungle would have been very difficult without the advent of modernity. This stress on accommodating others brought forward in their dealings with leaders from peninsular Malaysia when Sabah and Sarawak agreed to form Malaysia in 1963, on the condition that they are able to maintain their high level of autonomy and special laws are enacted to protect the large indigenous population. Other minority groups in Malaysia, such as the Chinese and Indian communities, also reflect this willingness to give and take. The social contract made by Malaysia's founding fathers is reflective of this attitude. Before independence, the different races agreed to a trade-off for non-Malays to be granted citizenship. In return, Malays and the indigenous people are granted special rights and privileges as laid down in Article 153 of the constitution. These communities have come to accept that the leader of the country shall

most likely be a Malay for the simple reason that Malays make up a majority of the country. Thus, these acceptances of the reality in Malaysia have shaped the outlook of the Malaysian people as a whole.

Linguistically, Malaysia is home to various mother tongues, including Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, Hakka, Cantonese, and other native languages spoken in East Malaysia. Rather than being a hindrance to democracy, language has become the basis for the vernacular school system in Malaysia, as proposed in the Razak Report in 1956 and incorporated into Section 3 of the Education Ordinance of 1957. In fact, through the constitution and acts of parliament, vernacular education is a guaranteed right in Malaysia ("Fix national schools", 2014). Moreover, it is part of the social contract made between the majority Malays and the other minorities. Regardless, it is compulsory for every student in Malaysia to learn the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, and English. This enhances democracy because language is the basis for communication, which allows for better interaction and greater understanding, which are important for democratic governance. Although a single national school system could foster better interaction among the races, there is no support to the idea that speakers of different languages are hostile to one another. Language is a tool used to communicate and interact with one another, not as a scheme to conjure up racial disharmony or national disunity. On the contrary, language-based education in Malaysia should be seen as a reinforcing agent to nation building, as diversity is actually an advantage for Malaysia to reach greater heights in a globalised world. As this paper argues, by not forcing racial or linguistic assimilation and allowing different races the freedom to have their own school system, this will ensure contentment and avoid racial disharmony and the breakdown of democracy as the classic case of the break-up of Pakistan in 1971.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first prime minister of Malaysia, noted in 1983, "The country has a multiracial population with various beliefs. Malaysia must continue as a secular state with Islam as the official religion" (Ooi, 2007). Even if Muslims are the majority in Malaysia with more than 60% of the population being Muslims, they are not homogenous and are separated by dialect, region, and social class. On the other hand, Buddhists are the largest minority in Malaysia, with close to 20% of the population adhering to the faith, followed by Christians (9.2%) and Hindus (6.3%). More relevant to this paper is the fact that

even though Muslims make up a majority in the country, respect for the right of other religions is widely practiced in the country. Take for example the fact that religious holidays of a small minority, such as Diwali and Thaipusam for Hindus, are also designated as national or regional holidays. This is in contrast to other secular Western democracies such as the United States of America where the only religious holiday that is celebrated on a national level every year is Christmas. Furthermore, the role of institutions such as ethnic and religious based civil society organisations, are also responsible for the relative peace and stability in Malaysia. These organisations differ from political parties because they do not seek to form a government but simply to improve the lives of these minority communities. Among them are the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, the Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM), and the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Taoism (MCCBCHST). Allowing these different religious and ethnic identities to manifest itself legally in the public sphere reduces the perception of being victims in a country with a majority Muslim population. There is an outlet for their grievances to be heard, thus proving that having a heterogeneous society does not hinder democratic consolidation as long as the government provides the right opportunity and structure.

Unlike in the case of other democracies in Asia such as India and Indonesia, the authors of Malaysia's constitution decided to make Islam the official religion of the country. Article 3 of the Federal Constitution places Islam as the religion of the federation, though the right to practise other faiths peacefully is guaranteed. Yet, it is incorrect to call Malaysia an Islamic state because an Islamic state would mean that all the laws governing the country, including the criminal justice system, would be based on Islam, which is not the case in Malaysia. Instead, Malaysia is a secular state which has elements of Islam as part of the Federal Constitution. Rather than imitating secularism as understood in the West, the government would still interfere in the matter of religion if it saw fit. The presence of multiple religions in the country does not hinder democratic governance because a society that is happy and content with the choices it is offered is less prone to rise up against the government of the day. It is when identity is suppressed that religious identity—or any other identity—becomes susceptible to, and plays into, the hands of ethno-nationalists. In contrast, Malaysia's electoral system guarantees that religious political parties such as the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party

(PAS) are forced to moderate their stances in order for it to be able to win the most votes in a constituency and to be represented in parliament. If religious plurality is disallowed in politics, sympathisers would only go underground, with no mechanism to ensure they would not succumb to extremist ideologies or activities. The classic case of this counterfactual case is the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. With no ability to participate in political process for decades prior to 2012, splinter groups that are more violent were accused to have materialised from the ideas and philosophies of the Muslim Brotherhood (Paya & Espositon, 2011). To the contrary, Malaysian democracy could flourish where differences of opinion are respected and not suppressed in the name of peace and homogeneity.

Conflicts

Nonetheless, Malaysia is far from being a conflict-free country, with the oft-cited May 13, 1969 conflict being a watershed in Malaysian history. The background of the conflict itself is long and convoluted; currently, there are two highly plausible contending versions, but the official version as widely known, started with the national campaign of the 1969 general election. Two main opposition parties—PAS and the Democratic Action Party (DAP)—were able to put up a strong challenge to the Alliance coalition, resulting for the first time since independence in a government that was without a two-third majority. On May 12, a day after the election, thousands of Chinese held a celebratory march in the streets of Kuala Lumpur, the state capital of Selangor, while hurling insults towards the Malays, who were seen as the backbone of the Alliance. The next day, members of UMNO—the main component of the Alliance coalition—wanted to have a demonstration of their own because, technically, the Alliance had won in Selangor by only one candidate. Needless to say, clashes turned violent, with 196 people killed between May 13 and July 31, 1969 (Hwang, 2003, p. 72). On May 14, a state of emergency was declared, and two days later, under Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, the National Operations Council (NOC) was established to govern the country while parliament was suspended.

Although this event has tarnished the ethnic relationship in Malaysia, Hippler (2008) argued that the outcome of a compromise is the key. Interestingly, he mentioned that conflicts involving ethnic violence are

much harder to solve because there is no middle ground to identity, while at the same time, he proposed that part of the solution to end a civil war lies in state building, including nation building. Malaysia's elites have attempted nation building to reduce the racial gap in society through what Hippler called pluricultural integration, "which includes . . . the (re)distribution of economic resources and opportunities of access to public institutions for ethnic groups" (p. 563). However, as alluded to by Hippler, not all countries successfully transition from a civil war to a stable democracy, with Malaysia producing a hybrid regime following the conflict, and with its suspension of parliament, "it is not surprising that manipulation of the rules of the game becomes a salient feature of post-civil war politics" (Kissane & Sitter, 2005, p. 191).

Despite the political root of the conflict, "the violence was regarded as an indication of deep seated Malay dissatisfaction, particularly with the Malay economic position vis-à-vis the Chinese" (Horowitz, 1989, p. 255). Consequently, under Tun Abdul Razak and the NOC, new policies were introduced in the form of the New Economic Policy (NEP) that would end the identification of ethnicity with economic function through a process of nation building. Tun Abdul Razak went about doing so by first enlarging the Alliance coalition (and renaming it Barisan Nasional or National Front) to include parties that were formerly in opposition, including PAS. While there were negotiations for DAP to join BN, it fell apart. With most of the belligerents under one coalition, Malay and Chinese elites devised a solution that turned Malaysia into a guided democracy, with the discussion of sensitive issues restricted by sedition laws (Hiebert & Jaysankaran, 1999, p.46). At first, the policies of the NEP were the brainchild of a small group of young state-capitalist Malays, but with the Chinese coming to be viewed with scepticism by the masses, the Chinese leaders relented and agreed to the NEP as long as "the Malays were to gain an extensive stake in the modern economy without confiscation" (Horowitz, 1989, p. 257). Together, this small circle of elites played a disproportionate role in creating an affirmative action program that indirectly enlarged democracy in multi-ethnic Malaysia. Even though the elites in the NOC were only thinking of the best strategy for them to move forward politically, the continuation of elections helped entrench democracy's role in society, leading to the final habituation phase by Malaysian citizens as seen today.

Another important aspect of the government's intentional efforts to expand economic growth in the country has been to redistribute wealth to all communities in Malaysia. When everyone, not just the Malays, are able to reap the benefits of a growing economy, it is very unlikely that Malaysia would collapse into instability. Following restructuring under prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia consistently recorded more than 7% of GDP growth in the 1980s and 1990s due to its exports (Mohammad Isa, 1996). In the late 20th century, still under Mahathir, Malaysia experienced an economic boom and underwent rapid development. The Household Income Survey undertaken by the government in 2014 indicated that the average household income of Malaysia increased by 18% to RM 5,900 a month, compared to RM 5,000 in 2012. This rise in wealth to the average family in Malaysia is probably responsible for the relative peace and stability in the country as more people are integrated into the country's economic system. It is marginalization that creates insecurity especially if those who are badly affected by the economy belong to a minority community. The economic direction of the country is heavily influenced by the government through five-year development plans, of which currently is the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020). The current national plan contains strategies and programmes to encourage productivity and transform innovation into wealth. It will be the basis for sustainable economic growth, create new economic opportunities and ensure continued wellbeing of the people. Besides the five-year plans, Malaysia also benefits from multiple long-term plans such as the Vision 2020 which was a brainchild of Mahathir. It seeks to transform Malaysia into a developed nation economically, politically and socially by 2020. Najib Razak, the current prime minister has proposed a new plan called the TN50 (National Transformation 2050), another 30-year plan for the development to boost Malaysia's economy. Due to the government's diligence in boosting the country's economy upwards, society has benefited as a whole, thereby negating the individual's feelings of being an outcast in the country. As a result of the current leadership's initiatives, Malaysia's poverty is almost eradicated at 0.6% (Ee, 2016). Economically content citizens equate to political stability in society.

Unfortunately, many more conflicts have come about following the 2008 election. For example, in 2014, a cow's head was placed at the home of R. S. N. Rayer, an assemblyman from the opposition party.

Since Hindus believe that the cow is a sacred animal, the act was a blatant insult to the religion. All of this was a consequence to Rayer uttering the phrase "UMNO celaka", or "Damned UMNO". This was the second time such an incident had happened, as in 2009, a cow's head was brought to the Selangor state secretariat building by a group of residents from the city of Shah Alam to protest the state government's decision to relocate a 150-year-old Hindu temple (IANS, 2009). In April 2017, a Selangor senior executive councillor, Datuk Teng Chang Khim came under fire for approving the third edition of the Selangor Manual Guideline and Selangor State Planning Standard that included prohibitive guidelines on constructing new non-Islamic houses of worship. Among the guidelines are that such houses of worship must be at least 50 metres away from the nearest Muslim-owned homes, and they need to obtain permission of residents within a 200 metres radius. Furthermore, non-Islamic houses of worship cannot be constructed in commercial areas and should not be taller than nearby mosques. This is in stark contrast to the Selangor government's track record of tolerant policies as seen in its role in approving 252 land or gazette applications for non-Islamic houses of worship, the most in 50 years preceding 2008. The outcry from this blunder shows again that as long as the government ensures institutional guarantees that are respectful of the rights of other minorities, there is no reason to expect the fall of democracy in Malaysia.

More famously known among the conflicts is, of course, the court battle where non-Muslims were forbidden to use the word *Allah* to refer to God. The Islamic authorities argued that Malay-language Bibles could possibly be used to proselytising Muslims, which is illegal in Malaysia. The Roman Catholic Church was engaged in a court case to challenge the ban on using the word Allah following the government's instruction for the Church's newsletter, *The Herald*, to stop using Allah to refer to God. Unfortunately, after a judge ruled in the church's favour in 2009, 10 churches were vandalised (Ramasamy, Chong, & Tan, 2015). While an appeals court overturned the ruling in 2013, by mid-2014, the Federal Court upheld the government ban, rejecting an appeal by the Roman Catholic Church.

Despite this downward trend in Malaysian religious harmony, it is worth noting that even when PAS was considering the implementation of *hudud* law, its president, Hadi Awang, sought to do so by introducing the

controversial bill through parliament rather than by a coup or a violent rebellion. Although Malaysia's democratic system and judiciary are obviously flawed, the collage of ethnic and religious groups in Malaysia understand that it is of utmost importance to not allow Malaysia to spiral out of control because of a handful of extremists. It is also important to remember that violence does not occur every day in Malaysia, and when it does, most violence is locally confined.

In summary, Malaysia's founders were correct in their decision to build a grand coalition and to develop economic plans that would allow different ethnic groups and religions to flourish, as has been proven by its relative peace in comparison to its neighbours. After independence, Malaysian elites recognised the importance of a master narrative in nation building under the country's social contract where all religions, as well as languages and ethnic groups, would have an equal place in the national family and, in principle, none would be intimidated by the others. Even when there is an ethnic-based conflict, it does not shift into all-out genocide because of Malaysia's stable institutions (Mann, 2004), which are able to address such conflicts peacefully. By the government legally accepting diversity in the population, minorities in Malaysia are not afraid of the loss of their identity and thus are more willing to participate in the political process. This is important because a democracy could not work without political equality among all people. Malaysia, not unlike any other socially diverse country, is proof that ethnic, religious, and linguistic politics do not have to lead to a downfall of democracy if the elites are committed to the democratic process and institutions.

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