

Democracy and Development: A Comparative Analysis of Nigeria and Malaysia

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Nigeria and Malaysia share certain features in common. Both are plural societies; both experienced colonialism and both are federal and “democratic” states. However, unlike Nigeria, Malaysia has been able to tackle not only its cultural and religious differences, but also economic challenges. Within the past three decades, it has deepened its democracy and achieved a significant level of economic development via responsible political leadership as well as consistent economic planning hence, Malaysia is now one of the emerging economies in the world with a prospect of joining the league of developed nations in the nearest future. This is a great feat for the country that was far behind Nigeria in the 70s in terms of economic development. Using descriptive and historical approach as well as data from secondary sources such as text books, journal articles, newspapers, magazines and monographs, this paper, comparatively appraises the practice of democracy, and development efforts in both countries over the years. The aim is to unearth how Malaysia was able to strengthen its democracy and achieve economic transformation, whereas Nigeria has not. The paper concludes that the Malaysian experience is a clear testament that democracy and development can be achieved in plural societies like Nigeria, but only when public policies are informed by collective interest and driven by an unflinching political will.

Key Words: Democracy, development, comparison, leadership, Nigeria, Malaysia

Introduction

In the extant literature, apart from corruption, the most recurring explanation as to why democracy and development have eluded the Third world countries is that their multi-ethnic configuration and the legacy of colonialism are not amenable to democratic practice and development. This particular reason is often deployed to explain the crisis of democracy and development in Nigeria. On the contrary, Malaysia has proven that democracy and development are feasible in plural societies. Interestingly, Nigeria and Malaysia have similar historical and cultural characteristics. Both are plural societies; both were colonized by Britain and both inherited federal and “democratic” structures at independence. At independence, Nigeria and Malaysia had high hopes of consolidating democratic practice and achieving rapid economic development. Five decades after, Malaysia, even with its quasi democracy, has to a large extent been able to realize these hopes especially in the area of socio-economic transformation, whereas Nigeria has not. This raises some fundamental questions: Why did two countries with such similar colonial and ethno-religious features achieve levels of development that are poles apart? What has Malaysia done right or is doing well that Nigeria has not or is not? What lessons can the latter learn from the former?

To answer these questions, this article will examine development efforts particularly as they re-


late to economic policies and planning, policy consistency, policy implementation, human development index, unemployment rate and the incidence of poverty, in both countries. But it will first look at the history of both countries and appraise their democratic practice over the years using attributes such as regular free and fair elections; separation of powers; the rule of law; freedom of the press and civil societies and above all, the respect of fundamental human rights.

A Brief Conceptual Clarification

Democracy and Development

The classical idea of democracy is “rule by the people” and this is derived from the combination of two Greek words – *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). The most widely reference definition of democracy was that offered by Abraham Lincoln which is that democracy is a government “of the people, by the people and for the people”.

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Schumpeter (1947:269) defined democracy as “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples’ vote”. In the words of Dahl (1976) democracy is a form of “elective polyarchy” which guarantees popular participation and inclusiveness in decision-making. Przeworski (1991, p.10) posited that “democracy is a system in which parties lose elections”. For any system of government to qualify as a democracy it must “ensure peaceful competitive political participation in an environment that guarantees political and civil liberties...[However] democracy could mean different things to different people in different historical and cultural traditions” (Samarasinghe, 1994, p.8). This explains why sometimes even semi-autocratic governments lay claim to be practicing democracy. But Jega (2002) cited in Jamo (2013, p.86) opined that “if there is any consensus about what democracy means, it is perhaps in relation to the understanding that, it is not personal rule, and that, it is different from authoritarian/dictatorial rule”. Generally speaking, democracy is that system of government which in theory and practice, guarantees periodic free and fair elections, separation of powers, checks and balances, the rule of law and most essentially, respect of the fundamental human rights as well as popular sovereignty exercised directly by the people or through their elected representatives.

On the other hand, development is a multi-faceted process which entails high economic growth, reduction of economic inequality and elimination of absolute poverty (Todaro 1989 cited in Majekodunmi, 2012, p.65). It is a “continuous process of positive change in the quality of life of an individual or a society” (Jamo, 2013, p.87). In the opinion of Gboyega (2003) cited in Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011, p.237-8) development implies “improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future”.

Democracy and development “are inseparable because the components of development such as; discipline, commitment, honesty, transparency, accountability peaceful co-existence, integrity, etc are also embedded in democracy. The success of one leads to the success of the other and vice versa” (Lawal and Olukayode, 2012, p.452). Similarly, Lipset cited in Samarasinghe (1994, p.14) noted that “economic development is essential for democracy to come into being”.

Democratic Practice and Development Efforts in Nigeria

To understand how a country that inherited so much from nature has achieved so little and given back too little to its citizens, it is perhaps, impera-

tive to begin this analysis with a brief history of Nigeria, and then proceed to its encounter with democracy and development.

With over 200 ethnic groups and 500 indigenous languages as well as 2 major religions - Islam and Christianity, Nigeria is indeed a heterogeneous society and the most populous country in Africa. Its largest ethnic groups are: the Hausa-Fulani in the North who are predominantly Moslems, the Igbo in the East who are overwhelmingly Christians, and the Yoruba in the West half of whom are Christians and the rest Moslems (World Bank, 2013). Nigeria got its independence from Britain on 1st October, 1960. The 2006 Census placed the country’s population at over 140 million (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2014). Nigeria is a hugely resource endowed country, having the 6th largest gas reserves and the 8th largest crude oil reserves as well as 37 different solid minerals in commercial quantities (Sanusi, 2010, p.2). This is in addition to its large arable land and lush vegetation laden with a great biodiversity of flora and faunas.

In attempt to address the concerns arising from its multi-ethnic configurations, it adopted a federal structure prior to its independence, thus Nigeria is today, a federation of 36 states. It became a republic in 1963 hence all political leaders from president to local government councilors are selected through elections. Nigeria inherited Parliamentary system of government at independence, but switched to presidential system in 1979. It operates a multi-party electoral system. State power is shared among the three arms of government – the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Nigeria is a secular state. It has a constitution that guarantees democracy and its attributes such as separation power, the rule of law, freedom of the press and inalienable human rights like right to life, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of speech, right to private ownership of property, and so on (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, Nigeria has had a chequered political history since independence. Over the years, bad governance has been a recurring feature of the Nigerian state. To this end, the late literary legend – Chinua Achebe once lamented that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (Achebe, 1984, p.1). The culture of flagrant disrespect of the grand norm (the constitution) among the Nigerian politicians had bred other anti democratic cultures: ethnicity and nepotism, corruption, religious intolerance, election rigging and political intolerance, et cetera. The implications of these abnormal cultures were unhealthy inter-ethnic rivalry, religious crisis and political instability. Hence barely six years after independence, Nigeria experienced military coups and counter-coups which later resulted in a 30 month civil

war (1967-1970) in which millions of people lost their lives and properties worth billions of naira destroyed.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian political elites learnt little or no lessons from the Nigerian civil war also known as the Biafran war. Hence after the war, the culture of corruption, abuse of the constitution, impunity, ethnicity, nepotism, religious and political intolerance and election rigging not only continued, but also increased and so did the attendant inter-ethnic rivalry, military coups, religious and political crises and the consequent economic underdevelopment. The rise of insurgency in the North and militancy in the Niger Delta and ethnic militias (MASSOB, OPC, MEND, etc) in virtually all the six geo-political zones are some of the implications of the failures of political leadership and democratic culture. Similarly, Okezie and Amir (2011, P.369) posited that the inability of the Nigerian political leaders to forge a national identity and interest that “transcend ethnic, regional, religious and personal interests” has been the major cause of political instability in Nigeria. In his own view, Mazrui (2011, p.2) argued that Nigeria’s democracy was undermined by its rich resources endowment particularly the discovery of crude oil before independence which later led (though indirectly) to the scramble for the oil wealth or the petrodollar by the political elites, and in that scramble everything else was marginalized and/or abused including the constitution and democratic practice. Citing as an example how the discovery of oil in Norway after its independence helped it to stabilize and steer its democracy and development, Mazrui argued that such would have been the fate of Nigeria if the oil resource was discovered few or many years after independence and democratic experiment.

Even though Nigeria has all the essential principles of democracy enshrined in its constitution, there is always a problem when it comes to their implementation. In most of the Nigeria’s political sojourn as a nation, the provisions of the constitution and other extant laws have not been always adhered to by the governing elites, and this has been the bane of Nigeria’s democracy since independence. For example, in terms of regular free and fair elections, prior to the emergence of the current fledgling democracy in 1999, elections in Nigeria have not been regular due to incessant military intervention. In fact, between 1966 and 1993, Nigeria witnessed six successful military coups which terminated three different Republics or democratically elected governments. In Nigeria’s 54 years existence as an independent nation, the military ruled for 25 years. And between 1960 till date, most of the few elections that did take place (with the exception of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election and 2011 General Elections) were neither free nor fair nor credible.

When it comes to the respect of the fundamental human rights, the Nigerian state has not fared better. During the military era, the constitution was suspended and the inalienable rights of Nigerians were abused. Examples were the cancellation of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election which was adjudged to be the most free and fair elections ever-conducted in Nigerian history, and the subsequent unlawful arrest and imprisonment of Chief M.K.O Abiola who was the acclaimed winner of that election; the unfair trial and execution of human and environmental rights activist - Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others (the Ogoni Nine); the unlawful arrest and detention of many outspoken journalists and other critics of the junta such as Prof. Wole Soyinka, Chris Anyanwu, to mention but a few. Also, the press was equally targeted by the military. The obnoxious Decree No.4 by Gen. Mohammad Buhari’s regime which limited press freedom attests to this. Although since the emergence of the present 4th Republic respect for human rights has improved especially as it affects freedom of speech and the press, hence unlike before, Nigerians now criticize those in power and so do the press particularly the privately owned media who now engage in constructive, and sometimes, subjective criticisms of the political leaders with little or no harassment by the government in power.

Also, the principle of separation of power was not observed during the military era since the legislature was usually suspended, and the judiciary existed at the mercy of the military ruling council. Once the constitution was suspended and decrees enacted in place of the constitution, the military never adhered to the rule of law. In fact, the military era was characterized by monumental corruption and gross abuse of state power and democratic attributes.

Regrettably, the various successive civilian administrations did not fare better in this regard. It is on record that in the 1st Republic, the ruling party –Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) rigged the 1964 Federal Elections as well as the 1965 Western Regional Elections. This generated crises which indirectly caused the termination of the Republic. The politicians of the Second Republic did not live above board either. Apart from corruption and mismanagement of public funds that characterized that era, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) under President Shehu Shagari rigged the 1983 General Elections, and the crisis it generated created the condition for the military to intervene again in Nigerian politics. The 3rd Republic was botched. The present 4th Republic which started in 1999 has not fared better. Apart from the rigging of 2003 and 2007 General Elections by President Olusegun Obasanjo and the ruling party – the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) coupled with the chronic unhealthy inter-party relations between the ruling party and the major opposition parties, corruption

and ill-gotten wealth by politicians are being celebrated. The recent award of National Honour to an ex-convict - the former governor of Bayelsa state – D.S.P Alamiyeseigha by President Goodluck Jonathan attests to this.

Although Nigeria operates a multi-party system, political parties are often formed along ethnic lines, and the ruling party hardly forms a workable and cordial coalition or alliance with the opposition parties. Also, both the members of the ruling party and opposition parties indulge in undemocratic practices such as corruption and election rigging, and some of them do fan the embers of religious and political intolerance thus, the prevailing cases (though isolated) of religious and political crises which have continued to decimate the Nigerian population and material resources and by extension, impede effort towards democratization. Accordingly, Majekodunmi, (2012, p.68) opined that: *Corruption is quite widespread and consists of various forms and this is why each successive administration in Nigeria has always been accused of corruption. Till today, it is pertinent to note that some state governors have been accused of corrupt practices including the immediate past Senate President, Adolphus Wabara, with some members of the National Assembly in league with the former minister for Education, Prof. Fabian Osuji. So also, the erstwhile Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun was convicted on charges of graft. All these serve as barriers to our growth as a nation because private interests have taken over public interest.*

More, the rule of law is not being strictly adhered to. It appears some people in power are above the law. An example was the refusal of the former Head of State – Gen. Ibrahim Babangida to appear before Oputa Panel (a commission of inquiry which was lawfully constituted and mandated to investigate the crimes and injustices committed by the past military regimes). In a similar vein, some former presidents, ministers, governors, lawmakers, etc, who have been accused of embezzling public funds or appropriating to themselves the commonwealth still walk scot-free today, even when their constitutional immunity has expired. Some even deploy the same ill-gotten wealth to bribe the judiciary and obtain court orders stopping the initiation of any criminal proceedings or prosecution against them, and even police arrest. Nigeria appears to be the only country in the world where courts grant perpetual injunctions to corrupt politicians restraining them from facing trial or arrest by the law enforcement agents. The lack of constitutionalism and respect for the rule of law that characterize the actions and inactions of the present crop of Nigerian political elites make one to wonder whether the system we have in place in this 4th Republic is a democracy or a mere civilian rule. Perhaps apart from the regular elections, the only

difference between the present Republic and the past military regimes is the degree of abuse of the fundamental human rights of Nigerians as well as the use of constitution instead of decrees to govern. All this political cum democratic quagmire has continued to hinder Nigeria's quest for economic development.

Economically, Nigeria has not fared better. The failure of democracy in Nigeria has also led to the failure of economic development. Any wonder Ake (1996, p.1) observed that "by all indications, political conditions in Africa are the greatest impediment to development". How right he was! Looking at how the Nigerian political elites have mismanaged the nation's huge natural resources hence, the prevailing development woes, one cannot agree less with Ake. Nigeria is an agrarian economy richly endowed with arable land, crude oil and other minerals. In the 60s, its major exports were cocoa, palm oil, cotton and groundnuts, and later crude oil in the 70s. It has been the expectation of many that the Nigerian governing elites would use the huge proceeds from the export of cash crops and crude oil to build a viable economy that would be the envy of the world. Unfortunately, this has not happened. Although Nigerian economy performed relatively well in the 60s up to mid 70s, factors such as political corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, incessant military intervention in politics and the economic policies inconsistency and somersault have individually and in combination, stagnated or retrogressed Nigeria's development in the past four decades.

Since independence, Nigeria has had only four national development plans and these include; First National Development Plan 1962-68, Second National Development Plan 1970-74, Third National Development Plan 1975-80 and 4th National Development Plan 1981-1985. While the aim of the First National Development Plan was to achieve rapid industrialization and agricultural development, the thrust of the Second National Development Plan was to fast-track the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure that were destroyed during the Nigerian civil war, and to accelerate industrialization. The First and Second National Development Plans were to some extent, religiously implemented, and the resultant effect was a relative economic development (Ukah, 2007).

However, the Third and Fourth National Development Plans which were a continuation of the previous plans with some new additions (like employment generation, improvement of living standards, etc) to reflect the changing needs of the time, were not adequately implemented due to political corruption, the decline in oil revenue and the lack of strong political will among the political elites, hence they failed, and this marked the beginning of Nigeria's economic stagnation and retrogression. Suffice it to note here that the Dutch disease that

accompanied the oil price boom of the early 1970s which shifted priority attention to oil and gas, but neglected investment in agricultural and industrial sectors contributed immensely to Nigeria's development problem because when the price of crude oil decreased significantly in the 1980s and Nigeria had no other strong alternative source of external revenues, the oil boom became oil doom since the last two national development plans were to be funded with oil revenue (Okezie and Amir, 2011, p.375). In their submission, Osabuohien, Efobi and Salami (2012, p.13) argued that "the high expectations of the various planning episodes might not have been realised due to inadequate commitment to the planning imperatives, plan and fiscal indiscipline, corruption and mismanagement of resource". Worst still, since 1985, Nigeria has not had another national development plan other than the various ambitious but often ambiguous development agendas or economic visions by the various successive governments. The likes of Vision 2010; National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS); the 7 point Agenda and Vision 20:2020, all belong to this category. One of the major problems with these development visions or agendas is that unlike the national development plans of the 60s, 70s and 80s which were built on the principle of succession and continuity, they were often a discontinuation of previous governments' development policies. Hence, in recent times, development agendas in Nigeria are informed by the successor government intention to either alienate and belittle the achievement of its predecessor, or an attempt to consolidate power and accumulate wealth. To achieve this, development agendas are renamed development visions and vice versa even when such agendas and visions have the same contents, and also, old contracts are re-awarded, funds are re-allocated and projects relocated (in some cases) to the village of the successor president or governor, while those projects that cannot be re-awarded or relocated are usually abandoned or under-funded. In this way, the so-called development agenda or vision becomes the governing elites' tool for political vendetta, power

consolidation, wealth accumulation, and personal glory should the agenda succeed. This explains why Vision 2010 was jettisoned even before its target date of 2010 and was replaced with NEEDS which was later abandoned for a 7 Point Agenda that has now been replaced with Vision 20:2020.

Meanwhile, most of these development policies are good in content, and capable of engendering the so-much needed socio-economic development, but political corruption, financial impropriety and lack of unfailing political will among the governing elites always hinder their implementation and success. And among "the reasons why economies fail is fiscal indiscipline" (Moyela, 2014, p.70). That is why several decades of Nigerian government pre-occupation with development agendas have failed to improve the welfare of its citizens. In this light, Ogundiya (2010, p.201) lamented that "political instability, abject poverty, acute youth unemployment, heightened crime rate, poor health prospects and widespread malnourishment have been the main features of Nigeria's political economy".

Not even the rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is now about \$522.6 billion (World Bank, 2014) has been able to dislodge poverty and decrease unemployment rate in Nigeria. Thus, Sanusi (2010, p.3) noted that: *Economic growth has risen substantially, with annual average of 7.4 per cent in the last decade. But the growth has not been inclusive, broad-based and transformational. Agriculture and services have been the main drivers of growth. The implication of this trend is that economic growth in Nigeria has not resulted in the desired structural changes that would make manufacturing the engine of growth, create employment, promote technological development and induce poverty alleviation. Available data has put the national poverty level at 54.4 per cent.*

Poverty level in Nigeria has become "extremely high compared to other countries that have the same level of potentials the country has". This is partly caused by corruption and parasitic bureaucracy which have continued to impede "genuine investment and growth" (Nigeria's Democracy and National Development Conference Report, 2012).

Table. Inigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) Trend, 1980-2012

Year	Life expectancy	Years of Schooling	GNI per Capita (2005 PPP\$)
1980	45.5	6.6	1,571
1985	45.9	8.4	1,202
1990	45.6	6.5	1,274
1995	45.1	6.5	1,303
2000	46.3	7.9	1,285
2005	49	9	1,540
2010	51.4	9	1,928
2011	51.9	9	2,017
2012	52.3	9	2,102

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Index Report 2013

Human Development Index (HDI) indicates progress in three key human development indicators: healthy and long life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living which are measured through life expectancy, access to knowledge and National Income (GNI) per capita expressed in constant 2005 international dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) rates (UNDP, 2013). Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) over the years shows that the standard of living has

been low and declining though with little improvement in recent years. With a per capita income of 2,102 dollars as indicated in Figure 1, the standard of living in Nigeria in 2012 was among the world lowest. In the same year, life expectancy in Nigeria was 52 years and the Human Development Index value was 0.471. These were below the Sub-Saharan Africa average of 54 years and 0.475, respectively (UNDP, 2013).

Table 2. Nigeria's Unemployment Trend, 2010-2014

Year	Unemployment Rate
2010	21.1%
2011	23.9%
2012	24.3%
2013	28.5%
2014	30% (projection)

Source: CBN and NBS cited in Eme, 2014

Unemployment is one of the key indicators for measuring development of a particular country. A country is said to be achieving development if its unemployment is declining. And when jobs are created employment increases while unemployment declines. This often enhances households' income and purchasing power, living standard, social security and savings. The reverse is the case in a country with high unemployment rate (Jamo, 2013, p.90). Regrettably, Nigeria has been experiencing exponential rise in unemployment as the data in Figure 2 indicates. The data shows that between 2010 and 2013 unemployment rate increased from 21.1% to 28.5%. This means that Nigeria's rising economic growth has not translated into higher employment rates thus, about 50 million Nigerian youth are estimated to be currently unemployed (World Bank, 2013). And just as the past military regimes failed to use the proceeds from "Nigeria's enormous oil wealth...to build a viable industrial base for the country and to launch an agrarian revolution to liquidate mass poverty" (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011, p.238), the present civilian administration is so engrossed in crass accumulation to the detriment of national development.

Nonetheless, apart from the rising unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, basic amenities such as roads, railways, electricity, hospitals and schools are either lacking or dysfunctional, and insecurity is becoming invasive: posing threat to the nation's corporate existence. The "mounting security challenges are a major cause of concern" (Ogunlesi, 2014, p.76) because without peace and security Nigeria cannot achieve development (Kolawole, 2014, p.104). With all these appalling indicators, it is clear that Vision 20:2020 with which Nigeria

hopes to become one of the top 20 economies in the world in the year 2020 may remain a mirage.

Democracy and Development: The Malaysian Experience

Again, we will begin this analysis with a brief history of Malaysia because the knowledge of such history is relevant to understanding the trend of Malaysia's democracy and development and how the interplay of race and religion influences its politics and economy, and it is this we now turn to. Malaysia is located in South East Asia. It got its independence in 1957 from Britain. Its major exports include tin, rubber, palm oil and recently, crude oil, electronics and electrical. Currently, Malaysia has a population of over 29 million (World Bank, 2014), and three major ethnic groups: the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians. The Malays, also known as the Bumiputeras (meaning sons of the soil) include the Malays and other indigenous tribes such as Kadazans, Ibans, Muruts and Bajaus and they collectively make up 62 percent of the total population, while the minorities who are Chinese and Indian migrant population brought in (as cheap labour) by the British colonialists to work in tin mines and rubber plantations make up 26 percent and 10 percent, respectively. Islam is the religion of the state, but religious right or freedom of religion is guaranteed for the minorities (Kim, 2001).

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy hence, the king -"Yang di Pertuan Agong" derives his power from, and is limited by the constitution. As the head of state, the king presides over the Conference of Rulers comprising a chamber of nine Malay Sultans and four Governors, and he has prerogative powers over matters concerning Malay

culture and tradition. However, the real political power lies with the prime minister who is the head of government and who must be an elected member of the parliament. State power is shared between the legislature (the parliament), the executive (which is also part of the parliament), and the judiciary. Malaysia's parliament is bicameral comprising the Senate (Dewan Negara) which is the upper chamber and the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) which is the lower chamber (Heufers, 2002, p.44). The federation of Malaysia was established in 1963, combining the territories of Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak. However, two years later, in 1965, Singapore was separated from the federation. Today, Malaysia's federation comprises of three federal territories and thirteen states (BTI, 2014, P.3).

In terms of democratic practice, Malaysia has been described with many political adjectives. The Malaysian dual "semi authoritarian" and participatory political rule has elicited descriptions such as "semi-democracy" or "quasi-democracy" or "syncretic state" which "operates at a multidimensional level, mixing coercive elements with electoral and democratic procedures" (Haji Zakaria, 1989, James Jesudason, 1996, cited in Heufers, 2002, p.40). The Description of Malaysia as pseudo-democratic and semi-authoritarian emanates from the fact that Malaysia possesses "not only all the trappings of a democracy, but also some authoritarian features" (Fazwan and Farouk, 2011, p.93). In consonance with this, William Case cited in (Weiss, 2005, p.64) observed that most Asian democracies (such as Malaysia) are pseudo-democratic because they "have few of the protections associated with liberal democracy, but also lack the more systematic repression associated with hard authoritarianism".

For instance, Malaysia operates a multiparty-system and has had regular elections since independence but only one particular political party – Barisan Nasional (BP) though a coalition (made up of three major ethnic based political parties: the United Malay National Organization – UMNO as a senior partner representing the Malays, as well as the Malaysian Chinese Association – MCA and the Malaysian Indian Congress – MIC, as junior partners representing the Chinese and Indians, respectively), has been ruling the country till date. Even the ex Prime Minister - Mahathir Mohamad stayed over two decades in power (1981-2003). Throwing more light on this, Weiss (2005, p.64) stated that: *Opposition parties compete openly and with some success, especially at the state (as opposed to federal) level; a degree of space is allowed for even politically oriented CSOs; and the regime claims a mandate and legitimacy on the basis of regular elections, even if these elections are not entirely free and fair. Still, state and ruling party are virtually fused, as permutations on the same ruling coalition (led always by the United Malays National*

Organisation, UMNO) have governed since independence in 1957.

But for the Malaysian ruling party not to lose elections for over five decades is strange in a democracy because according to Przeworski, (1991, p.10) "democracy is a system in which parties lose elections. There are parties: divisions of interest, values and opinions. There is competition, organized by rules. And there are periodic winners and losers". The ruling party in Malaysia cannot claim that all its electoral victories since independence have been free of manipulations and other democratic malpractices. Even in consolidated democracies like the United States of America, political parties do lose elections from time to time irrespective of how good its policies may be. The import of political parties losing elections in a democracy is that it re-affirms that popular sovereignty belongs to the people, and that the people have the power to change the government through election. It is this people's power that makes democracy unique and differentiates it from absolute monarchy and dictatorship.

Also, freedom of worship or right to religion is guaranteed in Malaysian laws, but Islam is the official religion of the state, and this is a source of worry for the minority Christians and Buddhists. Moreover, all Malaysians are equal before the law but Affirmative Action which gives certain privileges to the majority ethnic group – the Bumiputera is enshrined in the extant laws, and the minority Chinese and Indians view this policy as discriminatory and unjust. Although freedom of speech and the press is allowed, any criticism of the monarchy, the Bumiputera Affirmative Action and/or the influence of Islam on state policies is unlawful no matter how potent and constructive such criticism may be. And any media outlets or civil society organizations (CSOs) that critique the government or the monarch often have their licenses suspended. In other words, freedom of speech, association and the press is limited in Malaysia (BTI, 2014).

Another repressive content of Malaysian democracy is the Internal Security Act (ISA) which it inherited from Britain but still in active use today (Kim, 2001, p.67) though with some additions and subtractions. The Act still empowers the state security agents to arrest without warrant and detain without trial. The ruling party sometimes deploys this repugnant law to witch-hunt the opposition and to cage members of the public. And even when there is arrest and trial, the judiciary is often compromised by the executive. Any wonder Celebi and Ibrahim (2011, p.14) warned that although Malaysia is "a country with the potential to demonstrate...that a Muslim-majority country can flourish with a strong economy and a strong democracy, these values and practices...are threatened by such practices as smearing one's political enemies for political gain", and a typical example was the un-

fair arrest, trial and imprisonment of the Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition party - Anwar Ibrahim.

There is no doubt that Malaysia has enjoyed “decades of regular elections and political stability. However, a full-fledged democracy requires fulfillment of three essential conditions: extensive political competition, a high level of political participation as well as guaranteed civil and political liberties” (Crouch cited in Heufers, 2002, p.40). The Malaysian state has deliberately and calculatedly sustained and also created authoritarian procedures and institutions to hinder the transition of Malaysia to a full-fledged democracy. To understand why the post-independence Malaysian state is semi-authoritarian and at the same time semi-democratic, one has to go back to the events of 1969 whose remote cause dates back to the negative legacy of colonialism. At independence, Kim (2001, p.71) reported that: *The Malay community was confined to the rural areas, whereas the Chinese dominated the towns and also much of the economy. The economic dominance by the Chinese was seen as the main cause of the economic backwardness of the Malays...On the other hand, the Chinese community perceived the Malays as holding the political reins of the country...and therefore being in a position to endorse policies that discriminated against the Chinese. This belief regarding both communities originated from the divide and rule strategy of the British colonialists, where business opportunities were opened for the elite Chinese capitalists while at the same time upper-class Malays were streamed into the civil service. This demarcation of roles according to ethnic back-grounds laid the base for ethnic consciousness as well as conflict. Tensions between the two ethnic groups erupted into riots after the elections in May 1969. Following the riots, a strong central government structure was set up in which the Executive dominated and controlled democratic practices.*

Hence, “ever since the racial riots of 13th May 1969, [in which] 196 people died, and 753 buildings were destroyed, government action is mainly aimed at reducing tension and avoiding ethnic conflicts. Its political legitimacy draws from attaining this goal rather than from the compliance with democratic rules” (Heufers, 2002, P.41). It is against this background that the former Prime Minister of Malaysia - Mahathir Mohamad asserted that “democracy is not the easiest way to govern a country, more often than not it fails to bring about stability, much less prosperity”. He further stated that “for a society precariously balanced on a razor’s edge, where one false, or even true word can lead to calamity, it is criminal irresponsibility to allow that one word to be uttered” (Mahathir Mohamad, 1985, cited in Kim, 2001, p.69). While we relatively agree with the view of the Prime Minister

especially as it relates to racially diverse societies, we argue that though democracy alone may not guarantee stability and economic prosperity, it is certainly an imperative for sustainable peace and development, and any political stability and economic transformation that are exclusively founded on authoritarianism may not withstand the test of time as the Arab Spring and the regimes that crumbled as a result indicate. Even the world’s last standing absolute regimes like Saudi Arabia, Morocco etc, are beginning to reform and embrace some principles of democracy knowing full well that they will certainly fall if they don’t democratize. And perhaps the story of Malaysia would have been different today had the ruling elites failed to incorporate democratic elements such as periodic elections and multi-ethnic or consociational coalition into their authoritarian strategy.

That said, Malaysian democracy, at best, could be described as a benevolent dictatorship however, what endears it to many particularly plural societies where political stability has remain elusive is its ability to achieve over four decades of racial harmony, a cordial ruling coalition comprising major political parties from both the ethnic majority – the Malays, and the minorities – the Chinese and Indians, periodic elections, and above all, political stability and good governance.

In the area of economic development, the Malaysian state has performed even better. Its political elites have transformed Malaysia from a poor unemployment-ridden agrarian economy (it used to be) to a semi-industrialized nation with a prospect of joining the league of most developed countries in the nearest future. The rapid economic transformation of Malaysia commenced over four decades ago when the government embarked on a reform aimed at industrializing Malaysia. It would be recalled that at independence, tin, rubber and palm oil were the major source of foreign exchange earnings for Malaysia (crude oil later joined the export list from 1970s). Five decades after, Malaysia has become not only the world largest exporter of palm oil, but also an important exporter of electronics and electrical products (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p.xi).

Since independence, Malaysia has launched ten development plans. The First Malaysia Plan (1956-60) was crafted by the departing British colonialists with little inputs from the Malaysian nationalists. The Second Malaysia Plan (1961-65) was the first post-independence national development plan. Although the plan emphasized agricultural development, diversification and economic empowerment of all Malaysians, it failed to achieve these aims, hence the racial riot of 1969 which brought to the fore the huge poverty, inequality and inter-ethnic discord that were ravaging the country. The riot interrupted the Third Malaysia Plan (1966-70), but in 1971 the Malaysian

government decided to take drastic actions to tackle the challenges of the rising economic inequality, poverty and the attendant racial discords. It embarked on national reforms which culminated to the inauguration of the New Economic Policy – NEP (1971-90) which became the first economic Outline Perspective Plan (OPP). Apart from rapid agricultural development, diversification and industrialization as its broad aim, the New Economic Policy (NEP) had other two pronged objectives: poverty alleviation and the restructuring of the Malaysian society to arrest economic inequality among Malaysians irrespective of race in order to significantly reduce and eventually eliminate the identification of race with economic function (Aun, 2004, p.69). To achieve these aims, the government declared and implemented Bumiputera Affirmative Action so as to bridge the economic gap between the Chinese and the economic disadvantaged Bumiputeras (the Malays). “The government justified the affirmative action character of the NEP, claiming that the wide economic gap between the Malays and the non-Malays (the Chinese) threatened racial harmony and had prompted the May 1969 riots” (BTI, 2014, p.4). Under this policy, while still allowing the Chinese a free hand in the economy and opportunities to prosper, the government provided the Malays with some privileges like quotas for government jobs, contracts, special licenses, university admissions and scholarships. “Trust agencies such as Perbadanan Nasional Bhd (Pernas) and Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB), were set up to acquire corporate assets for the Bumiputera as a community”. It was projected that by 1990 the economic inequality in Malaysia would have been reduced and the Malays should have acquired at least 30% ownership in all important sectors of the economy. The Malaysian ruling elites gave all the needed energies, commitment and patriotism and vigorously implemented NEP, and it succeeded in engendering rapid economic development and at the same time elevating

the economic status of the Malays. The success of NEP created at least national feelings that the ruling party comprehends not only the challenges arising from the heterogeneous nature of Malaysian society, but also committed to the economic needs of the various ethnic groups (Kim, 2001, p.71).

It is worthy of note that subsequent development plans were built on the continuum of NEP and its successes, though sometimes with some variations (like increasing the role of the state in the economy and/or opening up the economy) to address the changing needs of the changing time. The Fourth and Fifth Malaysia Plans which were launched in-between NEP, and other post-1990 development plans including the present Tenth Malaysia Plan, all attest to this principle of policy continuity. Hence, what has remained unique in Malaysia’s quest for development over the years is the culture of policy continuity and total commitment to national unity and development among the political elites, and this has yielded an overwhelming positive result. In general, absolute poverty has declined. Poverty rate decreased from a record 49.3% in 1970 to 29.2% in 1980, 17.1% in 1990, 7.5% in 1999, and 1.7% in 2012 (Aun, 2004, World Bank, 2014). Even the very few who are still poor are being taken care of by the government. For instance, in 2012, the Malaysian government launched a social security program called 1Malaysia People’s Aid (Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia, BR1M) aimed at assisting the country’s poorest. Under this program, households with a monthly income of 3,000 Malaysian Ringgit or less receive payments of 500 Malaysian Ringgit. While individuals who are 21 years or above who earn less than 2,000 Malaysian Ringgit a month, receive a single-time 250 Malaysian Ringgit (BTI, 2014, P.26).

The human development index in Malaysia has also improved significantly, and unemployment has drastically declined within this period as the figures below reveal.

Table. 3 Malaysia’s Human Development Index (HDI) Trend, 1980-2012

Year	Life Expectancy	Years of Schooling	GNI per Capita (2005 PPP\$)
1980	67.4	9	4,692
1985	68.8	9.8	5,009
1990	70.1	9.7	6,328
1995	71.1	10.2	8,702
2000	72.1	11.9	9,378
2005	72.9	12.6	11,020
2010	74	12.6	12,758
2011	74.2	12.6	13,322
2012	74.5	12.6	13,676

Source: Adapted from UNDP Human Development Index Report 2013

Table 4. Malaysia's Unemployment Trend 2009-2012

Year	Unemployment Rate
2009	3.7%
2010	3.4%
2011	3.0%
2012	2.9%

Source: Adapted from BTI, 2014

Table 3 shows that between 1980 and 2012, life expectancy in Malaysia increased from 67 to 74 years, while the per capita income more than tripled from 4,692 dollars to 13,676 dollars. The HDI value also stood at 0.769 in 2012 (UNDP, 2013). All these positive indicators are signs that the standard of living in Malaysia has improved remarkably.

Table 4 also indicates a falling unemployment rate hence, from 3.7% in 2009, it declined to 2.9% in 2012. This shows that Malaysia's GDP growth of 7% on the average (World Bank, 2014) is inclusive and impacting the lives of the majority of its citizens. It further reveals that Malaysia's economic prosperity is not "growth without development" which has come to characterize many developing economies. In this regard, Commonwealth of Australia, (2005, p.xi) noted that "economic growth and social development have gone hand-in-hand...most Malaysians who want a job can find one...Malaysian purchasing power has not been eroded...literacy rates have risen appreciably. Most of the country has access to...water, electricity and roads".

The World Bank's Doing Business Index 2014 ranked Malaysia 6th out of 189 countries in the world and this shows that the country is among the world's most business-friendly countries (World Bank, 2014). Malaysia has also performed better in the area of gender equality. In 2011, with a Gender Inequality Value of 0.286, it ranked 43rd out of 146 countries. The female literacy rate is 94.6% which is higher than male literacy rate of 90.3% (BTI, 2014, P.14).

With all these positive development indicators, Malaysia has once again endeared itself to the world. Malaysia is no longer trying to conquer hunger, poverty, and unemployment for it had done that and successfully too, within the past 30 years. Its current preoccupation is to attain high income status by 2020 while sustaining or doubling the economic growth it achieved over the past three decades, hence the launching of the New Economic Model (NEM) in 2010.

Democracy and Development in Nigeria and Malaysia Compared

From the proceeding analysis, it is palpably clear that both Nigeria and Malaysia have performed differently in terms of democratic practice and development efforts, and the results of this in both

countries are also different. In terms of democratic practice, Malaysia is a semi-democracy. It operates a multi-party electoral system and has conducted periodic elections since independence (even if those elections were not free and fair). Also, its political elites, unlike Nigeria, have been able to evolve a lasting cordial ruling coalition representing the interests of all the ethnic groups. Even though Islam is the religion of the state, other religious minorities have freedom of religion and worship. This is implemented both in theory and in practice, thus there is hardly religious crisis in Malaysia. All these have resulted in over four decades of racial harmony and political stability. However, respect of fundamental human rights is still limited, as some undemocratic provisions of the extant legislations such as the Internal Security Act (which has been in existence since colonial era), Civil Societies Act, Emergency Rule (which has been in existence since the 1969 riot), Police Act, etc, still exist, and are sometimes deployed by the state to unduly limit freedom of speech, association and the press. Hence Fazwan and Farouk (2011, p.105) suggested that the unnecessarily restrictive legislations been repeatedly deployed by the Malaysian government to restrict and punish the civil societies "often in an arbitrary fashion" should be reformed. And without such reform, civil societies cannot perform its expected functions like oversight and checkmating the excesses of the government.

On the other hand, prior to 1999, elections in Nigeria were irregular owing to the incessant military intervention during which the inalienable rights of Nigerians were also abused. However, elections have been regular since the return of democracy in 1999 and respect of fundamental human rights has relatively improved. But unlike Malaysia, the Nigerian political elites have not been able to develop a healthy inter-ethnic and inter-party relations, much less mutual ruling coalition. It is on record that the coalition government of the 1st Republic between the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was not cordial and as such, could not last. Like in the past, corruption, nepotism, ethnicity and religious jingoism (despite the fact that Nigeria is a secular nation, some Northern states have adopted Sharia Laws without taking into consideration the concerns of the Christian minorities), are still the order of the day. The implication of this however, has been over four dec-

ades of ethno-religious crises and political instability.

In the area of economic development, Malaysia has also fared better than Nigeria. Unlike Nigeria, Malaysia has transformed from being a poverty-laden agrarian economy at independence to a fast industrializing society that produces and exports not only agricultural produce like palm oil and rubber, but also finished goods such as electronics and electrical parts. Thanks to its patriotic political elites who, in the past four decades, have shown strong political will to national development, hence the culture of consistent economic planning, policy continuity and fiscal discipline which have come to define development efforts in Malaysia over the years, and which also led to the success of NEP via which high economic inequality and abject poverty were remarkably reduced. To this end, UNRISD (2010, p.4) noted that: *The [Malaysian] national economy is one of the rare successes of post-colonial capitalism. In developmental terms, the economy has sustained high levels of economic growth and recorded meaningful degrees of structural transformation. Consequently, Malaysia has progressed from being one of many lowly, commodity-producing, underdeveloped countries to being one of the much vaunted East Asian newly industrializing economies, or what the World Bank once categorized as 'high performing Asian economies'.*

The Malaysia state "propagates religion in society as it pursues secular economic goals...it pursues a combination of economic practices ranging from liberal capitalism to state economic intervention" (Jesudason cited in Heufers, 2002, P.40-41). Despite the huge economic development success it recorded over the years, Malaysia is still working tirelessly to become one of the most developed economies in the world, hence its Vision 2020 which its leaders view not just "as a lofty goal, but more as an imperative to remain relevant" (The Economic Planning Unit – Putrajaya, 2010, p.5). However, unlike Malaysia, Nigerian economy has been mismanaged over the years by its political elites. Nigeria has underperformed when compared with its enormous resources and contemporaries like Malaysia. Decades of lack of consistent development plans and culture of policy continuity couple with political corruption have been the bane of Nigeria's development. Over the years, the political elites have failed to display evolve an attitude conducive for national development. Crass accumulation, fiscal indiscipline and lip service to economic development have been the defining character of the Nigerian elites. It is this parasitic character that has hindered agricultural development and the desired economic diversification and industrialization. Unlike Malaysia that used its crude oil revenues to diversify and develop its agricultural sector, proceeds from the sale of crude oil worth billions

of dollars have been embezzled by the Nigerian political elites. The implication of this is that Nigeria metamorphosed from being a prosperous agrarian economy at independence to a poverty and unemployment laden society, and by extension, a beggar country, which today has become paradox of "a country that is so rich yet very poor".

Even with a GDP of \$312.4 billion which is less than Nigeria's rebased GDP of \$522.6 billion (World Bank, 2014), Malaysia is economically stronger. Available key historical economic indicators attest to this. As earlier noted in Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4 above, while income per capita has risen remarkably in Malaysia over the years, it has barely increased in Nigeria. Also, while absolute poverty and unemployment have dramatically declined in Malaysia, they have increased exponentially in Nigeria. For instance, as at 1970, the absolute poverty rate in Malaysia was 49.3%, but this has decreased to 1.7% as at 2012. Unemployment has also declined to 2.9% in 2012 and it is still declining. Income per capita has increased more than three-folds from 4,692 dollars in 1980 to 13,676 dollars in 2012, and life expectancy has risen from 67 years to 74 years within the same period. All these are indicators of a healthy economy. However, in Nigeria absolute poverty which was insignificant as at 1960 has risen to 54.4% as at 2010 and it is still rising. Unemployment rate has also increased to 23.4% and 28.5% in 2012 and 2013, respectively, and it is still rising. The 2012 Nigeria's income per capita of 2,102 dollars was too paltry when compared to Malaysia's 13,676 dollars.

Although like Malaysia, Nigeria currently has a Vision Plan with which it hopes to become one of the most developed economies in the world by 2020, the parasitic character of the Nigerian elites will surely hinder this from becoming a reality. It is on record that the first big idea in the Malaysian current 10th Economic Plan with which it intends to achieve its Vision 2020, is to build an economy that is "internally driven, [but] externally aware". This is unlike Nigeria that currently gives more attention to attracting Foreign Direct Investments without looking inward to see how it can prudently use its available resources to drive its development, internally.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has been able to analyze and compare democracy and development in Nigeria and Malaysia. It found that though Malaysia is a semi-democracy it is succeeding while Nigeria is failing. It revealed what Nigeria did wrong that Malaysia has done right: From non-interference of the military in politics to regular elections to a working cordial ruling coalition comprising of, and that protects the interests of the major political parties from all the ethnic groups; from the ruling elites unwa-

vering commitment to racial harmony, national unity and economic equality to consistent development plans to policy continuity and zero tolerance for political corruption and financial impropriety. The implication of this is over four decades of political stability and overwhelming economic development in Malaysia, thus poverty and unemployment have declined from a record high at independence to the lowest level today. The paper argued that Malaysia has been able to achieve this much because it had addressed not only its minority question, but also the leadership question as well as the “majority” question as the ruling coalition and Bumiputera Affirmative Action, respectively attest. Based on this fact, the paper concludes that the success of the Malaysian experience has demonstrated the feasibility of democracy and development in multi-ethnic societies, and therefore, it recommends that Nigeria should learn from the Malaysian approach to political leadership and economic development. However, apart from unlimited freedom of speech and the press, if there is one thing Malaysia must learn from Nigeria, it is, “be not like Nigeria”.

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