



## **Participation of Political Parties in Elections in Malaysia: Allies or Adversaries of the Development Process?**

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**Abstract** : Development should strive to elevate the community's standard of living, fostering prosperity and alleviating extreme poverty. Given Malaysia's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, addressing unity is paramount for harmonious development, allowing political leaders to focus on progress. Ethnic and religious diversity, perceived as a divine gift for mutual understanding, must be effectively managed without assigning blame. In Malaysia, distinct political parties represent various ethnic groups, advocating for their democratic rights. This paper explores whether political party participation in elections aids or hinders national development. It aims to (1) examine development's purpose in a multi-ethnic setting, (2) assess the role of political elites in national development, and (3) evaluate the impact of diverse political party participation on the country's development. As a macro-conceptual secondary analysis, the study concludes that development in Malaysia should prioritize unity, as current efforts are impeded by political elites exploiting power for personal gain. While political parties are expected to catalyze development, their presence in Malaysia is viewed as a hindrance, contributing to racial divisions and issues like religious sensitivity. Managing ethnic and religious diversity is deemed essential in Malaysia, a prerequisite for successful development initiatives.

**Keywords:** Development; political participation; multi-ethnic dan multi-religious;

### **INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between politics and development has been emphasized since the era of Adam Smith, with a prevailing belief that economic development is inseparable from politics (Ehighebolo and Braimah, 2020). This paper, titled "Political Party Participation in Malaysian Elections: Ally or Adversary in the Development Process?" posits that the involvement of various political parties in Malaysian elections has not significantly contributed to the nation's development. The motivation for this article stems from recent

partisan political developments in Malaysia, characterized by widespread slander and divisive rhetoric, potentially undermining harmony and jeopardizing development—a situation perceived as intentionally created by political elites for political gain.

The article aims to enhance understanding that democratic processes, particularly the participation of diverse political parties in elections, may not directly facilitate national development. The involvement of various political parties, especially those based on ethnicity and religion in Malaysia, if not properly regulated, can have adverse effects on the country's development. Reflecting on Quranic verse Surah Saba' 58, the aspiration is for a prosperous nation where people live cooperatively and harmoniously. The essence of Surah Saba' 58 suggests that a nation's development extends beyond physical and economic aspects, encompassing human development so that individuals comprehend their role as Allah's stewards on Earth (Shahnon Ahmad, 1990; Ghazali Basri and Mohd Fuad Zarkashi, 1992).

The vision is of an affluent, blessed nation where all citizens live in peace, prosperity abounds, the nation's wealth benefits the common people, and there is trust, religious tolerance, and fair leadership. This nation, referred to by Allah as "baladatun toyyibatun wa rabbun ghafur," cannot be achieved unless the citizens understand their duty as Allah's stewards. Before attaining independence, the populace collectively dreamed of realizing this ideal when the nation gained freedom.

While citizens of any nation aspire to a peaceful existence and comfortable living after independence, the reality often diverges. Many nations, post-independence, face challenges such as poverty, societal discord, and suspicion among the populace. The dreams of a "baladatun toyyibatun wa rabbun ghafur" nation remain elusive due to developmental actors not appreciating and sometimes abusing their role as Allah's stewards.

Many countries worldwide, including Malaysia and Indonesia, are formed as multi-ethnic and multi-religious nations. In fact, all other countries globally also exhibit a multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. As citizens in democratic nations, individuals from various ethnic backgrounds have the right to participate in the country's politics. In Malaysia, for instance, diverse ethnic groups establish their political parties to represent their interests within the democratic framework. This paper aims to conceptually connect the relationship between the participation of these various political parties in elections and the nation's development process. The objectives of this paper are to:

1. Discuss development goals in a multi-ethnic nation,
2. Examine the role of political elites in national development, and
3. Explore whether the participation of diverse political parties in Malaysian elections contributes to the country's development or has opposing effects.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is fundamentally macro-conceptual, employing a methodological approach known as secondary analysis. Secondary analysis is a research technique that utilizes existing secondary data to address the study's objectives. This means that, to discuss the

central issues of this paper, the required data sources are secondary in nature. As such, several secondary data or information sources, including the Quran, Furnival (1939), Malaysia (1971), Syed Hussin Ali (1984), Brookfield (1975), Michael P. Todaro (1983), Mohd Syukri Abdullah (1989), Shahnnon Ahmad (1990), Ghazali Basri and Mohd Fuad Zarkashi (1992), Ari Aisen & Francisco Jose Viega (2010), Francis Fukuyama (2013), Syarif Muhidin Abdurahman & Wan Ibrahim Wan Ahmad (2016), Ehighebolo and Braimah (2020), as well as qualitative observations on current political developments, are utilized as foundational information for this paper.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS and DISCUSSION**

### **Development in a Multi-Ethnic Nation**

After achieving independence, nations strive vigorously to progress in their development (Mohd Syukri Abdullah, 1989). The entire energy and resources of the country are directed towards making the newly independent nation an advanced one. Development should be aimed at improving the standard of living of the population (Mohd Syukri Abdullah, 1989) by reducing poverty levels and enhancing the well-being and welfare of the people (Brookfield, 1975). In simple terms, the term development refers to the process of advancing a country in all aspects of life, both economic and non-economic (Todaro, 1983). One of the focal points of the development process for the newly independent nation is establishing political unity and stability. This is crucial to achieving the appropriate level of harmony, enabling political leaders to focus on development efforts in areas such as the economy, social aspects, and other facets of life (Ari Aisen and Francisco Jose Viega, 2010).

To achieve the desire for national unity and political stability, Malaysia introduced the New Economic Policy (RMK, 1971), whose primary objectives are:

1. Reducing and eradicating poverty by increasing income and providing job opportunities to the people regardless of their ethnicity/race.
2. Accelerating the restructuring of society to rectify economic imbalances and reduce or eliminate ethnic/racial distinctions in their economic functions.

Unity is a fundamental aspect before a nation can progress in other areas. The impact of unity and political instability on a country's economic performance is negative (Ari Aisen and Francisco Jose Viega, 2010). In a multi-ethnic nation, political stability and unity become even more crucial. It is like a variable, whose value fluctuates, determined by various determinants or other variables. If unity is the dependent variable, then many independent variables can serve as determinants of its level. This implies that other forces determine the level of unity. These forces are classified into two categories: unifying forces and divisive forces. The development goals in a multi-ethnic nation should be directed towards enhancing unifying forces and reducing divisive forces to establish harmony and unity among various ethnic groups.

Unlike Indonesia, issues related to ethnicity and religion in Malaysia remain unresolved. Since gaining independence, the issue of unity among ethnic groups is far from achieving the desired target. Negative prejudice among Malays, Chinese, and Indians persists. In

major cities, Malays, Chinese, and Indians tend to reside in areas with ethnic clustering, creating distinct Malay, Chinese, and Indian settlements.

Even though it has been 66 years since independence, and Chinese and Indians are legitimate citizens according to the constitution, Malays still perceive Chinese and Indians as foreign immigrants who do not deserve economic, social, and political rights. Malays are concerned that not only will the Malaysian economy be controlled by the Chinese, but the sovereignty of the country will also fall into Chinese hands. This Malay anxiety is not entirely unfounded. Until now, Malays view the Chinese as prioritizing their own community.

Ironically, those who feel concerned about the Chinese are ordinary Malaysians, not Malay political elites. Qualitative observations reveal that secretly, the Chinese become golden children to Malay political elites because they serve as a source of corruption. While Malay political elites publicly advocate Malay supremacy, behind the scenes, they clandestinely award mega development projects to the Chinese. This practice has led to a significant economic gap between the Chinese and Malay communities.

The implication is that unity cannot be achieved due to the deep economic disparity between the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups. Therefore, the primary goal of development after independence in a multi-ethnic nation like Malaysia is to eradicate poverty, reduce income inequality among communities, foster unity, and eliminate any misuse of power by political elites that leads to a prevalent culture of corruption, resulting in substantial income loss for the nation.

The role of political elites in national development is pivotal in any country. After achieving independence, the direction of a nation's development depends on the decisions made by political elites who hold governing power. These political elites usually operate within democratically elected political parties for a specified term. In many early-stage developing nations, the wealth of the country is often absorbed by the political elites who govern the newly independent state.

This occurs because the majority of the population in the early stages of independence may have a low understanding of the intricacies of state administration, making them susceptible to manipulation by political elites. Consequently, despite utilizing substantial national resources for development, the country may not progress, and the population remains impoverished with limited employment opportunities. Meanwhile, the political elites overseeing the development process accumulate wealth and live in luxury through continuous illicit financial gains.

In Malaysia, questions may arise, such as whether the efforts for national development are genuinely aimed at improving the well-being of the people. Or do the people merely serve as scapegoats for development projects that ultimately benefit the wealth of political elites involved in the development process? This is among the dilemmas faced by political elites in a nation's development process. What the ordinary citizens perceive in a developing

country like Malaysia is often the remarkable physical development that surpasses even that of advanced nations.

Ordinary citizens are often unaware of the processes involved in development projects or how they are negotiated with relevant parties to become our grandiosity. They are unaware of how tenders are issued, how the selection of contractors is done, how negotiations occur between development actors and the responsible contractors, and the relationships between the selected contractors and development actors. Citizens are kept in the dark about the commissions taken by political elites from approved development projects and many other secrets behind a development project deal that they remain unaware of.

The only time citizens become aware is when certain high-ranking government officials face corruption charges or when specific politicians, development actors, are found guilty of corruption. In the current political crisis in Malaysia, many development actors have been implicated in corruption cases worth billions of ringgit. Numerous prominent former political leaders have been charged in court for being involved in corruption scandals. In the ongoing critical political crisis, the current government is making efforts to demonstrate to the people that they will not compromise on any form of corruption. The government is now utilizing its investigative powers to look into corruption cases involving former ministers and prime ministers and opening investigations into individuals or other development actors who are at the center of corruption activities in Malaysia.

Once upon a time, there was a development actor in a state famously known as Ustaz 10%. It was disgraceful because this actor, a religious scholar, became involved as a member of the political elite. Ustaz, previously a renowned preacher with the potential to reform the corrupt habits of political elites, sadly succumbed to corruption when he became a crucial actor in the development process. In his jurisdiction, every contractor vying for government projects under his influence had to agree to pay him 10% of the project's tender price.

The Ustaz 10% case is not an isolated incident in Malaysia's development process. It occurs widespread among many Malay political leaders and elites. Imagine how much money Malaysia has lost due to this 10% corruption from all the mega development projects undertaken since independence until today.

Corruption is not unfamiliar in Malaysia even up to the present. In the past, when Malaysia was prosperous, such corruption was rarely heard of and not taken seriously. Corruption existed then, perhaps even more than today, but because Malaysia was wealthy at the time, people were not concerned about the mismanagement of national income. Despite development actors being involved in billion-ringgit corruption cases, the country had so much money at that time that it did not suffer significantly from the negative consequences of corruption.

This is why Malaysia did not progress as rapidly as Singapore, Korea, or Taiwan, even though these nations started developing around the same time as Malaysia. Unfortunately, development actors in Malaysia consistently exploit every opportunity within the development process to engage in corruption. While the citizens may take pride in the

development projects, the development actors boast about the wealth gained through corruption. These actors do not need to work hard to earn hundreds of millions or even billions of ringgit. They simply need to agree to a particular tender, and substantial sums of money await them.

In contrast, ordinary citizens have to work tirelessly every day to meet their family's daily needs. Some individuals spend their youth immersed in the education system, obtaining a Ph.D. to ensure they receive a decent salary to improve their family's lives. However, many of them face setbacks along the way, with some succumbing to stress and others tragically losing their lives in the prolonged struggle to attain higher education.

In a recent study involving 1,016 Malaysian citizens aged 18-65 working in various industries, the findings presented in the 2022 Workers' Well-being Report reveal that 58% of them experience fatigue, a condition that can lead to more severe mental health risks. The conclusion drawn from this study is that Malaysians endure stress and various other risks in the pursuit of a decent life. Meanwhile, political elites who serve as development actors, enjoying various privileges provided by the government, such as lucrative salaries and allowances, persistently seek opportunities to embezzle public funds as an easy path to accumulating personal wealth. For them, politics is an effortless means to amass the people's money.

### **Is the Participation of Various Political Parties in Elections a Friend or Foe to National Development?**

After the 15th General Election (PRU-15), the Unity Government (KP) was formed on November 25, 2022, taking over from the National Unity Government (PN) that governed Malaysia previously. This Unity Government is a coalition of parties from Pakatan Harapan (PH), Barisan Nasional (BN), Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), and Warisan. Before PRU-15, the PH coalition comprised only PKR, Amanah, and DAP, excluding BN, GPS, GRS, and Warisan. After PRU-15, GPS, GRS, and Warisan joined forces with PH to form the Unity Government mandated by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

Several political analysts argue that this extensive coalition could potentially remain and benefit Malaysia in the long run. This perspective follows statements from BN Chairman and Umno President, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who expressed that this new party cooperation should be maintained for an extended period to ensure a brighter future for Malaysia. BN Secretary-General, Zambry Abdul Kadir, stated that the coalition parties had signed agreements to ensure the stability of the Unity Government. Analysts suggest that PH, BN, GPS, GRS, and Warisan each possess strengths capable of forming a dynamic coalition under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim.

In Malaysia, numerous political party coalitions compete for power in elections, namely Perikatan Nasional (PN), Barisan Nasional (BN), and Pakatan Harapan (PH), which consist of various political parties. Additionally, there are parties like Warisan, Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS) in Sabah and Sarawak.

Perikatan Nasional, the former ruling coalition, was a union of several parties, particularly BERSATU and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS). Barisan Nasional comprises several parties, including Umno, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), and Gerakan, while PH consists of the People's Justice Party (PKR), Amanah, and the Democratic Action Party (DAP). PN, Umno, MCA, and MIC are ethnicity-based parties, whereas PAS is based on religion. With the consent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the Unity Government successfully formed the Malaysian government on November 25, 2022.

The participation of various political parties in elections is crucial for the maturity of the political process and nurturing democratic practices that can lead to national development. Ideally, the participation of diverse political parties should be a catalyst or ally to national development. However, in the Malaysian context, the existence of these parties seems to be an adversary to the development process. Often, the involvement of various political parties becomes a cause of declining unity levels, hindering the development process.

In Malaysia, the participation of various political parties does not serve as a democracy enhancer; instead, it becomes a hindrance to development. The involvement of ethnically based political parties brings about numerous issues and acts as a barrier to the development process. These problems include (1) an increase in ethnic division issues, (2) the spread of sensitive religious issues, and (3) the widespread issue of declaring fellow Muslims as unbelievers.

### **The Increasing Issue of Ethnic Division**

Malaysia, as described by Furnivall (Furnival, 1939; Syed Husin Ali, 1984), much like Indonesia (Syarif Muhidin & Wan Ibrahim, 2016), is a plural society living together in one political unit but separate, with each ethnic group having its own religion, culture, and language. In line with this, several dominant parties in Malaysia, namely PN, BN (UMNO), MCA, and MIC, are ethnicity-based parties, while PAS is a religion-based party. Long before PRU-15, UMNO (BN) was a component of the PN coalition but separated just before PRU-15. In the context of the 21st century, ethnicity and religion-based parties are no longer relevant in the democratic political arena. This is because ethnicity and religion can be determinants that fracture the level of ethnic unity being formed.

In Malaysia, since gaining independence, those promoting ethnic issues have been political elites from the UMNO (BN) party aiming to garner Malay support to win elections. Over the past decade, PAS, after cooperating with UMNO (BN), besides promoting religion, also began endorsing ethnicity in their political narrative—a departure from PAS's previous political approach opposing any form of asabiyyah and promoting Islam for All. Since the formation of the PN government following the Sheraton Move, a move that seized power from the PH government after the previous PRU-14, PN, UMNO, and PAS have been allies in the PN government that governed Malaysia until PRU-15. Just before PRU-15, UMNO (BN) had parted ways with the PN government, making UMNO not bound to any coalition, whether PH or PN. At that time, UMNO (BN) still did not align with PH.

Using ethnicity and religion issues seems not to bring any good to the political environment in multi-ethnic and multi-religious Malaysia. Malays dominate rural areas, and support for UMNO and PAS mostly comes from these rural areas. Political leaders of these dominant Malay and Islamic parties in Malaysia are seen as compelled to use ethnic issues to secure victory in elections. The leaders of these two parties warn their Malay supporters that Malaysia could face various problems, including a constitutional crisis, and the country could turn into a republic if Malays do not support UMNO and PAS in elections.

Malays are also threatened with the future of the Malay language as the National Language if they do not support UMNO and PAS, even though these matters are clearly stated in the Malaysian constitution and cannot be easily changed without the consent of the Malay Rulers' Council. Despite many voices opposing these racist campaigns that are seen to disrupt unity and stability in the country, ethnic issues continue to be a tempting feast for political elites.

However, the results of PRU-15 show that UMNO has been rejected by the majority of Malays, winning only 30 seats out of over 200 contested during PRU-15. This may indicate that ethnicity-based parties are no longer favored by Malaysians in this contemporary era. Nevertheless, under the decree of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, the Pakatan Harapan coalition, which won the largest number of seats, agreed to compromise and form a government together with UMNO, which is part of the BN coalition.

### **The Spread of Religious Sensitivity Issues**

Similar to Indonesia, religious issues become highly sensitive in the political context of Malaysia. Malays are manipulated with the issue that non-Muslim leaders will make Christianity the official religion of Malaysia. In sociological terms, religion is one of the divisive elements in society. This is because Malaysia, and Indonesia as well, is a multi-religious country. In a multi-religious country, matters related to religious beliefs need to be treated seriously because what may be good in one religion may not necessarily be perceived the same way in another. A significant mistake made by political leaders of PN, UMNO, and PAS is that they believe Malaysia is the absolute right of the Malay and Muslim community, whereas the Chinese, Indians, and various other ethnic groups practicing different religions have been granted rights since Malaysia gained independence.

Based on this belief, leaders of PN, UMNO, and PAS vigorously promote that only Malay Muslims are eligible to be chosen as leaders. They claim that choosing non-Muslim leaders is forbidden by Allah SWT, and if Malays choose a party other than PN or PAS, they will be cast into hellfire (since UMNO separated from the PN government just before PRU-15, leaders of PN and PAS also advertise to Malays that if they choose UMNO leaders, they will be cast into hellfire, a situation different from when they were still part of the coalition). Many Malays in rural areas are influenced and believe in these claims. They refrain from voting for non-Muslim leaders because they fear being cast into hellfire. However, Allah states that He does not prohibit all non-believers from being chosen as leaders. Political leaders of UMNO, PAS, and PN have successfully concealed Quranic verses that permit the



appointment of non-Muslims as leaders. Non-Muslim leaders from MCA and MIC are not problematic, unlike those from the DAP party.

Many Malays believe that it is forbidden to vote for non-Muslims. They hold this belief because it is reinforced by political ulama from PN and PAS. Those who disagree with this "fatwa" are considered infidels, unjust, and corrupt. This is the law sold everywhere as political propaganda by political ulama from PN and PAS. These political ulama claim that this prohibition is based on the Quran, Sunnah, and ijma' (Quran, Al-Maidah: 44, 45 & 47, and various other verses). For them, choosing a non-Muslim leader is akin to opposing the Quran, Sunnah, and the consensus of scholars, while opposing the Quran, Sunnah, and the consensus of scholars can be considered haram.

There are indeed Quranic verses that prohibit Muslims from choosing non-Muslim leaders. This group relies on verses from the Quran in surahs such as Al-Imran: 28, Al-Imran: 149-150, An-Nisa: 138-139, An-Nisa: 141, An-Nisa: 144, Al-Maidah: 51, Al-Maidah: 80-81, Al-Mumtahanah: 1, and Al-Mujadila: 14-15. Allah also prohibits Muslims from making non-believers their allies, as mentioned in verses such as At-Tawbah: 16, At-Tawbah: 23, Al-Mujadila: 22, and Al-Imran: 118.

In the context of Surah Al-Mumtahanah, those who disagree with appointing non-Muslim leaders rely solely on verse 1. However, this prohibition is clarified in Surah Al-Mumtahanah: 8-9, which is limited to non-Muslims who openly display hostility toward Muslims and expel them from their homeland. The translation of Surah Al-Mumtahanah: 8-9 is clear that Allah's prohibition is only against non-Muslims who (1) display hostility toward Muslims and (2) expel Muslims from their homeland. The verses state:

"Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly."

This prohibition only applies to specific and particular circumstances. It cannot be interpreted for all situations in contemporary life. Therefore, the thinking of political ulama, selling the idea that choosing a non-Muslim leader goes against the religion, deviates from the true Islamic thought. They selectively pick Quranic verses they like and ignore others they dislike. I have examined writings that support the idea of prohibiting non-Muslims from being chosen as leaders in various online articles. Many of these writings are authored by writers from Indonesia, besides Malaysian writers. In Indonesia, there is a strict group that prohibits ordinary people from choosing non-Muslim leaders. For them, appointing non-Muslims as leaders is considered haram.

In Malaysia, political leaders from PH believe that the prohibition of choosing non-Muslims as leaders is not absolute. Allah provides the freedom to think about how to apply laws that are not clearly defined in the Quran in life. It is not appropriate to easily enforce the law as haram in implementing political actions because politics is *ijtihad* to make decisions that can lead to benefits and prevent harm.

### **The Proliferation of the Issue of Takfir (Deeming Others as Infidels) Among Muslims**

Another negative consequence of the participation of various political parties in elections in Malaysia is the widespread issue of takfir (deeming others as infidels) among Muslims. This issue initially occurred only among leaders and followers of UMNO and PAS parties, with leaders of PAS being the ones who declared followers of other parties as infidels.

The issue of takfir dates back to the 1980s, initiated by a PAS political leader who was fervent in promoting religious issues in Malaysian politics. For PAS, politics and religion are inseparable, and politics falls under the category of creed. They believe that if Muslims make the wrong choice in electing leaders during elections, it could jeopardize their faith. During that time, animosity between PAS and UMNO became evident. According to PAS leaders, UMNO leaders were deemed unfit to lead the country because UMNO did not champion Islam.

In the past, Muslims who sided with UMNO and voted for UMNO leaders were considered infidels. PAS party followers saw UMNO party followers as infidels. In mosques, congregational prayers were led by two different imams, meat slaughtered by UMNO supporters was considered forbidden, marriages conducted by UMNO imams were deemed invalid, and the peak of this conflict manifested in the bloody incident known as the Memali Tragedy on November 19, 1985. The main figure in this tragedy was Ustaz Ibrahim Mahmood, known as Ustaz Ibrahim Libya, a former preacher at the Kuala Lumpur Islamic Center, a PAS leader highly devoted to promoting the issue of takfir in Malaysian politics.

According to sources, Ustaz Ibrahim Libya and several other PAS leaders were reportedly ordered to be arrested under the Internal Security Act (ISA). The police directed 576 police personnel (according to local population sources, the actual number of police involved was around 3,600) to carry out the operation to apprehend Ustaz Ibrahim Libya. As he refused to surrender to the authorities, the operation ended in a tragedy that claimed the lives of Ustaz Ibrahim Libya and 13 of his followers, with four police officers also becoming victims. The issue of takfir persists.

Leading up to PRU-15, the issue of takfir resurfaced but with a new face: Muslims who voted for non-Muslim leaders and leaders other than PAS and its coalition partner, PN, were deemed sinful. It was even suggested that such individuals, upon death, were not eligible to enter Paradise. Previously, PAS only labeled UMNO leaders and followers as infidels, but since they formed an alliance with UMNO, they no longer labeled UMNO leaders and followers as infidels. Instead, they now label their political opponents, namely leaders and followers of PH, as infidels.

The issue of takfir has been a political tool for PAS for a long time. They are sure to exploit this issue as elections approach to garner support from Muslims. They argue based on the Quran, specifically Surah Al-Maidah, verse 44, which condemns as infidels those who do not judge by the law of Allah. Many political analysts argue that the concept of takfir is an ideology associated with Shia Islam, which holds that only leaders who are direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's family are qualified to lead. According to this

ideology, non-Muslims are ineligible to lead, and choosing a non-Muslim leader is considered forbidden. This perspective contradicts the mainstream belief of Sunni Muslims.

## CONCLUSION

Politics and development are inseparable. The goal of development is to ensure the well-being of the people, eradicating extreme poverty. Therefore, the focus on the development process in newly independent countries like Malaysia is vital for societal progress. Given that Malaysia, like Indonesia, is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation, addressing unity issues is crucial to achieving the necessary harmony, enabling political elites to concentrate on development efforts.

The diversity of ethnicity and religion is a divine decree and gift from Allah, intended for the benefit of humanity, fostering cooperation and thoughtful engagement. It is essential not to oppose this diversity. The underlying purpose is for all people to recognize and collaborate with one another. Managing ethnic diversity should be done constructively, avoiding blame games. Addressing ethnic and religious diversity is among the fundamental or indispensable matters that need proper attention first to move towards a peaceful and prosperous nation where people collaborate.

Non-Muslims should be considered a field for religious scholars to accumulate spiritual assets, not a tool for sowing discord to create unrest in society. If we desire a nation of peace, ethnicity and religion should not be divisive factors. While religion serves as a unifier, it's within the context of people sharing the same faith. In a multi-ethnic setting with different religions, religion can become a divisive element. Allah could have ordained a single religion or ethnicity, namely Islam.

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