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# AN EVALUATION OF THE COVERAGE OF POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE MALAYSIAN AND NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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## ABSTRACT

The word ‘crisis’ has been used to define and identify many serious situations such as protests, terrorism, wars, diseases, among others. In this paper. Crisis reporting could be defined as the reporting of information about the state of affairs in which a decisive change for the worse is about to, or has occurred. Nigeria and Malaysia are no exception to the crisis and each of them do experience crisis now and then. The news media have a unique and exceptionally important role to play when covering a national crisis. In this regard, accurate and appropriate information about a crisis is an expectation that is required if the government of a country wants to allay fears from the public. This is because modern democracy depends on a vibrant news media to keep the public informed. At no point is this more important than in times of crisis. This is a comparative study on how newspapers in Malaysia and Nigeria reported the political crisis that characterized the two countries from 2007 to 2009. The research used content analysis to compare the coverage by newspapers in the two countries. This is aimed at determining the differences in the rate of coverage, observing the trend of crisis occurrence in the two countries, and determining the sources of information for the newspapers. The research relied on the framing theory. One of the findings of the paper is that Nigerian newspapers have significantly reported more of the crisis than Malaysian newspapers. This study has also been able to show how newspapers in the two countries differ in their reporting of the political crisis that occurred between 2007 and 2009.

**Keywords:** *Crisis reporting, political crisis, news framing, news coverage, news media*

## INTRODUCTION

Since Malaysia’s independence in 1957, its political landscape has been dominated by Barisan Nasional, a coalition of the United Malay National organization (UMNO), the Malaysian

Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). This explains the reason why most of Malaysia's political crisis arose when it appears the ruling coalition performs poorly in elections. In the words of Razaleigh Hamzah (2010) "*The deterioration of Malaysia's political order did not happen overnight or in isolation. It is part of a more general pattern of the decline of democracy and the rule of law in many newer democracies. Many post-colonial societies that began with democratic institutions saw democracy collapse afterwards into dictatorship*". For instance, at the May 1969 federal elections, the UMNO-MCA-MIC Alliance polled only 48 percent of the vote, although it retained a majority in the legislature. The MCA lost most of the Chinese-majority seats to Gerakan or DAP candidates. The victorious opposition celebrated by holding a motorcade on the main streets of Kuala Lumpur with supporters holding up brooms as a signal of its intention to make sweeping changes.

Fear of what the changes might mean for them (as many of the country's businesses were Chinese owned), a Malay backlash resulted, leading rapidly to riots and inter-communal violence. The government declared a state of emergency, and a National Operations Council, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, took power from the government of Tunku Abdul Rahman, who in September 1970 was forced to retire in favour of Abdul Razak. Using the Emergency-era Internal Security Act (ISA), the new government suspended Parliament and political parties, imposed press censorship and placed severe restrictions on political activity. The ISA gave the government power to intern any person indefinitely without trial. These powers were widely used to silence the government's critics, and have never been repealed. The Constitution was changed to make illegal any criticism, even in Parliament, of the Malaysian monarchy, the special position of Malays in the country, or the status of Malay as the national language.

Again, the Barisan Nasional narrow victories in November 2007 two anti-government rallies occurred, precipitated by allegations of corruption and discrepancies in the election system that heavily favoured the ruling political party, the National Front (known as Barisan Nasional) which has been in power since Malaya achieved independence.

On the other hand, political crisis in Nigeria dates back to 1960 when the country gained independence from the British colonial government. During the first republic, the country was split into three geopolitical regions, namely Western Region, Eastern Region and Northern Region. Prior to this period, there was a brief period when the various Ethnic Groups of Nigeria coalesced to form a nationalist political movement - The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), a political movement that could have established a solid foundation of a true national political party and that would have prevented the crisis from developing. In the elections of 1938, the NYM dominated the Legislative Council and moved to establish a genuinely national network of affiliates. This promising start was stopped short three years later by internal divisions in which ethnic loyalties emerged triumphant. The departure of Igbo leaders from the NYM left the organization in Yoruba hands. During World War II, the NYM was reorganized into a predominantly Yoruba political party - the Action Group thus set the stage for a Yoruba-Igbo rivalry that has become a major factor in Nigerian politics. Undoubtedly, strong ethnic identities and the fear of political domination by other Ethnic Groups, which were developed during pre-colonial Nigeria, created ethnic cleavages in pre-independent Nigeria.

As indicated by Ojo (2012), 1964-1966 would go down the annals of Nigerian history as turbulent and politically explosive years. The federal elections of 1964, which, for all intents

and purposes, was an electoral battle between the Nigerian National Alliance and the United Progressive Grand Alliance, subjected the Nigerian democratic process to unprecedented stress. The electoral battle between the alliances produced a political stalemate which, for the first time since the 1914 amalgamation, left the country without a legally constituted central government for about two days. Although, the deadlock was eventually resolved through a wretched compromise which did not address the fundamental causes of the crisis; the relief was transient. Thus, in 1965, pre and post election violence in the defunct Western Region created unprecedented political instability in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the ethnic and other interests of some of the leaders of the Structural Frame made a quick resolution of the crisis impossible and on 15 January 1966, the military intervened in the Nigeria democratic process to restore law and order. Till date, Nigeria's democratic process, particularly the transition of power from one civilian government to the other is usually characterized with crisis.

Building positive relationships with the media during crisis helps to establish rapport that will serve well in managing the situation. Understanding that newspapers play important role in informing the public is important during a crisis. Providing timely, accurate, helpful information both in critical situations and in the mundane can enhance the credibility of the government. As noted by Kowalski T.J (2000), one of the most important elements in crisis management is working with the media. Media relations are also one of the most overlooked areas of crisis management. While the circumstances and reactions to crisis differ from country to country, the presence and importance of the media have remained constant. In crisis situation, the government can expect local, national, and even international media attention. So knowing that the media will be a part of any crisis event will help government and its agencies to prepare for media inquiries, while using the media to disseminate the most accurate information about the crisis and what is being done in response to it. This is to say that during crisis, the media plays important role of informing the community of what is going on. Failure to maintain good relations with the media and not having a plan to deal with them have always turned even the most thorough plans into chaos. More so, the centrality of the media in contemporary democracies makes the public to be sensitive to news; particularly to "bad" news that often attracts public attention. The publication of news about crisis could trigger panic among the public. Media influence on public opinion may impact not only the actions of government but also on those of the public directly and indirectly affected by the crisis.

## **OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

The objective of this study is to compare the coverage of political crisis by the Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers. This is achieved by stating some research questions which help in proper understanding of the situations in the two countries. These questions include, the rate of coverage given to the political crisis in the two countries, the difference in the way the crisis was reported by newspapers in the two countries, the trend of political crisis occurrence in each of the countries, the sources of information for the stories, and the frame which is featured more prominently than others. To be able to answer these questions, this study uses the framing analysis.

The findings of this study provide a useful insight into the way and manner newspapers in the two countries cover political crisis. It should be noted that there is no existing literature on comparative studies between Malaysia and Nigeria in the field of political crisis reporting

in newspapers. However, literatures exist in each of the two countries regarding political crisis or sometimes political conflict. This study in a way will help to fill the knowledge gap that exists in determining how the press in the two countries compare and contrast with each other in reporting the crisis. Again, the findings will deepen readers' understanding of the media environment in the two countries and how government-owned newspapers determine what constitutes a crisis.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is content analysis. Four newspapers (two each) were selected from Malaysia and Nigeria. The newspapers are the *New Straits Times (NST)*, and *The Star* (Malaysia), the *Sun* and the *Nation* (Nigeria). The choice of these newspapers was made based on the wide coverage they gave to the crisis. Again, they are government-controlled mainstream newspapers, and their determination of what constitutes a crisis is based on their ownership pattern. The *NST*, and *The Star* are linked to Malaysia's ruling coalition party—Barisan Nasional. On the other hand, *The Sun* and *the Nation* are owned by two former state governors of Abia State and Lagos state. These former governors are still active in Nigerian politics and have their interests represented in government. The time frame for the research is from 2007 to 2009. This becomes necessary owing to the fact that the period was characterized by different types of crises in the two countries, but the major focus of this paper is on political crisis. The criteria for extracting the stories include headlines of the stories, place and time of occurrence. Others are causes of the crisis, the categories of the news and the page numbers where the crisis is reported. In all, a total of 1,106 news stories were collected from the four newspapers, 269 from Malaysian newspapers and 837 from Nigerian newspapers. Each of the stories serves as unit of analysis. Chi-Square test was used to determine the aggregate reporting of the political crisis stories in the four newspapers. This helps to enable us know how the two countries differ in their reporting.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While newsmakers may employ many different frames in their coverage of an issue, scholars agree that this abundance in choice in how to tell and construct stories can be captured in analyses as certain distinctive characteristics. Weaver (2007) mentioned that frames can be studied by means of systematic content analysis or more interpretative textual analysis alone. Van Gorp (2007) also observed that some researchers opt for a rather qualitative approach in analysing media frame, such as discourse analysis, while others apply traditional content analysis or other quantitative methods. He argued that the strongly abstract nature of frames implies that quantitative research methods should be combined with the interpretative prospects of qualitative methods. Furthermore, Tankard (2008) remarked that framing might give quantitative researchers a way to approach ideology, a subject mostly dealt with by critical theorists to date.

According to Bryant and Miron (2004), in recent years framing theory has taken over from agenda setting and cultivation theory as the most commonly applied research approach in the field of communication science. It should be noted however that one of the most pressing issues in framing research is the lack of conceptual clarity and operational definitions. But

one can draw from Entman (1993: 52) who suggests that to frame is to “select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context.

### FINDINGS

A total of 1106 news stories were collected from the four newspapers, 269 from Malaysian newspapers and 837 from Nigerian newspapers.

**Table 1: Total number of political news stories in Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers**

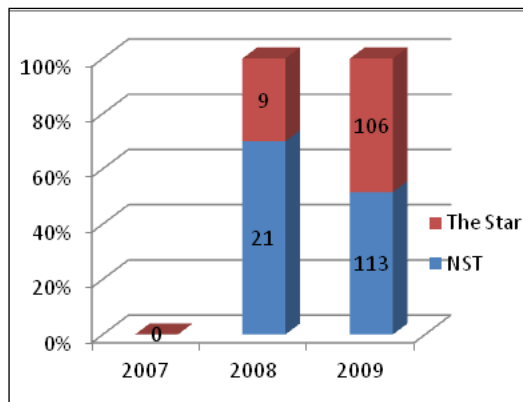
Malaysian Newspapers				
	2007	2008	2009	Total
<i>New Straits Times (NST)</i>	0	21	113	134
<i>The Star</i>	0	9	106	115
			Total	249

Nigerian Newspapers				
	2007	2008	2009	Total
<i>The Sun</i>	247	119	101	467
<i>Nation</i>	209	100	61	370
			Total	837

Using Chi-square, the data indicates that Malaysian newspapers (*NST* and *The Star*) reported a total of 269 political crisis stories as against 837 by Nigerian newspapers (the *Sun* and the *Nation*). The result indicates that there is a significant difference in the coverage between Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers. Nigerian newspapers have significantly reported political crisis more than Malaysian newspapers,  $X^2(1, n = 1106) = 291.703, P < .001$ .

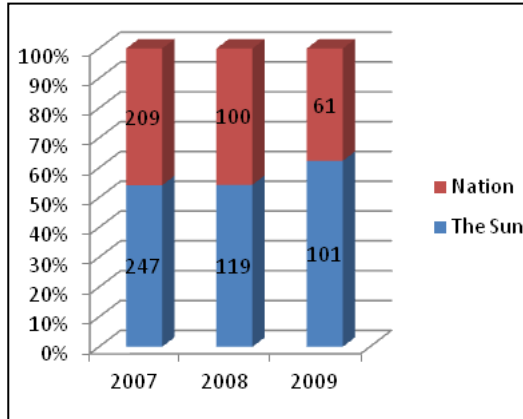
**Figure 1: Trend of political crisis reporting in Malaysian newspapers**



In observing the trend of crises reporting in the two countries, each of the four newspapers was analysed on day by day news stories covered, to find out the percentage of occurrence of the crisis each year. The result is presented in Figure 1.

The bar chart shows that there was 0% political crisis in 2007, 11.2% in 2008, and 88.8% in 2009. This means that the greater percentage of political crisis reports in the Malaysian newspapers within the three years occurred in 2009, but lowest in 2007.

**Figure 2: Trend of political crisis reporting in Nigerian newspaper**



The bar chart in Figure 2 above shows 54.5% political crisis in 2007, and 26.2% in 2008, and finally 19.3% in 2009. This means that the political crisis occurred more in 2007, followed by 2008, but lesser in 2009.

**Table 2: Sources of news for Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers**

Sources	<i>NST</i>	<i>The Star</i>	Total	<i>Sun</i>	<i>Nation</i>	Total
Government	102	83	185	281	197	478
Police	24	14	38	65	52	117
Public	11	5	16	43	59	102
Opposition	17	13	30	78	62	140
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>837</b>

From the table above, government sources contributed to a total of 185 stories in Malaysian newspapers, 102 news stories from the *NST* and 83 from *The Star*, resulting to 68.8% of the total percentage of sources of information during the period under study. This is followed by police sources with 38 news stories in all, 24 from the *NST* and 14 from *The Star* which sums up to 14.1%. Opposition sources recorded a total of 30 news stories, 17 from *NST*, 13 from *The Star*, and these constitute 11.2%. Lastly, public source contributed to a total of 16 stories, 11 from *NST* and 5 from *The Star*. Put together, this amount to 5.9%. Therefore, this means that both the *NST* and *The Star* relied heavily on government sources in gathering information for their stories.

Also in Nigerian newspapers, the findings reveal that government sources contributed to a total of 478 news stories, comprising 281 from the *Sun*, 197 from the *Nation*. In all, government sources contributed to 57.1% of the overall percentage of sources of news in the Nigerian newspapers. This is followed by opposition sources with a total of 140 news stories, 78 from the *Sun*, 62 from the *Nation*, and these amounted to 16.7%. The third in the list is police sources with an overall of 117 stories, 65 from the *Sun* and 52 from the *Nation*, totaling 14%. Public sources were the least on the list with a total number of 102 stories, 43 from the *Sun* and 59 from the *Nation*. These summed up to 12.2%. In this respect, it is evident that government source contributed the greatest percentage of the stories in the *Sun* and the *Nation* newspapers; hence government sources once again dominated every other sources of information during the crisis.

**Table 3: Types of news frames in Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers**

Frames	<i>NST</i>	<i>The Star</i>	Total		<i>Sun</i>	<i>Nation</i>	Total	
Responsibility	6	2	8	Malaysian Newspaper	11	7	18	
Conflict frame	8	11	19		Nigerian Newspaper	16	10	26
Consequence	3	6	9			6	3	9
Human	3	4	7			6	8	14
Moral	1	0	1			8	7	15
	21	23	44	47		35	82	

The table above shows the different types of frames that Malaysian newspapers (*NST* and *The Star*) and their Nigerian counterparts (the *Sun* and the *Nation*) used in reporting the political crisis during the period of study. The need for this is to identify the type of frame(s) that featured more prominently than the others. The result shows that *NST* and *The Star* used a total of 19 conflict frames, 8 from the former and 11 from the later, representing 43.2% of total frame in Malaysian newspapers. Consequences frame is the next in occurrence with 9 stories, 3 from *NST* and 6 from *The Star*, and these summed up to 20.4%. This is followed by responsibility frame with 8 appearances, 6 from *NST* and 2 from *The Star*. All makes up 18.2%. The fourth is human frame which was used 7 times, 3 in *NST* and 4 in *The Star*, representing 15.7%. Finally moral frame appeared only once in *NST* and none in *The Star*, and this takes up 2.3%. From this one can deduce that conflict frame featured more prominently in the Malaysian newspapers more than other frames.

In Nigerian newspapers, the result indicates that the frame with highest occurrence is equally conflict frame, with a total of 26 stories, 16 from the *Sun* and 10 from the *Nation*. These put together make up to 31.7% of the total percentage of frames used by the Nigerian newspapers within the period. This is followed by responsibility frame with 18 stories, 11 from the *Sun* and 7 from the *Nation*, (21.9%). The next is moral frame totaling 15 stories, 8 from the *Sun* and 7 from the *Nation* (18.3%). Human frame and consequences frame recorded 14 and 9 stories, representing 17.1% and 11% respectively. With regard to the above, Nigerian newspapers have featured more conflict frame than others just like their Malaysian counterparts.

## DISCUSSION

In comparing the political crisis in the two countries, the aggregate report (Table 1) shows that there is a difference in the newspapers' coverage. Nigerian newspapers (*The Sun* and *the Nation*) have significantly reported more crisis stories than their Malaysian counterparts (*NST* and *The Star*), hence the chi-square test result  $\chi^2(1, n = 1106) = 291.703, P < .001$ . The year 2007 was the height of Nigeria's political crisis in the current democratic dispensation which started in 1999; hence the two newspapers recorded a total of 456 political crisis stories.

In 2008, political crisis stories were 219 in number and 162 in 2009. Altogether, a total of 837 political crisis stories was reported. As rightly stated Nigeria witnessed a dramatic political crisis in 2007, resulting from President Obasanjo's attempt to change the country's constitution to enable him run for the presidency the third time. This was against the constitutional provision of a Nigeria's presidential system which allows for two-term tenure for the office of the president. As expected, the opposition parties and Nigerian publics, and even most people from the ruling party opposed this move, resulting to political turmoil. On the other hand, the internal political crisis within the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) ensued, leading to a strained relationship between the President and his Vice, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, and also between the executive and the legislative arms of government.

At the expiration of the tenure of the two-term tenure of the President in May 2007, Nigerians had hoped that there would be a smooth transition of power from one civilian government to the other, but this never happened. The Vice President (Atiku Abubakar) who was supposed to have been the Presidential flag-bearer of the ruling party in the April 2007 polls was denied the ticket by the PDP at the dictate of the President (Obasanjo). Instead, the party handpicked Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as the presidential flag-bearer and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as his running mate. Following this drama, Atiku defected to the opposition party, All Nigerians Peoples' Party (ANPP), and became its Presidential flag-bearer for the election.

As envisaged, the April 2007 general election in Nigeria was claimed to have been marred by irregularities and rigging orchestrated by the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). Notwithstanding, the candidate of the Ruling Peoples' Democratic Party, Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was declared winner of the Presidential election. Subsequently, the result was contested by the opposition parties, resulting to lawsuits and counter lawsuits by both parties which lasted over one year. The *Sun* newspaper captured the crisis in the following news reports; "Presidential polls: Atiku goes to Supreme Court", (03/12/2007); "Flawed polls: Labour calls for Yar'Adua's resignation" (12/01/2008); "Presidential polls: results in 29 states written before election – Buhari" (04/02/2008) and "Presidential polls: Supreme court decides Yar'Adua's fate May 9" (13/02/2008).

In the same way, *the Nation* newspaper reported the political crisis in the following manner – "Britain denounces general election" (29/04/2007); "Atiku heads to supreme court over witnesses" (03/12/2007); "Yar'Adua worried over tribunal cases" (12/01/2008); and "Atiku urges tribunal to cancel election" (22/01/2008). It should be noted that from April 2007 till December 2009, Nigeria was under serious political crisis which almost torn the country apart. As noted by Adejumobi (2001), "the Nigerian political climate from particularly the civil war period or immediately after 1966 was characterized by lack of commitment to the virtues of honesty, equality, social justice, accountability, trust, peaceful co-existence amongst co-ethnics and respect for human rights."



With regard to Malaysia, the country did not experience any political crisis in 2007; hence the two newspapers have zero record on it. The reason is because the country's politics was stable during the time, even though the general election the next year (2008) would consequently spark off political crisis. In 2008, a total of 30 political crisis stories was reported, resulting from the aftermath of the general election in which the ruling coalition, Barisan Nasional was almost defeated by the opposition. This point marked the beginning of the build up for both internal and external political crisis that would ensue in the coming year. In 2009, there were a total of 239 political crisis stories. The bulk of the stories came from the Perak Assembly crisis which was a direct result of the outcome of the 2008 election. Other stories are from leadership crisis in Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), and the Negri Sembilan Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC).

In one of its news reports, the *NST* of 5<sup>th</sup> February 2009 stated that "Perak Government in limbo: Barisan Nasional claims power, 3 independents declare support for BN". Also on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009, the paper reported that "Youths protest against new Barisan Nasional Government in Perak. As a result of this protest, the UMNO Youth leader, Khairy Jalamuddin expressed the Barisan Nasional determination to take over power from the opposition when he stated in the following day (10/02/2009) news report "Use all means to stop Nizar: Khairy". This is a call he made to Barisan Nasional members in Perak to ensure they toppled the leadership of the opposition. In the same vein, *The Star* report of 17<sup>th</sup> February, 2009 portrayed a picture of the political situation in Perak State Assembly, "Perak political situation needs fast resolution". Subsequently, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2009, *the star* report entitled "Battle of wills for Perak" depicts how fierce the crisis was.

In observing the trend of crisis coverage by newspapers in the two countries, the findings show that 2009 was the height of the political crisis in Malaysia. It was low in 2008 and lowest in 2007. Even though this might not be a true reflection of the situation on the ground, yet one can infer that Malaysia's political environment is more stable than Nigeria's. One other reason for this is because the media in Malaysia are seen as a partner in the development of the country and is not expected to highlight much on critical issues that could distract government. As remarked by Azizah (2009),

In Malaysia, the media system is an important agent of socio-political, economic and cultural change in our society. We are aware that its power, influence and impact has no limits and if wrongly managed may disrupt and destabilize our society. Therefore, we in Malaysia must think hard and creatively about the role of media in bringing about stability and pushing towards making Malaysia a developed, strong and prosperous nation.

But in Nigeria, the rate was higher in 2007, low in 2008 and lowest in 2009. This is so because of the nature of Nigerian society with its multi-ethnic background and with divergent religious, social and cultural orientations. Whatever that starts as religious or social conflict will boil down to political crisis. As indicated by Lai (1991). The historical accounts of the Nigerian press are premised on its overt political nature. This is probably largely due to the fact that the Nigerian press has its root in the anti-colonial agitation of the frustrated Lagos elite whom a Nigerian historian, Ayandele (1974) described as the "deluded hybrids". Golding and Elliot have remarked that "Nigerian journalism was created by anti-colonial protest, baptized in the waters of politics, and matured in party politics" (1979).

This study revealed that both Malaysian and Nigerian newspapers hugely depended on government sources in gathering the information for their stories. The reason for this is as a result of the ownership pattern of the newspapers.

Over the years, the media industry in Malaysia has witnessed a growing and troubling trend of media ownership concentration and consolidation, which was triggered by economic and, to some extent, political considerations. Such a phenomenon prevails primarily because of the laws that govern the mainstream media, namely the Printing Presses and Publications Act for the press and the Communications and Multimedia Act for the broadcasting industry and the Internet, which invariably empower the ministers concerned to determine who can or cannot own and run the mainstream press and broadcasting stations. This situation certainly has serious implications on press freedom and the media's qualitative diversity because media ownership concentration tends to constrain the diversity of content and viewpoints in the mainstream newspapers and broadcasting stations, especially when most owners of these media organizations are associated with the ruling coalition or constitute their economic allies. In other words, the parameters of freedom and space found in the mainstream media are directly or indirectly prescribed by the powers-that-be (Zaharom, Nain & Mustafa K. Anuar. 1998).

In his book, *Old versus New Politics in Malaysia; State and Society in Transition*, Francis Loh Kok Wah (2009) questioned whether the mainstream media journalists in Malaysia are professional journalists or propagandists. This stems from the fact that during the electioneering campaign in the country there will be little discussion of serious issues. Rather the media engages in comments by editors and feature writers that there are 'no important issues' worth discussing, because in their own thinking those issues have recently been resolved through a new promise or a recent policy initiative. He further noted that from this point onwards, the mainstream media begins to lobby unabashedly for the ruling party—Barisan Nasional, carrying several advertisements on several pages of the newspapers supporting the BN. Even though there are sometimes few advertisements for the opposition, yet it cannot be compared to the volume of same that supports the ruling party. Much of the pro-Barisan Nasional political advertisements will highlight the development achievements of the party, and page after page will recall the major projects the party has delivered since 1957. From this, it is not surprising that they depended on government as their major source of information during the crisis.

Even though, there is much more degree of freedom for the Nigerian press unlike their Malaysian counterpart, yet it is evident that each state in the country has its own government newspaper which serves as its megaphone. The same applies to the Federal government with a national newspaper such as the *Daily Times*. Apart from these, ownership of the media in the country is dominated by politicians, former state governors, and business moguls who still have their stakes in the ruling government. Therefore, it is not surprising to see journalists depending on government sources for most of their information.

On news frames, the findings indicated that conflict frame was dominantly used by the four newspapers in reporting the crisis in two countries. One of the reasons for this is because political crisis on its own depicts conflict, and this study noted both intra-party and inter-party conflicts. Between 2008 and 2009, there were intra-party squabbles in the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). These three component parties make up Malaysia's ruling coalition party known as Barisan Nasional (BN). Even the ruling coalition was not

also spared of the crisis because during the period the party was experiencing internal leadership disputes which eventually compelled Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi to step down and transfer power to his deputy, Mohammed Najib. On the other hand, there were equally ongoing conflicts in the opposition parties, namely Democratic Action Party (DAP), and Pakatan Rakyat.

In Nigeria also, the internal crisis in the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) was such a huge issue that tended to threaten the country's nascent democracy. On their own, the opposition parties in the country were making efforts to wrestle power with the ruling party through legal actions resulting from the perceived electoral malpractices.

It is in view of the above scenarios that conflict frame became dominant in the coverage of the crisis by the four newspapers. In Malaysia for example the *New Straits Times* and *The Star* which are considered as government mainstream newspapers presented the crisis in such a frame that portrays the opposition parties as the ones fomenting trouble in the Perak State Assembly. On the front page of the *NST* dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2009, the disappearance of two state Assemblymen was presented in various ways that evoke a sense of crisis. The paper portrayed the situation in Perak State as a "State of confusion" and accused the opposition of inciting youths in the state to protest against the new state government led by Barisan Nasional, (*NST* 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009). As a result of this, the paper concluded that the opposition wants to overthrow the government of the ruling party, "Pakatan planning to topple Barisan Nasional government" (*NST* February 19, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

This study has been able to show how newspapers in the two countries differ in their reporting of the political crisis that occurred between 2007 and 2009. It should be stated that the number of crisis news found in the two Nigerian newspapers is a reflection of how politics dominates other aspects of life in the country. The inability of the Nigerian government to peacefully transfer power from one democratic government to the other has already set the stage for political crisis to always erupt in the country. Successive elections in the country have been allegedly marred by electoral malpractices which in turn have always led to legal and counter-legal battles.

On the other hand, in Malaysia, the political environment is considered a very sensitive issue, so journalists are required to apply caution in reporting about it. Again, journalists in the country are expected to work as partners of government in the development efforts of the country rather than focusing attention on reporting crisis. In this wise, one can deduce that by focusing attention on the good side of government activities, the two Malaysian newspapers have reported the political crisis in the frames they like. On the other hand, by using the language of crisis on the numerous political problems in Nigeria, the two Nigerian newspapers have chosen to direct the attention of the people to this situation. Therefore, by choosing what to report and what not to report, the journalists in the four newspapers have succeeded in focusing the attention of the public on what the media want them to know.

In view of the role of the media during crisis, it is evident that the public becomes almost totally dependent on the media for news that may be vital for survival and for important messages from public and private authorities. The mass media are the only institution with the capacity to collect this escalating mass of information and disseminate it quickly. When

people become aware of crises, they therefore pick a copy of newspaper; turn on their radio or television sets often on a round-the-clock basis, to monitor the event. The presumption is that informed citizens are better able to support or oppose public programs or policies.

There is no denial of the fact that sometimes conflicting interests may arise as the media pursue to tell everything while the government seeks to control the public from “panicking” when faced with crisis. These conflicting interests could be the authorities who may respond either as denial or an apologia covers up or giving out information selectively or wholly. Another point of view is that of the audience. Here the audience could be sceptical or believe the information concerning the situation. On the other hand, the media could be the critical media or straight reporting

Robert Chandler and Scott (2007) noted that “Communication challenges are exacerbated during a crisis when time is short, decisions are urgent, information limited, and our opportunities for the rich interaction we require are constrained”. Sometimes also, the degree of freedom given to the press in any country determines how much objectivity journalists should ensure in their reporting. As developing countries, the Malaysian and Nigerian press operates under so many restrictions, particularly in obtaining information described as classified. Again the ownership pattern also affects the way and manner news is reported. In Malaysia, most of the mainstream media are owned and controlled by the government and those close to the corridors of power. In Nigeria also, even though some individuals own many newspapers, yet one can see that the owners are either politicians or businessmen closely connected to the government. In this wise, journalists in the two countries have depended heavily on government sources in reporting the political crisis.

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