

WOMEN POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: POLITICAL
PARTIES AS AGENT OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION
IN EMPOWERING WOMEN POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

The representation of women in Malaysia is still considered as under-represented as it does not meet the agreed 30% stated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) that was signed by the government in 1995. The failure to ensure the minimum 30% in decision-making groups resulted in men overshadowing the women in such circumstances. This study aims to look at the pattern of women's political participation within the time frame of 2013 until 2020. Women's political participation in the context of this study will be focusing on women candidacy in parliamentary and state assembly seats in the 13th and 14th General Elections. In addition, this study looks into the appointment of women as Ministers and Deputy Ministers after their success in securing seats in both General Elections. This study also looks at the pattern of women who contested for top positions at the party level during their party's election. Political participation also refers to the opportunity provided by the political parties in both written constitution and also common practices adopted by political parties in Malaysia. Moreover, this study also analyses the challenges faced by women politician. To answer the problem that has been highlighted, this study has managed to interview several of the prominent women politician and also top leadership figures from UMNO, PKR, DAP, WARISAN, AMANAH, MCA and GERAKAN political parties. This study also explores the political parties' constitutions in order to understand the roles and the opportunities given to their women members. The results of the study shows that opposition parties are bolder in fielding more women candidates in the 13th and 14th General Elections. Moreover, this study also sees that all political parties have no objection in accepting and welcoming women to join as their members. However, there are several challenges that have been identified in this study that have restricted women from being actively involved in politics, which are institutional challenges and personal challenges.

خلاصة البحث

لا يزال عدد النساء الممثلات في ماليزيا تحت التمثيل لأنه لا يفي بنسبة الـ 30 في المائة كما ورد في اتفاقية القضاء على جميع أشكال التمييز ضد المرأة التي وقعتها الحكومة في عام 1995. وأدى عدم التأكد من أن الحد الأدنى من 30 في المائة في مجموعة صنع القرار إلى أن الذكور يطغون على النساء في مجموعة صنع القرار. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى النظر في نمط المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في الإطار الزمني من عام 2013 حتى عام 2020. وتركز المشاركة السياسية للمرأة في سياق هذه الدراسة على ترشيح المرأة في مقاعد البرلمان وفي مجلس الولايات في الانتخابات العامة الثالثة عشرة والأربعين. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، تنظر هذه الدراسة في المرأة التي يجري تعيينها وزيرة ونائبة للوزير بعد أن تمكنت من الحصول على مقعدها في الانتخابات العامة، كما تنظر هذه الدراسات في نمط المرأة التي تنافست على شغل منصب أعلى على مستوى الحزب خلال الانتخابات الحزبية. وتشير المشاركة السياسية أيضاً إلى الفرصة التي أتاحتها الأحزاب السياسية في كل من الدستور وفي الممارسات المشتركة التي تعتمدها الأحزاب السياسية في ماليزيا. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن هذه الدراسة تحلل أيضاً التحديات التي واجهتها السياسيات والتي من أجل الإجابة على هذه المشكلة برمتها التي تم تسليط الضوء عليها، وقد تمكنت هذه الدراسة من إجراء مقابلات مع بعض السياسيات البارزات وأيضاً كبار الشخصيات القيادية من الأحزاب السياسية في UMNO، PKR، DAP، WARISAN، AMANAH، MCA و GERAKAN. كما تبحث هذه الدراسة في دستور الأحزاب السياسية من أجل فهم الدور والفرصة التي منحتها الأحزاب السياسية. تظهر نتيجة الدراسة أن أحزاب المعارضة أكثر جرأة في تقديم المزيد من المرشحات في الانتخابات العامة الثالثة عشرة والـ 14. وعلاوة على ذلك، ترى هذه الدراسة أيضاً أن جميع الأحزاب السياسية لم يكن لديها اعتراض على قبول المرأة للانضمام إلى هذه الأحزاب السياسية والترحيب بها. ومع ذلك، هناك تحديات قليلة تم تحديدها في هذه الدراسة التي قادت المرأة من المشاركة بنشاط في المشاركة السياسية التي هي تحديات مؤسسية وتحديات شخصية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the Master of Human Sciences in Political Science.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Tulisan ini didedikasikan untuk Arwah Abah yang pesan untuk buat apa yang Mil inginkan dalam kehidupan, juga buat semua yang sentiasa ada dalam sepanjang perjalanan pengajian sarjana

*“Oleh itu, maka (tetapkanlah kepercayaanmu) bahawa sesungguhnya tiap-tiap kesukaran disertai kemudahan,
(Sekali lagi ditegaskan): bahawa sesungguhnya tiap-tiap kesukaran disertai kemudahan”
(Surah Ash-Syarh, Ayat 5 & 6)*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AMANAHA	Parti Amanah Negara
AWAS	Angkatan Wanita Sedar
BN	Barisan Nasional
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DAP	Democratic Action Party
GE	General Election
GERAKAN	Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia
GS	Gagasan Sejahtera
PR	Pakatan Rakyat
PH	Pakatan Harapan
MCA	Malaysia Chinese Association
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MNP	Malay Nationalist Party
NUWSS	National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies
PAS	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia
PPBM	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia
PKI	Pergerakan Kaum Ibu
PKR	Parti Keadilan Rakyat
UMNO	United Malay Nation Organization
UN	United Nation
US	United States
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
WARISAN	Parti Warisan Sabah
WSPU	Women Social and Political Union
YB	Yang Berhormat

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In this millennium era, women's representation in the highest leadership, either at the government or political party level, is becoming a new norm. Regardless of their gender, they are given the chance and opportunity to show their quality as leaders by leading the country or political organization. Names such as Jacinda Ardern, Margaret Thatcher, Theresa May and some other names had proven that women can also strive in leadership as the head of government or political parties. The ability of women to lead should not be underestimated in terms of gender, as women also have the same potential as male leaders.

At a global level, the effort to increase women political representation in a country showed positive developments. This effort was also assisted by the call from the United Nations (UN) who had taken the initiatives to create a declaration that impelled the impetus and provided enough room for women to debate in the country. The initiatives created by the UN were the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination in Women (CEDAW). CEDAW is committed to addressing and rejecting all types of threats or discrimination against women in all forms. This effort was clearly emphasized when UN adopted this international treaty and later on in 1981, a total of 189 states across the world agreed to ratify this convention.

Malaysia is also not left behind in the efforts pioneered by the UN. The evidence showed that Malaysia had been raising aspirations inspired by the UN which can be seen through the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Family & Community Development in 2001. This clearly showed that Malaysia is committed to

participating in this initiative. Additionally, another example that showed Malaysian women representation in political positions can be seen through the inauguration of the first woman Deputy Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Wan Azizah during the 14th General Election in 2018.

However, the appointment of the first woman deputy Prime Minister did not reflect the progression of such initiative, because the number of women representation was still under-represented. Based on a report by (Bernama, 2018), which stated that the total number of women voters registered for the 14th General Election was 7,557,187, which when converted into percentage, became 50.58%. This percentage showed that the number of women voters was higher compared to men voters in the 14th General Election. Therefore, due to the high number of women voters, the amount of women representatives should also be increased in order to empower and fight for women agenda at the highest level of government.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

According to the 2019 Global Gap Index (2020) that was released by World Economic Forum, Malaysia is ranked at the 104th position out of 153 countries listed. The ranking showed that Malaysia is the lowest among the countries in the Southeast Asian region. Overall, based on the scorecard of the number of women in parliament and women holding the ministerial position, Malaysia ranked 121st and 88th respectively out of 153 countries in the world. In contrast, the Philippines took the top spot in Southeast Asia as they ranked first among the rest of the countries in the region. They scored at 16th place overall out of 153 countries. For the scorecard of women in parliament, they ranked at 51st place and have been ranked at 118th place out of 153 countries for scorecard of women representation in the ministerial position.

Malaysian global gap index ranking history had a roller coaster pattern from year to year. In 2016, Malaysia was ranked at 106th position. In the scorecard of women in parliament and women in ministerial position, Malaysia was ranked at the 134th place and 118th respectively (Global Gap Index, 2016). In 2017, based on the annual global gap index report, Malaysia was ranked 104th overall. For the scorecard of women in parliament and women in ministerial position, Malaysia was placed at 123rd and 118th out of 149 countries (Global Gap Index, 2017). In 2018, Malaysia ranked at 101st where they placed at 113th and 122nd for the scorecard women in parliament and women in ministerial position respectively. However, Malaysia ranking show a little bit downward as we mentioned above. Comparing the last 3 years' report of global gap index in scorecard of women in parliament and women in ministerial position, there were upside and downside pattern that could be seen through the report.

Malaysia, based on the ranking, is left behind by the neighbouring countries. This is in comparison to neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, Singapore and also the Philippines, who showed better performances in the ranking. They also had already experienced women political leadership at the highest position. In Singapore, Halimah Yaacob was appointed as the President of the country. Yingluck Shinawatra also created history by becoming the first woman prime minister in Thailand after she brought a glorious victory for her party, Pheu Thai Party in the 2011 election. The Philippines had two woman Presidents where Corazon Aquino held the Presidential position in 1986, and later Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in 2011.

However, in Malaysia, women are still being constrained in holding the highest political leadership position due to the existing law and lack of support from political parties. This problem can be illustrated from the *Langkah Kajang* move,

where Wan Azizah was denied the position of Chief Minister of Selangor because of the constitutional state law. According to *Undang-Undang Tubuh Negeri Selangor 1959*, (n.d.), Sultan Selangor has the power to put aside the state constitution based on His Majesty's consideration, based on the Chapter 3 paragraph L111 no. 3. In Selangor's constitutional state law, men are given a bigger priority to fill the position as compared to women. Women will only be taken into consideration if there is no suitable male candidate for the Chief Minister post (Zain, 2014). The second case that can illustrate this would be through the case of Senator Siti Aishah. Siti Aishah was supposed to be appointed as the Speaker of Perak Legislative House, since her name was nominated by the PKR state as one of the candidates for becoming the Speaker. But due to the objection from a component party of PH, which is DAP, and some intervention from the former Chief minister of Perak, Datuk Seri Nizar Jamaludin, she pulled out her name from being appointed (Shaarani, 2018). Siti Aishah, when asked why she withdrew her name as the candidate of Speaker Perak Legislative House, indicated that she wanted to see the smooth transition of government after PH winning the 14th General Election.

In the last 14th Malaysia General Election, it can be seen that the number of women being selected by the political party to be candidates was still low as compared to male candidates. For parliamentary seats, only 60 women candidates were given the chance to represent their party (Rohaniza, 2018). This shows that, the number was increasing as compared to the 13th General Election women candidacy. During the 13th General Election, the number of women selected to be candidate for parliament was 56 (Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga Dan Masyarakat, 2018). Even though the number increased, the woman still underrepresented in the legislature

This is in line with the trend of women political representation in Southeast Asia. Malaysia's closest neighbouring countries, such as Thailand and Singapore, did also face the same problem. In Thailand, there were only 13-woman representatives out of 240 parliament seats, or 5% women representation in the legislature (Wibawa, 2019). As for Singapore, the percentage of women representation was slightly better where they had 24 women representations out of 101 parliamentary seats, or 23% of women representation in legislature (Agarwal, 2018).

Based on the problem stated above, this study aims to look into political parties as the main agent that can provide access to greater women representation in the decision-making processes through enhancing the merit of women political participation. It clearly shows that women face obstacles in obtaining political power because of their gender. Furthermore, this study also aims to discover why women have a lesser chance to be selected as candidates as compared to male politicians.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Throughout this research, the following questions will be answered:

1. What is the pattern of women political participation in 13th and 14th General Election?
2. How political parties leadership view women political participation in the parties?
3. What are the challenges faced by women politicians?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research will achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the pattern of women political participation in 13th and 14th General Election.
2. To know the political parties' views on woman political representation.
3. To explore the challenges faced by the women politician.

1.5 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This research is significant due to several reasons. Firstly, the research identifies issues faced by women that make them restricted from being active in political participation and opportunity in political leadership. Next, this research acts an additional contribution to the field of gender studies, especially in the Malaysian setting. This research is also able to explore whether political parties uphold the agenda of woman empowerment by giving chances to women to become representatives. Furthermore, this research helps guide the policymakers and political parties in improving women political participation as women comprise almost 50% of the Malaysian population. Finally, this study emphasises the role of political parties in enhancing women's political participation.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.6.1 Early Women Movement in Politics

The beginning of women's movement in politics was driven by the lack of women in the decision-making process. Besides that, women's voting rights were also denied. This led to women being ignored in policy making process resulting in law, and policies were formulated by not taking into account their impact on women. This clearly shows that women were left behind in all political aspects compared to men. Therefore, women demanded the same rights as men in the voting system.

As a result, before the 19th century, a group of women in the United Kingdom came together and formed a movement called the suffrage movement. At first, the group's efforts seemed to fail when their attempt to bring the motion of women's right to vote was rejected. Although their efforts were rejected by the highest level, they did not stop there. The birth of names like Lydia Becker and Millicent Fawcett continued to support this start-up. They adopted different approaches, such as a dialogue session with parliamentarians, reaching out to the general public and through legal means to ensure those women's voting rights were met (Duarte, 2008). In this discussion, the author mentioned two prominent figures in the early women's movement. This work highlights the early approaches of the movement in upholding women's right at an early stage.

According to Lovell (2012), the two movements that were most active in demanding women's participation in the electoral system were the National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women Social and Political Union (WSPU). Both movements were very vocal in their fight for women to be given the right to vote in elections. They also asserted that the exclusion of women's suffrage would result in women being discriminated against as citizens, and that the country and society would not benefit from women's expertise.

The movement was also visible in the United States (US) after 1870. This was due to the denial of women's voting rights when women's votes were rejected under the Fifteenth Amendment issued by the US government at that time. This led to a movement called the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874 (Zahradnikova, 2010). Initially, the objective of the group was to focus on social issues such as drug and crime issues. However, the support received by the group made them come together to give women the right to be in the political system. In this

work, it can be seen that the element of togetherness led to the agenda of women empowerment being upheld. Thus, in order for woman agenda to be seen as strong, there must be a great support from interested parties in order to make sure the agenda is successful.

The women's suffrage movement continued when the Woman Suffrage Amendment was presented by Senator A. A. Sargent. As a result, several states in America granted women the right to vote, for example, in Utah and Wyoming (Zahradnikova, 2010). The success of securing voting rights in both regions resulted in other provinces also giving women the right to vote. The highlight was reflected in the amendment of the Nineteenth Amendment in the constitution when it declared that every citizen of the United States regardless of gender are eligible for voting in the electoral system. The work by Zahradnikova had shown how women fought for their rights to vote and to be involved in the election process, which was achieved by the amendment that was passed in the constitution.

In the Asian continent, for example in Japan, the involvement of women in politics was found to be active after the Second World War. Before the Second World War, women in Japan were hired to work in labour factories and performed agricultural work. At this time, women's rights to vote and participate in politics were also hindered (Dubois,1991). The movement to demand women's rights to vote and to be involved in the political process did exist but the support received was not much as in the post-World War 2. An article published by Reicho Hiratsuka entitled 'New Women' discussed that the issue was met by Japanese women in 1911 (Khairunnisa & Zakaria, 2013). Thus, a women's group called the 'New Women's Association' was formed to demand women's rights, especially in politics and to abolish the laws of women involved in politics.

After the Second World War, women in Japan were given more rights. Japanese women's desire to participate in politics and the rights to vote was realized in 1946 when articles 14 and 15 of the Japanese constitution stated that every citizen of Japan regardless of race, gender and rank was given the right to vote, to obtain the right to vote and get involved in election (Khairunnisa & Zakaria, 2013). The work done by Khairunnisa and Zakaria showed how, in Japan, the women themselves managed to get the right of voting after the constitution had been changed, which allowed them to participate in election processes.

1.6.2 Early Women Movement in Malaysia

According to Cecilia, Maznah and Tan (2006), the earliest movement of women can be seen through the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP). The MNP was a party that fought the independence of Indonesia together with Malaya. The MNP took women's voice in the party seriously when they had almost 2000 membership. These were the efforts of the party to encourage women's participation in politics. MNP expanded their efforts to attract more women's involvement by introducing women section in 1946 called the Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS) led by Aishah Ghani (Zeenath, 2006). The purpose of this group was to promote the role of women in the local community. In addition, the group also called on women in the Malay community to join forces against the colonial powers. As a result, many women in the Malay country were keen to join AWAS to oppose the occupiers for the sake of independence in Malaya.

Another women's movement that can be found is Kaum Ibu Rembau which was established in the same year as AWAS (Roslan & Siti Zafrina, 2012). The group was established to lift women's dignity in religion and education. The group also joined forces against the foreign invaders to gain independence from Malaya. In

addition, the group received the support of the royal family of Negeri Sembilan. As a result, the group was able to attract women in the Malay country to participate. Ramlah (1993) stated that, apart from the blessings given by the royal family, the Malayan Union factor was also one of the strong reasons for women to step out of the Malay stereotype, which said that women are only fit to do housework, and together fought for independence.

According to Muhammad Rahimi and Bahiyah (2007) the earliest women group that existed in Malaya was Pergerakan Kaum Ibu (PKI). PKI is the backbone of the United Malay Nation Organization (UMNO). At that time, UMNO was a party committed to gain independence from the British. UMNO opened their space to women through the PKI as a chance to work together in demanding independence from the British. Apart from the objective of gaining independence, PKI also encouraged women to participate in politics and take care of the welfare of the Malay women at that time. Until today, PKI still exists in the country but was branded with the new name 'UMNO Wanita'. The involvement of women in politics had somehow led them to be in the decision-making processes. Thus, their voices are being heard. They do not only become supporters of the party, but also take part in constructing the policy of the country for people's benefit.

The group of women Malay movement mentioned above showed that their involvements in the political scene can be traced even before Tanah Melayu achieved independence. Even though there were very few women movements that were created, they shared a common goal, which was getting independence for Tanah Melayu. This group also showed how women too can contribute by getting involved in the political process and fought for independence.

1.6.3 Women Political Participation

In this paper, to narrow down the scope of the study of political participation, it will focus on the representation and the leadership of women in the political scene. The representation will look into descriptive representation. Meanwhile, for leadership, this paper will look on how women are being selected as the leader in government and also being chosen to represent their party in elections.

To observe the female's participation and representation in the world of politics, the concept of political representation should be understood first. The famous concept of political representation in the academic field was brought by Hanna Pitkin in 1967, cited in Childs & Lovenduski (2012). The ideas of political representation in this concept focused on 4 types of representation, which are authorised, descriptive, symbolic and substantive representative. These four types of representatives are the main ideas for indicating political representation in this concept brought by Pitkin.

Another study by Devi in 2006, cited in Sharifah Syahirah (2013), also highlighted four dimensions of political representation. The four dimensions are the representative, the constituents, opinions and political context. Based on the comparison of these two works done by scholars, they showed the same concept of defining political representation. This political representation dimension also worked as an indicator to study how political representation in the studies conducted.

Both studies had their similarities, where the aspect of descriptive and substantive was considered in their study. Thus, in this research, these two aspects were observed in more detail in order to understand the women political representation. In addition, this research also looked at how political parties allow them to fill up the political leadership position, be it in the political parties or government.