FUTURE ACADEMY

INCoH 2017
The Second International Conference on Humanities

LEADERSHIP AND GENDER: WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIA (1980-2013)

Nor Rafidah Saidon (a)*, Sity Daud (b), Mohd Samsudin (c)
*Corresponding author

(a) Centre for Policy and Global Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia, adeif_07@yahoo.com
(b) Centre for Policy and Global Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia, sitydaud@ukm.edu.my
(c) Centre for Policy and Global Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia, moss@ukm.edu.my

Abstract

This study discusses the relationship between leadership and gender in women's political participation in Malaysia from 1980 to 2013. This study has tried to identify the factors for women's political participation and the relationship between leadership and gender in women's political participation in Malaysia. The aim is to show women's ability to manage leadership as elected representatives in their constituencies, political parties, community and country. This study also investigates the obstacles to women's political participation in Malaysia. Qualitative research method used are observation and interviews with 15 respondents selected amongst politicians and scholars who write about women's political participation. In addition, secondary data and information from past research are combined with primary sources in the qualitative analysis. The conceptual framework used in this study is a legal-rational leadership theory and the concept of the social construction of gender. Finding shows that women's political participation is influenced by several factors that are identified as educational, economic, social, health and environment. The level of women's political participation takes place in stages due to some constraints such as education, culture, religion, social and other factors. The ability of women's leadership is not influenced by gender but it affects her leadership style. Female Members of Parliament are capable to perform their job as good as the male counterparts, as well as able to be knowledgeable of various issues and have a high level of political awareness.

Keywords: Leadership, gender, women, participation, politic.

1. Introduction

Women today have a nearly equal position with men on their achievements based on merits. The former's ability, capability and efficiency as leaders are already being recognized. Therefore, to ensure the smooth development of the country, the role of women cannot be ignored. Their contributions in various aspects of life such as economy, social and politics in many countries in the world are so dominant. Big names such as Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Corazon Aquino and others have become synonymous with world leaders.

Women's political participation is an effort to empower women in the political arena with the potential to bring about change in society. Participation of women in politics not only helps improve the position of women and highlight gender issues but also determines which party is ruling as the female population accounts for 50 percent of the population of Malaysia (Ramli, 1998a). As political leaders usually they have powers that are difficult to challenge. They are legally authorized through the political unit or party they represent (Herman, 1977). However, the number of women's representation in politics is still too small. Gender inequality can be seen through the number of opportunities for women in the electoral nomination. The ruling party promised the number of women candidates in general elections will be added. But women continue to be the 'underrepresented' group in politics.

The imbalance of formal political representation from the gender point of view has led to women around the world being largely marginalized and become global minorities although they comprise a population equal to that of men (Karam, 1998; Phillips, 1998; Ramli, 1999). Overall, the level of political representation of women is low and does not reach the quota of 30 percent as agreed by the various actors, particularly governments of the United Nations (UN) member states. The lack of women in decision-making or leadership gives the impression there is gender inequality in politics in Malaysia (Ramli & Hassan, 2010).

Although women have mastered critical areas such as medicine, engineering, judicial, et cetera. and have been out of traditional areas such as teaching and nursing, women are still far behind the opportunity to hold the top posts and cabinet ministers in Malaysia. Women are still haunted with the perception that men are more 'superior' and discrimination against their leadership abilities still exists in the selection of the top leadership and the Malaysian cabinet. Women still find it difficult to team up with men although their role is just as important as men's and women's contribution to the country is also significant.

2. Problem Statement

Women's involvement in politics is important to address their problems. Women have to compete with men and to go against the odds in order to achieve their positions according to their ability and credibility in politics. However, despite the increased participation of women in the Malaysian politics since Independence, the number of female candidates is still very low compared to that of the male candidates in the polls for Parliamentary or State Legislative candidates. This is partially explained by the stereotyping of women's leadership and capabilities. Very few women at decision-making or leadership levels illustrates gender inequality in Malaysian politics (Ramli & Hassan, 2010).

Given the fact that 50 percent of Malaysian population are female, the involvement of women in politics not only enhances the position and KPIs of women as the objective of the National Women's Policy (1989) but also determines governing party. However, female political representation is still very small. Gender inequality can be seen through the number of female nominations in elections. Despites promises by the ruling party that the number of women candidates in the elections will be increased, women continue to be underrepresented in politics (Minister of Women, Family and Community Development 2014).

3. Research Questions

There are three main questions in this study, namely:

- What are the factors of political participation of women in Malaysia since 1980-2013?
- How does the relationship between leadership and gender influence the empowerment of women's political participation in Malaysia in 1980-2013?

What are the obstacles to gender empowerment in Malaysia politics?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study seeks to examine the factors for women's political participation, analyses the relationship of leadership and gender and shows the obstacles faced by women in their political participation in Malaysia from 1980 to 2013. This period was chosen to reflect the changes and the impact of government policies for women in Malaysia. The increased participation and involvement of women in Malaysian politics since Independence is indeed glaring with the significant increase in the representation of women in politics. However, women are still at the periphery in decision-making.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on political science research design methodology of qualitative research. In depth interviews were conducted on a total of 15 respondents selected from among academicians, political leaders from component parties of Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Rakyat (PR). The key informants are selected from a 'purposive' sampling based on some specified criteria.

The results of the interview which form is the primary data shows differences in the ability and leadership style among respondents and their views on the issues, obstacles and challenges for women in the political arena. Respondents are as follows:

- Tun Mahathir Mohammad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia
- Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, former Chief Minister of Kedah
- Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz, former Minister of International Trade and Industrialization
- Tan Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, former Minister of Women, Family and Community Development
- Datuk Noraini Ahmad, former Deputy Minister of Human Resource, Chair of MITI, Parit Sulong Member of Parliament
- Tan Sri Zaleha Ismail, former Minister of Women and Welfare

- Tan Sri Dato' Sri Ng Yen Yen, former Minister of Women, Family and Community Development
- Dato' Seri Nancy Shukri, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department
- Datuk Rosnah Shirlin, Deputy Minister of Works, Sandakan Member of Parliament
- Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun, Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development

Other political figure:

- Datin Seri Wan Azizah, The President of PKR, Permatang Pauh Member of Parliament, Kajang Assemblyman
- YB Teresa Kok, Seputeh Member of Parliament from DAP
- YB Dr Halimah Ali, Klang Member of Parliament from PAS, Selangor Education Exco,
- Datin Jaya Parthiban, Former MIC Women Leader

Except those figures, also interview to academic members whose generously study about gender, woman and policies

Prof Emeritus Dato' Dr Nik Safiah Karim, UM Distinguished Fellow.

6. Findings

Based on the main objectives of this study to determine the factors of women's political participation, there are five factors identified to have influence on women's political participation from 1980 to 2013. These factors are education, socialization, economic, health and environmental factors that is to have a high political consciousness.

Based on Table 1, according to Bailey (1992) and Sekaran (2009), a strong factor must have a value of (F> 0.8), (F = 0.5) for medium and (F <0.5) is weak. Value factor obtained from the interview shows how respondents agreed or have in common and how often they call and choose a theme or a common factor. The strongest factors influencing the involvement of the political leadership are women's education, socialization and the environment (F> 0.8), whereby most respondents agree that education, socialization and environment is the main factor of women's political participation in 1980-2013. This is because there are no more restrictions for women to study up to the highest level. Parents have an open mind and raced to send their daughters to institutions of higher learning.

According to Ramli (1999) and Shahrizat (personal communication, December 3, 2014), education factors affect and increase the involvement of women in politics, in which the number of highly educated women were higher in the 1990s compared to the previous decade. For example, in 1983 there were only 48 percent of women at the university level but this number increased to 66 percent in 1993. This indirectly gives the advantage to women to contest and win the title.

Table 01. Compilation of factors for women's political participation in Malaysia (1980-2013)

Factor Participation politic	Respondents															Total *frequency (No /15= F)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Education	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15(1)
Socialization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15(1)
Environment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	13(0.867)
Economy	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x		x	11(0.733)
Health Level	x		x	x	x				x			x	x			7(0.467)

Economic factors also strongly affect the involvement of the political leadership of women (F>0.6). The effect of development has changed the economic situation of women and public opinion about the importance of education not only to boys but also to girls. Women's participation in the economy is also a factor that makes it easy for women to get involved in politics because they have their own income and financial resources that are essential for successful women in politics (Asl, 2018; Ramli, 1999).

Meanwhile, the level of health only affects women's political participation partially (F = 0.5 medium). According to (Ramli, 1999) health status also plays an important role as the factors for women's participation in politics. Good health can liberate women from physical inability for women to become more actively involved in political activities. For example, Lo'Lo Dr Mohd Ghazali, Hussien Onn, Seah Leong Peng and others. According to Ng Yen Yen, women involved in politics must be strong and have a good health, family and a good job. This allows them to manage political issues in helping the people (personal communication, June 30, 2015).

The first finding showed an average education, environment and socialization greatly affect the political participation of women. Typically, women are involved in politics and achieve the highest position and political legitimacy in the early stages as a result of a family relationship or a close contact with leading politicians. As (Ching, 1999) claims it is a tradition in Asian societies where most women who get involved in politics were elected as leaders because of her husband or father.
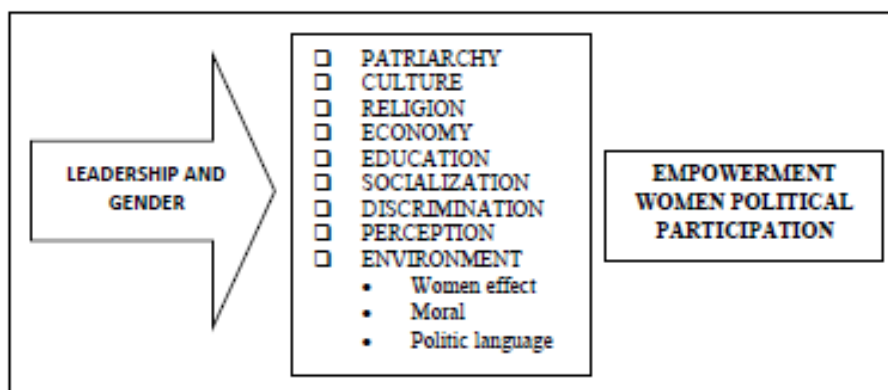

Figure 01. The relationship between leadership and gender in women's political participation in Malaysia. Source: Adapted from (Ramli, 1998b, 1999; Yusop, 2012)

Meanwhile, Figure 1 shows that there are several factors that influence the relationship between leadership and gender in 1980-2013 consisting of eight factors, namely culture of patriarchy, discrimination, perception, religion, economy, education, socialization and the environment. These factors have also shown a lack of support by the community for women to be actively involved in politics. Eastern societies, especially Malay and Indian women have been plagued by the Eastern values which make patriarchal culture as a basis for administration and business in their lives.

A powerful factor of (F=0.8) affects the relationship between leadership and gender is a culture of patriarchy, discrimination, perception, religion, education and socialization. As noted by Jaya Parthibhan, for women in Malaysia, in accordance with the customs and the culture of the East, no matter how high the position of a woman, she still needs to follow the restrictions of traditional and cultural values that favour men as leaders because it is the identity of our society (personal communication, February 10, 2015). In fact, as supported by PKR President, Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, said that the people of Malaysia celebrate their Eastern culture and values that give priority to men in the leadership and administration (personal communication, November 26, 2015). A study by Abdul Muin (1996) confirmed that the texts in historical study of Malaysia such as Malay history, genealogy and Hikayat Seri Melayu Kelantan showed men in traditional Malay societies had a superior positions than women.

Discrimination is a common practice in the world. It stems from the human tendency to discriminate against each other. (Ramli, 1999) argues the challenges women faced in their political participation is the gender factor in the sense that they have to deal with the views of people who are less confident in the ability of women in leadership. Nik Safiah said if women leaders make mistakes, the public will quickly judge them as incapable in leadership (personal communication, April 7, 2015).

Economic and environmental factors have a strong influence on the political language in the relationship between leadership and gender, as specified by Ng Yen Yen, about the economy.

"A strong economy and good financial resources are vital if women want to be involved in politics for helping the people" (personal communication, June 30, 2015).

Whereas to understand and master the language of political will put a leader in high position and be able to impress and influence their followers. As noted by Nik Safiah, political language is how politicians communicate their ideas. Political language is the language used by politicians for political purposes such as to gain votes, communicate and deliver political issues (personal communication, July 4, 2015).

In addition, environmental factors and moral have influence on some women's political leadership as stated by Teresa Kok, that Ng Yen Yen has managed to secure the support and influence of women in the elections of 2004. She has managed to influence the vote of women in Petaling Jaya Utara to support the BN candidate Chew Mei Fun. Whereas the constituency is a DAP stronghold. Women's votes defeated DAP (personal communication, December 20, 2014). Meanwhile, according to Chew Mei Fun, she rejects leaders who have moral problems because it will reflect the weakness of leaders and will be an example to the members of her party. Moral issues can affect the support and confidence of the people to the party and will indirectly reduce votes for the party (personal communication, March 11, 2015).

All these factors affect the relationship between leadership and gender in women's political participation. The political legitimacy of women can be achieved if they have positions of authority that is valid in law and must be accepted by all parties. (Weber, 1968) through his concept of legal authority or

legal rationale authority stated this authority has been the underlying principle of women's leadership. Therefore, to ensure all issues and women's issues can be taken care, women's position as a supreme leader is very important and must be achieved. Women's participation in politics is necessary for two reasons, namely gender equality for women and to resolve some critical issues pertaining to women.

The second finding identified factors for the relationship between leadership and gender in the level of women's political participation in Malaysia between 1980 and 2013. These factors have given privileges to women to participate in politics because of their role as a balance between the sexes. The representation of women in politics can determine the existence of fair conditions, equal opportunity and fair treatment between the sexes to live and thrive as a partner in the family and society. The role of women and men as partners between the sexes should also be applied in national politics. Then we can create a balance between the sexes and building a more equitable and fair society.

Women leaders face greater challenges than male leaders, as the former as expected to be more multitasking as they have to take care of family, home, community, party and state. Although women have come out of their role as wives and mothers, their family role should not be abandoned because the society will assess their ability as leaders in the public space and the private space. In contrast to the male leaders, their role and duties in the public space is more challenging as they have to assist the male leaders too.

There are various obstacles faced by women in political participation in Malaysia. Among these obstacles are self-imposed restrictions, age, perceptions, time, limited resources, the structure of the party, religion, law, education, culture, socialization and environment that consists of family and morale.

Table 02. Compilation of obstacles to women's political participation in Malaysia (1980-2013)

Obstacles	Respondents															Total *frequency (No /15= F)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
Self-imposed	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15(1)
Culture	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15(1)
Party structure	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14(0.933)
Time	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	13(0.867)
Perceptions	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	13(0.867)
Education	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	13(0.867)
Socialization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	13(0.867)
Religion	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	12(0.8)
Limited Resources		x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x	11(0.733)
Party Constitution	x			x		x		x	x		x		x		x	8(0.533)
Age	x				x			x	x	x	x		x		x	8(0.533)
Environment																
• Family	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	15 (1)
• Moral	x	x	x					x		x	x		x	x	x	9 (0.6)

According to the study, Table 2 shows very strong obstacles to women's political participation are self-imposed barriers, the party structure, religion, education, culture, perception, socialization and environment that consists of family. According to Daud, (2015) family encouragement is very important to a female leader. Women who want to be actively involved in politics need permission from their husband, father or brother to guarantee their political survival. If they don't get the support of family members, their political journey will be short-lived because society will assess how women balance and maintain family connections to get involved in politics. According to Rafidah, stable families are very important in determining women's political course. Family support and understanding will ensure continuity of women's political participation (personal communication, March 6, 2015).

Meanwhile, limited resources are strong obstacles in women's political participation. According to (Ramli, 1999) women candidates from small parties, especially opposition parties, generally do not have financial resources, machinery, media campaigns and adequate assistance. Halimah said that during the campaign she had difficulty to attract voters and the local community due to lack of financial resources and campaign machinery, but her profession as a doctor helped her to reach out to local communities to provide free medical treatment. Throughout the campaign, she can reach out and delve into the problems of the local community (personal communication, October 21, 2015).

While age, Party Constitution and moral environment are only moderate influence as a barrier to political participation of women. According to Sanusi, male politician problem is money and women. While female politicians are often involved in the scandal and affair. Therefore, women must keep their individuality so that male politicians do not look down on women involved in politics (personal communication, May 17, 2016). Obstacles such as the aforementioned disturb public confidence in the abilities and capabilities of women as leaders. Although women are willing to make sacrifices and show a strong commitment to the party, their efforts are still not given due recognition by male politicians. Women are often considered to be more appropriate as a supporter of male politicians. Gender imbalance in political participation at national and local levels is due to the people's mindset about women's capabilities and abilities as a leader. They often question the women's credibility as an authority. As a result, women should use their wisdom to set their political agenda and prove that women are also capable of running the country well. However, Mahathir said women had been involved in politics since the early days, since Independence. Today there are no obstacles for women to become leaders but women must be efficient and capable. Women need to gain the trust of party members as a candidate in the elections. Women must be able to convince sufficient members of the selection committee consisted mostly of men that they are the best capable candidate (personal communication, January 21, 2015). The third finding confirmed that there are many obstacles for women to get involved in politics between 1980 to 2013. Women are often associated with leadership based on cooperation, while men are associated with the aggressive and conflictual way the leadership. Such perceptions are based on the social construction of gender assumption that men are more rational thinking, while women are too influenced by emotions in decision making. Although there are various obstacles to women's active participation in politics, it is not a reason for women not entering politics.

The advantages of education and the influence of a strong woman can strengthen the position of women in the political arena. The woman must be wise to set their political journey beginning at the grassroots level. Determined women will come forward to bridge the gender gap in leadership. The

woman is not just a candidate to be underestimated or just for appearances, but women are now better prepared and understand politics better. Women today have a greater political awareness and handle serious matters which traditionally were the responsibility of the men.

7. Conclusion

This study is different from academic and previous studies in which it discussed gender issues critically and find the best solutions. Meanwhile, conceptual discussions have been taking a broader view that includes some of the more important questions. Among the challenges for women in leadership, gender and politics, where women are also responsible for the leadership because she is trustworthy and cover a broad field that encompasses leadership to herself, family, community and country. This study may also provide some solutions to address the problems faced by women. Discussion on crisis and the obstacles faced by women can propose the best solution and directly give hope and paradigm shift to women in the face of political life that is full of challenges and high competition.

Acknowledgments

References

Abdul Muin, M. (1996). Wanita Melayu dan kegiatan sosial. Latihan Ilmiah, Jabatan Sejarah. Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya.

Asl, M. P. (2018). Fabrication of a desired truth: the oblivion of a Naxalite woman in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland. *Asian Ethnicity, 19*(3), 383-401. https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2018.1429892

Bailey, K. D. (1992). Kaedah penyelidikan sosial. (Hashim Awang, Trans.). Kuala Lumpur, KL: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. (Original work published 1984).

Chew, M. F. (March 11, 2015). Personal Interview.

Ching, F. (1999). Wake up call. Far Eastern Economic *Review*. 20, 30-31.

Daud, S. (2015, 20 March). Adakah pemimpin wanita sekadar pelacur politik atau gerakan pemikir?. In. Nur Lina Mastura (Eds.), Malaysian Digest.com. Retrieved from https://suara.tv/20/03/2015/pemimpin-wanita-sekadar-pelacur-politik/

Halimah, A. (October 21, 2015). Personal Interview.

Herman, M. G. (1977). Introduction: A statement of issues. In. Herman, M. G. et al., *Psychological examination of political leaders*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Karam, A. (1998) Women in Parliament: Beyond numbers. Sweden: International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Asistance (IDEA).

Minister of Women, Family and Community Development. (2014). National Women's Policy. 1989. Retrieved from http://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/Dasar/17DASAR_WANITA_NEGARA.pdf

Mahathir, M. (January 21, 2015).Personal Interview.

Ng, Y. Y. (June 30, 2015). Personal Interview.

Nik, S. K. (July 4, 2015). Personal Interview.

Nik, S. K. (April 7, 2015). Personal Interview.

Parthibhan, J. (February 10, 2015). Personal Interview.

Philips, A. (1998). Democracy and representation: or, why should it matter who our representative are? In. Philips, Anne (Eds.). Oxford readings in feminism: feminism and politics. Oxford New York: University Press.

Rafidah, A. (March 6, 2015). Personal Interview.

Ramli, R. (1998a). Democratisation in Malaysia: Towards gender parity in political participation: *Akademika, 53,* 61-76.

Ramli, R. (1998b). Pembangunan politik dan gender: Cabaran dan strategi bagi calon-calon wanita. In. Rokiah Talib & Shanthi Thambiah (Eds.), Gender, budaya dan masyarakat (120-128). Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya.

Ramli, R. (1999). Gender dan politik: satu penelitian teoretis dan empris. In. Ghazali Mayudin (Eds.), Teori sains politik pilihan: aplikasinya dalam konteks Malaysia (50-59). Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

Ramli, R., & Hassan, S. (2010). Wanita dan pembangunan politik di Malaysia: alaf baru, politik baru. In. Jamilah Ariffin (Eds.), Himpunan makalah wanita dan pembangunan di Malaysia: satu kesinambungan menyusuli perubahan selama empat dekad. Kuala Lumpur: MPH Group Printing (M) Sdn Bhd.

Sanusi, J. (May 17, 2016). Personal Interview

Shahrizat, A. J. (December 3, 2014).). Personal Interview.

Sekaran, U. (2009). Research methods for business: A skill-building approach. In. Sekaran and Roger Bougie. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Teresa, K. (December 20, 2014). Personal Interview.

Wan, A. W. I., (November 26, 2015). Personal Interview.

Weber, M. (1968). On charisma and institution building. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Yusop, N. (2012). Satu tinjauan atas persoalan gender di Malaysia. In. Haris Zuan & Rizal Hamdan (Eds.), Wacana baru politik Malaysia: Perspektif ruang awam, budaya dan institusi. (116-128). Petaling Jaya: Strategic Information and Research Development Centre.