

AN ASSESSMENT INTO WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MALAYSIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the state of women political participation in Malaysian democratic governance. Using descriptive qualitative method, secondary resources like academic books and journal articles, as well as liberal democratic theory as a parameter for analysis to create linkages for sound conclusion, several results emerged. Emerged results disclosed that Malaysian women from the 1957 independence, enjoy their right to vote and contest during elections. Article 8(2) also guaranteed gender equality and avoidance of discrimination or marginalization of citizens including women in their pursuit of political life. Results also showed upward movement or increase in the number of Malaysian women who occupy prominent political offices like the Deputy Prime Minister, Parliamentarians, Members of the Cabinet, Anti-corruption Head, Ministers and Deputy Ministers after the 2018 general elections. Notwithstanding the above upward movement in representation, result also showed that Malaysian women still face a lot of challenges in pursuing their political interest. These challenges as disclosed include male dominance emanating from cultural and religious beliefs, lack of family and spouse supports, poor financial support, absence of political training and marginalization from political parties. The negative indices work against women and must be addressed. They are against the ethics of the liberal democratic theory. To address them, the political leaders must adhere to the constitution and the Beijing Conference 30% advocacy to give Malaysian women their rightful place in politics. The study would benefit the political leaders, women, and researchers. There is the need to also study women political representation in other countries of Asia.

Keywords: democracy, governance, Malaysia, political participation, women

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democracies, the need for citizens' inclusion or participation in the political decision-making processes and governance in their society should not be underestimated (Dim & Asomah, 2019; Oni, 2014; Agbalajobi, 2010). This is hinged on the premise that democracy belongs to the people and encourages inclusion and equal representation and participation of the ordinary people in the processes of governance and decision-makings that have to do with them (Choi, 2018; Liu, 2020). It is also important to understand that in a democratic system, Kim (2019) noted, the equal representation and involvement of all citizens including the womenfolk amongst other bodies in the political processes of their societies remains key to democratic consolidation. This is because they have the right to contribute in taking decisions that affect their lives and wellbeing in the society. With special focus on Malaysian women in political participation and

representation, Saidon, Daud and Samsudin (2019) drawing experience from the parliament, explained that Malaysian women are capable and have all the ability to execute political assignments perfectly as their male counterparts. They have a good level of political awareness and knowledgeable in many public issues that affect the society. Also, to ensure and encourage Malaysian women political participation and representation in public lives, the Malaysian Federal Constitution under Article 8(2) established equal rights for all citizens and no citizen including the womenfolk shall be subjected to discrimination or marginalization in pursuit of his/her political and public interest. The whole of this, without doubt, is to ensure that every citizen including the women are carried along and included in the decision-making processes of the nation's democratic governance.

According to Saidon, Daud and Samsudin (2017), Malaysian women are critical instrument to the society and the country at large. They are not only qualified as leaders but could also lead the country. Their participation and representation in public sectors at both local and national levels could ensure positive changes in legislations and policies that affect women, their children, and families in Malaysia. This shows the importance of women in public life. Notwithstanding the above, however, the question whether Malaysian women are fully represented or allowed to participate and freely advance their political interest, remains a bone of contention in the Malaysia politics and public life. To address the above, several studies have also been carried out such as the works of Saidon et al (2019), Ng (2010), Syahirah (2013), Yusoff, Sarjoon and Othman (2016), and Mohamad (2018) amongst others. Despite these bodies of literatures, none was found to wholly focus on the state of women political participation in Malaysian political parliamentary democratic governance. This study, therefore, filled the gap in literature and contributed to the body of knowledge in understanding the state of political participation and representation of Malaysian women in the public sector governance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The essence of a literature review in a research cannot be underestimated as it serves as a gateway into understanding what has been done and areas to consolidate on. On this, therefore, this study reviewed past literatures under the subheadings below to consolidate understanding on the topic of interest.

Democratic Governance and Political Participation

While it becomes critical to understand that democracy connotes a political organization that operates on arrangement between the state and the ordinary citizens (Okpe & Taya, 2018), governance entails the process of putting the state machineries into action to realize the wills and the interest of the people through a due process, accountability and upholding the rule of law. It simply connotes the instrument of basic liberty, respect to the right of citizens and strengthening democracy (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2016; Inokoba & Kumokor, 2012). According to Isma'ilah and Othman (2016), democracy and governance as state concepts are exceptionally and independent unique as variables but are also connected in ensuring better life for the citizens and good governance. Joining the two concepts together, therefore, Isma'ilah (2016) observed that democratic

governance involves a situation where the state democratic institutions like the national assembly, the executive, the judiciary, political parties amongst others exist and exercise their legal and constitutional duties on the bases of democratic philosophy. It also involves the encompassment of political participation of every citizen including the womenfolk in the business of governance in the state. In line with this, therefore, political participation in a democratic system involves the encompassment and participation of the ordinary people in the processes of decision-making and governance that affect their everyday life and existence. It simply involves the non-exclusion of citizens including the womenfolk in the operation of the state (Conway, 2000). It involves playing active roles to influence government policies, decisions and participate in electing or selecting public leaders of their own choice. It is all about good governance which is the performance outcome of government policies (Graaf & Paanakker, 2015; Rotberg, 2014).

In line with the above, Falade (2014) observed that political stability and development of any democratic governance or their consolidation, can only be achieved in a true participation and inclusion of the ordinary citizens in the governance processes of their state. This is because, Adelakan (2010) observed, there is the need to carry them along in making decisions on issues that directly affect their existence, rights, programs to achieve and how to achieve them. Political engagement of the common people, Abubakar (2010) noted, is an age-long practice in several societies. Therefore, this simply means that the ordinary Malaysians including men and women have all the rights to be engaged in state governance amongst other political leadership positions in the society. Also, unlike in a monarchical or authoritarian regime where their freedom of political participation is usually and highly limited, democratic system offers the ordinary citizens including women the freedom to be included in the governance processes of their communities. According to Arowolo and Aluko (2010), the essence is to enable them to compete for public office, engage in decision processes and in the distribution of scarce resources in their community. Therefore, in this context, no citizen or an individual must be denied or discriminated in the governance processes of their state including the womenfolk. It would justify the operation of the democratic governance, its consolidation and ensure dynamism in the political system.

Women Political Participation in Democratic Governance

To ensure good governance in a democratic government which is usually considered as the end-result of government policies (Graaf & Paanakker, 2015; Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019), democracy and governance remains important variables as they are interconnected to promote good life for the common people (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016). Democratic governance as observed by Isma'ila (2016), involves the operation of the political system by the political institutions in line with democratic principles. It is the enforcement of good governance by the public institutions (Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019), and this encompasses the engagement of the womenfolk amongst other people in governance and other public leadership positions in the society. Women political participation in democratic governance, therefore, and in line with the above opinions, connotes gender balance in political and governance processes in a democracy. Gender balance or parity in politics, according to Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), simply means equal opportunities for men and women in a political and governance processes. In a democracy, women political participation informs the free political inclusion, and representation of women in public leadership positions. Their active

inclusion and equal participation with men in political decision-making processes in a democratic system remains germane to economic development, stability, and the consolidation of democracy (Kumar, 2017). According to Kumar (2017), women in the 21st century still face all levels of marginalization and discrimination globally. This is despite their capability to contribute positively in leadership and decision-making ramifications of their societies. This, however, contradicts the tenets of a democratic governance.

Supporting Kumar's submission above, Barnes and Burchard (2013) revealed a huge gender disparity in political participation between the womenfolk and the menfolk but varies from state to state and within states in a democracy. According to Community of Democracy (2017), despite many conversations and debates at the global levels on how the womenfolk should be empowered politically and given a fair share of political representation in public leadership and governance in democracies, the achievement remains far from being realized. Between 1999-2015 in the Nigerian parliament, for example, literatures revealed that only 8 women were represented in the Senate out of the total number of 109 seats. In percentage, it represents only 7.3%. While in the House of Representatives, only 19 women were represented out of its 360 seats, and equivalent to 5.3%. The rest of the seats were occupied by men (Oshewolo & Adedire, 2019; Oluyemi, 2016; Nwabunkeonye, 2014). This was despite their critical importance in the national assembly amongst other critical sectors of the democratic system. In Malaysia, also, and as of 2019, Louis (2020) revealed that despite 50.3% of women enrollment in institutions of higher learning above their men, their total representation in the parliament amongst other senior government offices remains 24.7%. This was despite their huge population. It simply shows that women are still facing a lot of challenges with regards to fair inclusion in political and democratic processes and it cannot consolidate democratic ethos.

Aligning with the scholars above, Mlambo et al (2019) observed that in several democracies, women are still underrepresented, discriminated, and marginalized in economics, public leaderships amongst other political levels. To ameliorate these challenges and ensure women political participation in democracies, some scholars observed the significance of complete execution of the 1995 Beijing Conference 30% declaration in favor of women in all public decision-making processes (Uwa et al., 2018; Fashagba et al., 2019; Oshewolo & Adedire, 2019). According to Mlambo et al (2019), however, even the 30% Beijing Conference Declaration is yet to be achieved in several democracies and still halfway to 50% benchmark target by the Protocol on Gender and Development of 2008. The above stands as a clear sign that women are still underrepresented, marginalized, and discriminated in many countries and democracies and Malaysian women may not be an exception. It does not reflect or align with the ethics of a liberal democratic political system where democracy encourages and permits the free engagement and participation of all citizens in the governance and decision-making processes of their society.

History Of Women Political Participation In Malaysian

Democratic Governance

Malaysia is a parliamentary democratic nation with three major races of Malays being the earliest settlers, the Indians, and the Chinese. The Indians and the Chinese came around 1900 and were

brought by the British who ruled the country between 1874 to 1957 as workers in tin mines and rubber plantations (Ariffin, 1999). According to Ariffin (1999), the history of women political participation in Malaysian democratic governance is as far back as before the independence of 1957. Being a British colony, the right of women to vote during elections was established in the Malaysian constitution when it gained her independence in 1957. Also, the origin of many women reformists in Malaysia today started with their participation against the British colonial regime as they struggled alongside their men in the nationalist struggle for independence. Their struggle for political participation started in 1940s' and since then has become a pattern for agitation by women in different political wings and parties for political inclusion in governance processes (Ariffin, 1999). Though during the independence struggle, the issue of women political participation and representation was not the key agenda but there were demands for improved education for the female gender. However, Ariffin (1999) further observed that notwithstanding the role of women during the independence struggle and their agitation for political participation, their representation in public leadership remains low. In 1950s, for example, as he added, there was no single parliamentary woman in the state parliaments. Between 1980s to 1990s, they managed to grow from 4.8% to 6.3%. In real terms, their number in the state parliaments was just 17 women out of 351 members. In 1995, also, they managed to rise to 25 women in the parliament out of 394 parliamentary members. It was really a slow growth and does not reflect the ethics of democratic governance that encourages equal citizens participation and representation in public decision-making processes.

At the federal parliament, Ariffin (1999) observed, women political participation slowly moved from 1% to 3.3% between 1955 to 1975. Also, between 1982 to 1990 and to 1995, their percentage moved from 5.2% to 6.1% and finally, 7.8 % in 1995. The rate of women representation in the federal parliament between 1945 to 1995 was very poor as it reflected a huge underrepresentation of the womenfolk in public life despite their population and participation during voting in elections. Aligning with the above, Pembangunan (2003) also observed that several legislations had taken place between 1957 to 2000 to protect and promote women rights in Malaysia. He revealed that the enactment of 1973 Women and Girls Protection Act and its subsequent amendment in 1987 was for the good of the women. Other Acts are Domestic Violence Act of 1994 and the 1996 establishment of the Code of Practice and the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Harassment in workplaces. To ensure women political representation and participation, Pembangunan (2003) observed that the Malaysia Federal Constitution in Article 8(1) ensured equal rights and protection for all the citizens in Malaysia. In Clause (2), also, as amended in 2001 by the Dewan Rakyat, it further established that no citizen shall be discriminated or marginalized on the bases of his/her place of birth, race, gender, or religion for any public office. According to Pembangunan (2003), the above enactments have helped the women through the years to show considerable leadership capabilities with regards to public office or positions even at community levels and private organizations, however, they are still left behind in comparison with their male counterparts in high-leadership positions and engagement in public decision-makings. A good number of the women remain confined to family lives while their menfolk pursue their aspirations through which they have access and control the political power structure and processes of decision-making in Malaysia.

Pembangunan (2003) concluded that the trend of women political participation in Malaysia since her independence of 1957, shows that women are slowly waking up and playing critical roles as party candidates, workers and voters as well as ensuring the success of their political parties during elections. Some of them are public leaders and stand as representatives on issues that affect them. Some of them are parliamentarians, ministers and deputy ministers in the cabinet, secretaries in the parliament, members in the state assemblies, councilors, leaders of women wings, board of directors in companies and registered members in Community and Security Council. However, he maintained, their percentage is still very low compared to the menfolk. Though democratic governance involves gradual process and consolidation, the increase, and the percentage at which the women are represented in Malaysian public leadership positions and decision-making proves below standard in comparison to the 1995 Beijing conference declaration for 30% women inclusion in public lives. The above views were supported by Ahmad (1998), Mustafa (1999), and Syahirah (2013). According to Ahmed (1998), women in Malaysia have always had the freedom to vote and even hold political office. Today, they constitute one-half of the registered voters, active in political parties and continued to be loyal to their parties. They raise fund for their parties and support their male counterparts as leaders. They vote hugely during elections and even campaign but have remained as supporters to the men. With few exceptions, many of them have continued to be confined within the traditional gender roles even in the contemporary political life.

Drawing from the 1995 general election in Malaysia, Mustafa (1999) observed upward movement in women political participation as candidates in election. He noted that during the 1995 general election, 61 women contested for public office and they came from various political parties. However, as he added, their number remain very low as they only constituted only 4.64% out of the entire number of candidates that participated in that election. The women still face challenges and obstacles of gender, family background, religion, education, and low political experience. From the 2013 general elections, also, Syahirah (2013) observed that despite that women in Malaysia made up of the electorates, their representation in both states and national parliaments remains low. Since 1959 general elections, he added, women political representation and gender politics appears not to be any serious issue amongst the political leaders as they continued to be overshadowed by ethnic issues and religious propaganda. The gender disparity gap remains wide between men and women in public life. From the 2013 general election, for example, Syahirah (2013) added that though the number and the percentage of women contestants increased when compared to previous general elections in the country. However, the percentage of their representation at all parliamentary levels remains low. Also, despite agitations for their inclusion by women NGOs in the country like Joint Action Group and the National Council of Women Organizations, their formal representation in politics amongst other public leaderships in the country remains behind the 30% policy mentioned in many regional and global conventions. From the forgoing, therefore, it is very clear that judging from history of women political participation in Malaysia, their number and representation in public positions amongst other decision-making processes in the political democratic governance remains very low. It does not reflect the consolidation of democratic governance.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Descriptive qualitative method was adopted in this study to explore, understand, and describe the state of women political representation and participation under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance. Descriptive method, Wright and McKeever (2000) observed, aligns better in the exploration and explanation of social events, and this includes women political participation in a democracy. The reason for the research method, Magilvy (2003) noted, is to produce a deep thought or sound description of the subject matter. The research method has the capacity and the ability to explore and bring social issues to knowledge (Creswell, 2013; Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Nassaji, 2015; Colorafi & Evans, 2016). This is because social issues like politics, economics amongst others are complex issues and cannot easily be maximized quantitatively. The above submissions justify why the method was adopted to understand the state of women political participation in Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance. Materially, also, the study relied mainly on secondary resources which include journal articles and books written by Fagbadebo and Ruffin (2019), Fashagba et al (2019), Oshewolo and Adedire (2019), and Agunyai and Olawoyin (2019) amongst others. Finally, the study also relied on the theory of liberal democracy as a framework of analysis and to develop connection for sound understanding and conclusion on the subject matter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applied the theory of liberal democracy to explore, understand and describe the state of women political representation and participation under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance. Though other social theories such as Marxist democratic theory, Elitist democratic theory and Normative democratic theory can also be adopted in addressing the phenomenon, liberal democratic theory stands out with more potential features to explain social and political representation of women in a political democratic governance like Malaysia. According to Vincent and Tunde (2018), scholars like Barron Montesquieu, John Lucke, Adam Smith, and Rousseau, J.J. were the early proponents of the theory. These scholars, they added, believe that liberal democratic theory of democracy has the potentials to explore, understand and describe human social events and can also bring to knowledge the type of democratic experience being enjoyed in several democracies. The theory still enjoys credibility and acceptance around democracies in different continents of the world, they demonstrated. The above submission by the scholars demonstrates how rich the theory could be in understanding and explaining social events like democracy and political participation of individuals.

The main premise of the theory, Muhammad (2013), and Kwasu (2013) observed, lies in its ethics that a democratic political system must be the kind that not only promotes political participation in a democratic governance, but must be the type that involves the people including the womenfolk in all its political dimensions and governance processes. The theory believes that the political system and its governance processes must ensure citizens representation and voluntary participation to contest in elections and vote their leaders without prejudice, gender disparity, discrimination, wealth, or marginalization of any sort. The theory encourages an active and dynamic political practice and atmosphere where the common citizens including the womenfolk

would be carried alongside their men in all political decision-making of their societies. Their participation and representation would not only enable them to contribute effectively on issues that impact them but would encourage them to protect their interest, encourage liberty, support government activities for effective development and democratic consolidation in their society. From the foregoing, the adoption of the theory to explore, understand and describe women political participation in Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance was considered timely and scholarly importance. It would assist not only the policymakers, women, and the general citizens to understand democratic governance, but would also help researchers to comprehend its doctrine with regards to political participation and representation of women in a democratic regime.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

To explore, understand and describe the state of women political representation and participation under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance, eminent findings emerged from the body of literatures amongst other scholarly works reviewed. The findings were dissected and discussed in the subheading below for effective and deep comprehension of the subject matter.

Women Political Participation in Malaysian Democratic Governance

Under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance, evidence abound that Malaysian women make up almost half of the country's population (Ariffin, 1999). However, questions about the state of their representation and participation in the political parliamentary democratic governance of the country continues to be an unending debate amongst academics and the womenfolk. In the Federal Constitution, for example, Article 8(2) empowers the political representation and participation of Malaysian citizens including women in public governance (Azmi, 2020; Pembangunan, 2003). The position of the constitution is to ensure that no citizen is discriminated or marginalized in the pursuit of his or her political life. This also falls in line with the doctrine of the liberal democratic theory which encourages the free participation and representation of every citizen in the governance processes of their political system. Based on the above, therefore, and trying to ascertain the state of their representation and participation in the nation's political democratic governance, several findings were discovered. Amongst the findings was that Malaysian women from 1957 when the nation gained her independence has had the freedom and the political right to vote in elections and to also hold public office. In the contemporary time, also, they make up one-half of the nation's registered voters and have remained active in political activities (Ahmad, 1998). Further result as revealed from the work of Ariffin (1999), disclosed that between 1980s and 1990s, the percentage of women representation in the subnational politics went up to 6.3% from 4.8%. In 1999, also, their percentage rose to 17% out of 351 parliamentary seats in the law chamber, and subsequently rose to 25 parliamentarians out of 394 seats in the parliament. In the federal legislature, however, their percentage between 1955 to 1975 rose from 1% to 3.2% percent. Also, between 1982-1990, their percentage shifted from 5.2% to 6.1%, and moved to 7.8% in 1995. The results above showed upward movement in women political participation and representation in Malaysian democratic governance. However, does

such increase show enough representation and participation in public life by Malaysian women remains a question to battle with?

In addressing the above question, findings further disclosed that in the federal parliament, especially between 2013-2018, the percentage of women representation moved from 10.8% to 14.9%. In 2019, also, their percentage rose to 14.9% which corresponded to only 33 women representatives in the parliament. There were also 9 women in the government cabinet and amounted to 16.4%. Others were 17.8% for 5 women Ministers and 14.8% for 4 Deputy Ministers, respectively (Sukhani, 2020; Izharuddin, 2019). The above further proved upward movement in women representation and participation under the nation's political processes. However, the increases were and are not without challenges as also disclosed by the findings. For example, Sukhani (2020) further revealed that it was only after the general elections in 2018 that Malaysian women were able to see their fellow woman as a Deputy Prime Minister in the country. They also witnessed their first Chief Justice as a woman, woman as the head of the anti-corruption department, five women Ministers as well as four women as Deputy Ministers. The development above was significant in the nation's political journey since independence, but Sukhani (2020) further argued that while their representation and participation increased politically during the administration of the Pakatan Harapan's (PH) administration, the level of progress remains slow and poor as many women still face a lot of hinderances in pursuing their political interest in the public space. The above shows that though Malaysia operates a democratic system, the practice does not reflect the doctrine of a liberal democracy that hinges on inclusion and encompassment of citizens in the political processes and governance.

Furthermore, and corroborating with the above, Krishnan (2020) observed that under the nation's contemporary parliamentary democratic governance, the womenfolk are still marginalized, discriminated, and left behind compared to the menfolk in political participation and decision-making. He concluded that despite their enormous capability and performance over their men in education with 1.053%, they still enjoy 10.8% score and the lowest in political empowerment and representation. This proves that they are still marginalized in comparison with the menfolk in ministerial appointments and in the parliaments at both federal and state levels, he concluded. Aligning with the above submission, also, Louis (2020) explained that despite that women under the Malaysian democracy and through their population influence and decide who emerges as a Prime Minister amongst others, and who would remain in office, their equal and rightful space with men in the Malaysian politics remains denied and marginalized. In 2019, for example, as he further explained, available statistics disclosed the total number of women in the nation's parliament, managers, and as high government officials to be 24.7% only, while their score as professional and technical workers was just 44.3%. This was against the fact that their record and enrollment into the nation's higher institutions surpassed that of the menfolk which stood at 50.3% against 37.8% for men. Even in the legislatures, Muhamad (2018) argued that in comparison to the Southeast Asia and world parliamentary democracies, political participation, and representation of women in Malaysia records low. The above findings, though with upward movement, women are still marginalized and discriminated in the public decision-making and leadership processes in Malaysia political parliamentary democratic governance in comparison with their men counterparts.

Challenges of Women Political Participation in Malaysian

Democratic Governance

The above result on women political representation and participation under the Malaysian parliamentary democracy showed upward movement but not without challenges. The results showed that women in Malaysia are still marginalized and discriminated in political appointments and decision-making processes. On this, Louis (2020) disclosed the way political parties in Malaysia operate as a great obstacle to women in realizing their full potentials in public sector. He observed that political parties in the country often place more emphasis on issues that border on nationalism, social conservatism, and regionalism with little or minor attention to the interest and rights of women participation and representation in the whole political processes. Also, while men and the womenfolk during elections almost vote at equal rate, gender disparity persists and works in favor of men against women in the political arena (Liu, 2020). This also corroborate with the findings of Isnin (2012), Krishnan (2020), and Sukhani (2020). Gender disparity, Isnin (2020) observed, usually play against women in decision-making and political appointments in the public sector. Women with family always experience obstacles and barriers receiving support or permission from their families. Amongst other challenges working against women in Malaysian public sectors ranges from religion, political structure, and cultural beliefs. They pose a great challenge against women from realizing their full potential with their men counterpart in the Malaysian political sector. It is also against the teachings of the liberal democratic theory and cannot consolidate democracy. Women are equal citizens going by Article 8(2) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution. Therefore, they need not be marginalized or discriminated in political appointments and decision-making processes in the country. These challenges are almost global except in some few Western democracies where literature revealed that the gender disparity between the folks is reducing (Burns et al., 2018; Bode, 2017). In Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia where Malaysia belongs, women remain more marginalized in politics (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2011; Coffé & Dilli, 2015; Desposato & Norrander, 2009; Espinal & Zhao, 2015). This unequal gender participation will continue to raise questions on the legitimacy about women representation in governance processes and would continue to affect democratic consolidation until it is addressed by the political institutions involved.

DISSCUSSION

From the findings above on the state of Malaysian women political participation, representation and challenges in Malaysian democratic governance, a lot needs to be done. The results showed that women from the Malaysian independence of 1957, have had the legal right to participate in politics especially in voting and engaging in political party activities. However, such right and participation does not correspond to the level of political appointment and representation in high government office. It only showed that Malaysian women are still not only marginalized in terms of political representation and appointment but are equally discriminated. In education, for instance, the percentage of women as of 2019, stood at 50.3%, while that of men remained 37.8%. The percentage of women in education not only showed that women are enlightened but are also

capable to manage public office through their acquired knowledge. It must be made known that even as of 2019, the total number of women in public sector occupying higher offices was just 24.7%. The 24.7% is a sign of underrepresentation and marginalization, which is in sharp contrast to the doctrine of liberal democracy that espouses equal representation of all citizens in a democratic government. The Malaysian women need to be given more support and adequate representation especially in the parliament and government cabinet. Increasing their percentage in public sector would help them to overcome some of their challenges working against them in public life. The Malaysian Constitution under Article 8(2) already given them the political and legal right to be engaged in public life, but women still face a lot of challenges as revealed by the results. In a democracy, government belongs to the people. Therefore, Malaysian women do not only need a participation in the government but equal and fair representation. The authorities concerned must possess the political will to ensure that more seats are reserved for the women both in the parliament and in the cabinet of the government. Since the independence of 1957, only after the general election in 2018 that a woman became a deputy prime minister, chief justice, head of anti-corruption department amongst other ministers and deputy ministers in the government. It only showed that women are underrepresented all this while in the government and does not reflect the 30% 1995 Beijing conference declaration to give women more representation in public life.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the beginning of the study, its objective was to understand the state of women political participation and representation under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance. The study relied on secondary data, descriptive qualitative analysis, and the theory of liberal democracy to achieve its objectives. From the analysis, several results emerged which showed that Malaysian women were not only underrepresented or discriminated but equally marginalized in political appointments and decision-making processes. The result revealed that women in Malaysia since independence of 1957 have enjoyed the right to participate in elections, voting, and even contest for public offices in both national and subnational governments. The Constitution under Article 8(2) also empowers their right to freely participate in public life without discrimination on the bases of gender, religion, color amongst others. However, as the findings further disclosed, notwithstanding the population of the women and their 50.3% in higher institutions, they are still underrepresented in public life. In addition to the above, it was only after the 2018 general elections that Malaysian women had their first deputy prime minister, chief justice, head of anti-corruption department, five ministers and four deputy ministers. As of 2019, also, the total number of women in public sector was just 24.7% which did not in any fairness correspond with their degree of educational exposure and population in the country. Similarly, the findings also revealed that challenges working against women political participation in Malaysia to range from poor family support and the role of political parties. Other challenges include lack of financial capacity, political inexperience, marginalization, religion, cultural belief, and lack of political will on the path of the politicians and decision makers.

Considering the above results and challenges, Malaysian women still have a long way to go in political participation and representation under the Malaysian parliamentary democratic governance. However, the only remedy is to allow women to enjoy their political rights to public

office. The women have a lot to contribute in the development of societies as mothers. The policy makers must endeavor to adhere to the constitution that gives women equal opportunity in the pursuit of their political lives in the public space. Both the political parties and the constitution must reserve specific seats and space for the women as a support for the 1995 Beijing Conference that advocated women inclusion with 30%. When the above are done and adhered to, women would be well represented, and democracy consolidated under the Malaysian democratic governance. In contemporary Malaysia, the population of the women compared to their menfolk cannot be undermined. Therefore, there is the need to ensure the political implementation of affirmative policies amongst other political measures by the political leaders to offer Malaysian women a fair representation in the nation's politics. It is also important to mention that, until the above recommendations are given serious attention, Malaysian women would remain marginalized and underrepresented in the public sector. The authorities concerned must investigate their plight and address the issues concerned. Similarly, various women organizations and pressure groups can also help in promoting the voice of women in Malaysian politics. Finally, this study by implication would not only benefit the Malaysian womenfolk but would also benefit other women outside Malaysian democracy as women political marginalization remains a global issue. The study had also contributed to the body of knowledge as it did not only unfold the state of women political participation in Malaysia but also made recommendations on how their underrepresentation can be resolved. The study would also help politicians and public policymakers to understand the state of women representation in Malaysian politics and do the needful by addressing their underrepresentation through relevant public policy enactments. The study would also help researchers who have the interest to study women representation in contemporary democracies outside Malaysia. Women are our mothers, therefore, there is the need to give them a fair representation in Malaysian politics.

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