

THE 30% HOPE SECURING THE ELECTORAL SUCCESS OF WOMEN IN MALAYSIA BAHARU



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The historic triumph of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition in Malaysia's 14th general election (GE14) in May 2018 was premised on an ambitious manifesto, which included a promise to achieve a minimum of 30% female representation in state and federal government.¹ However, despite an increase in the proportion of women in the federal parliament—to 14.9% from 10.8% after the prior election in 2013—the PH coalition has failed to meet its manifesto pledge, and Malaysia continues to rank poorly in global indexes of women's political representation and gender equality. As of 2019, there are 33 women in federal parliament (14.9%), 5 female Ministers (17.8%), 4 female Deputy Ministers (14.8%) and 9 women in Cabinet (16.4%).²

Using the 'supply and demand' model and feminist-institutional theory, this policy paper focuses on the factors that impede women's political representation in Malaysia. The experiences and views of Malaysian women members of parliament (MPs) on quotas as a legitimate way to increase women's political representation are taken as interrelated factors in the supply and demand side of candidate selection. Interview responses from the MPs are used to develop recommendations in strategic areas in the 'supply' (a reference to qualified and resourceful candidates) and/or 'demand' (candidate selection practices) of the party nomination process.

The critical mass of 30% female representation in politics is typically taken as an axiomatic goal in democratic societies, and quotas are deployed globally to accomplish it. But this paper reveals that few of the elected women MPs are unequivocally supportive of gender quotas in elections. In spite of this, this paper identifies the important role of demand for female representatives, and of formal institutions, in the selection and electoral success of women MPs in Malaysia.

The Akademi Keadilan Rakyat is presented as a case study for examining internal party strategies for promoting demand and improving women's chances of selection and electability. Its parent party, Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), has the best record for electing women parliamentarians in GE14. Its success can be attributed to its 'values-based' ideology and innovative approach to training and mentoring female political hopefuls. It was also the first political party in Malaysia to include in its party constitution a commitment to gender equality and attaining 30% women in all levels of Malaysian government.

This policy paper makes 3 recommendations based on field research and interviews conducted with 20 women MPs from 7 political parties and the deputy principal of Akademi Keadilan Rakyat. First, it recommends the enforcement of reserved seats for women in central board of parties and selection committees. Second, the paper echoes the argument made by some MPs interviewed in this study for replacing the present electoral system with proportional representation (PR). Third, the PH government can achieve its 30% manifesto promise by improving the chances of nomination and electability in its smaller component parties Parti Pribumi Bersatu (Bersatu hereafter) and Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah hereafter) through mentoring programmes for women like Akademi Keadilan Rakyat.

¹ A pledge to increase women's political representation to a minimum of 30% is one of five of Pakatan Harapan's 'Special commitment for women' to 'democratise the political system to create more female leaders' (Buku Harapan 2017: p140)

² Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019

A voter poses with her inked finger after voting in GE14 on 9 May, 2018. MANAN VATSYAYANA/AFP/Getty Images

PART 1: REACHING 30%

THE CASE FOR QUOTAS

The 30% minimum of female representation is understood as the critical mass or critical minority for creating change in political culture.³ There are many cases for attaining 30% female representation in all levels of government. Aside from the aspiration for gender equality and the argument that the demographic of political leadership should reflect its electorate, descriptive representation (simply the number of women in politics) improves opportunities for legislative reforms, otherwise known as ‘substantive representation’, that benefit the lives of women and other groups marginalised from spheres of power.⁴

The case for gender quotas as the ‘fast track’ solution to produce the 30% in countries with a small minority of women in politics has been made in numerous studies.⁵ More than 100 political parties around the world have either adopted or debated the adoption of gender quotas.⁶ But as the political scientist Lea Sgier argues, ‘gender quotas are not “only” about women, but—amongst other things—about the relationship between the citizens and the state, conceptions of representative democracy, identities, and about the power to define the social world’.⁷

Gender quotas are not without controversy. Arguments against quotas are familiar and well-rehearsed: that they are undemocratic, and that they limit men’s opportunities because women are given preference. As I will show below, many Malaysian women MPs feel that gender-based affirmative action delegitimises women’s qualifications and undermines empowerment. Scholars who disagree with the concept of women’s critical mass in politics find that women can make profound legislative change as a small minority group and that more women in politics does not necessarily lead to legislation that benefits women.⁸

As researchers attentive to Malaysian elections point out, being a woman candidate is not itself an impediment. Women have a higher chance of

- 3 Dahlerup 2006
- 4 Thomas 1991
- 5 Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005
- 6 Krook 2007
- 7 Sgier 2003: 21
- 8 Childs & Crook 2006

winning against a male candidate. Their higher rates of electability against male candidates in GE14 have produced a 'reverse gender gap' in UMNO (-23.8%), PKR (-12.8%), Bersatu (-9.3%), and Warisan (-3.3%).⁹

Currently, appointed women-only non-constituency seats have been introduced to address the lack of women in the Terengganu state assembly. Seats reserved only for women candidates reduce barriers for female aspirants and have a positive or neutral effect on voters.¹⁰ The lack of objection to the creation of such a de facto quota in Terengganu ought to pave the way for extending the quota policy to selection committee and central board of parties, with the aim of achieving the 30% 'critical minority' of women in those bodies.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY: SUPPLY, DEMAND, AND GENDERED INSTITUTIONS

This study was conducted between February and June 2019. Interviews with all 32¹¹ Malaysian women federal lawmakers from both the government and opposition were arranged, however only 16 were interviewed in-person while 4 responded to questions via email. 2 MPs from UMNO rejected our interview request. 10 MPs from the Democratic Action Party (DAP), PKR, UMNO, and Bersatu did not respond to our invitation for interview.

All face-to-face interviews were at least 1 hour long and took place primarily in parliament between February 2019 and April 2019. 2 interviews were conducted in the MP's own constituency and party headquarters. Interview questions were modified depending on the MP's terms in office and public profile. An in-depth interview was also conducted with the deputy principal of Akademi Keadilan Rakyat to gain further insights into the party's leadership training programme for women and gendered strategies for electoral success.

Interview questions and recommendations were framed around factors that influence 'supply' and 'demand' in the candidate selection equation. Adopted from economics, the 'supply and demand' model explains the electoral outcome of a multi-strata party selection process.¹² On the 'supply' side are would-be political candidates who possess the resources (time, connections, and experience) and motivation (drive and ambition). 'Demand' constitutes factors in the candidate selection process based on formal and informal criteria of ability and electability.

However, the supply and demand model does not sufficiently explain why women are underrepresented in different national contexts. For this reason, the feminist-institutional theory proposed by political scientist Mona Lena Krook supplements the model by paying attention to three types of gendered institutions—systemic, practical, and normative—in the election of women.¹³ Gender quotas can influence the configuration of institutions and how institutions interact with one another. For example, the introduction of reserved seats reconfigures systemic institutions, which consist of the electoral and party systems. Reserved seats can have similar effects on practical institutions or the practices that determine the criteria for political candidacy. Normative institutions refer to the values and principles that parties uphold and can be influenced by strategies to improve women's political representation.

First term MPs were asked about their personal experiences and reflection on their electoral success in the 14th general election (supply). Multiple-term MPs were asked how they managed to stay in power (resources). All were asked if they supported the gender quota to improve female representation in Malaysian politics (institutions) and the qualities that women politicians should have if they intend to put themselves forward as parliamentary nominees (demand). As lawmakers, each were asked about issues on their legislative agenda that affect women in their constituency and nation-wide (motivation). Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu and English. ■

9 Pey 2018; Tan 2019; Wong 2019

10 Nugent & Crook 2016

11 The 33rd woman MP, Vivian Wong Shir Yee (DAP) was elected in Sandakan on 11 May 2019.

12 Norris & Lovenduski 1993

13 Krook 2010



Queuing to vote during GE14 in Kuala Lumpur, 9 May 2018. REUTERS/Athit Perawongmetha

PART 2: FINDINGS

NO TO THE GENDER QUOTA? THE 14.9% AND THEIR ELECTORAL SUCCESS

This section considers the conditions that led to the personal electoral success of women MPs. I suggest that their support (or lack thereof) for the gender quota can be linked to the gender of the party gatekeepers behind their nominations, their roles in civil society (or lack thereof), and the number of terms in office.

Women remain largely excluded from the party nomination process and preselection typically relies on a patronage-based system. Newer parties like Bersatu and Amanah are hampered by a limited pool of female recruits, but even in UMNO, where female party members outnumber male members, women are excluded from the nomination process and male gatekeepers are disincentivised from nominating them. With the exception of a few MPs in PKR, women's nomination in winnable seats in the rest of PKR, DAP, PBB, UMNO, and PAS has been facilitated by male gatekeepers in the party and then being 'parachuted' into winnable seats.

Women independent candidates, though they did not confront the obstacles of party structures, faced unique challenges in the 11-day GE14 campaign period. Although campaigning in alliance with PH, the only independent woman MP elected in GE14, Maria Chin Abdullah, did not have access to any party's resources. However, her fame as a civil society activist attracted 100 volunteers to assist her on the campaign trail.

The MPs interviewed spoke candidly about overcoming personal and institutional challenges to attain electoral success. In PKR, intra-party strife threatens women's success and they were not protected from vicious internal competition and disputes. There is also little party support for women whose constituencies were far from where their families lived.

15 out of the 20 MPs interviewed in this study were either deeply ambivalent or against women-only seats or a shortlist and gender quotas of any kind. Nancy Shukri, a multiple-term PBB MP and champion of women's community development in Sarawak, found that gender quotas are not yet 'practical' because there is still little support for the recruitment and preparation of indigenous East Malaysian women nominees for local

politics. Tan Yee Kew, a PKR MP who defected from Barisan Nasional in 2013, argued that quotas are ‘not healthy’ for women’s progress in Malaysia:

When I was younger, at your age, we used to think that women were oppressed and weren’t given the chance so we thought gender quota was the answer. Now, I believe women should be given a fair opportunity, a level playing field to work towards higher representation of women. But with a quota you create a ‘misconception’ that just because you’re a woman you deserve a seat. I think no one should think like that especially with a job in public service. People should elect you not because you’re a woman.

Hannah Yeoh, the Deputy Minister for Women, Family and Community Development, known for her role in legislating a more family-friendly political culture,¹⁴ also expressed reticence about gender quotas. She argues that women should compete based on their own merit and candidates who succeed by virtue of their gender are deemed less legitimate:

I have seen myself women [elected representatives] abusing the gender quota; [once in office], they don’t perform, they don’t work. But when they are dropped from their role, they insisted on being fielded again [by appealing to the gender quota].

There are no party-based trends for or against the gender quota but there are common characteristics shared by women MPs who are deeply apprehensive about the gender quota. Across the political divide, both in the opposition and in government, they tend to be first term MPs, handpicked by male gatekeepers in the party or ‘parachuted’ into winnable seats.

Ironically, DAP women parliamentarians who were handpicked and ‘parachuted’ into seats in an attempt to achieve the party’s constitutional commitment to 30% female representation were the same MPs who did not express support for gender quotas and women-only seats. This is a lesson to be learned about the limits of descriptive representation, and the cynical appropriation by male gatekeepers of the critical mass model of women’s political representation simply to gain political points, rather than genuinely serve the goal of women’s substantive participation in politics.

Women MPs who were against gender quotas saw barriers to women’s participation in politics to be obstacles that were cultural (lack of a family-friendly culture in politics) and individualistic (personal dislike of ‘dirtiness’ in politics), rather than structural ones such as the rigid and opaque party nomination process (especially evident in UMNO) and the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system—the problems of which I discuss below. Hannah Yeoh sees the problem of women’s under-

representation as a supply-side problem:

Actually the female talent pool in Malaysia is large but there are not enough women who are willing to sacrifice their time [for politics].

The responses above come across as counterintuitive and may be put down to the MPs’ own lack of appreciation of how gender quotas work, and exposure to their efficacy in countries around the world. In an indirect way, their selection by male gatekeepers within the party and lack of formal mentoring by senior female MPs may play a role in limiting perspectives and opportunities for reforming gendered systemic, practical and normative institutions.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AS FUNDAMENTAL TO WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

5 out of the 20 MPs said they were amenable to women-only seats. Fuziah Salleh, Mas Ermeyanti Samsudin, Noraini Ahmad, Rohani Abdul Karim and Maria Chin Abdullah were either multiple-term MPs with a long history in civil society and women-centric engagement or were champions of human rights and social justice issues. They were also more specific about how gender quotas should be implemented: that is, enforced through sanctions as enshrined in reformed federal and party constitutions. PKR’s Fuziah Salleh, the Kuantan MP and Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs, proposed that if ‘parties do not nominate 30% women as candidates, they cannot participate in elections.’ But party nomination of 30% women is insufficient, she argues:

We must first change our electoral system. Our electoral system is first-past-the-post. The electoral reform committee must look into mechanisms of how the electoral system can provide a means to bring in more women. Because in our current election system, I don’t think it is possible to achieve the numbers [30% women in politics]. Because you can have 30% women as candidates, this is within our control [in the party]. [...] But first-past-the-post is very difficult for women. Why? Because *dalam dunia wanita ini* [in a woman’s world] women always have to be extra good to succeed, the glass ceiling exists. And because of that women have to be very strong to be recognised. *Nak menang tu susah* [winning is harder for women].

The single-member constituency system disadvantages women candidates because it creates pressure on a party to select incumbents (who are usually male), limits voter choice and disenfranchises the losing vote. PR systems allow for a party to field several candidates in multi-member constituencies. Under such circumstances, parties can be pressured to balance their nomination

14 ‘Parliament to set up childcare centre this year—speaker’. *New Straits Times*, 18 February 2019. Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/02/461227/parliament-set-childcare-centre-year-speaker>

lists with equal numbers of female and male candidates. Formal proposals for replacing the FPTP electoral system with proportional representation (PR) were made by the civil society coalition Bersih to the parliamentary committee for electoral reform in 2011.¹⁵ Proposals for PR were not engaged with by the then-ruling Barisan Nasional government because of their direct challenge to the status quo. But the recommendation for PR discussed below resonates, with some interest expressed by the new electoral reform committee convened after the 2018 general election to replace the present electoral system with PR.

Even in the event of changes to the electoral system, parties' internal nomination mechanisms also present barriers to women's entry to parliament. UMNO MP and Wanita UMNO leader Noraini Ahmad contends that her own party does not appreciate the political contributions of its female members. Compounding this lack of recognition is the byzantine candidate selection process women in UMNO face to rise to the party's positions of leadership. Before the party can begin to contemplate nominating 30% women candidates, Noraini insists that one woman must be installed in the position of party co-vice president. There are discussions to amend the party's constitution to include gender quotas but women's political representation is sadly presently not a priority:

We in Wanita UMNO want a woman elected as a vice president. If the rest of the party wants to fight, we won't fight because we won't touch the other three vice president [positions]. We're hoping that proposals to change UMNO's constitution will let us have our own vice president. That is our main agenda. Currently Wanita UMNO's status is a *pergerakan* [wing or auxiliary branch] like Puteri and Pemuda UMNO [women and men's youth wings, respectively]. In terms of membership, we have more. Wanita UMNO also have more experience on the ground but our members do not ask for *imbuhan* [extra payment] because they love the party so much. But in terms of [leadership] positions, we are so far behind.

Newer parties like Bersatu meanwhile lack an established structure to boost women's participation and political training. Bersatu's Mas Ermieyati Samsudin however sees that as an opportunity to introduce the gender quota within the party:

Yes, the party [Bersatu] is still in its early stages, so we need to push for [gender quotas]. [...] Yes, merit is important but we can have the quota and we only take the best, not just anyone [*bukan calang-calang orang*]. It's not like we're taking in a factory bus driver as state exco [in reference to DAP's Executive Councillor Norhizam Hassan Baktee].

Although many Malaysian women MPs are apprehensive about the merits of gender quotas, there are already party-based institutions that have made important inroads into improving women's chances of nomination and electoral success. As I discuss in the next section, an illustrative case is the Akademi Keadilan Rakyat whose 'value-based' ideology and innovative political leadership training programme have a substantial effect on creating winnable women.

MEETING THE DEMAND: THE CASE OF AKADEMI KEADILAN RAKYAT

This case study explores the electoral strategies employed by PKR behind their success in GE14, where PKR fielded the highest percentage of women candidates at 20.0%, followed by DAP at 17.0%. The party has also succeeded in electing 11 female parliamentarians, or 23.4% of its total MPs, and the first female deputy prime minister. In May 2019, PKR has proposed the establishment of an Integrated Law Reform Committee for the Empowerment of Women and Family and to create more non-constituency seats for women.¹⁶

PKR has succeeded in maximising the combined effects of supply and demand thanks to practical and normative institutions cultivated in its leadership programmes run by Akademi Keadilan Rakyat (AKR). Founded in 2009 by Fuziah Salleh, AKR is PKR's organ for training members from all levels of the party, from senior position-holders to regular members, and the preparation of state and federal candidates for effective leadership. In AKR workshops, party members and officials would be groomed to be 'agents of change' who 'accept the Reformasi Agenda'.¹⁷

Since its inception in 2009, the academy has conducted on average 12 events and programmes a year, including political workshops and public forums attended by party members around the country. AKR's highest ranking members including the academy's principal are women: Fuziah Salleh, Zaliha Mustafa and Raiyana Abdul Rahim, all of whom run the academy on a voluntary basis. Fuziah Salleh plays the role of mentor to younger women in PKR:

I do my part to groom younger leaders; to train them and to pick them out. But by the end of the day [you don't have control over their careers], you have someone like YB [Isnaraissah] Munirah; she was from PKR but she moved to Warisan [Sabah Heritage Party]. *Itu anak didik I* [she was my protégé]. When she first joined [PKR] nobody noticed

15 Ng 2011

16 'Wanita Keadilan's latest proposals to empower women'. Bernama, 24 May 2019. Available at <http://www.bernama.com/en/news.php?id=1729544>

17 AKR objectives.

Right: a 'SIM Democracy' board game is used in Akademi Keadilan Rakyat to instruct members in the art of politics and praxis of governance. Courtesy: Raiyana Abdul Rahim



her, she was wearing braces [laughs]. Then I picked her out from the crowd, developed her, and gave her the confidence to build her political career.

PKR has an effective leadership training programme that appeals to the party's two key sub-demographics: younger, middle-class professional Malay-Muslim women and older/retired Muslim women, who also tend to have large families. Although PAS and PKR women leaders share similar supply factors in that they promote strong Islamic principles and have large families, the contrast between PAS's approach to putting women in office compared to PKR is striking. Despite its multiple women's and youth leadership development programmes like Nisa', AMIRAH, and Briged Muslimat, PAS lacks the demand factors and practical institutions to field many women nominees in winnable seats in GE14.¹⁸

PKR's success in increasing women's nomination chances, electoral success, and effectiveness in office can be attributed to AKR's intensive technical modules on electoral management that supply participants with strategies for winning elections. These pedagogical approaches are effective because the female members whom the party grooms for leadership potential are highly educated and employed in white-collar professions.

The women who have ascended the ranks of PKR leadership comprise university-educated corporate trainers, engineers, investment bankers, law professors, teachers, and medical doctors—professions that signal 'trustworthiness'. They belong to an urban middle-class cohort that does not find any conflict between a high-powered professional career and family life. New recruits

are likely to share similar backgrounds.

Consistent with research that ideology is a more powerful factor in women's political success than proportional representation,¹⁹ all PKR women MPs interviewed share a similar ideological narrative: 'social justice', 'change', and 'human rights' feature strongly in their political vocabulary.

According to Nurul Izzah Anwar, who was appointed the party's Elections Co-Director, the party can ensure higher numbers of women in future electoral nominations through the creation of an 'ecosystem in which women are able to participate in a way that allows them to comfortably balance the multiple identities that women choose to hold—as a woman, mother, sister, daughter, caregiver, nurturer, and breadwinner'.²⁰

AKR utilises games as a pedagogical medium for training its members in electoral strategy, success and effectiveness. It has developed a simulation democracy game (Figure 1), a board game in which participants engage with political scenarios and ways of operationalising concepts related to good governance. The board game promotes cooperation and camaraderie in critical problem-solving skills across the party hierarchy.

The combination of a 'value-based' ideology and technical pedagogical strategies described above is efficacious for a party like PKR because of its appeal to university-educated, middle-class, and professional women who have a passion for social justice rather than a party that prioritises religious and ethnic issues. ■

18 Pey 2018

19 Paxton & Kunovich 2003

20 Personal communication, 2019

Party supporters at UMNO's 71st birthday event in Kuala Lumpur, 11 May 2017. ALEXANDRA RADU/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

PART 3: RECOMMENDATIONS

REFORMING INSTITUTIONS & CONDITIONS FOR DEMAND

The findings above show that women who enter Malaysian politics face challenges to electoral success on the demand side of candidate selection. Women MPs urge for increased female representation in party leaderships and selection committees. They have also proposed systemic institutional reforms to the electoral system.

The following 3 recommendations are further elaborated based on the findings. They are consistent with PH's 'special commitment' to 'democratise the political system to create more female leaders', as expressed in its 2018 general election manifesto.²¹ They are meant to improve existing conditions for demand-side of candidate selection and influence reforms in systemic, practical, and normative institutions. Supply-side factors are not identified as a major impediment in the narratives of elected MPs and will be not be considered in the recommendations.

1 The enforcement of reserved seats in central board of parties and selection committees.

Even if Malaysia does not adopt the PR system (discussed in the next recommendation), women-only reserved seats in party board committee can positively influence female representation within the constraints of a FPTP system.²² Comments from the MPs interviewed speak of a desire to reform the gender configuration of candidate selection practices. This means gender quotas for central boards of parties and preselection committees.

Reserved seats can be expanded from existing quota practices. At present, the Terengganu state assembly has elected a woman into its newly-created woman-only non-constituency seat, a move academic Maznah Mohamad regards as the 'most feasible, fastest and least contentious way of accelerating women's participation in formal politics.'²³

Gender quotas can neither be voluntary nor aspirational for parties. In her interview, PKR's Fuziah Salleh stated that gender quotas can only be effective if tough sanctions on parties for non-compliance are imposed.

21 Buku Harapan 2017: 140

22 Krook 2010

23 Maznah 2017

2 Replacing first-past-the-post elections (FPTP) with proportional representation (PR).

Perhaps the most ambitious recommendation in this list, reforming the election system for proportional representation, requires amendments to the Malaysian federal constitution. FPTP elections have been reported by women MPs in this study to be a barrier to increasing women's participation for clear reasons. FPTP favours the status quo of male dominance: it fields fewer candidates, and in a male-dominated pool, male incumbents and hopefuls are reluctant to give up their seat to a woman. There is growing public discussion after GE14 about introducing PR in Malaysia.²⁴ Proposals to replace the FPTP with mixed-member PR by GE15 were mooted by the all-male Electoral Reform Committee in 2018.²⁵ However, the purpose of replacing FPTP has been framed as having less to do with improving female representation in politics than with addressing malapportionment and gerrymandering. PR was also supported by smaller parties like Bersatu, so that their agendas and electorates can be better represented without being forced into coalitions with larger parties.²⁶ FPTP and opaque candidacy selection have also drawn scrutiny from Bersih after the Port Dickson by-election, which saw the election of Anwar Ibrahim to federal parliament in 2018.

Some PR systems are more advantageous for women than others. Evidence from Costa Rica and Sweden shows that PR systems that combine high party magnitudes (i.e. numbers of party candidates) with high district magnitudes (i.e. multiple seats per district) and high electoral thresholds (i.e. only larger parties can form coalitions) increases the chances of electing more women.²⁷ As scholars have observed, the costs of maintaining the FPTP in Malaysia are high: the deepening of communal tensions, the continued under-representation of women in politics, and the potential implosion of the PH government.²⁸

3 Reforming practical and normative institutions through mentoring programmes in smaller component parties.

Although the findings above show that male leaders in the opposition and DAP play an influential role in handpicking successful female nominees, PKR has a proven record of women gatekeepers mentoring and influencing the

nomination of electable women. The latter has also produced MPs who were sensitive towards structural inequality and more amenable to gender quotas than male-picked DAP women MPs. AKR grooms women to learn the written and unwritten 'rules of the game' through mentoring and shadowing more-experienced women MPs.

Male politicians benefit from access to long-established informal networks or 'old boys clubs'. By contrast, women's access to men's informal networks, that can take place in spaces of male homosocial bonding like bars and mosques, can be much more limited. Researchers Pamela Perrewé and Debra Nelson have argued that the lack of access to mentors and informal networks for mentoring to develop organically is 'the most threatening developmental disadvantage' that women politicians can face.²⁹

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

GE14 has redrawn Malaysia's political landscape, with a historical, though only incremental, increase in the number of women in public office. Since the election, the creation of female leaders has continued through informal processes. Meanwhile, the lack of support for gender quotas as an institutional approach to remedying women's under-representation in Malaysian politics means that the question of what type of quotas Malaysia requires is neglected, much less formally proposed.

A focus on gender alone—to the exclusion of intersecting social categories such as ethnicity, socioeconomic and regional background—is not enough. For instance, there are very few women of Indian ethnicity active in Malaysian politics. DAP's Kasthuriraani Patto's career was spurred by Malaysian Indian women activists like Irene Fernandez who were visible in the public sphere: 'I could relate to them. We were [after all] minorities in this country. They were women who were put there because of the support of the people', she recalled in her interview.

In East Malaysia, where women from indigenous communities are severely under-represented, barriers to women's political representation exceed individual and cultural impediments. There are logistical challenges faced by women politicians in East Malaysia where

24 'GE15 may see new election system, revamped EC'. *Malaysiakini*, 29 August 2018. Available at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/440858>

25 'Time to review First-Past-The-Post election system, says Bersih 2.0'. *New Straits Times*, 17 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2018/09/412247/time-review-first-past-post-election-system-says-bersih-20>

26 'First-past-the-post system does not create healthy competition'. *New Straits Times*, 17 September 2018. Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/politics/2018/09/412231/first-past-post-system-does-not-create-healthy-competition>

27 Matland 2005

28 Ng 2011, Wong 2018

29 Perrewé & Nelson 2004: 370

many constituencies are remote and difficult to access.

The nomination of party candidates remains a black box; there are no written rules and women are typically handpicked for strategic reasons. The legislation of minimum 30% women in the party's selection committee and nominees can make the nomination process more transparent and accountable to a party's commitment to 30% critical mass.

At present, 130 countries have adopted constitutional, electoral or political party gender quotas and the average percentage of women's political representation in countries that have adopted them is 24.9%.³⁰ Malaysia should be on this list and can certainly benefit from joining it. ■

INTERVIEWS

In person

Rohani Abdul Karim

Nancy Shukri

Noraini Ahmad

Mas Ermieyati Samsudin

Azizah Mohd Dun

Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff

Kasthuriraani Patto

Hannah Yeoh Tseow Suan

Wong Shu Qi

Fuziah Salleh

Maria Chin Abdullah

Tan Yee Kew

Rusnah Aluai

Natrah Ismail

Isnaraissah Munirah Majilis

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Nurul Izzah Anwar

Teo Nie Ching

Azalina Othman Said

Yeo Bee Yin



An electoral worker carries ballot boxes after the general election, Petaling Jaya, 9 May 2018. REUTERS/Lai Seng Sin

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