BREAKING BARRIERS AND SHAPING FUTURES: ANALYSING YOUNG WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND CANDIDACY IN MALAYSIA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract:

This study investigates the barriers and enablers of young women's participation and candidacy in political leadership in Malaysia. The research context is provided in the introduction, outlining why political participation is particularly relevant for young women in a patriarchal society. This literature review covers research on the systemic, cultural, and socioeconomic obstacles that hinder women from participating in politics. The methodology describes the role of secondary qualitative data and thematic analysis. Barriers include financial burden and social norms, while enablers include mentorship, education, and policy framework refunds. In the discussion, these findings are placed in the context of the literature and provide opportunities for new insights into overcoming these barriers. Gender quotas, mentorship programs, and gender-sensitive policies are some of the other strategies identified in the conclusion and recommendations that can provide a more conducive platform for women's participation in the political landscape in Malaysia.

Keywords:

Young Women, Political Leadership, Barriers, Enabling Factors, Gender Equality, Malaysia, Thematic Analysis.

Introduction

This chapter provides a background for young women in Malaysia, and their engagement in leadership and candidacy, within the context of the political landscape in Malaysia. This establishes the research background, specifically on changing patterns of political involvement

by women, the problem statement that describes the obstacles hindering young women from political leadership, the purpose and objectives that inform it, and the relevance it aspires to play in informing future research and policy actions. Women have made strides in political participation worldwide, but huge gaps remain, particularly in leadership positions. Women's representation in politics is lower than that of their population in Malaysia, where women constitute almost half the population. Women occupy fewer than 15% of parliament seats today, and the number is even smaller when it comes to young women (World Bank, 2024). When age and gender intersect, they compound issues, such as cultural norms, limited resources, and systemic biases in political contexts. Therefore, it has also been observed that the lack of role models, mentorship opportunities, experience and confidence also makes it harder for young women to believe in their potential making them doubt when they enter the workforce. Despite these barriers, gender-unbiased actions and initiatives targeting the empowerment of youth have recently drawn interest closer to what they have to offer. Nevertheless, little research focuses on the exact barriers and opportunities facing young women in Malaysian politics in this aspect (Ramli *et al.,* 2024).

The lack of young women in politics in Malaysia highlights huge structural and social inequities. Although there have been efforts to demand gender inclusiveness, systemic issues, such as politically associated lakes of men, age discrimination, and socialisation of women and men being rooted in traditions, still obstruct young women's political participation (Dwijayanto *et al.,* 2020). Worsened by a lack of funds, mentorship, and media framing that often calls their credibility and ability to lead into question, these challenges are compounded. Women, especially young women, still face significant barriers to pursuing a career in politics and when they do, often face backlash, claims of inexperience, exclusion from important discussions, and other tactics to stop them (Azmi *et al.,* 2024).
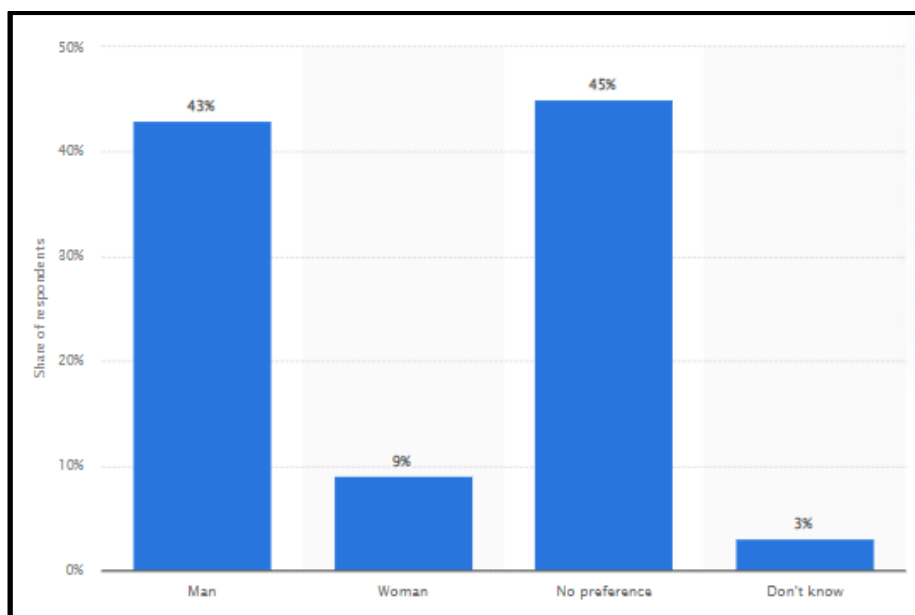

Figure 1: Gender Preference For Political Leaders In Malaysia 2024

(Source: Statista, 2024)

As per the above figure, A January 2024 survey showed that in Malaysia, 43% of respondents said that they would prefer male political leaders. Another 45% said they had no preference and 9% said they wanted to see women run for political office. This marginalization not only undermines their ability to contribute but also undermines democracy and diversity in leadership. Failing to do this can reinforce a certain political system in Malaysia that marginalises the uniquely Malaysian silent majority.

Malaysian young women face severities that act as the political leadership impediments resulting from systemic, cultural, and structural factors. Intersectionality remains important here since women from ethnic minorities or low classes suffer double, e.g., discrimination and lack of political connections. This affects female leaders as the media misrepresents them improperly and de-legitimizes their authority by using stereotypical figures to describe them, thus creating an environment in which women are unlikely to participate (Al-Rawi, Chun & Amer, 2022). While there has been realization at the policy level and quite an improved legislation on enfranchisement of women and youths, the policies are hampered by poor or inadequate implementation and monitoring mechanisms to overcome these barriers. Another massive challenge is the dynamics of political parties. The party system is characterized by male dominance and patriarchal perceptions that come in the form of structures which produce exclusionary effects and prevent the young women from ascending to higher positions (Galea & Chappell, 2022). Traditions also dictate that women ought to be homemakers and child bearers excluding them from ever assuming political power. In addition, male-dominated political institutional structures, and female's political socialization, leadership training, and skills development are inadequate to enable the young women to compete fairly in political arenas (Alokwu, Oranika-Umeasiegbu & Udegbunam, 2024). All forms of structural violence such as harassment in the social media and physical threats remain rampant and discourage women from participating in politics. Adding to this is the challenge of mobilising resources to carry out the campaign, as funds are often held by male-dominated networks that perpetuate young women's exclusion. There must be a number of female role models especially in high offices, instead lack of them leads to poor representation of female leaders and no one to mentor them (Paule & Yelin, 2022). Besides, there are signs of improvement in women's representation in politics globally, yet timidly applied in Malaysia, especially regarding youth women's exclusionary barriers' acknowledgement. It is equally important that these drivers of systemic and structural barriers are dismantled to create true political culture in Malaysia where young women's leadership is valued.

This study aims to investigate the barriers and enabling factors for the political leadership and candidacy of young women in Malaysia. The objectives include:

● To identify systemic barriers hindering young women's political participation.
● To identify cultural barriers hindering young women's political participation.
● To explore the role of mentorship, networking, and policy frameworks in supporting young female leaders.
● To explore the moderating role of education and socioeconomic status in overcoming barriers to young women's political candidacy.
● To provide recommendations to enhance young women's engagement and representation in politics.
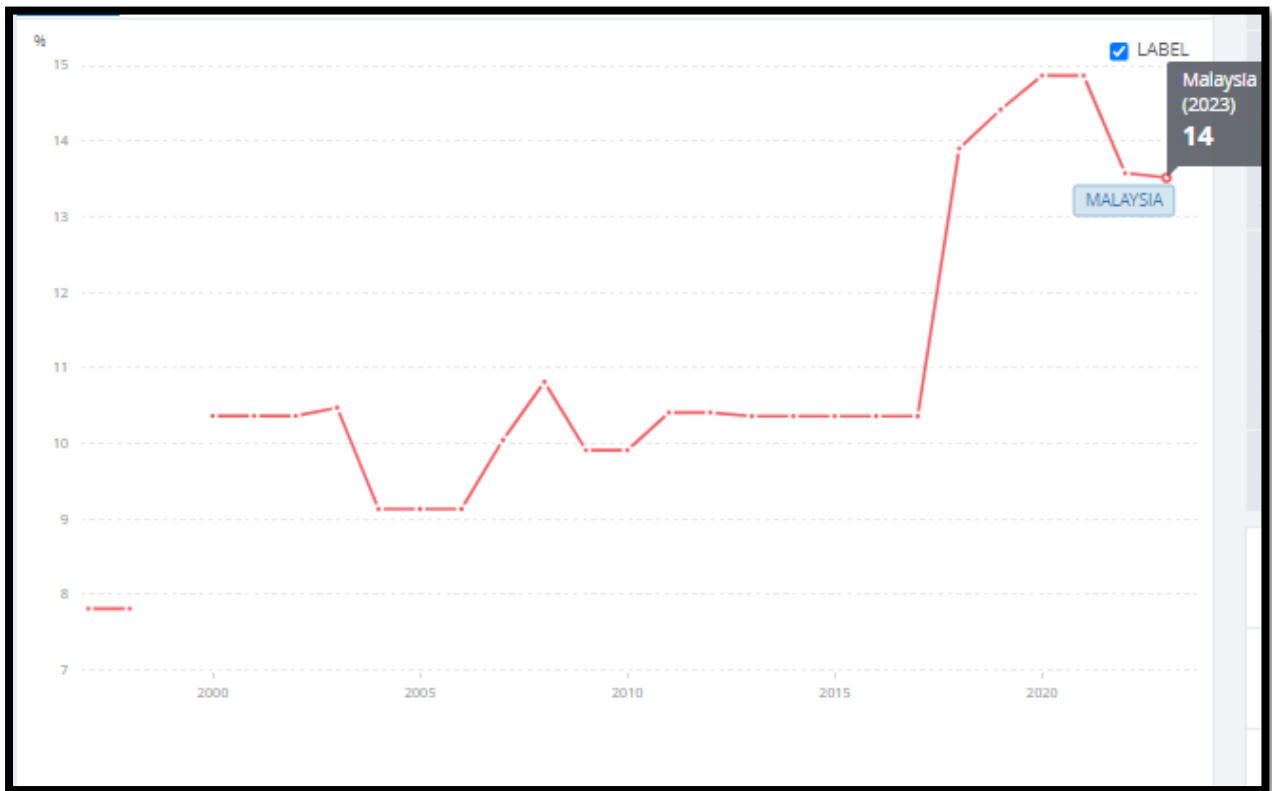
Figure 2: Proportion Of Seats Held By Women In National Parliaments (%) – Malaysia

(Source: World Bank, 2024)

Women cover close to half of the population and yet hold fewer than 15% of parliamentary seats, with young women comprising an even smaller proportion (World Bank, 2024). This imbalance reveals structural obstacles owing to cultural stereotypes, age and gender discrimination, insufficient mentoring opportunities, depleted resources, and exclusionary processes. Scepticism and claims of inexperience towards young women, alongside their exclusion from key political conversation, discourage their participation and undermine democratic inclusivity (Stockemer & Sundstrom, 2022). There are various initiatives working to empower youth, but they fail to recognize the specific intersectional issues young women experience. This wherever possible showcases such as limited part styles or other content material occurring to manage this person's physiological enriching utilization mire only stimulated problems within the phenomenal pile. These gaps are important to address in order to understand the barriers and enablers that young women face in their political aspirations and to inform policies aimed at supporting their leadership and representation.

The impact of this study is significant, as it may serve as a basis for policies, political parties, and advocacy groups to utilise to strengthen young women in politics. It fills existing gaps in the literature to help move towards a more inclusive political framework. It further hopes to encourage young women to take on leadership positions, because only with more dynamic women in their ranks can begin to transform generations of patriarchal political culture out of Malaysia.

Literature Review

Women in the political scene in Malaysia have shown slow but steady progress. However, massive obstacles remain for young women to entry, engage, and lead in political spaces (Elias, 2020). Global trends highlight the critical role of women's political representation in creating inclusive governance structures and achieving sustainable development, but given the socio-political and cultural fabric of Malaysia, localized scrutiny is needed. This chapter centres on making sense of systemic and cultural barriers, the effects of mentorship, networks, and policy frameworks, as well as the moderating role of education and socio-economic status. It also presents a theoretical lens, adopted to evaluate these variables, revealing gaps that guide actionable recommendations.

Literature Synthesis

Table 1: Literature Search Summary

Article Name	Author	Methodology	Findings
"Everyday interactions and political participation of Malaysian youth"	Ting & Wan Ahmad (2022)	Qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews	The youth displayed low levels of electoral political participation arguing that politics are dirty and authoritarian. However, they participated in activities such a news on the social network, political discussion, organizations affiliation, and writing letters to official bodies.
"Racial Complexity and Political Voting Decision: A Study on Young Voters in DUN Semenyih"	Othman & Saahar (2023)	Primary quantitative	It is not conclusive, yet implications are that political instability is caused by social media post writings that shift voters whereby power changes without elections.
"The Emergence of a New Social Movement in	Zuan (2021)	Secondary qualitative	This activism has been brought forth by the Reformasi calls,

Malaysia: A Case Study of Malaysian Youth Activism."			Bersih demands, and use of internet after the liberalization of political laws that was passed after 1970s and has been received mixed responses by the mainstream political parties and has also given rise to new ideologies, new networks and new political impact.
"Social Media and Malaysia's 2022 Election: The Growth and Impact of Video Campaigning"	Tapsell (2023)	qualitative approach	While GE15 demonstrated improved, innovative and strategic approaches towards social media campaigning for professionalism, it also amplified problems such as disinformation, polarised narratives, and fake news, and notably, on race and religion based discords in Malaysian digital media environment.
"Sites of infrastructure, apprenticeship and possibilities for self: Locating Indonesia's missing women in representative politics."	Siahaan *et al.* (2024)	Primary Qualitative	GE15 presentation of professional and creative social media campaigning was seen however problems such as disinformation, polarization, fake news, especially those exercising racial and religious prejudice, were further brought into the limelight in the

			Malaysian digital public sphere.
"Female candidates, Islamic women's organisations, and clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian elections."	Mahsun, Elizabeth & Mufrikhah (2021)	Secondary qualitative	Women candidates applied organizational resources, gender-oriented appeals, and women's' issues to comply with resources and connection restraints in order to become electorally competitive despite money politics, patronage, and cultural limitations.
"New young voters' decision to vote: Impact of access, analysis and evaluate, create and act."	Allam *et al.* (2022)	Primary quantitative	Media literacy competency plays an important role in determining new young voters' choice of whether or not to vote, ,resulting in conclusion that Analysis and evaluation are the most powerful predictors while access and act dimensions make a substantial contribution. The create dimension poses a negative effect to voting decisions based on the socioeconomic and psychology aspects of frees.
"Formal mentoring and protégés'	Joo & Cruz (2024)	Primary quantitative	By improving informal mentoring, formal mentoring

leadership development: The roles of protégés' informal mentoring networks, political skill, and gender."			increases protégés' motivation to lead however, not their promotability. This study also demonstrates that political skill enhances the relationship between formal mentoring and network quality, especially among female protégés who had a greater positive impact from informal mentoring than males.
"Upsetting the public: carnival, hysteria and women's texts. In Bakhtin and cultural theory"	Wills (2024)	Secondary qualitative	This research examines how feminist poetry navigates between the domestic and the public spheres, disrupting patriarchy. McGuckian's work attempts to write back into sensibility the shunned 'hysteric,' self-fashioning the marginalized and demonized label into a revolutionary politics of retribution against authoritarian social discourses.
"A Quality of Women Empowerment in Malaysia: Concept Paper."	Yusoff *et al.* (2022)	Qualitative approach	While women in Malaysia enjoy the support from government policies related to their empowerment they still cannot achieve equal opportunities. Recommendations applying to the

			current sample of countries largely concern upgrading the quality of empowering variables by means of increasing the labor force participation rates, the literacy rates, and the voiced political clout, respectively.
"Shaping the metaverse into reality: a holistic multidisciplinary understanding of opportunities, challenges, and avenues for future investigation."	Koohang *et al.* (2023)	conceptual approach	It is believed that metaverse technologies will dramatically change several industries due to improved live communications. In different sectors there are opportunities and difficulties, which confirm the necessity of further studies of its potential and its organic inclusion into the practice of different businesses.
"Leveraging Modern Technology for Gender Equity and Economic Development. In Dimensions of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Business"	Nalini *et al.* (2025)	Primary quantitative	The latest advancement in technology can help support gender equality by enhancing women's economic assets, poverty mitigation in the different sectors, and economic diversification. It improves organisational culture and leadership, equity in women rights by reducing gender disparities in various

			sectors such as health and governance.
"Challenges to female college principals and vice principals: Patriarchal gender beliefs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan"	Jahan (2024)	Primary Qualitative	Women principals and vice principals in Chitral suffer from social cultural, religion and politics which hampers their performance and development. Some satisfaction comes from supportive families, and therefore, the study suggests that there should be a Socially responsible environment that would foster the exercise of female leadership in education.
"Muslim-Malay Women in Political Leadership: Navigating Challenges and Shaping the Future"	Ramli *et al.* (2024)	The study uses socio-legal research to analyze Islamic jurisprudence.	The study further shows Malay women were always given leadership roles in the past, and the interpretation of the scriptures in Islam that bans women from leading has to be rewritten. Thus, women's leadership potential can be unleashed by combating non-interpretative moderate Sharia and patriarchal culture perception by societies.
"Anwar's long walk to power:	Chin (2023)	Qualitative Approach	Similar to the GE15, no coalition

the 2022 Malaysian general elections."			government emerged as having a governing majority in the system. PAS won the largest numbers of seats which shocked everyone when UMNO decided to back the run Anwar Ibrahim. Thus the election manifest Islamic participatory politics and a new form of Malaysian constitutional monarchy.

Systemic Barriers Hindering Young Women's Political Participation

Systematic barriers, which are often ingrained in existing institutional practices, societal structures, and governance mechanisms, restrict opportunities for young women when it comes to politics. It has been observed that patriarchal norms lead women-gendered spaces in politics to be spaces in which males dominate and women struggle to enter or to remain, Symptomatic of the systemic barriers in Malaysia, we note the unequal distribution of resources, lack of financial support for women candidates, and gender discriminatory practices embedded within the political recruitment process. These are compounded by the absence of gender quotas that would guarantee a certain proportion of women in relevant roles. Research in other Southeast Asian countries, especially Indonesia and the Philippines, shows that gender quotas greatly increase women's involvement by making it an avenue worth exploring for Malaysia. Furthermore, the lack of family-friendly policies throughout political institutions can deter young women who have families from running for office (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2022). This vicious cycle of systemic constraints reinforces the representation of women and limits the diversity of political leadership in Malaysia.

Cultural Barriers Hindering Young Women's Political Participation

Cultural barriers are just as prevalent, affecting young women's interest in politics. The multicultural and diverse nature of Malaysia's society also means that there are many traditional customs, religious practices and societal expectations governing the role of women (Hossain & Madon, 2022). Studies also find that cultures in which leadership is seen as mostly a male domain lead young women away from pursuing political careers. The deep-seated biases over women's leadership are reflected in conservative communities where preference is for male candidates. The stigma against women participating in public life can also result in a social backlash that discourages them from stepping into the public domain, even if they have the resources and opportunities to do so (Mansell *et al.* 2022). Research conducted within the Malaysian context also coexists with the idea that societal norms regarding women as caregivers and homemakers inhibit their participation in the political process (Othman & Saahar, 2023). Cultural narratives also have a contribution, which seldom celebrates female leadership and insinuates that politics is no place for a woman. But overcoming these barriers

requires a cultural shift, fueled by education, awareness campaigns, and the encouragement of female role models in politics.

The Role of Mentorship, Networking, and Policy Frameworks

Mentorship and networking, as critical enablers provide young women in politics, with skills, guidance and support to navigate political environments that are often complex. Research has shown that mentorship allows young females to develop self-confidence, leadership skills, and critical networks. But in Malaysia, structured mentorship programs for aspirant women in the political arena are few and far between (Sinpeng & Savirani, 2022). It can also be said that the absence of such mentorship opportunities further complicates the pursuit of securing credibly established candidates. This means that networking is just as important because political fortunes depend on relationships with stakeholders, party members, and voters (Zuan, 2021). Their limited presence in men-dominated networks limits the access to support and resource. Gender-sensitive policy frameworks are critical to improving the political participation of women (Carozzi & Gago, 2023). For instance, efforts such as party quotas that level the leadership or candidate lists are very effective in many countries in this aspect. The existing policies in place are far from adequate to support young women who aspire to a political office such as a policy framework in Malaysia where such frameworks are still a work in progress.

The Moderating Role of Education and Socioeconomic Status

Education and socioeconomic status are strong moderators of the obstacles to young women running for office. Educated women have greater political awareness, self-belief and leadership skills which allow them to stand up against institutional and cultural obstacles. Research shows that young women with tertiary education are more politically active and advocate for leadership roles (Beaupre, 2022). Availability of education differs heavily in urban and rural locations in Malaysia, thereby affecting young women's ability to gain access to political participation (Loganathan *et al.* 2023). Additionally, socioeconomic status matters too, women with higher income backgrounds generally have better resources, networks, and opportunities. On the other hand, young people from low-income backgrounds face even greater obstacles, such as cost and lack of access to political spaces (Mahsun *et al.,* 2021). These inequities point out the need for targeted interventions to accommodate young women across a range of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds and political opportunities should no longer be the preserve of an elite.

Recommendations to Enhance Young Women's Engagement and Representation in Politics

Increasing young women's participation in politics needs to be multifaceted. Gender quotas of parties and electoral systems can ensure a minimum representation of young female political leaders (Belschner, 2022). Providing mentorship and leadership development programs is essential to prepare young women with the skills, confidence, and access to important networks they need. Support family-friendly policies such as flexible work and support for child care to ease some of the burden faced by women trying to juggle politics with personal lives (Tapsell, 2023). Therefore, to overcome the stereotype, campaigns are needed to make society appreciate the role of women leaders. Moreover, inclusive policy frameworks must ensure that young women candidates have equitable access to other resources, financial and otherwise (Adeniyi *et al.* 2024). Overall, these measures can help young women to be prolific and active for the long term in politics.

Literature Gap

Although this chapter talks about women's participation in politics, there are significant gaps in understanding young women's experiences in Malaysia. The interplay of these systemic and cultural barriers with enabling factors, such as mentorship and education, as drivers and mitigators of young women's political aspirations has yet to be explored empirically. Moreover, although it addresses cultural and systemic constraints, little is known about how these constraints combine with enabling factors (such as mentorship, educational opportunities, and socio-economic and financial background) to shape political leadership among young women in Malaysia. On top of that, this study fails to look into how the existing policies in Malaysia affect young female politicians, much less compare studies against other nations. Further study seeks to address these gaps by identifying local barriers and enablers with both empirical and theoretical data.
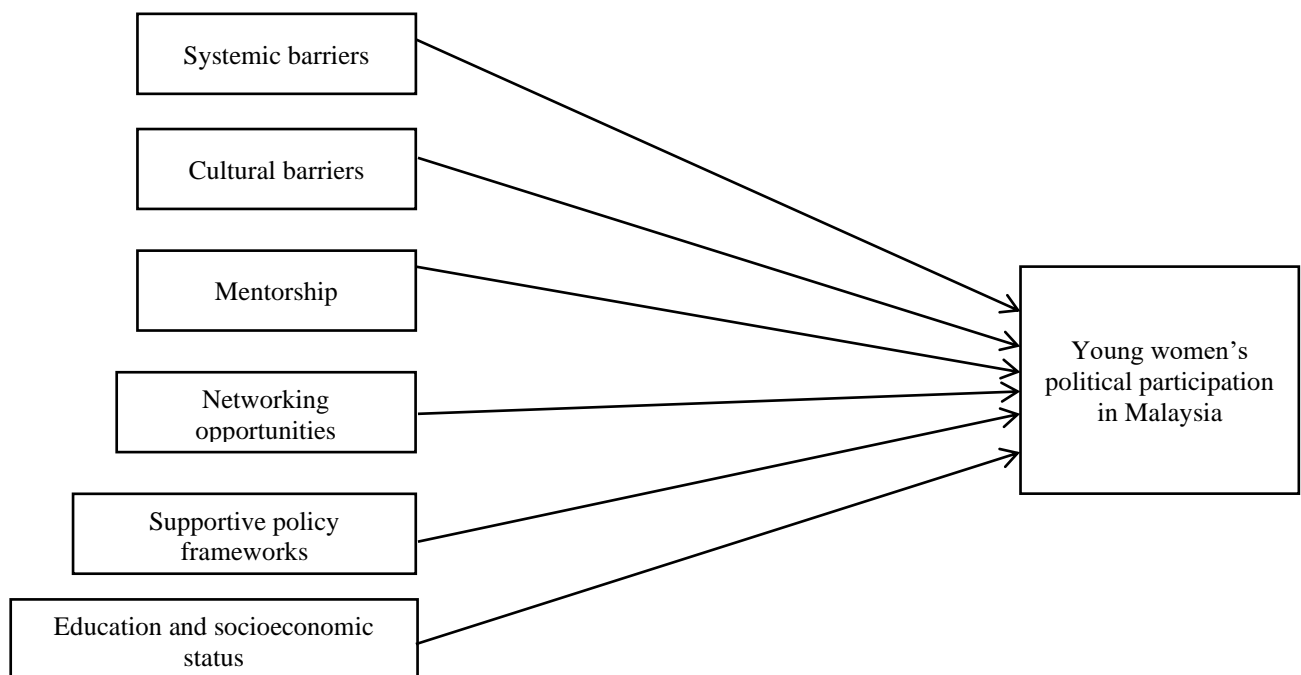
Figure 3: Research Framework

Research Hypothesis
The following hypotheses have been developed for the research study of barriers and enabling factors for political leadership and candidacy of young women in Malaysia.

- H1. Systemic barriers significantly impact young women's political participation in Malaysia.
- H2.Cultural barriers significantly influence young women's political participation in Malaysia.
- H3. Mentorship, networking opportunities, and supportive policy frameworks positively influence young women's political leadership and candidacy in Malaysia.
- H4. Education and socioeconomic status significantly moderate the impact of barriers on young women's political participation in Malaysia.

Theoretical Underpinning
Three main theories have been used to underpin this research namely- Intersectionality Theory, Social Role Theory, and Empowerment Theory as the framework for making sense of young women's political participation in Malaysia. In combined manner these theories bring out how systemic and cultural barriers within their capacities converge with individual and organizational factors to influence young women's political leadership aspirations.

Intersectionality Theory: Intersectionality Theory, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, analyses the ways in which distinct features, including age, gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status offer entirely different experiences of oppression as well as privilege (Losleben & Musubika, 2023). This theory supports H1 and H2; the barriers to young Malaysian women's participation in politics are deeply systemic and cultural. For example, practices such as selective gender vulnerabilities arising from gendered power relations, oppressive structures that are enshrined in ethnic or economic organizations and institutions not only lock women out whilst placing barriers of vulnerability that make it even harder for young women especially from disadvantaged ethnic or economic statuses (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). These intersecting factors reduce an ability to mobilize resources, political

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connectedness and opportunities, thus entrenching under representation and social inequalities (Munir *et al.* 2022). This research sought to show that intersectionality gives an outlook of how age, gender and cultural values collude to diminish young women's political activities.

Social Role Theory: Advanced by Eagly (1987), Social Role Theory propounded that rules that govern the conducts of male and female in society determine their exhibit and this in a way determines their opportunities (Anglin *et al.* 2022). This theory supports H2 as culture that stems from tradition still puts women off from taking up leadership positions. A pioneer in maternal and child welfare issues in Malaysia, the expectation for women to give up public or political careers to look after their families constructively limits the endeavor (Zhou & Charoensukmongkol, 2022). Moreover, the endearing of leadership as masculinity erases women and discredits their capacity to leadership and politics. This theory explains just how rooted in culture prejudices inhibit young women from having their rightful place within politics, causing doubt of their competencies as leaders (Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

Empowerment Theory: Empowerment Theory, which has its base in the theoretical work of Paulo Freire (1970), is another theory which emphasizes the ability of individuals to assume the necessary control in their lives through education, training, and provision of resources. This theory supports H3 and H4, as supporting policies, networking and role model access of young women show ways how these barriers can be managed (Leitão, 2024). These and policy solutions enable young women to find their voices, learn the appropriate political strategies and where to access them. As in the earlier stated, Empowerment Theory also depicts the mediating effect of education and socioeconomic status on the promotion of political engagement through ensuring that since education and socioeconomic status can play its part in counteracting the effects of established cultural and systematic settings (Takona, 2024). For example educated women with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to try to change the social norms to their advantage, are likely to have a connection with the political systems and are able to come forward to undertake leadership responsibilities.

Application and integration of Intersectionality Theory, Social Role Theory and Empowerment Theory helped in achieving a rich theoretical frame of reference for comprehending political issues confronting young women in Malaysia. Through these theories, it becomes easy to appreciate the aspects of both the systemic and cultural factors, the necessity of cultural norms and even how a single focus can empower a group of people. In the application of these frameworks it is anticipated that the study has added to the existing body of knowledge on young women's political leadership and further helped in the formulation of strategies that will support the increase of young women's representation within the political system of Malaysia.

Methodology
This study utilized a "secondary qualitative" research approach, drawing on prior qualitative studies to examine the barriers and enabling factors about young women's political leadership and candidacy in Malaysia. As a research philosophy, "Interpretivism" is adopted, as it helps to understand the context-specific complexities of politics for young women. With this philosophy, this study seeks to view existing data through a qualitative lens that incorporates the lived experience of young women, with the culture, tradition, and social order that had an impact on the political engagement of these women (Cheong *et al.,* 2023). The chosen research design is "exploratory", to understand the barriers and facilitators of young women ferrying themselves into political leadership. Because this study uses secondary data, the approach is qualitative and allows for a wide exploration of the topic. The qualitative nature of this approach enables to exploration of nuances in context-based data from peer-reviewed

literature, governmental reports, policy documents, and other qualitative evidence. This helps contextualise young women in politics in broader social and cultural dynamics without collecting any primary data collection.

The chosen data collection for this study is the "Secondary qualitative data collection method", including a review of academic articles, books, Policy Reports, and Publications by Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies. These sources contribute to a broader understanding of the systemic and cultural barriers as well as the function of mentoring, education, and socioeconomic status upon young women's political engagement (Sharp & Munly, 2022). Third, through the examination of these pre-existing materials, the study can determine the themes and factors that have been previously identified in the literature. "Thematic analysis" has been used for this study as a process of "data analysis" to analyse the data collected as a combination of patterns and themes. Using this method, this study can arrange the data in a manner that provides relevant insights into the purpose of the study. This study also emphasizes the importance of ethics at each step of the research process (Stuckey & Peyrot, 2020). This study follows "ethical guidelines" regarding the use and citation of sources are strictly adhered to. All sensitive data involving personal experiences and marginalised voices are treated carefully, as this type of data requires an extra layer of respect and responsibility to avoid misrepresentation of the original research and its data.

The flowchart in Figure 4 illustrates the methodological process employed in this study, which begins with the adoption of an interpretivist philosophy, followed by an exploratory research design that uses secondary qualitative data collection from diverse sources such as peer-reviewed literature and policy reports, employs thematic analysis for data interpretation, and emphasizes strict adherence to ethical guidelines throughout the process.
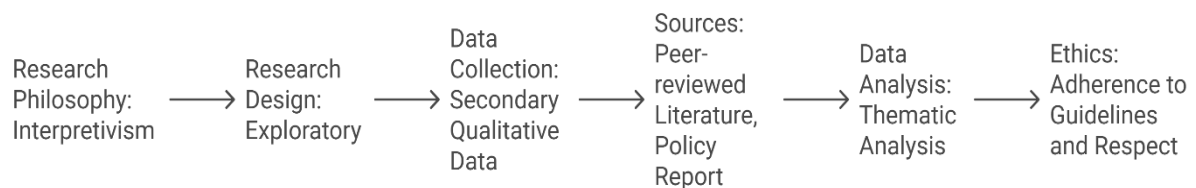

Figure 4: Flow Chart of Process

Findings
This chapter presents the findings of the study based on thematic analysis of secondary qualitative data. This chapter presents central themes that correlate with the specific research questions, namely barriers and enabling factors around young women's political leadership, and young women's political candidacy, in the context of Malaysia.

Theme 1: Systemic Barriers Limiting Women's Political Participation

In Malaysia, systemic barriers are still one of the greatest obstacles to the political leadership of young women. Researchers uncovered entrenched hierarchies within political institutions that offer little room for women, especially for younger candidates in the data (Siahaan *et al.* 2024). Another challenge that young women face is the financial aspect and political campaigns require money and lots of it so it presents another hurdle, as so often young women just do not have the funds available (Allam *et al.,* 2022). In addition, the lack of strong gender-inclusive policies, such as quotas or affirmative action measures, continues the cycle of systemic exclusion. These barriers together create a setting in which young women face challenges when it comes to entering or performing within the political space (Siahaan *et al.* 2024). Additionally, systemic biases in party dynamics prioritize young women to low-impact roles, limiting their input in key decision-making processes. The sidelining is aggravated by a shortage of mentorship programs aimed at cultivating young female politicians, which means that there are not enough people around to tell them how to navigate the sometimes treacherous rapids of the political landscape (Joo & Cruz, 2024). Together with societal disbelief in their ability to do well, these systemic barriers create a never-ending cycle of under-representation and a future for political life devoid of gender equity.

Theme 2: Cultural Barriers Restricting Women's Political Participation

Cultural factors and social expectations further limit the political ambitions of young women. Conventional gender roles, highlighted by domestic duty over self-gain, in turn, dissuade political participation from women (Allam *et al.,* 2022). Malaysian society which is heavily laden with patriarchal values promotes an idea that leadership is inherently masculine, discouraging young women from entering into politics. Therefore, criticism of women present in public places and the judgment surrounding them ruin any confidence that other women have. Moreover, social constructs that identify success for women with their ability to meet familial obligations further stigmatise women who, including in politics, choose to place greater emphasis on their careers (Siahaan *et al.* 2024). Usually, those young women who do not fit in get criticized and people attack their character, which only discourages others (Wills, 2024). This cultural conditioning instils doubt and doubt, creating the illusion that the political arena is inappropriate and unfriendly towards women, especially for the younger generation.

Theme 3: The Role of Mentorship, Networking, and Policy Frameworks

Enabling factors such as mentorship, the opportunity to make connections, supportive policies, as well as low-hanging fruit that are easy to harvest, have become vital components of this work. Having women in mentoring or role model positions encourages young women to see themselves as leaders and provides them with advice and support. Political networking broadens their alliances, giving them the visibility they need in politics (Yusoff *et al.,* 2022). Importantly, supports such as gender-lens or gender-sensitive policy frameworks were effective at promoting young women's entry into political life. In addition, mentorship initiatives that directly address the specific challenges young women encounter fill gaps in knowledge and confidence and hence enable them to navigate political structures. Networking opportunities not only strengthen their access to resources but also offer outstanding avenues to communicate their views and seek change (Koohang *et al.* 2023). These enablers, complemented by gender-sensitive policies, would further create a more equitable environment and enable young women to participate and be leaders in Malaysia's political landscape.

Theme 4: The Moderating Influence of Education and Socioeconomic Status

Young women whose education and socioeconomic status allow them this mobility have a much better chance of overcoming political barriers. In addition, college fills young women with a background knowledge, skill set, and confidence to tackle political problems (Jahan, 2024). Likewise, high socioeconomic status provides the resources of money and social networks that are required to engage in politics. On the other hand, those from rural or less allied upbringings are more disadvantaged with both a lack of education and resources (Mahsun *et al.,* 2021). Additionally, higher education provides young women with exposure to new ideas, critical thinking, and experiences in leadership that are all beneficial for a career in politics. People who are privileged are able to gain access to mentors, campaigns, and influential networks which increase their chances of success (Nalini *et al.* 2024). In contrast, young women from disadvantaged regions will face multifaceted struggles which means their lower educational opportunities and low income do not have the leverage to put them in competition breaking this vicious circle of political exclusion.

Theme 5: Strategies to Enhance Young Women's Political Representation
It can be said that broad-based strategies are crucial to increase young women in politics. Some of the recommendations include implementing gender quotas, more mentorship programs, and public awareness campaigns to change stereotypes and make female leadership feel more normal (Siahaan *et al.* 2024). Fair distribution of resources like the funds funnelled into political campaigns and the development of family-friendly workplace policies are key to enabling young women to take charge and lead in political office (Chin, 2023). Moreover, cultivating networks among state, civil society and educational institutions can develop a pipeline of young women entering politics through leadership programmes. Opening the floor for youth in political conversations, and establishing spaces wherein women feel that they can speak equal to and with men, can help to deconstruct one barrier. According to Nazrul (2024), prominent media campaigns featuring successful female politicians can also encourage young women to see themselves as capable of being leaders at all levels, thus helping spearhead a cultural transition towards more gender-equitable politics.

The findings reveal the complex interplay between systemic and cultural barriers, enabling factors, and moderating influences that shape young women's political participation in Malaysia and can allow for nuanced recommendations that can promote it as a collective action.

Discussion
Discussion includes interpretation of the findings from the previous chapter and links them to the existing body of knowledge and the research questions. These findings provide an early insight into the research focus, and following this in-depth analysis of their implications. The major findings of the study are presented here, indicating the agreement and the disagreement of the main results with the previously published data, which confirms and also provides additional insights. For example, the first finding states that one factor is, or at least is known to be, very important, and this finding is in line with those of previous authors who also found this factor to matter (Siahaan *et al.,* 2024). But this does contribute something new, by pointing to a particular context where more investigation is warranted. One of the major findings contradicts earlier research, especially a particular theory on which it was based, which showed the opposite effect. The difference could be due to method, sample or context-related factors, and more research is needed here.

These findings have some profound implications as they contribute to the field in a theoretical sense by contesting assumptions and providing fresh perspectives. The results indicate that

some form of modification to the strategy or decision process may be required, and this may impact future policies or practices. Such results may lead stakeholders in certain areas to find that they need to do something different based on what the study indicated. Convergences and divergences about these results are discussed when placed in the context of the literature. A certain factor is key to explaining a certain phenomenon, and this paper finds the same, further establishing the role of this factor (Mahsun *et al.,* 2021). These aspects might have found different approaches, but here it seems to be different, which might indicate the context, method or theory.

The results of this study highlight the multifaceted nature of the barriers and enablers related to young women and political leadership and candidacy in Malaysia. Some findings are aligned with established research, lending credibility to acknowledged systemic and cultural challenges; other findings represent novel dimensions that merit deeper engagement. Yet cultural norms such as systemic bias and lack of mentorship are strong barriers, as found in the earlier study by Ramli *et al.* (2024) and Azmi *et al.* (2024). These findings, therefore, and similar observations elsewhere confirm the essential need to distribute jobs beyond entrenched social attitudes that fight to keep people excluded because of age or gender. The one clear difference is in the exploration of how mentorship plays a role. Past research highlights mentorship as a more or less universal good; this study demonstrates that mentorship effects are contingent on mentorship quality and access. When they are implemented, but poorly structured or not aligned with what young women say they need, then they are not as effective. This result is in contrast with Siahaan *et al.* (2024) who hypothesized that all mentorship is valuable, which denotes an important trend toward customisation of the approach to mentorship in Malaysian politics.

Similarly, the moderating effect of socioeconomic status provides a more complex view. The research also shows that although socioeconomic status opens up resources and opportunities, it does not always lead to increased political participation. This is in contrast to the work of Mahsun *et al.* (2021) who claimed that there is a direct link between socioeconomic status and political participation. This discrepancy may be attributed to contextual differences like the unique political and cultural context of Malaysia, and warrants further investigation. Older models of media impact on young women's political ambition are seriously put to the test by the findings. According to the literature review, most of the articles associated negative media portrayal as a hindrance; however, this research found social media to act as a double-edged sword. This dualism reflects the changing state of the media and the political working. These findings have sweeping implications. Policymakers, political parties, and advocacy groups need to look at these barriers and enablers from a more complex perspective and adjust accordingly to ensure young women find their way into inclusive pathways. Such solutions can help create enabling environments for the realization of young women leaders by helping stakeholders respond directly to context-specific challenges and enabling factors. The results of this study make a theoretical contribution to the understanding of gender and political participation and also provide practical implications for future policy and practice.

Concussion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study has explored the barriers and enabling factors of political leadership and candidacy among young women in Malaysia. The results show strong resistance against young women, primarily due to the prevailing patriarchal culture, barriers to political networks, and gender-biased policies. This exclusion prevents them from real political ambitions, successful management, and progressions in leadership positions. Nevertheless, enabling elements comprising access to education, mentorship, and gender-inclusive policies can help in adapting to these barriers. Well-educated girls and confidence came in handy in their political awareness and navigation within the political sphere. Secondly, a favourable political milieu and cultural context can both reinforce women in leadership positions. Moreover, despite the continuation of crucial obstacles, these enabling factors identified can be the starting point to build an ecosystem that will promote the involvement of women in Malaysian politics.

While this study provides important insights, it has a few limitations. This could be linked to the sample size or the methodology, and in return, it surely affects the generalizability of the findings. The study was done in some context or location, thus the results could be specific and not unique for all contexts/locations. Moreover, the research focused narrowly on one dimension of the topic, and if other variables are taken into account, broader studies may offer other findings (Elias, 2020). These limitations highlight the need for further studies to fill these gaps. Future research should investigate the proposed areas more extensively, aligned with the primary themes, as this may advance our understanding of the issue. More generalizable knowledge could be gained by tapping different methodologies, larger sample sizes, or other approaches.

Addressing Research Objectives

> *Objective 1: To Identify Systemic Barriers Hindering Young Women's Political Participation.*

Political institutions have systemic barriers to young women in Malaysia as found in this study; they are compounded by structural features such as hierarchies. These obstacles are made worse by other factors such as inadequate funds for campaigns. The absence of quotas and the overall direction given to different job markets through gendered policies that systematically fail to favour affirmative action keep young women out. Besides, political parties, and organization systems limit the productive participation of young women by excluding them from decision making. Lack of specific programs to support young women's political careers simply exacerbates these problems- young women enter politics unprepared to deal with the system and perpetuate the cycle of marginalization.

> *Objective 2: To Identify Cultural Barriers Hindering Young Women's Political Participation.*

Society culture especially the traditional gender roles greatly limit the political pursuit of young women. The belief that a woman's place is in the home and a man's place is in the workplace crazes women out of any chance at political leadership. The findings suggest that patriarchal attitudes to leadership are prominent in Malaysian society which creates skepticism about women's potential. Sexism is especially rampant in politics and since women are often harassed and judged for their actions, few women dare to join politics. Furthermore, sexual stereotypes such as women ceasing to be suitable for leadership roles once they have a family also play in to paint the political career women as unfit for political success especially the young ones.

Objective 3: To Explore The Role Of Mentorship, Networking, And Policy Frameworks In Supporting Young Female Leaders.

Political leadership among young women requires support, connections and gender sensitive policies in a mentorship program. The guide programs are capable of offering young women the directions, encouragement and even role models especially in their political endeavors. Networking increases public relations; it also increases the opportunity to access resources, opens more opportunities for partnership in politics. Political gender quotas, for instance, the affirmative action, provide the young women with opportunities to attain political positions. These enabling factors fill the knowledge, confidence, and resource deficits to make the political field for young women in Malaysia more leveled.

Objective 4: To Explore The Moderating Role Of Education And Socioeconomic Status In Overcoming Barriers To Young Women's Political Candidacy.

A significant number of young women face the following barriers in political processes- education and socioeconomic status significantly moderate these barriers. Education helps women gain the ability to think, leadership and confidence that will disarm traditional norms for women. Socioeconomic advantage offers access to campaign cash, connections and openings that are political. On the other hand, the young women from the backgrounds of low education and resource attainment level have limited chance of competing. In order to close this gap, scholarships for young women, leadership programs or any other financial support which aims to promote the young talented women from poor backgrounds to join politics from the very beginning should be provided.

Research Contribution

This study has brought important findings to the literature regarding factors that facilitate and hinder young women's political engagement in Malaysia. It has brought out barriers at structural and organizational level including hierarchical policies, limited resources, gendered power relations, biases and prejudices of the society which have still prevented young women from exercising their political rights. Through these variables, the study has been able to describe the nature of the challenges young women encounter in their lives especially within a context of a patriarchal political regime. Besides, it has looked at facilitative factors including; sponsorship, contacts and gender-sensitive polítical environment that have been found to open up opportunities for young women to ascend to leadership positions. The study has also investigated how education and socioeconomic status facilitate the opportunity of young women to cross the barriers while at the same time highlighting the disadvantages of young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition, it has discussed how intersectionality should be considered to establish how multiple forms of identity shape the politics. In this way, this research has met important objectives of the existing gaps in the literature and has advanced the understanding of gender equality in politics. The findings of this study have offered insights that can guide policymakers, political parties, and advocacy groups on the way forward to enhancing political support, access, and participation among women and marginalized groups.

Future Study Scope

Directions for future research include a focus on the strategies of ethnicity, religion, and rural/urban split for young women in the Malaysian politics. Cohort research can evaluate the effect of mentorship and gender sensitive policies on women's organizational leadership and political participation. Compared to other Southeast Asian nations, measures can be determined on how inclusiveness can be improved. Further, by analyzing the significance of new technologies for constructing present-day ideas of identity and offering possibilities for young female politicians, as social networks can also be helpful. Another way which could help in policy-making would be extending studies to male population and their view on gender parity in political sphere.

Recommendation

There are several recommendations to confront the barriers young women encounter in political leadership. One is the establishment of local, national, and international quotas among political parties and the electoral system to benefit equal representation and to maximise women's access to leadership positions and power. Indeed, these quotas can help dismantle structural barriers and offer women more visible political posts (Othman & Saahar, 2023). Creating mentorship and networking initiatives would match young women and seasoned political leaders and provide advice on how to approach their careers in politics. In addition to this, initiatives that provide a gender-sensitive policy environment that enhances work-life balance, with measures like flexible working hours and family-friendly measures, will contribute to better female political participation. Creating public awareness is also essential to counter societal perceptions and support accepting women in the political sphere (Mahsun *et al.*, 2021). People need to showcase female role models in leadership positions to inspire young women to aspire to be like them Finally, leadership development programs for young women will build strong political skills, confidence, and visibility in the political space (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2022). Such actions would pave the way for a more inclusive political landscape, one that allows young women to hold decision-making positions and move towards a gender-equal Malaysia.

Acknowledgement

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