

## Relationship between Political Community and Women's Support in Politics: Malaysian Experienced

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**Abstract.** Many countries in Asia have experienced rapid development in economic, social and politics growth and led to a rapid rise over the past 20 years. However, the political support of women still low over the decades. This scenario does happened in Malaysia over the years when lower rate of support in politics of women from the women wings until the federal supports since 1970s. Thus this research objective is to examine the relationship between political community and political support of women in northern states in Malaysia which consists of Perlis, Kedah and Penang. The sampling of this research is 780 respondents by using stratified sampling. This research used Descriptive Statistic and Pearson Correlation for data analysis purposes. The hypothesis which is political community does have a strong significant with political support of women in findings. In future research, a set of proper guideline in political supports among women should be formed in order to increase the level of women's support in politics accordingly. In future research, by collaborating with government and community as well as women wings in the grass-root, it will improve the transparency of political landscape in Malaysia as well.

**Keywords:** Politics, Community, Political Community, Women, Support, Political Support.

### 1. Introduction

The study of political support has traditionally been considered as central to the analysis of political processes and, especially, of democratic political systems. Even if citizens' participation in their self-government is the defining feature of democratic systems, there are several and differing understandings of which should be the real degree of citizens' involvement in government. Women constitute half of humanity, and it follows that any decision-making, whether at the personal, family, societal or public levels, should be mindful of and involves the participation of women in the making of those decisions (Rai, 2003). However, today the state has appropriated the issue for itself. But when women become more political, for example when they speak out on human rights issues, question police violence or are critical of the nature of development in the country, then we are faced with the dilemma of whether to just accept this untenable situation or struggle within whatever existing space is left. According to Rashila (2000), she explains at least five common factors which form obstacles to Malaysian women's active participation in politics. She further adds by classifying the factors as social discrimination against women's roles in the public domain, time constraints due to career and domestic demands, cultural and religious arguments that a woman's place is at

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the home, structural constraints within each political party that do not allow women to advance beyond a certain level, and lack of adequate resources in terms of organizational support, personal influence and finance. Many feel that Malaysian society is still male dominated, and men are threatened by the idea of women holding senior posts. In the political sphere this is compounded by the high premium placed on political power (Mazur, 2005). This makes some men even less willing to share power with women. Based on the Malaysian experience, this study explored some of the obstacles that hinder the participation of women in political supports.

## 2. Literature Review

From the time of Independence in 1957, Malaysian women have had the right to vote and to hold office. Today women comprise one half of the registered voters and are active in political life. The trends of participation among women members of various political parties do not show significant differences among them. Women have continued being loyal supporters of political parties in Malaysia. Members of the Wanita UMNO in 1971 have continued to gain wide recognition for their prominent role amongst women's political organizations in Malaysia (Rashila, 2000). However, women have continued the trend of providing solid support for male leaders, and have engaged themselves primarily in raising financial support for the parties (Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, 2009).

Women members turn out in full force during election campaigns, and carry out routine tasks related to daily campaigning and facilitating voter participation during the election process. Despite the significant roles played by the Wanita UMNO and the other women's auxiliaries at the level of mass politics, the representation of women as branch or division heads is limited (Cecilia Ng, 2009).

In 1993, 5 out of 30 members (17 percent) of the central committee were women, and out of 153 divisions only one is headed by a woman. None of the 14,784 branches is headed by a woman. For more than forty-five years, the women's auxiliary of UMNO has only three women heads of divisions. (Jamilah Arifin, 1994).

From available data on local councils from five state governments in Peninsular Malaysia, (Selangor, Penang, Johor, Kelantan, and Terengganu), the number of women councillors for the period 1988-93 is insignificant in comparison to male councillors. Women's representation in Penang local authorities has not changed significantly since 1988. On the basis of data from the states of Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, similar trends are to be found. In 1993, women were even less visible in state assemblies. At the national level, women's representation is still relatively low. Women's participation in decision making positions in government ministries is similar. Women's participation in government service has increased rapidly between 1980 and 1991, from 27 percent to 33.6 percent (Election Commission, 2008). Several factors are important in this regard, the most significant being women's increasing participation in education. It was also in part due to the expansion of the health and education sectors, and the increased opportunities in government service for teachers and health workers (Rashila, 2000).

Political support is a concept with many possible meanings and, accordingly, a wide variety of definitions can be found in the literature. One of the most frequently used definitions is provided by Easton (1975), who defines support as 'an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively'. In the field of comparative politics, research on political support has been closely connected with research on political attitudes and political culture. Almond and Verba (1963) referred to political attitudes as the political culture of a nation. Political culture includes everything from beliefs in the legitimacy of the political system to attitudes towards the appropriateness of political input structures and government policies. In a recent contribution to political culture studies, Pippa Norris and some other prominent scholars have developed David Easton's three-fold distinction between different objects of support- the political community, the regime and the authorities- into a five-fold model of political support (Norris 1999). Emphasizing the fundamental multidimensional nature of the concept of 'support', Norris distinguishes between five levels or objects of support: the political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions and political actors. The distinction between regime principles and regime performance is made in order to account for the difference between support for 'democracy' as a

principle or a normative ideal, i.e. as the best form of government, and attitudes towards the way democracy works in practice, in a particular country at a given point in time (Linde and Ekman 2003; Linde 2004).

### 3. Methods and Material

The researchers have chosen survey and cross-sectional surveys as the research design. Quantitative method used in order to have better understanding the relationship between political communities with political support of women in northern states. The population was among voters above 21 years in Kedah, Penang and Perlis. The sample for this study comprised of 780 respondents and the breakdown of the respondents based on state is 280 (25.6%) from Perlis, 300 (38.5%) from Kedah and 280(35.9%) from Penang. In order to analyze the data, the statistical techniques used are Descriptive Statistic and Pearson Correlation.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Profile of Respondents

In this profile of respondents, the researchers discuss about the respondents demographic such as age, marital status, race and respondent's income. It indicates that most of the respondents are in the age of 21-29 years old which recorded 238 (30.5%). This been followed with the group age of 30-39 years old recorded 231 (29.6 %). The study also indicate the lowest been recorded is the group age of 70-79 years old. From the result, most of the respondent that took part in this research are youth which the range of 21-39 years old. Reason behind these results possibly the high awareness of youth groups toward the political movements in the northern region. From the study, it shows the marital status of the respondents which most of the respondents were married status with recorded as 474 (60.8%). This followed by single status with 251 (32.2%). Instead that figure, it also indicates the lowest respondents were widow status with 55 (7.1%). Furthermore, it shows the race of the respondents which indicated that the highest race participated in this research are among Malay respondent recorded 494 (63.3%). This followed by Chinese respondents with recorded 163 (20.9%). There are also stated others race which include the race like Iban, Kadazan and other indigenous groups in Malaysia with 4 (0.5%) which the lowest participants. The reason highest percentage in Malay respondents because the study has been done in Northern states which most of the Malay society live in this region. The results show that most of the respondents income are in the range of RM 1001-RM 3000 with 381 (48.8%). This been followed closely by respondents income that below RM 1000 with 185 (23.7%). It also indicated that respondents income above RM 10001 only 5 (0.6%) which is results a small percentage. High percentages in income range RM 1001-RM 3000, because of the respondents were worked as government servant and private workers. Nevertheless, the results also indicated no income level which is 45 (5.8%) due to some of them were housewives.

In next results, it shows the level of political support among the women in the political activities. Results remarked the not active in the political support as the highest with 557 (71.4%). There also indicate the results of very active in the political support among women participants with a small size with 39 (5%). While for the active group it was resulted 184 (23.6%). As described, 692 (88.7%) respondents has involved in politics in the form as voter while 88(11.3%) respondents has never done as voter in political activities. This is not surprising finding as it has been proven in many previous study that form of voter is the popular support in political activities (Norris, 1976). Furthermore, more respondents have never support in politics as a candidate which represents 755 (96.9%) while 2.5 (3.2%) have direct support in politics as a candidate. It shown that northern region still has the lower support in the form as candidate among women.

#### 4.2. Results of finding

#### 4.3. The Pearson Correlation obtained for the eight intervals scaled variables shown as indicated as follows:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between the political community and political support among northern region women.

Table 1. The Relationship between Political Community and the Political Support of Women

	Political Support	Political Community
Pearson Correlation	1	0.603(**)
Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
N	169	780

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows there is a significant relationship between Political Support and Political Community where  $p < 0.01$  ( $p = 0.000$ ) and  $r = 0.603$ . So, the researcher does accept the H1.

## 5. Comparison and Evaluation of Findings

### 5.1. Political community has a positive relationship with political support of women

An analysis through the experiences of the respondents in northern states reveals that the political community has significant and positive relationship towards political support. Therefore sense of belongingness and general willingness to involve in political associations were creating political support in northern region. Feminist groups have sense and an intention to join political associations was an important element to support the national political system. This is because within the community, the individual willingness to bond in the association or political parties for supports the political agenda. With these impressive findings of political community, it is expected that most of the respondents were satisfied and agreed that community played a major role in influencing them to support in politics even in different of political community and views. This study clearly indicates the influence of intention, belief and political community within the particular community will encourage the political support toward ruling government. The existence of political community and cooperation should be practiced to ensure a survival of the political system (democratic) within the state.

## 6. Recommendation

### 6.1. Empower the women with political knowledge

Knowledge and understanding about the political views is needed in order to encourage women to support more actively and effectively. In this light, the government and other stakeholders have a role in guiding them in understanding form of support in politics. The government, especially the respective federal and states government, do carry out briefings at the start of a new term of political support. Women should be more knowledgeable in politics from upper to lower level and this responsibility usually complemented by the state governments' efforts in conducting seminars related to its machinery.

### 6.2. Seek supports from a broad range of women's perception

It is important for government to have a comprehensive understanding on the various form of support in politics by women in its agenda. Women should not be treated as one single entity as there are different roles with men. Some may oppose emotionally in support the political activities and some may support as voter or involved in talks, campaigns, lobbyist, but normally those who walk the loudest will get the attention. The federal and states ruling parties should also take account the existence of organized and unorganized public and whose interest do they represent.

## 7. Conclusion

Political support model has emphasized the importance and benefits of support for democratic decision making. On the same note, there is a abundant of literature over time that produces models and typologies to describe level of political support, with commonly referred to being Norris and David Easton model of political support. Yet, many studies on political support conclude that achieving effective political support is quite subjective and sensitive to be discussed easily and an elusive reality. As this case revealed, political community regime is indeed a factor that correlates women with the interest to support in politics. To sum up, women needs collaboration and for engage more to support effectively in politics, they need to blend well with social interactions accordingly in order to achieve common goals and objective. Therefore, a part of

focusing on improving political support process, future policies on empower women in decision making process also should be directed by federal and states ruling parties.

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