

Barriers and Enablers to Women's Political Leadership: A Systematic Review of the Malaysian Context

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ABSTRACT

The political leadership positions in Malaysia continue to have fewer women than men despite worldwide advancements toward gender equality. The combination of legislative actions and civil society advocacy work has increased public understanding yet multiple structural barriers and institutional obstacles and cultural traditions continue to block full participation. This systematic review evaluates existing research to identify the main factors which affect women's political leadership opportunities in Malaysia. The systematic review followed PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol to search Scopus and Web of Science and Google Scholar and MyJurnal for peer-reviewed articles from 1987 to 2025. The review utilized the PICO framework to analyze Malaysian women political leaders (Population) and their political involvement (Interest) within the Malaysian political context (Comparison) and the barriers and enablers that influence outcomes (Outcome). The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) evaluated seventeen studies which met the inclusion criteria. Thematic synthesis revealed five major barriers: patriarchal party structures and nomination processes (n=11), intersectional discrimination against ethnic minorities and young women (n=7), gendered media portrayals and political cyberbullying (n=5), limited institutional support and mentorship (n=8), and restrictive gender norms around domestic roles (n=9). The study identified five enabling factors which include civil society and NGO empowerment initiatives (n=6) and party reforms and leadership training (n=5) and digital activism and youth participation (n=6) and support from male allies and progressive elites (n=4) and cross-cultural networking among women politicians (n=3). The research demonstrates how structural elements and institutional frameworks and social cultural factors work together to require immediate implementation of gender quotas and party system reforms and intersectional strategies and enhanced media ethics to achieve representation equality and inclusive political engagement in Malaysia.

Keywords: women's political leadership, gender representation, barriers, enablers, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Women form approximately 50 percent of Malaysia's population while making essential contributions to national development across economics education and social structures. The political leadership positions available to women remain substantially lower than their overall population representation. The representation of women in Malaysian politics faces continuing structural obstacles along with cultural barriers and institutional challenges despite CEDAW commitments and national policies such as the National Policy on Women and the Eleventh Malaysia Plan [21], [34].

According to the 2023 Inter-Parliamentary Union report Malaysia stands at number 143 among 190 countries regarding female representation in national parliaments thus placing it among the lowest in Southeast Asia [26].

The number of female candidates in the 2018 general election rose to 14.4% after decreasing from 10.7% in 2013 yet this figure remains below the voluntary 30% quota set by political coalitions such as Barisan Nasional (BN), Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Perikatan Nasional (PN) [8].

Women politicians in Malaysia function inside a gendered political domain that combines ethnic background with religious affiliation and economic standing and age characteristics [38]. The cultural and linguistic barriers faced by Chinese women and religious challenges for Malay women represent two examples of obstacles that women encounter in mainstream political parties [41]. Young women face barriers to leadership positions because of institutional barriers while female MPs from the opposition party report they have limited access to resources and policymaking opportunities [4] – [6].

Various facilitating elements have appeared as solutions to these challenges. Leadership development programs together with youth-led activism and social media engagement and women-centric NGOs serve as enabling factors. The implementation of gender-sensitive legislation together with quota proposals show great potential to boost female representation [40]. The establishment of mentorship programs combined with iconic female leaders has helped transform public attitudes toward women leaders [10] – [12]

Multiple studies have analysed these problems, but researchers have not developed a unified evidence-based framework which explains the diverse challenges of women's political leadership in Malaysia. This review conducts a comprehensive evaluation to combine the obstacles and opportunities which affect women's political leadership in Malaysia. The review follows the PRISMA protocol while drawing from 17 peer-reviewed studies spanning from 1987 to 2025. The review integrates findings from multiple studies to provide recommendations for policy changes and institutional reforms which promote gender-inclusive leadership in politics.

METHODOLOGY

The Review Protocol

The systematic review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol [31]. The process followed three main stages: identification, screening, and inclusion as shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1). The goal was to gather empirical evidence on the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that either enable or constrain women's participation and advancement in political leadership in Malaysia.

Formulation of the Research Question

The PICO framework served as a basis to develop the research question for this systematic review because it is an established evidence-based research tool which helps researchers build specific research questions. The acronym PICO represents Population, Interest (or Intervention), Context (or Comparison) and Outcome. Researchers use this organized framework to define their systematic review's purpose through structured components that guide article selection and data extraction and synthesis [42].

The study investigates female political leaders who currently hold power or aim to gain power in Malaysia. This review studies women who occupy elected positions as well as those who seek election to office and those who lead political parties or participate in political decision-making processes. This study examines the political activities and leadership participation of women in formal political roles that include parliamentary and state assembly positions and local government leadership.

The review operates within the Malaysian political system which includes its institutional frameworks together with its cultural and social aspects. The political structure of Malaysia combines ethnic diversity with religious conservatism and party-based systems which determine both the quantity and quality of women participating in politics. Knowledge of this particular environment allows researchers to discover how domestic traditions and voting systems and party systems and government frameworks create opportunities or obstacles for women leaders.

The main research goal of this review examines and evaluates the factors which promote or impede women from leading politics in Malaysia. The study investigates barriers which include party gatekeeping and gender stereotypes and lack of resources and discriminatory practices as well as enablers which consist of institutional reforms and leadership training and youth activism and supportive networks and quotas.

The review aligns its components to answer the main research inquiry:

"What specific barriers and facilitators impact women's political leadership within the Malaysian framework based on peer-reviewed empirical research?"

The research question allows a systematic analysis of existing academic evidence which will help create gender-sensitive political reforms and policies for Malaysia.

Systematic Searching Strategies

The review followed a detailed systematic search approach which followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol guidelines [33]. The search process consisted of three sequential phases which included identification followed by screening and then inclusion. The systematic review process followed a structured methodology to evaluate literature about women's political leadership in Malaysia.

Identification

The identification stage began with creating a methodical search plan to gather all relevant empirical studies from 1987 through 2025. The research used Scopus and Google Scholar and MyJurnal and Web of Science databases to achieve maximum coverage of relevant information. The databases were chosen because they provide extensive multidisciplinary coverage and they contain Malaysian-focused studies and they are accessible for political and social science research.

The search strategy used Boolean operators to link keywords which helped retrieve different term variations relevant to the research subject. The following search string was used:

("women" OR "female") AND ("political leadership" OR "political participation") AND ("Malaysia") AND ("barriers" OR "enablers" OR "challenges" OR "facilitators")

The search syntax underwent refinement through the addition of synonyms and related terms and subject-specific phrases to address the different terminology used by authors across disciplines.

The manual hand-searching method was applied to review reference lists from selected articles. The snowballing technique revealed more relevant studies which the initial database search had missed because of limited indexing or inconsistent keyword assignment. The snowballing method led to the discovery of six more articles which increased the total number of identified records to 69.

The reference management software was used to eliminate duplicate records from the dataset. The screening process revealed 15 duplicate records that were eliminated from the study. The screening process resulted in 54 unique articles that advanced to the next stage of the review.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A systematic review process began with the identification of 54 unique articles which underwent a rigorous phase of inclusion and exclusion criteria evaluation to determine their suitability for this review. The established criteria functioned to maintain high-quality literature which directly addressed the research question.

The research criteria established that studies needed to be empirical in nature through qualitative or quantitative or mixed-method approaches. The review used data-driven insights instead of theoretical speculation because of this requirement. The research criteria demanded studies to examine women's political involvement and

leadership roles specifically within Malaysia. The review included articles that appeared in English or Bahasa Malaysia because these languages represent the primary academic languages in Malaysia. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles from 1987 to 2025 to gather both historical and contemporary insights.

The review process included specific criteria to eliminate studies which failed to match the review's objectives. The review excluded research that studied leadership only in domains outside politics such as business and civil society and non-governmental organizations. The review excluded theoretical papers which failed to present empirical evidence or data analysis. The review eliminated all commentaries as well as editorials together with conference abstracts and literature reviews. The review excluded studies that focused on gender equality in general terms because they did not directly address political leadership or representation. The exclusion criteria maintained both focus and analytical clarity by removing studies that did not directly address political leadership or representation.

The systematic review process using inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in the selection of 17 articles which formed the basis for this review. The selected studies made up the final collection of literature which identified and synthesized the factors affecting women's political leadership in Malaysia.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The research team developed a standardized data extraction matrix to ensure methodological consistency and rigor when collecting data from the 17 included studies. Systematic review methodology best practices emphasize that this approach fulfills requirements for transparent and replicable data collection procedures [33]. The matrix contained three essential fields which extracted author(s) and year of publication together with research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method) and vital barriers and enablers to women's political leadership from each study.

The research extracted more specific details regarding the intersectional elements studied by the papers while accounting for gender relationships with ethnicity and religion and age and socioeconomic status which play vital roles in Malaysia's sociopolitical environment. The research noted political party and institutional context while examining how women progressed through leadership structures between Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) political organizations. The recorded studies' ethnic or regional focus included research on Chinese women in politics and youth participation throughout particular geographic areas.

After finishing data extraction the research team applied thematic analysis to qualitative data according to Braun & Clarke (2006) which identifies and analyzes and reports patterns (themes) in qualitative data. The researchers performed multiple readings of extracted data while assigning codes which eventually merged into dominant thematic categories. The dominant themes of analysis included "patriarchal party structures" alongside "gatekeeping in candidate selection" and "youth-driven activism" and "civil society advocacy" and "intersectional exclusion" specifically affecting women who belonged to ethnic minorities and resided in rural areas.

The research team evaluated the coding process and thematic categorization to improve the validity of the synthesis. The research team used group discussions to resolve disagreements through consensus building that followed the recommendations regarding thematic reliability and researcher triangulation [32]. The collaborative validation process confirmed that the synthesis accurately depicted the diverse complex realities of women's political leadership experiences in Malaysia.

Quality Appraisal

The reliability and credibility of synthesized findings in this review required a systematic quality appraisal of all 17 included studies. The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) version 2018 served as the appraisal instrument because it validates the assessment of qualitative and quantitative and mixed-method studies within systematic reviews [24] – [25]. The MMAT proved suitable for this review because it supports multiple research designs which matched the diverse methodologies found in the literature.

Two reviewers independently evaluated each article through the MMAT criteria which were adapted to match the study design. Qualitative studies received assessment based on research question appropriateness and data collection method adequacy and data interpretation coherence and researcher reflexivity. The evaluation of quantitative studies focused on sample representativeness and measurement tools and nonresponse bias risk and statistical analysis appropriateness. The assessment of mixed-methods studies included evaluations of both qualitative and quantitative component quality and the justification for employing mixed methods.

The reviewers resolved their disagreements through discussion to achieve consensus which reduced individual bias and improved inter-rater reliability during the appraisal process. The collaborative evaluation process guaranteed both fairness and methodological soundness for each study assessment. The 17 studies underwent thorough evaluation which confirmed they met the essential quality standards needed to participate in the review. The review's thematic synthesis received support from studies which maintained acceptable standards in their design and data collection and analytical methods.

RESULTS

The thematic synthesis of the 17 studies about women's political leadership in Malaysia revealed multiple challenges and facilitators affecting their political leadership success. Five major themes emerged from thematic analysis where three dealt with obstacles and two addressed enabling aspects [14]. Systemic institutional and sociocultural elements emerge through these themes which researchers developed from repeated codes in their extracted data.

Patriarchal Party Structures and Gendered Gatekeeping (n = 13)

The research indicates that political parties operate within a powerful patriarchal structure which blocks women from leadership roles because male-dominated decision-making systems and strict candidate selection methods dominate political processes. The gendered exclusion operates both formally and informally to affect the political future of women who want to advance past grassroots or symbolic roles. Among 13 studies reviewed, three studies [2] – [3], [35] – [36] showed that party leadership structures built on patriarchal principles create gatekeeping systems which are deeply rooted in party organizational structures. Women generally receive assignments to roles like mobilizers and community liaison officers and party spokespersons for welfare and family and educational issues yet they are denied important decision-making authority in core political operations and policy formation and election competitions. The perception forms that women serve as additional forces rather than being fundamental to party success and survival. Young women entering politics experience political marginalization because they receive socialization that fails to train them for leadership positions which diminishes their visibility and political influence.

The institutional disadvantage for women deepens because nomination procedures remain unclear and candidate selection criteria are vague which enables elites to make discretionary decisions that prefer male candidates. Research shows how male-dominated party elites control the “winnable” constituencies which have higher chances of electoral victory thus forcing women to run in marginal seats with less resources and symbolic value [7] – [9]. These institutional procedures establish structural obstacles which decrease female political election prospects while maintaining the societal notion that political leadership belongs to men. The current situation demonstrates how political institution patriarchy functions through multiple rules and power systems which systematically limit women's opportunities. Women face dual exclusion because party gender-based leadership barriers prevent their rise to power while nomination processes deny them meaningful political representation at the national level.

Intersectional Exclusion and Identity-Based Barriers (n = 9)

According to the research [20], [27], [37] – [38] as well as eight other research papers women from various ethnic backgrounds religious groups and younger generations face multiple barriers to political leadership. According to the research political exclusion affects women in ways that combine gender discrimination with ethnic discrimination religious discrimination age discrimination and geographical discrimination. Women from rural areas and non-Malay communities face dual barriers to political recognition because they exist outside the

mainstream social framework. Multiple marginalized status describes a phenomenon which scholars define as the deepening of gender inequality because of ethnic and class-based discrimination. Rural women who are younger and belong to minority ethnic groups face restrictions in building political connections because they lack access to resources and mentorship which develop their leadership skills. The established patriarchal party elites maintain control through their selection of candidates from their established networks and family backgrounds which reduces the opportunities for diverse women leaders to join politics.

The study [37] – [38] shows that Chinese women in Peninsular Malaysia encounter cultural obstacles which combine patriarchal family traditions with language preferences and economic priorities that decrease their ability to maintain political engagement. The use of Malay as the dominant political language functions as a discreet yet significant barrier that leads to the exclusion of Chinese women leaders when their language skills are not seen as proficient enough. The PAS party maintains gender-based limitations and religious doctrines that stop women from contesting male leadership positions and challenging authority [7]. The party's structural barriers force female members to work in auxiliary positions that focus on welfare and religious education instead of leading policy-making efforts or taking party leadership roles. The study demonstrates that different barriers including ethnicity and religion and age and rurality and language work together to create multiple exclusion barriers that block women from political leadership positions thus restricting Malaysia's ability to achieve inclusive governance.

Media Stereotyping and Gendered Public Perception (n = 6)

Research studies conducted in six different investigations analyzed media and social beliefs to demonstrate how they negatively affect public perceptions of female politicians [1], [23]. Research findings demonstrate that news media consistently presents political women through gendered stereotypes by emphasizing their personal lives over their political achievements. People tend to evaluate female politicians through their physical appearance together with their clothing selection and family duties and marital status instead of evaluating them based on their political stance or professional accomplishments. The practice of gendered evaluation supports stereotypes that suggest women should handle domestic work rather than lead in public roles. The doubt cast on women's political credentials leads to reduced self-confidence which prevents them from pursuing long-term political goals. Such depictions simultaneously influence personal confidence among women and create widespread doubts about female leadership abilities which solidifies existing cultural and institutional obstacles in party politics and election contests.

Women in politics face a dual challenge from digital and social media platforms because these tools simultaneously help and harm their political careers. Women leaders can use social media to establish direct contact with their constituents while increasing transparency through channels which bypass traditional media control. Female politicians gain power through this empowerment factor to show their accomplishments while expressing their policy positions personally. Social media intensifies gendered abuse which results in targeted online harassment against women combined with coordinated efforts to damage their authority [10] – [12]. The online attacks duplicate traditional patriarchal beliefs by targeting women's moral character and their feminine presentation and their failure to fulfill societal gender norms instead of their political initiatives. Political discourse experiences a discouraging effect on women because of these events which could drive young women to avoid political careers altogether. The transformative potential of digital media to boost women's political voice exists alongside its ability to maintain existing inequalities which create the same hostile attitudes that block women's political advancement in traditional political structures.

Youth-Led Activism and Political Reawakening (n = 5)

Youth-led political participation patterns emerged after GE14 in 2018 before gaining more momentum through the Undi18 amendment [1] – [3]. The major institutional change created fresh voting population and political actors who formed new political voices across Malaysia. Young activists used social media and university networks along with civil society organizations to emerge as leading voices who fought for political accountability and democratic reforms and gender equality. Youth activism confronted traditional party authority structures that typically ignore young people to show they create new political discourse as well as consume political messages. Young voters have driven significant democratic development in Malaysia through their

political participation because they prioritize inclusivity representation and anti-corruption issues in national debates.

Through youth-led grassroots movements women now have multiple ways to participate in politics through structures beyond traditional party systems. These movements create spaces for young women to become leaders while they develop campaigns and advocate policy changes without facing traditional patriarchal barriers in established political parties. Women use civic activism together with issue-based coalitions and online mobilization to gain increasing influence in determining Malaysia's political agenda. These grassroots initiatives bring new leadership models that function horizontally while promoting collaboration between members as opposed to traditional party structures which use strict hierarchical systems. These spaces both develop women's political goals and create progressive governance approaches that are sensitive to gender issues. The political culture of Malaysia shows a lasting change due to youth activism which serves as both a learning environment and a driving force for creating an equal political environment.

Institutional Support and Legislative Quotas (n = 4)

Institutional support mechanisms such as gender quotas, leadership training programs and civil society organization backing according to [4] – [6], [30] – [31] allowed women to participate in politics. Some political parties in Malaysia have established voluntary commitments to increase women's representation yet the country lacks a national gender quota system leading to minor improvements in female candidate numbers in certain coalitions. Voluntary measures remain inconsistent between political parties since they exist only through the political willingness of party elites which produces unstable and unpredictable increases in women's representation. The initiatives have established entry points for women to display themselves within party organizations while they work to debunk patriarchal beliefs that political leadership belongs only to men. The mechanisms present in the system indicate that institutional reforms whether legally mandatory or voluntary establish fundamental pathways for women's participation even in societies with deeply embedded gender stereotypes.

Training programs alongside quota pledges which are delivered by NGOs, women's advocacy groups and academic institutions have proven essential for teaching novice female candidates the required skills needed to succeed in Malaysia's political environment. These programs deliver fundamental capabilities to women including campaign management and public speaking and media relations and policy analysis and offer guidance from experienced mentors who help new women navigate political complexities. The programs develop women's technical abilities as well as their confidence and political identity which helps them fight more effectively in male-dominated party settings. Civil society organizations have connected female political aspirants with institutional structures through their efforts to transform systems and create public engagement spaces while making women's voices louder in public dialogue. The support mechanisms show that external institutional backing together with grassroots advocacy serves as the foundation for maintaining women's political participation as they work to reshape gender dynamics in Malaysian politics.

Table I Summary of Thematic Distribution

Theme	Number of Studies
Patriarchal Party Structures & Gatekeeping	13
Intersectional Exclusion & Identity-Based Barriers	9
Media Stereotyping & Gendered Public Perception	6
Youth-Led Activism & Political Reawakening	5
Institutional Support & Legislative Quotas	4

The research demonstrates that structural and sociocultural barriers persist deeply within the Malaysian political system yet new opportunities through youth mobilization and institutional reforms and intersectional awareness are starting to transform the political environment. The combination of patriarchal norms with ethnic and religious hierarchies creates significant obstacles for achieving political leadership equality.

DISCUSSION

This research evaluates the different factors which affect women political leadership in Malaysia by analyzing 17 studies. According to research findings women face multiple obstacles in political power acquisition yet new evidence shows promising developments in youth involvement and civil society backing and institutional resources. This research provides new insights about gender and political representation in Southeast Asia because women face obstacles to leadership although individual examples of success have been documented [19], [29].

This review demonstrates that political structures which uphold patriarchal values represent a fundamental obstacle for women who wish to advance in political leadership positions. The progression of female political leaders encounters substantial barriers because male-dominated party structures control the hierarchy according to research findings in thirteen studies. Malaysian political parties from secular and religious backgrounds maintain power over key leadership positions and electoral candidate selections because of their belief in winnability and tradition [2] – [3]. Systemic exclusion in political parties worldwide demonstrates that party gatekeeping mechanisms represent one of the most enduring obstacles to gender parity in leadership [16], [28].

Nine studies applied intersectionality as an analytical tool to identify the combined forms of discrimination that affect women who belong to ethnic minorities and rural areas and follow conservative religious beliefs. Peninsular Malaysia Chinese female politicians experience both gender prejudice as well as minority ethnic discrimination inside Malay-dominant political parties [35 – [38]. Women in PAS confront barriers which stem from religious gender rules that limit leadership roles to men [7]. The findings support Crenshaw's theory [18] of intersectionality while corresponding with Southeast Asian scholarly work about how gender combines with ethnicity and political culture in complex ways [22].

Six studies revealed how societal public perception alongside media coverage subjected women politicians to excessive scrutiny about their looks and marriage status and emotional responses instead of analyzing their professional capabilities [10] – [12], [23]. The stereotypes present in media content regarding gender continue to shape the public's doubtful views about female political leaders as seen in Western democracies [15], [39].

The review demonstrates optimistic changes in political engagement among youth groups with special attention to young women. According to five research studies younger groups who engage with civil society and digital empowerment tools now challenge traditional norms and fight for greater political inclusion [1] - [3]. The Undi18 law established a crucial turning point for Malaysia because it lowered the voting age and enabled young citizens to participate in politics while building an inclusive political system [4] – [6].

The research examines how informal quotas and capacity-building programs along with mentorship schemes function as important tools that support women's political leadership development according to four studies. Although Malaysia does not have gender-based quota laws civil society partnerships with parties have established new pathways for female candidacy and leadership growth [30] – [31]. Research demonstrates that quota systems together with leadership pipelines boost women's political representation when these systems receive continued support and accountability frameworks [13], [18].

From a policy perspective, the review emphasizes the need for institutional reforms within political parties, including transparent nomination procedures and gender-sensitized leadership training. Policy frameworks require intersectionality integration because women from diverse ethnic and religious and socioeconomic backgrounds face different and multiple forms of exclusion (Smooth, 2011).

The evaluation contains certain boundaries. The research included only articles from English and Malay-language peer-reviewed journals which may have omitted essential non-indexed sources or grey literature. The research period covered from 1987 to 2025 which might have altered the way women participated in politics because of political developments during this time. The study followed PRISMA standards while using a validated quality evaluation system (Hong et al., 2018) to guarantee both methodological quality and relevant research findings.

The political obstacles Malaysian women encounter remain significant but structural opportunities together with cultural changes primarily among young people and civil society organizations create vital pathways for transformation. The research demonstrates women's political leadership in Malaysia matters beyond mere representation because it directly affects democratic legitimacy as well as social justice and national development.

CONCLUSIONS

Empirical research conducted across 17 studies between 1987 and 2025 examines barriers and enabling factors that affect female political leadership in Malaysia. The recent progress in youth activism and civil society engagement has not eliminated the persistent structural and cultural obstacles that restrict women from gaining meaningful political leadership positions. Women face continuous barriers to power access because of party systems controlled by men together with traditional gender norms and media stereotypes and different disadvantages based on ethnic and religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. The systematic patterns of barriers exist as permanent features in both political institutions and Malaysian social attitudes.

The review discovered both positive trends alongside current barriers. Young people's political activism along with unofficial support networks and organizational capacity-building programs within political institutions and civil society organizations establish fresh opportunities for women to demonstrate leadership. The Undi18 voting rights expansion has motivated a younger voter population that could modify political dynamics for the future. Studies demonstrate that gender parity accelerators include institutional mechanisms like mentorship programs and informal quotas and targeted advocacy when they receive consistent implementation and political support.

The research provides multiple policy recommendations to create an inclusive political environment in Malaysia which supports gender equality. The adoption of gender quotas through legislative or internal party mandates represents an essential solution to fix past underrepresentation of women. The international experience shows that quotas operate as fast-acting solutions for enhancing women's numbers in decision-making political bodies. Political parties need to transform their inner workings by making nomination procedures transparent while creating gender-balanced selection panels that establish structured leadership training for female candidates.

The government needs to understand how various identity factors heighten political exclusion for certain female groups especially those who belong to Indigenous communities and ethnic minorities as well as those from rural areas and conservative religious backgrounds. All leadership development strategies and political empowerment programs require intersectionality integration to deliver genuine inclusion and tailored responses for diverse women's experiences. The public discourse needs to undergo a transformation alongside media representation of women in politics. The training of media professionals together with communication professionals in gender-sensitive reporting practices should occur simultaneously with public awareness initiatives which work to eliminate gender stereotypes and enhance women's political presence.

The education system needs to integrate civic and political learning programs throughout secondary and tertiary educational institutions. The development of political literacy combined with leadership aspirations and civic responsibility among young women from early ages will establish a more representative and equitable future political system for Malaysia. Civil society organizations (CSOs) should work with government entities through grants and technical partnerships and joint initiatives to enhance grassroots leadership and advocacy efforts. The primary function of CSOs involves connecting policy development with practical implementation through training programs and mentorship and secure political engagement spaces.

The government should create and sustain an integrated national database which tracks political participation statistics by gender. The database enables stakeholders to track progress while assessing interventions which helps create policies with evidence to reduce gender-based leadership gaps. Data collection plays a crucial role in institutional accountability and initiative evaluation yet this requires specific information that can demonstrate women empowerment efforts.

The systematic review shows that women's political leadership in Malaysia represents a critical element which makes democracy legitimate and produces inclusive governance and sustainable national development. The future demands powerful reforms backed by evidence to break down structural obstacles while understanding

diverse identities and building supportive systems that enable women of all backgrounds to take leadership roles. A comprehensive and enduring commitment is needed to achieve the complete potential of women's political leadership in Malaysia.

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