POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN IRAN
AFTER THE 1979 ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

By
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Chairperson: Dr Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, PhD

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This research describes the political participation of women in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Research objectives were achieved by respondents answering three questions: 1) How do women politicians describe their experiences about the cultural obstacles to women in Iranian politics? 2) From their perspective, what factors have they perceived as structural obstacles to women in the politics of Iran? 3) What lessons can women draw from their experiences which might suggest ways to increase the proportion of women in similar positions?

The research employs a qualitative case study method and the primary data was collected mainly through in-depth interviews with thirteen informants using a
purposive technique. The study informants were chosen from Iranian women who were at least members of a political party and with more than 10 years political experience.

Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, and field notes have been taken to record the data. A qualitative analysis was employed to transform the data into a workable form. Trustworthiness and ethical practice were adhered to during the whole process.

The research findings showed that female Iranian politicians agree that they face cultural and structural obstacles to their entrance into top political positions. The data revealed that gender stereotypes and a patriarchal culture act as cultural obstacles, while inadequate educational and financial resources are structural barriers to Iranian women in frontline politics.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this research. This study found agreement among the informants that women faced cultural and structural barriers in their efforts to enter into top political positions in Iran. A key finding of this study was how the level of education and occupation increase women's mobility, making them more confident regarding major political decisions. According to this view, the more women are educated and employed gainfully, the more involved they are in power decision-making. Therefore, taken together, educational and financial resources appear to contribute more effectively to boost women’s self-reliance and enhance their role in Iranian politics.
The study findings also strongly support the gender differences theory in terms of cultural perspective. This emphasizes that the low level of political participation by women is influenced by three factors namely biological, situational and socialization. The main argument for these factors is that women’s participation in politics is influenced by gender and culture ideology, which is in turn, socially and culturally determined. According to this belief, women are inculcated that politics is the domain of men only and incorporate it into their self-conceptions. From these factors, cultural norms such as gender stereotypes which are the result of patriarchy, have preserved the definition of politics as being men’s work. As the data shows, gender differences were reflected in informants’ experiences. They had observed gender stereotypes as well as patriarchal and male dominance during their political activities. Therefore, these factors act as cultural obstacles to women’s presence in the politics of Iran. This study furthermore promoted a better theoretical understanding and knowledge in the area of political participation of women; and thus also contributes to women studies generally. Finally, some implications of the study were presented.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah Politik dan Kerajaan

PENYERTAAN WANITA DALAM POLITIK DI IRAN
SELEPAS REVOLUSI ISLAM 1979

Oleh
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Mac 2012

Pengerusi: Dr Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, PhD

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Kajian ini menggambarkan penyertaan wanita dalam politik di Iran selepas Revolusi Islam 1979. Objektif kajian ini telah dicapai melalui jawapan kepada tiga persoalan: 1) Bagaimanakah ahli politik wanita menggambarkan pengalaman mereka mengenai halangan budaya terhadap golongan wanita dalam politik di Iran? 2) Dari sudut pandangan mereka, apakah faktor yang mereka anggap sebagai halangan struktural untuk wanita dalam politik di Iran? dan 3) Apakah pengajaran yang dipelajari oleh wanita di Iran daripada pengalaman mereka yang mungkin dapat membantu dalam meningkatkan kedudukan wanita Iran dalam politik di Iran?

Satu kaedah kajian kes kualitatif telah digunakan dalam kajian ini dan data primer telah dikumpul terutamanya melalui wawancara secara mendalam...
with thirteen respondents using purposive technique. Informants for this study were selected from the group of women with the most political experience among female politicians in Iran.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and field notes were taken to collect data. Descriptive data analysis method was used to transform the collected data into a form that can be studied.

Confidentiality and ethical practices were emphasized throughout the data collection process.

The study findings show that women politicians in Iran believe that they face cultural and structural barriers at the initial stage of moving to a higher position in the political structure. Data shows that gender stereotypes and patriarchal culture are cultural barriers faced, while inadequate education and financial resources are structural barriers faced by Iranian women in formal politics.

Several conclusions were drawn from this study. This study found that there is agreement among informants that women face cultural and structural barriers at the initial stage of moving to a higher political position in Iran. The most important contribution of this study also shows that the educational and employment stages can increase women's mobility and self-confidence in making decisions.
yang penting dalam politik. Dapatan ini mempunyai sokongan kuat daripada teori perbezaan jantina dalam perspektif struktural. Menurut perspektif ini, wanita yang berpendidikan tinggi dan bekerja mempunyai penglibatan yang tinggi dalam kuasa membuat keputusan. Sehubungan itu, sumber pendidikan dan kewangan bersama-sama tampil untuk menyumbang kepada keberkesanan untuk meningkatkan kebergantungan diri wanita dan meningkatkan peranan mereka dalam politik di Iran.


Seterusnya, kajian ini dapat melahirkan pemahaman teori yang lebih baik dan pengetahuan dalam bidang penyertaan wanita dalam politik, kerana kajian ini juga turut menyumbang kepada bidang kajian wanita. Selain itu, berdasarkan latar belakang responden, dapat disimpulkan bahawa mereka datang daripada tahap pendidikan, ekonomi dan politik yang berbeza.
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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on March 2012 to conduct the final examination of Seyedeh Nosrat Shojaei on her thesis entitled "Political Participation of Women in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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