



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN IRAN  
AFTER THE 1979 ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

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**FEM 2012 16**

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**By**

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**March 2012**

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor for Philosophy

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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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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

dengan tiga belas responden menggunakan teknik purposif. Informan untuk kajian ini dipilih dari kalangan wanita yang mempunyai paling banyak pengalaman politik di antara ahli politik wanita di Iran.

Wawancara ini telah dirakamkan dan ditranskriarkan, dan nota lapangan telah diambil untuk mengumpul data. Kaedah analisis data deskriptif telah digunakan untuk menukarkan data yang dikumpul kedalam bentuk yang boleh dikaji. Kepercayaan dan amalan etika amat dititikberatkan sepanjang proses pengumpulan data kajian.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa ahli politik wanita di Iran bersetuju bahawa mereka menghadapi halangan budaya dan halangan struktur pada peringkat permulaan mereka melangkah ke kedudukan yang lebih tinggi dalam struktur politik. Data menunjukkan bahawa stereotaip jantina dan budaya patriarki adalah halangan budaya yang dihadapi, manakala pendidikan yang tidak mencukupi dan kekurangan sumber kewangan adalah halangan struktural yang dihadapi oleh wanita Iran dalam politik formal.

Beberapa kesimpulan didapati dari kajian ini. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa terdapat persetujuan di antara informan bahawa golongan wanita menghadapi halangan budaya dan halangan struktural pada permulaan mereka melangkah ke kedudukan politik yang lebih tinggi di Iran. Sumbangan yang paling penting dari kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa tahap pendidikan dan pekerjaan dapat meningkatkan mobiliti wanita dan keyakinan diri dalam membuat keputusan

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.

Dapatan kajian ini juga merupakan sokongan kuat untuk teori perbezaan jantina dalam perspektif budaya. Perspektif ini menekankan bahawa penglibatan wanita yang rendah dalam politik dipengaruhi oleh tiga faktor, termasuklah faktor biologi, tempat, dan faktor sosialisasi. Hujah utama yang membawa kepada faktor-faktor ini adalah bahawa wanita berpendapat bahawa politik adalah urusan lelaki dan menggabungkannya ke dalam konsep sendiri mereka sendiri. Data juga menunjukkan bahawa perbezaan jantina digambarkan melalui pengalaman responden. Mereka mengamati stereotaip jantina, patriarkal, dan dominan lelaki melalui kegiatan politik lelaki. Oleh kerana itu, faktor-faktor ini merupakan halangan budaya kepada kehadiran wanita 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.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is with great pleasure that I express my appreciation to the various people who provided me with their full assistance and support in completing this thesis. I extend my deepest appreciation to all my supervisory committee members: Dr. Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, Associate Prof. Dr. Zaid B. Ahmad and Dr. Sarvinder Kaur Sandhu for their guidance and constructive criticisms.

I would also like to thank those mentioned below, who have enabled me to embark on and complete this study with their help, support and personal encouragement:

- The soul of my father, Haj Seyed Mousa Shojaei, who always believed in me and encouraged me to continue pursuing knowledge to the highest possible level.
- To my mother, Seyedeh Fatemeh Mazarei, who has encouraged and supported me through her love.
- I owe my loving thanks to my husband Hossien Asayesh, who gave me the support and encouragement to follow my dreams. Indeed, without his support it would have been impossible for me to finish this work.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to all the people who attempt to improve women's presence in the politics of Iran.

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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