

Muslim-Malay Women in Political Leadership: Navigating Challenges and Shaping the Future

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Abstract

Women's participation in politics, particularly in leadership roles, remains a contentious topic within Muslim communities. This situation is due primarily to the prevalent interpretation that men are inherently more qualified for national leadership positions, as influenced by the patriarchal structure of society and persistent stereotypes that undermine women's capabilities. These cultural and societal barriers hinder women's ascension to the highest echelons of political power, especially in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. This study seeks to analyze Islamic jurisprudence originating from the Quran and hadith interpretation of women's status to address the common misconception that Islam inherently supports misogyny. It then contextually puts the analysis of Malay women's obstacles in achieving political leadership in Malaysia and Indonesia. This socio-legal research is aimed at understanding the complexities of gender-based challenges in political settings caused by prevailing non-moderate interpretation of Sharia sources combined with patriarchal culture in the Malay world. It reveals that historically, in Malay, women have been entrusted with national leadership responsibilities. Similarly, from an Islamic perspective, there appears to be a misinterpretation of hadith regarding the prohibition of appointing women as national leaders. Thus, this traditional culture that permits women to hold leadership positions must be re-polished because women can utilize their liberties, including leadership, previously denied by non-moderate views.

Keywords: Gender Analysis, Leadership, Patriarchy, Tradition, Women

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Introduction

The predominance of men in political and leadership roles has led to a conceptualization of politicians or political leaders traditionally aligned with traits often associated with masculinity, accompanied by diminishing regard for characteristics typically perceived as feminine.¹ In many nations, such as America and Japan, during election periods, gender stereotypes play a significant role in shaping voter perceptions of female candidates. These stereotypes often depict women as affectionate, kind, helpful, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, and gentle. On the other hand, male candidates are commonly perceived to represent qualities such as dominance, passion, and aggression. This correlation between femininity and commonality, alongside masculinity and leadership, contributes to the notion that women may not possess the inherent traits required for traditional leadership roles.²

This phenomenon makes women's political leadership a sensitive issue and has become a polemic in Islamic society. This problem is due to the patriarchal structure of many societies, where leadership roles are generally attributed to men, who are typically perceived as more dominant. According to the 2019 statistics from UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), women occupy only 24.3% of the national parliament seats worldwide. Additionally, 38 countries have less than 10% female representation in

¹ Johnson, Carol, and Blair Williams, "Gender and Political Leadership in a Time of COVID," *Politics & Gender* 16, no. 4 (2020): 943-950.

² Endo, Yuya, and Yoshikuni Ono, "Opposition to women political leaders: Gender bias and stereotypes of politicians among Japanese voters," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 44, no. 3 (2023): 371-386, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2023.2174365>.

their parliaments. The proportion of women in legislative bodies varies significantly across different global regions. For instance, the representation of women in parliament stands at 42.5% in Nordic countries, 30.7% in the Americas, 27.4% in Europe excluding Nordic countries, 23.7% in sub-Saharan Africa, 19.6% in Asia, 18.4% in the Pacific, and 18.1% in the Middle East and North Africa.³ These disparities highlight the ongoing challenge of achieving gender parity in political representation worldwide.

In Islamic society, women's participation in politics is often linked to a hadith where the Prophet is reported to have prohibited women from assuming leadership roles. However, according to al-Qaradawi, this prohibition contradicts the evidence presented in the Qur'an concerning women's leadership at the highest level, exemplified by Queen Balqis, the ruling monarch of the Kingdom of Sheba.⁴

This scenario resonates with the political history of Islamic societies in the Malay Archipelago. In Aceh, a similar issue emerged during the reign of the fourth Sultanah, Sultanah Kamalat Syah. A group of Muslim scholars sought a fatwa from the Sharif in Mecca, and the fatwa's content underscored that a woman should not govern an Islamic nation.⁵ Consequently, this perspective led to the termination of female leadership in Aceh.

³ UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2019," April 20, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/Women-in-politics-2019-map-en.pdf>.

⁴ Al-Qudsy, Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, "Kepimpinan Wanita Menurut Perspektif Siasah Syariyyah," *Jurnal 'Ulwan* 6, no. 3 (2021): 111-135.

⁵ Kana Safrina Rouzi, Halim Purnomo, Muh. Mustakim, and Faisal Bin Husen Ismail, "Transformational Leadership on Women's

Essentially, this textual literalist viewpoint reflects a patriarchal legalistic orientation that has heavily influenced the interpretation of Quranic texts, often shaping the mindset of scholars with a patriarchal theological orientation. This rigid interpretation is further compounded by the scholars' interaction with prevailing local traditions and cultures, which tend to reinforce patriarchal beliefs.⁶ The stronghold of this patriarchal ethos has, in turn, contributed to the emergence of misogynistic attitudes and views within these scholarly circles.

Despite some advancements, the dynamics of Islamic societies have shifted to include greater female participation in the public sphere, attributed mainly to more equitable educational opportunities for both sons and daughters.⁷ Nonetheless, these changes have not significantly altered the landscape of women's political leadership, as they still face barriers to achieving top positions in national governance. This disparity is evident in Malay Muslim nations like Indonesia, where only 20.7 percent of Cabinet members are women, Malaysia with 16.7 percent, and Brunei with 11.1 percent. The representation is even lower in parliamentary participation: Indonesia records a mere 21.6 percent, Malaysia 13.5

Leadership in Islam," *Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1 (Januari 2022): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.19184/JFGS.V2I1.29200>.

⁶ Napitupulu, Dedi Sahputra, Salminawati Salminawati, and Novita Sari, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Islam," *Al-Muaddib: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (2020): 119-133, <https://doi.org/10.31604/muaddib.v5i1.119-133>.

⁷ Abd Rahim, Rahimin Affandi, and Nor Adina Abd Kadir, "Wacana Bias Gender dalam Masyarakat Melayu di Malaysia: Analisis Kritis," *The Malaysian Journal of Social Administration* 9, no. 1 (2013): 107-128; Ramli, Mohd Anuar, "Bias Gender dalam Masyarakat Muslim: Antara Ajaran Islam dengan Tradisi Tempatan," *Jurnal Fiqh* 7 (2010): 49-70.

percent, and Brunei only 9.1 percent. These figures underscore the persistent challenges women who seek leadership roles in political domains within these societies face.⁸

Concerning the issue, this study examines Muslim women's political leadership, focusing on the historical context during the golden era of women's political leadership in Muslim societies, especially in Malay. Moreover, the research will analyze the issue of women's leadership from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, specifically by scrutinizing hadiths that seemingly convey negative implications regarding women's roles in political leadership.

Islamic scholars hold varying perspectives on women's leadership in the political sphere. The first perspective, rooted in conservative literalism, strictly prohibits any form of women's leadership. This view characterizes women as primarily reproductive and domestic, relegating them to a traditional role within the household.⁹ The second perspective, held by contextual liberals, interprets leadership as an obligation not constrained by gender but focused on individual capability, suggesting that women can assume roles traditionally occupied by men. The third perspective represents a moderate stance, acknowledging women's potential for leadership but restricting it to specific areas.¹⁰

⁸ UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2023," April 20, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023>.

⁹ Mark R. Thompson, "The rise and downfall of dynastic female leaders in Asia," in *Asian Women Leadership*, ed. Chin-Chung Chao, Louisa Ha (London: Routledge, 2019), 49–62.

¹⁰ Dedi Epriadi, Dedi Epriadi, and Zuhdi Arman, "Analisis Terhadap Kepemimpinan Perempuan Ditinjau Dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam Dan Hukum Indonesia," *Al-Muaddib: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2020): 217–23,

Thus, this research adopts the moderate view (the third view), advocating for a balanced approach that addresses contemporary challenges while respecting local cultural contexts. By embracing this perspective, the study aims to broaden the scope of women's participation in leadership from an Islamic viewpoint while simultaneously recognizing and working within the constraints of male-dominated cultural traditions. This approach seeks to empower women's leadership by integrating Islamic principles with local cultural understandings, fostering a more inclusive environment for women's participation in political leadership.

Muslim Malay-Women's Political Leadership: A Historical View

Women's leadership is not a sporadic episode in human historiography, whether in Islamic society or not. In the tradition of Islamic ruling, there are a few episodes of women's leadership. For example, Princess Radiyah Begum Jalal al-Din (1236AD) was in India¹¹. So was in the Malay world, women will accede the throne to continue the dynasty as it was in Bentan that was ruled by Uwan Seri Bani (Queen Sakidar Syah) and in Majapahit by Raden Galoh Awi Kesuma (Princess Naya Kesuma).¹²

Between around 1584AD and 1688AD, upon the demise of Sultan Mansur Shah, the state of Patani was ruled by four female Queens with the Siamese title of *Phra-cao*. The Queen and people of Siam were called the *Phra Nang Chao Yang*, and the Malays were called *Raja Nang*

<https://doi.org/10.31604/muaddib.v5i2.217-223>.

¹¹ Charis Waddy, *Women in Muslim History* (London: Longman, 1980), 91.

¹² Desi Purnama Sari, "Ulama's Perceptions of Women Involvement in Politics in South Aceh," *Al-Lubb: Journal of Islamic Thought and Muslim Culture (JITMC)* 2, no. 1 (2020): 64–77.

Cayam.¹³ The first female Queen was Raja Hijau or Queen Green (1584AD-1616AD), who was believed to be responsible for building the irrigation canal in her state. The second was Raja Biru or Queen Blue (1616AD-1624AD), and while under the rule of Raja Ungu or Queen Purple of the state of Patani, the state achieved its glorious period. The fourth female Queen of Patani was Raja Kuning or Queen Yellow (1635AD-1688AD).¹⁴

At the same time, while the female Queen ruled Patani, women took the throne in Kelantan. From 1610AD-1667AD, Cik Siti Wan Kembang ruled from Gunung Cinta Wangsa (Mount et al.) in Ulu Kelantan. Under her reign, trade had thrived. Her foster daughter Puteri Saadong (Princess Saadong) replaced her until 1671 AD.¹⁵

It was the same in Aceh, where women had also ruled from 1641AD-1699AD. Four queens ruled the government of Aceh Dar al-Salam, namely Sultanah Taj al-'Alam Safiyat al-Din Syah (1641AD-1671AD), during which the state had a glorious period¹⁶, followed by Sultanah Naqiyat al-Din Nur al-'Alam (1675AD-1678AD), Sultan 'Inayat Syah (1678AD-1688AD) dan Sultan Kamalat Syah (1688-

¹³ Muhammad Zamberi A. Malek, *Umat Islam Patani: Sejarah dan Politik* (Kuala Lumpur: Hizbi, 1993), 48; Ayah Bengnara, *Patani Dahulu dan Sekarang* (Patani: Panel Penyelidikan Angkatan al-Patani, 1976), 15.

¹⁴ A Teeuw and D K Wyatt, *Hikayat Patani* (Netherlands: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkund, 1970), 16.

¹⁵ Mohd. Taib Osman, *Hikayat Seri Kelantan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004); Nik Mohamad Nik Mohd. Salleh, "Sistem Politik dan Kesultanan Kelantan," in *Kelantan Zaman Awal: Kajian Arkeologi dan Sejarah di Malaysia*, ed. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abd Rahman (Kota Bharu: Perbadanan Muzium Negeri Kelantan, 1986), 38-39.

¹⁶ Norshahril Saat, "Malay Women Leaders in Malaysia: The Unthinkable?," *Hawwa* 19, no. 2 (2019): 177-201, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341363>.

1699AD).¹⁷ The installation of women as leaders had brought conflict and upheaval between groups that supported those that opposed them, 1981). The internal conflict was resolved after the intervention of Shaykh 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Singkeli.¹⁸ The era of Sultanah's rule was critical to Aceh's reigns of queens due to the fights against Dutch colonialists. However, at the same time, it was depicted as a prosperous period by al-Raniri¹⁹, according to him:

"The city of Darussalam at that time was extremely prosperous, and the food was very cheap. Everyone lived in peace and followed all commands. And fairness to all laws and submissive to all works."

However, during the ruling of the fourth sultanah, Sultanah Kamalat Syah asked for a fatwa from Mekah, and later, the fatwa stressed that a woman must not rule an Islamic country.²⁰ With the legitimacy of a fatwa from the Middle East, Sultanah Kamalat Syah abdicated. While the Fatwa from Mekah in 1699 AD ended women's rule in Aceh, the same situation did not occur in Patani. This situation was because eight years after the Fatwa was pronounced, Raja Dewi took over the throne as the fourth ruler of the Kelantan Dynasty in Patani in the absence of an heir to the throne (Descendants of Kedah royals who ran away during

¹⁷ Mubarrak, Husni, and Faisal Yahya, "Women in the public sphere and religious discourse interpretation in the post-conflict Aceh," *Mazahib* 19, no.2 (2020): 195-218, <http://doi.org/10.21093/mj.v19i2.2204>.

¹⁸ Saeeda Shah, "We are equals'; datum or delusion: perceptions of Muslim women academics in three Malaysian universities," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 39, no. 3 (2018): 299-315, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1343126>.

¹⁹ Nuruddin Muhammad ibn Ali Hamid Al-Raniri, *Bustan al-Salatin*, ed. Jelani Harun, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2005), 368-370.

²⁰ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII* (Bandung: Penerbit Mizan, 1995), 77.

Aceh's attack on Kedah). When the Queen abdicated in 1716 AD, it ended women's rule.²¹

This condition proved women's position in Malay society during the post-arrival of Islam to the Malay world. Nevertheless, according to Ahmed, the occupation had an extreme effect on society, either internally or externally, especially in terms of exaggerating the roles and work based on sexuality already existing in society.²² This phenomenon can be scrutinized in the elite aristocrat's feudal system that was strengthened by the English colonial. The strengthening of the aristocrats indicated the subordination of women from the public circle. By the year 1900 AD, awareness had arisen in society of the fact that the fate of women needed to be given attention.²³

Malay women had been actively involved in politics after World War II. The wave of resurgence and awareness had enlivened the politics of the Malay Land, which was previously dominated by the male feudal elites. Initially, women who had joined local politics were those with religious education backgrounds. This factor is due to parents who had refused to send their children to English schools during that time for fear that the children would become Christians. Hence, the children had been sent to

²¹ Tedi Supriyadi, J Julia, and Endis Firdaus, "The Problems of Gender Equality: A Reconstruction of Islamic Doctrine," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 10, no. 2 (2019): 91–110, <https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/698>.

²² Akbar S. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society* (London: Routledge, 1988), 185.

²³ Meyzarti Yazid, "Wacana Pemimpin Perempuan Dalam Islam," *Al-Maiyyah: Media Transformasi Gender dalam Paradigma Sosial Keagamaan* 10, no. 1 (2017): 1–24, <https://ejurnal.iainpare.ac.id/index.php/almaiyyah/article/view/445>.

study at Padang Panjang Sumatera since the 1930s.²⁴ Amongst them are Tan Sri Aishah Ghani, Datin Sakinah Junid, and Shamsiah Fakeh. They founded a women's movement called *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (A.W.A.S.). When the English colonists later banned the movement, they then split up. Tan Sri Aishah Ghani joined the United Malays National Organisation (U.M.N.O.), Datin Sakinah joined Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (P.A.S.), dan Shamsiah Fakeh joined the Parti Komunis Malaya or Communist Party of Malaya (P.K.M.).²⁵

Women have also joined a few local and national organizations. The first association of Malay women was the Union of Johore Malay Women Teachers, which Hajah Zain Suleiman established in 1929. A.D. Tun Tan Sri (Dr) Hajah Fatimah Hashim, born 25 December 1924- 9 January 2010, was the Minister of General Welfare of Malaysia between 20 May 1969 to 28 February 1973 and the first Malaysian woman appointed as the Cabinet Minister of Malaysia. In addition, Datuk Seri Dr. Wan Azizah Wan Ismail was appointed Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2019 and became the first woman to hold the position. In the meantime, Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz became the first woman to be appointed as the Governor of Bank Negara.²⁶

²⁴ Arba'iyah Mohd Noor, "The Transition of Malay Women's Role and Contribution in The Early 20th Century," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 15, no. 1 (2020): 67-84, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.VOL15NO1.5>.

²⁵ Alexander Wain, "Southeast Asia's Forgotten Female Muslim Rulers," *ICR Journal* 10, no. 1 (2019): 121-23, <https://doi.org/10.52282/ICR.V10I1.77>.

²⁶ Wan Fariza Alyati and Wan Zakaria, "Gender Equity and Equality from Islamic Perspective: Malaysian Context," *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (2017): 123-29, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v7i2.183>.

Meanwhile, Megawati Soekarnoputri served as Indonesia's fifth President from 23 July 2001 until 20 October 2004. She was the country's first woman president.²⁷ In Singapore, Dr. Hajah Halimah binti Yacob is the President of Singapore. She was a former Singapore member of parliament representing the Jurong G.R.C. She was also the first woman to occupy this post in the Republic of Singapore's history.²⁸

Regrettably, the resurgence of women's awareness during this period was often depicted as a direct result of Western emancipation movements.²⁹ This influence did not mean that Westoxification regarded all that came from the West as toxic; instead, the values of Malay society are different from those of the West, especially regarding the treatment of women.³⁰ This phenomenon, therefore, denied the contribution of Islam in this wave of resurgence. This assertion is wrong if it is viewed in the Malaysian context:

1. The facts about Islam that upheld the status of women until they managed to take over the highest thrown in history; Patani and Aceh as examples.
2. Islam promotes democracy of education that does not limit the mastery and search of knowledge to only particular classes or genders.
3. In the Kaum Muda (the young) movement, the issue of gender and women's emancipation had been

²⁷ Megawati Soekarnoputri, "Kepemimpinan Presiden Megawati Pada Era Krisis Multidimensi, 2001-2004," *Jurnal Pertahanan & Bela Negara* 11, no. 1 (2021): 49-66.

²⁸ Thompson, "The rise and downfall," 49-62.

²⁹ Ismail, Indriaty, "The Development of Islamic Feminism in Malaysia," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 23 (2023): 39-49, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.23.2023.254>.

³⁰ Nur Saadah Hamisan Khair, "Syed Syeikh Ahmad Al-Hadi's Thought on Women's Emancipation and Gender Equality: Re-Evaluation and Analysis," *Afkar* 2020, no. Special Issue 2 (2020): 157-84, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.sp2020no2.6>.

widely featured, particularly in writing, especially by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, even though they received opposition from the conservative Kaum Tua (the old).³¹

Besides, Malay societies are a women-friendly community. According to Karim, the vital form of the Southeast Asian society system is bilateral, where the position and roles of women are similar to those of men. This position is the dynamics of Malay customs when interacting with Islamic Sharia. Women are more exposed to the Malay custom that acknowledges women, whereas men who practice Islamic Sharia are patriarchies even though Islam fundamentally acknowledges women's rights.³² The synthesis process between practicing customs and Sharia produces a shifting construction of gender where bilateral societies are born. Even though equal rights equalities between women and men are acknowledged in Islam and Malay society, the participation of women is still limited in politics and decision-making.³³

The View of Muslim Scholars on Women's Political Leadership

In general, the involvement of women in daily muamalah dealings is based on two authorities: general authority (*al-wilayah al-'ammah*) and special authority (*al-wilayah al-khassah*). The necessity of women in handling matters that are related to *al-wilayah al-khasah* is not disputed by the Muslim-Scholar.³⁴ However, on *al-wilayah*

³¹ Khair.

³² Arba'iyah Mohd Noor, "The Transition of Malay Women's," 67-84.

³³ Nurul Huda Nurul, "Intimacy Under Surveillance: Illicit Sexuality, Moral Policing, and The State in Contemporary Malaysia," *Hawwa* 18, no. 2-3 (2020): 325-56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692086-12341381>.

³⁴ Al-Qudsy, Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, "Kepimpinan Wanita," 111-135.

al-'ammah, polemic arises on the rationality in appointing a woman, upon considering women's characters, to hold a position considered *al-wilayah al-'ammah*.³⁵

Al-Wilayah al-'Ammah is a position or authority to conduct specific general affairs. In today's terms, using authority means exercising certain authority positions involving Legislative, Judicative, and Executive Power. In other words, it is the highest authority, judicative power, monitoring body, legislative power, and others included in *fardh kifayah*.³⁶ Classic Muslim-Scholar unanimously stated that women should not hold the highest position in leadership.³⁷ Men are required to be the primary fundamentals of this appointment.³⁸ They argued based on the firman of Allah S.W.T. In this matter, the interpretation "*al-qiwamah*" in surah Al-Nisa' (4): 34 initiates some of the prohibitions.³⁹

³⁵ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam* (Petaling Jaya: Ilmiah Publishers & The Islamic Foundation, 1999), 85-105.

³⁶ Fardh kifayah refers to broad (kulliyah) matters associated with religious and worldly interests, as outlined in Islamic law. Unlike fardh ain, which requires individual compliance, fardh kifayah mandates a collective obligation among the mukallaf (those legally responsible) to ensure these commandments are fulfilled. Thus, while the duty is shared among all, it is not assigned to each person individually.

³⁷ Abu Hasan Ali Bin Muhammad bin Habib Al Mawardi, *Al-ahkam al-sulthaniyah wa al-wilayat al-diniyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 25; Abi Ya'la Muhammad bin al Husain al Farra' al Hanbali, *Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 19-24.

³⁸ Yasir Sulaiman Almuways, "Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari and His Approach on the Tafsir of the Qur'an," *Al Hikmah International Journal of Islamic Studies and Human Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2020): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.46722/hkmh.3.4.20a>.

³⁹ Syamsul Bakri, "Womens Leadership in Islam: a Historical Perspective of a Hadith," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Literature and Muslim Society* 5, no. 2 (2020): 219-34, <https://doi.org/10.22515/islimus.v5i2.3276>.

Many exegeses of Al-Quran, such as al-Tabari and al-Razi, suggest that this leadership is due to men's mental strength and physical perfection. Therefore, the role of Khalifah, the leader (*Imam*) for prayer, the obligation to jihad, calling for prayer (*azan*), witness, marriage solemnization guardian (*wali*), talaq, ruju (reunited), and the limit of having four wives are given to men.⁴⁰ This view was accepted by contemporary scholars such as Abduh, Rida,⁴¹ and Nawawi al-Bantani.⁴² According to Shaltut, these advantages did not become the basis of slavery and discrimination towards women; instead, they became the advantage of the responsibility to earn a living in order to fulfill household needs.⁴³ This maintenance that became the husband's responsibility included food, clothes, accommodation, and the wife's ornament.⁴⁴

Due to these vast responsibilities, most Muslim-Scholar unanimously imposed a condition that the chief of state must be a man. The majority of classical Muslim scholars interpreted *qiwam* as leadership. This interpretation was due to men having been given two advantages, the first of which Allah S.W.T. has awarded those men with a strong character, challenging build, and the perfect mind that is not given to women. This condition is based on the award from Allah based in surah an-Nisa' (4):32. Second, Allah puts the responsibility to earn a living

⁴⁰ Abu Ja'far Muhammad b Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ayi al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Hijr, 2006), v.6, 687.

⁴¹ Muhammad 'Abduh & Muhammad Rashid Rida, *Tafsir al-Manar* (Kaherah: Dar al-Manar, 1947), v.5, 67-70.

⁴² Muhammad Nawawi Al-Jawi, *Marah Labid* (Cairo: Dar Ihya', 1960), 149.

⁴³ Mahmud Shaltut, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 12th Ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Syuruq, 2004), 141.

⁴⁴ Muhamad Rozaimi Ramle and Miftachul Huda, "Between Text and Context: Understanding Ḥadīth through Asbab al Wurud," *Religions* 13, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020092>.

and estate on men, not women. These advantages are assigned only to men.⁴⁵

However, some contemporary scholars such as Engineer and Wadud gave *the qiwwam interpretation that protects women, especially regarding household earnings*.⁴⁶ The sentence did not indicate the prohibition of women's leadership. This contradicting situation is further strengthened by the hadith Prophet (P.B.U.H.) that Women's leadership will fail.⁴⁷

“Hadith by Prophet (P.B.U.H.): A nation that appoints women to handle their affairs will never succeed.”

There are three main views concerning the hadith. First, the hadith covers women as a whole in all forms of leadership. Second, the hadith relates to the rule of Khalifah and not another rule; and third, the parties that disputed the authority of the hadith.⁴⁸ The validity of the hadith was disputed because:

⁴⁵ Tedi Supriyadi, J Julia, and Endis Firdaus, “The Problems of Gender,” 91–110.

⁴⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers), 54-55; Irma Riyani, “Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur’an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud),” *Ulumuna* 21, no. 2 (2017): 298–314, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v21i2.320>.

⁴⁷ Abdullah Muhammad bin Ismail al Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 3rd Ed. (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 1992), v.4, 1610; Muhammad Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad al Shawkaniy, *Nayl al-Awtar Sharh Muntaqa al-Akhbar min Ahadith Sayyid al-Akhyar*, 3rd Ed. (Cairo: Maktabah wa Matba’ah Mustafa al-Halabi, 1961), v.8, 273; Abu Isa Muhammad bin Isa bin Surah Al-Tirmidzi, *Al-Jami’ al-Sahih wa huwa Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi, 1978); Maghfirah Maghfirah, Ahmad Maulidizen, and Hasbullah Hasbullah, “Women’s Leadership in Islam with Asbāb al-Wurūd Approach,” *Madania: Jurnal Kajian Keislaman* 24, no. 2 (2020): 145–54, <https://doi.org/10.29300/madania.v24i2.3433>.

⁴⁸ Wulpiah Wulpiah, “Menelaah Kepemimpinan Perempuan di Pondok Pesantren Al-Islam Kemuja,” *NOURA: Jurnal Kajian Gender* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.32923/NOU.V2I1.855>.

1. The narrator of the hadith (Abu Bakrah) only stated the hadith 25 years upon hearing from the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) during the Jamal War that Aishah headed. The hadith was proposed after he did not want to be involved in the Jamal War.⁴⁹ He was deemed as a misogynist (it refers to someone who does not like females).
2. This meant hadith specifically to the Persian Emperor and the government of Kisra, which appointed his daughter. The hadith answered questions the sahaba (Prophet Muhammad's friends) gave regarding the move of the Persian King, Bushrawayh b. Abruwiz b. Hurmuz appointed his daughter, Buran, to take over the reign as the Persian Emperor. The purpose behind this hadith is to belittle the Persian government, and it is not related to leadership in Islam. Despite the existence of the usul method, "taking the law into account based on general pronunciation and not specific," in this case, it was specific.⁵⁰
3. On the contrary, Al-Quran narrated the story of Queen of Saba (al-Quran (27):23). Queen Balqis was wise, broad-thinking, democratic, and prioritized the welfare of her people.⁵¹
4. The hadith is an Ahad hadith. The Muslim-Scholar unanimously stated that Ahad hadith only produces

⁴⁹ Fatema Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, trans. Mary Jo (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991). 49.

⁵⁰ Al Hafizh Ibnu Hajar Al Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), v.13, 56.

⁵¹ Nyhagen, Line, "Mosques as Gendered Spaces: The Complexity of Women's Compliance With, and Resistance to, Dominant Gender Norms, and the Importance of Male Allies," *Religions* 10, no. 5 (2019): 321. <https://doi.org/10.3390/REL10050321>.

zanni laws even though the narrator is Imam al-Bukhari, a renowned hadith imam.⁵²

Based on the four causes above, it is clear that the hadith cannot be used as a basis to deny women of holding a position of *al-Wilayah al-'Ammah* because women are of weak minds.⁵³

“Hadith by Prophet (P.B.U.H.): I have not seen women of weak minds and religion that had managed to crush the heart of a strong man from amongst you.”

The hadith did not conform to the argument that women are of weak minds and religion; instead, it was found that:

1. Women converted to Islam before men did because of inducement of the mind; for example, Ummu Habibah converted before her father, Abu Sufyan. Fatimah converted before her kin 'Umar al-Khattab and the others.⁵⁴
2. It is contrary to the practice of the wives of the Prophet and female companions who had been involved in every political activity during the time of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and Khulafa' al-Rashidin. So did in war. With the guide of mind, women would have kept quiet at home.⁵⁵

⁵² Dedi Epriadi, Dedi Epriadi, and Zuhdi Arman, “Analisis Terhadap Kepemimpinan Perempuan,” 217-223.

⁵³ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Markaz al-Mar'ah fi al-Hayat al-Islamiyyah* (Cairo,: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996); Yasmin Hanani Mohd Safian, “The contribution of Yusuf Qaradawi to the development of Fiqh?,” *Electronic Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law* 4 (2016): 45–53.

⁵⁴ Nasirudin Al Ahsani, “Kepemimpinan Perempuan Pada Masyarakat dalam Perspektif Sa'īd Ramaḍān Al-Būṭī (Telaah Hadis Misoginis),” *Al-Hikmah* 18, no. 1 (2020): 51–66.

⁵⁵ Engineer, *The Rights of Women*, 54-55; Kana Safrina Rouzi, Halim Purnomo, Muh. Mustakim, and Faisal Husen Ismail, “Transformational Leadership on Women's Leadership in Islam,”

3. The lack of women's knowledge at that time was due to the denial of women's rights during pre-Islamic times. Therefore, Islam has founded the democracy of education by not looking at gender preferences. With the education opportunities available, women managed to match or overcome the mental abilities of men.⁵⁶
4. The lack of religious perspective refers to women's biology, including the menstrual cycle, *nifas* (discharged from a woman's womb during or after childbirth), and others. This condition is because women are prohibited from performing salat and fasting during the biological periods mentioned. At the same time, Islam does not belittle women who are experiencing it. Therefore, the lack of religious perspective relates to the lack of certain ibadah.⁵⁷
5. Islam has often been misconceived as a religion that fetters and degrades the standard of women, where the development of the patriarchal society is a pre-Islamic heritage that influenced the interpretation of the *mufassir* and the comprehension (*fiqh*) of the *faqih*. This phenomenon developed after the era of

Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies 2, no. 1 (2022): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.19184/jfgs.v2i1.29200>.

- ⁵⁶ Abbasi, Muhammad Umar Riaz, "Islam, Modernity, and Justice for Women and Role of Women Leaders of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) Era," *Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online* 19, no. 2 (2020): 1381–94, <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2020.02.696724>.
- ⁵⁷ Mahmudat O Muhibbu-Din, "Feminism and Modern Islamic Politics: The Fact and the Fallacy," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 15, no. 1 (2019): 44–59, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.15.2019.005>.

the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) and the Khulafa al-Rashidin.⁵⁸

Besides the text of al-Quran, hadith, and the arguments, the lifestyle of the local society has to be taken into account in the process of building an Islamic law. There are three main theories about women's leadership. First is the ras theory, second is the nature theory, and third is the theory of socioeconomic changes.⁵⁹

Following the views of Ibn Hazm, al-Ghazali also opines that Islam does not prohibit women from holding any post except for the great Khalifah (*al-Khilafah al-Uzma*). Nevertheless, al-Ghazali stated that certain people rejected Ibn Hazm's view because it is contrary to the firman of Allah S.W.T. in al-Nisa' (4):34.⁶⁰

Al-Ghazali argued that the interpretation denied women's leadership because the further sentences related to the initial sentence show that leadership intended is household or family leadership. At the same time, he argued that when Khalifah 'Umar r.a appointed a woman, al-Shifa,' as the "Hisbah Judge" at the market of Madina, her power was not limited to only women, but men as well. For some, the hadith showed that whatever Muslim affairs were handed over to women would be bound for disappointment. Because of that, no roles whatsoever should be given to women, neither big nor small. Al-Ghazali, however, stated that according to the view of Ibn

⁵⁸ Siti Syamsiyatun, "Redeñing Manhood and Womanhood: Insights from the Oldest Indonesian Muslim Women Organization, 'Aisiyyah,'" *Studia Islamika* 29, no. 3 (2022): 547–73.

⁵⁹ Klaus Deininger, Hari K Nagarajan, dan Sudhir K Singh, "Women's political leadership and economic empowerment: Evidence from public works in India," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 48, no. 2 (2020): 277–291.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah: Bayna Ahl al-Firaq wa Ahl al-Hadith*, 3rd Ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Syuruq, 1989), 47-50.

Hazm, the hadith implied that only the highest leadership position of the country is affected.⁶¹

For al-Ghazali, however, the hadith needs to be seen much deeper. According to him, the hadith has its distinct background. At that time, the state of Persia was on the verge of its fall with the advance of the Muslim army. Persia was ruled by a female king who was dictatorial and with negative thinking. The religion that was followed at that time was statue-worshipped. The ruler's family did not accept the discussion and were unwilling to respect those different from theirs. Individual family relationships were also horrible, up to the point where killings occurred to achieve one's mean. At the same time, the people suffered. The country's ruler had to hand over to the daughter, who did not comprehend the means to rule. In such circumstances, the country would only suffer the downfall affected.⁶²

Al-Ghazali stated that the hadith by the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) cited above had discussed this reality. That country was ruled by a female king that would disappoint its nation.⁶³ However, suppose it is destined that the female leader is as strong as Golda Mier, the previous Israeli Prime Minister who successfully defeated Arab rulers in the 1969 war.⁶⁴ In that case, the provision might

⁶¹ Al-Ghazali.

⁶² Al-Ghazali.

⁶³ Al-Ghazali.

⁶⁴ Emine Enise Yakar, "Women's Political Leadership: One Question and Two Divergent Fatwās," *Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 2 (2022): 332–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/JLR.2022.15>; Fatmah T. Alotaibi, "Saudi Women and Leadership: Empowering Women as Leaders in Higher Education Institutions," *Open Journal of Leadership* 9, no. 3 (2020): 156–77, <https://doi.org/10.4236/OJL.2020.93010>; Fatmah Alotaibi, Roger Cutting, dan Julia Morgan, "A Critical Analysis of the Literature in Women's Leadership in Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of*

have been different. Defending his view, al-Ghazali stressed that it was irrational for the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) to have read to the people on the glory of the great Queen Saba', i.e., Balqis, but to dispute women's leadership in his hadith then. Such hadith would have been contrary to the al-Quran. As informed, Balqis was a great ruler; as cited in al-Quran, she had a massive government, like in verse al-Naml (27): 23.

Upon stating the successes of women rulers, such as Golda Mier (former Prime Minister of Israel from 1969-1974), Margaret Thatcher (former Prime Minister of Britain from 1979-1990), and Indira Gandhi (former Prime Minister of India from the year 1966-77 and 1980-84), also the failures of Arab rulers that were primarily men, in curbing the advancement of Israel⁶⁵ questioned, what is the correlation between all of these and gender issue? Al-Ghazali then stressed that it was not his purpose to defend women but to ensure that the hadith of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.) was not interpreted contrary to the reality of the life of society.⁶⁶

Thus, women's leadership is restricted by classical Islamic scholarship because of scriptural considerations, gender attitudes, and legal inertia. However, the moderates' views on women's leadership align with the present reality. It is consistent with women's widespread involvement in the public sphere and equips them with more excellent political knowledge than previous generations of women.

Business Administration and Management Research 3, no. 1 (2017): 29–36, <https://doi.org/10.24178/ijbamr.2017.3.1.29>.

⁶⁵ Samuelson, Hannah L., Benjamin R. Levine, Sara E. Barth, Jennifer L. Wessel, and James A. Grand. "Exploring women's leadership labyrinth: Effects of hiring and developmental opportunities on gender stratification." *The Leadership Quarterly* 30, no. 6 (2019): 101314.

⁶⁶ Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, 47-50.

Obstacles to Women's Political Leadership in Malaysia and Indonesia

Women's participation in political leadership at the highest levels remains limited. Despite historical instances of female political leadership, this alone does not ensure equal representation in contemporary politics. The persistent interpretation of certain hadiths further complicates this situation in a way that promotes misogyny, reinforcing societal paradigms that favor male political leaders. This situation continues even though changing times, locations, and contexts often necessitate re-evaluating traditional interpretations and adjusting fatwas accordingly. Notably, the Qur'an presents Queen Balqis of the Kingdom of Saba as an example of successful female political leadership, suggesting that such leadership is not inherently alien to Muslim society.

Indeed, the issue of women's political leadership is deeply entwined with the socio-cultural structure and the constructed frameworks of political behavior in society. Gender roles for women and men are inherited and defined by social and cultural norms, with gender encompassing not only sex differences but also the roles and societal positions assigned to both. These definitions are relative, adapting to changing social, political, and cultural conditions.⁶⁷ However, in today's women's political leadership debates, it is clear that Muslim women in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia, have yet to achieve the same level of recognition and influence they historically held within the Malay world.

According to Wardani and Subekti, in the 2019 Indonesian elections, the winners of the 575 seats in the

⁶⁷ Jayash Paudel and Pedro De Araujo, "Demographic responses to a political transformation: Evidence of women's empowerment from Nepal," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 45, no. 2 (2017): 325–343.

People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR*) comprised 120 women (20.9 percent) and 455 men (79.1 percent). This result marked a modest increase in women's representation in Indonesia's national parliament, rising from 17 percent (97 out of 560 DPR seats) in the 2014 election to 20.9 percent in 2019. This increase represented the highest level of women's representation in Indonesian parliamentary history.⁶⁸ However, this figure remains relatively low compared to the number of men, who are more likely to secure electoral success. Similarly, data from UN Women in 2023 reveals that only 62 out of 273 members of Indonesia's parliament are women, accounting for a mere 22.7% representation.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in Indonesia's political history, the only instance of a woman serving as the country's highest political leader was during Megawati Soekarnoputri's tenure as Vice President (1999-2001) and President (2001-2004), with all other top political roles historically dominated by men.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, women's participation in the 2022 General Election (GE15) was limited to 13.4 percent, with 127 women among the total 945 candidates. Of these 127 women candidates, only 32 secured victory in the election.⁷¹ At the parliamentary level, only 30 of the 222

⁶⁸ Wardani, Sri Budi Eko, and Valina Singka Subekti, "Political dynasties and women candidates in Indonesia's 2019 election," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2021): 28-49, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103421991144>.

⁶⁹ UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2023."

⁷⁰ Irmalinda, Zikra Putri, and Lince Magriasti, "Kepemimpinan Kepala Negara Perempuan: Studi Komparatif antara Indonesia dan Selandia Baru," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ekotrans & Erudisi* 2, no. 2 (2022): 71-76, <https://doi.org/10.31933/wp1ve705>.

⁷¹ Robbi, Ahmad Akram Mahmad, Saidatolakma Mohd Yunus, and Mohamad Faiq Mohamad Sharin, "Muslim Women in Politics: Does it Align with Shari'ah Parameters?," *Al-Burhān: Journal Of Qur'ān And Sunnah Studies* 7, no. 2 (2023): 162-172.

seats are occupied by women, representing just 13.5% of the total,⁷² a small proportion highlighting the challenge of empowering women, as outlined in Malaysia's National Women's Policy. The policy aims to boost women's political participation with a target of 30% representation, yet this goal remains unmet. This shortfall is primarily due to significant resistance from Malaysian men who are reluctant to provide women with more significant opportunities for political advancement and remain impervious to contemporary gender equality facts.⁷³

Conversely, the only time that marked a significant milestone for women's political involvement in Malaysia was during the victory of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition in Malaysia's 14th general election in 2018. This election witnessed the appointment of Malaysia's first female deputy prime minister, Dr. Wan Azizah, an unprecedented appointment of five female cabinet ministers, and nearly a 5% rise in the representation of women in the national parliament.⁷⁴ This period has fostered a burgeoning optimism about transforming the landscape for women seeking political leadership. The PH coalition had advocated for a minimum 30% quota for women in parliament and state assemblies.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, the coalition's dissolution halted these advances before implementing the policies.

Thus, these impediments are inextricably linked to patriarchal society and gender. The primary issue that drives women's roles is emphasizing leadership abilities

⁷² UN Women, "Women in Politics: 2023."

⁷³ Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakwan, *Women in The House: Leadership in The Malaysian Parliament*, 2nd Ed. (Gombak: IIUM Press, 2022), 3.

⁷⁴ Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani, *Women's political leadership in the ASEAN region: Research Report* (London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy Limited, 2022), 45.

⁷⁵ Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani.

that require 'macho thinking' without requiring women to behave like men. This situation involves preparing women to lead and preparing society to be led by women. In politics, leadership entails a process. They must wait for their time, in addition to developing characteristics in political leadership, which begins with motivating members and progressing to leaders who are able to influence others' opinions, are always prepared to provide solutions and represent the interests of the people.⁷⁶

In a patriarchal culture, males typically hold most leadership positions in political structures. This situation is exacerbated by a lack of transparency in the election process for party leadership, limiting women's opportunities to present themselves as viable candidates.⁷⁷ As a result, women are often relegated to domestic roles, seen as suitable only for homemaking rather than leadership. In some cases, female leaders are granted a limited quota, which is significantly smaller than their male counterparts. Typically, society views women's participation in economic, political, and social activities as a floating body that does not play a significant role in the creation of history or the building and reconstruction of meanings and power relations. Women are appointed to political positions based on quotas to celebrate society's will, attract the support of certain groups, and demonstrate the positive side of government. Indeed, women often serve as assistants or have minor positions.⁷⁸ This fact aligns

⁷⁶ Paudel and Araujo, "Demographic responses," 325–343.

⁷⁷ Samuelson, Hannah L., Benjamin R. Levine, Sara E. Barth, Jennifer L. Wessel, and James A. Grand. "Exploring women's leadership," 101314.

⁷⁸ W Munira, M Akhyar, and D Djono, "Women's leadership and gender equality in Aceh: A socio-historical perspective," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 5, no. 4 (2018): 79–88.

with the remarks made by Malaysia's former Deputy Minister of Women, Family, and Community Development, who stated that "the problem is not that we lack women leaders, but lack seats. Party presidents must, when they give seats to women, ensure that it is a winnable seat and not merely to fulfill a quota."⁷⁹

Meanwhile, in some cases, according to social custom, high-caste women have a better chance than low-caste women.⁸⁰ In Indonesia, the open-list proportional representation system leads to intraparty competition, which raises candidacy costs. The rising campaign costs have presented additional barriers to women aspiring to pursue political leadership.⁸¹ In Malaysia, the women politicians who reported encountering minimal obstacles on their path to political leadership typically come from elite backgrounds with ties to political families. By contrast, those who faced fewer hurdles in attaining leadership roles are often heavily involved in political parties and occupy senior-level positions in the women's wings of those parties.⁸²

Moreover, the continued perception of leadership positions as stereotypically "masculine" and powerful compared to technical ones as stereotypically "feminine" demonstrates how entrenched such gender stereotypes are. Women are seen as less capable leaders, which results in a lack of followership, communication difficulties, and poor performance. According to those who emulate these

⁷⁹ Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani, *Women's political*, 45.

⁸⁰ Ismail Suardi Wekke and Ibrahim Ibrahim, "Women Leadership on Public Institution in Muslim Minority Society of West Papua," *PALASTREN Jurnal Studi Gender* 12, no. 2 (2019): 569-88, <https://doi.org/10.21043/palastren.v12i2.6520>.

⁸¹ Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani, *Women's political*, 38-39.

⁸² Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani, *Women's political*, 38-39.

popular models, women do not exhibit the same capacity for stress as males, resulting in tension and conflict between the groups. A third stereotype revealed by the findings is that women are perceived as less capable of professionalism. As a result, the assumptions made about their capabilities harm the tasks they can perform and the types of interactions they can have.⁸³

Furthermore, elements of gender inequality continue to persist. From a gender perspective, stereotype-driven societal assumptions about women's roles and responsibilities have consistently shaped their experiences and opportunities.⁸⁴ These disparities invariably affect women's access to power, resources, and recognition. Additionally, in male-dominated professional environments, women are often viewed as mere complements and facilitators rather than critical players or leaders.⁸⁵ Consequently, women often encounter everyday sexism, which manifests through objectification, sexist remarks during meetings, and inappropriate jokes. Meanwhile, young women in political parties are subjected to everyday ageism, with disparaging comments suggesting they lack experience or maturity, resulting in their relegation to minor roles within party structures. This pattern, as observed in Indonesia, highlights the persistent

⁸³ Asif Hussain Samo, Sarah Wali Qazi, and Wafa Mansoor Buriro, "Labeling Them is Negating Them: A Phenomenological Study of Stereotypes and Followers' Experiences about Women Leadership in Pakistan," *Management Research Review* 42, no. 3 (2018): 391–411.

⁸⁴ Rushton, Ashleigh, Suzanne Phibbs, Christine Kenney, and Cheryl Anderson, "The gendered body politic in disaster policy and practice," *International journal of disaster risk reduction* 47 (2020): 101648.

⁸⁵ Ogharanduku, Bridget Efeoghene, William J. Jackson, and Audrey S. Paterson, "Beautiful SWAN, or ugly duckling? The attempt to reduce gender inequality by the Society of Women Accountants of Nigeria," *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 79 (2021): 102245.

gender-based biases and discrimination that women face in political environments.⁸⁶

Indeed, women are often associated with physical frailty, emotional dominance, and mental melancholy. This stigma is widely directed towards women and reinforces gender-based stereotypes.⁸⁷ However, this perspective is gradually shifting and gaining acceptance within society. The emergence of women who demonstrate leadership capabilities indicates that men and women possess equal potential, especially since not all men are inherently suited for leadership or excel in these roles.⁸⁸ Consequently, from a strict gender perspective, it is evident that neither gender should be assumed to have a natural advantage in leadership based solely on stereotypes. Ultimately, politics should not be defined exclusively by gender, especially if more competent and qualified women candidates are available.

Women Political Leadership: The Way Forward

As previously mentioned, women's political leadership in Malaysia and Indonesia faces significant hurdles due to the predominantly patriarchal structure and persistent gender stereotypes. Additionally, in both countries, where the majority of the population is Muslim, the more moderate views among contemporary Islamic scholars, which allow for women's political leadership in light of evolving societal conditions, are often subdued or underrepresented. These factors create a complex environment that hinders women's ascension to political leadership roles.

⁸⁶ Aim Sinpeng and Amalinda Savirani, *Women's political*, 39.

⁸⁷ Ramli, Mohd Anuar, "Bias Gender," 49-70.

⁸⁸ Rahman, K. A., Firman Firman, Yusdi Andra, Samsudin Samsudin, and Yulita Yulita, "Women's Leadership Styles: Indonesian Context," *Ta'dib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 23, no. 2 (2018): 212-223.

Indeed, Malaysia and Indonesia are focused on fostering opportunities for women's participation in politics, particularly at the highest levels. In Malaysia, for instance, achieving 30 percent representation for women in politics is still in progress, with only 12 percent remaining to meet this target. This commitment to gender parity in political representation was highlighted by the Minister of Education, Fadhlina Sidek, who emphasized the ongoing efforts to close the gap.⁸⁹ In Indonesia, the Deputy Head of The People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia, Lestari Moerdijat, emphasized in a written statement that “realizing greater women's participation in every public policy should be consistently pursued to foster improved development.”⁹⁰ This perspective underscores the commitment to advancing women's roles in policy-making to support the nation's overall progress.

However, the Political Empowerment subindex remains low for both nations. In Malaysia, the subindex reports only 0.0156% representation of women in parliament, 0.200% in ministerial positions, and 0.000% for Years with female/male head of state (over the last 50 years).⁹¹ In Indonesia, the situation is somewhat better, with 0.276% representation of women in parliament, 0.261% in ministerial positions, and 0.069% for Years with

⁸⁹ Bernama, “Representasi wanita di Parlimen terus jadi agenda pemberdayaan Wanita PKR,” *MYMetro* (News), November 25, 2023, <https://www.hmetro.com.my/mutakhir/2023/11/1034031/representasi-wanita-di-parlimen-terus-jadi-agenda-pemberdayaan-wanita-pkr>.

⁹⁰ “Peningkatan Partisipasi Perempuan dalam Politik Butuh Dukungan semua Pihak,” *MPR* (Official Web), March 17, 2023, <https://www.mpr.go.id/berita/Peningkatan-Partisipasi-Perempuan-dalam-Politik-Butuh-Dukungan-semua-Pihak>.

⁹¹ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2023* (Switzerland: WEF, 2022), 249.

female/male head of state (over the last 50 years).⁹² The lower scores in the political subindex are primarily due to the limited number of women in leadership and decision-making roles, significantly reducing Malaysia's and Indonesia's ranking on the index.

As this article contends, from a historical perspective of Malay women and within the context of Muslim scholars' perspective, women hold significant authority in society, with equivalent rights and responsibilities to contribute to national progress and foster a harmonious system. Women, like men, possess equal rights, obligations, and opportunities to participate in national development.⁹³ The ultimate goal of achieving a society devoid of gender biases can be attained through women's active involvement, contributing to creating culturally conscious and equitable citizens.

In order to achieve that, Shaya identifies three primary elements that contribute to empowering women in leadership: government initiatives, family support, and Islamic work ethics. Firstly, the government can facilitate gender equality by providing educational aid and internship opportunities, ensuring equal citizenship rights, and promoting gender parity in access to leadership roles. Secondly, families can offer financial support and social backing, granting independence, freedom of choice, and the capacity for reasoned decision-making, all of which contribute to elevating women's educational levels. Thirdly, Islamic work ethics, rooted in the Quran and Sunnah, can guide women to achieve a balanced approach to work and life, playing a crucial role in shaping their leadership style.

⁹² World Economic Forum, *Global*.

⁹³ Siti Raba'ah Hamzah, "Women in leadership in Malaysia," in *Current Perspectives on Asian Women in Leadership*, ed. Cho, Yonjoo, Rajashi Ghosh, J. Sun, and Gary N. McLean (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2017), 107–123.

These foundational elements can help foster an environment where women are empowered to ascend to leadership roles while maintaining cultural and religious values.⁹⁴

This article concurs with Shaya's third element, recognizing that societal perceptions of women's roles have experienced a significant transformation and are now receiving broader acceptance. Women are considered equal to men across various domains, including education, employment, scientific research, and athletics. No longer confined to domestic roles, women have expanded their presence into public service, occupying positions alongside men in educational institutions, administration, retail, healthcare, sports, and even the military. This transition mirrors an evolving recognition of women's substantial contributions and their potential to shape the trajectory of societal progress. The expanded roles of women not only challenge traditional stereotypes but also highlight the need for continued efforts to ensure gender equality and remove barriers that impede women's full participation in public life.⁹⁵

Thus, no justification may be used to prevent women from participating, choosing desired professions, and rising to the top positions in their fields as long as the employment is permissible and the Sharia's limitations are followed. It remains a source of dispute among academics in the chapter on political leadership. According to certain academicians, women should not be in positions of leadership. However, as society changes, supporters of this school of thought are dwindling. Al-Mawdudi, a well-known

⁹⁴ Nessrin Shaya and Rawan Abu Khait, "Feminizing leadership in the Middle East: Emirati women empowerment and leadership style," *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 32, no. 8 (2017): 590–608.

⁹⁵ Nessrin Shaya and Rawan Abu Khait, "Feminizing.

textual scholar dedicated to preserving Islam's fundamentals, has spoken in favor of women ascending to the post of Prime Minister in Pakistan.⁹⁶ According to al-Qaradawi, men's dominance over women mainly manifests in family life. There is no restriction in Scripture against women exerting dominance over men beyond the limits of marital life. Al-Qaradawi views the prohibition as a general restriction on women's leadership over men.⁹⁷

Women and men are created from the same source, and there is no distinction or degree of difference between them, except taqwa. Women may be leaders in a variety of contexts. They might be leaders to children, leaders in business, or even leaders in general. There is no barrier to women becoming leaders if the position can be done competently and efficiently, the individual has the potential and qualities of a leader, and the role does not threaten self, family, or society. Women who follow Islamic teachings can join politics if they adhere to Islamic principles in all areas of their relationships and interactions with men, including speech, clothing, and implementing all standards in political participation.⁹⁸

To gain societal acceptance, women's qualifications must align with societal expectations and gradually alter prevailing perceptions. Islam permits women to work and participate in public life, but it prescribes roles consistent with the natural attributes that Allah S.W.T. has established for women, ensuring their dignity while they work outside the home. Furthermore, the assigned roles should align with women's capacities, avoiding excessive demands or complex tasks that could be hazardous. These

⁹⁶ Asif Hussain Samo, Sarah Wali Qazi, and Wafa Mansoor Buriro, "Labeling Them," 391-411.

⁹⁷ Al-Qaradawi, *Fatawa Mu'asirah* (Beirut: Dar Uli Al-Nuha, 1990), v.2, 377.

⁹⁸ Nasirudin Al Ahsani, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan," 51-66.

roles should also be flexible enough to accommodate domestic responsibilities, allowing women to support their husbands and oversee their children's education. Given this framework, women can pursue top positions in their chosen fields, demonstrating competence while upholding traditional values.⁹⁹

Women should be allowed to demonstrate their superior leadership abilities at a higher level if eligible. Men and women have no significant differences regarding leadership qualities, effectiveness, or preferences. Engagement and mentorship are required to ensure women's sustainability and long-term success in leadership. Women's success in this field depends on developing connections with executives and incorporating organizational functions into their packages.¹⁰⁰ It is impossible to emphasize the importance of educating leaders and policymakers about gender leadership disparities. It is also crucial to have a professional education that includes cutting-edge research on women and leadership. A collaborative approach to women professionals' paths to success may help increase the number of women in leadership roles.¹⁰¹

Consequently, women may keep progressing in leadership roles and debunk myths about women's leadership history and capabilities. Most significantly, elements must be converted into tangible words in society's thinking to ensure that women receive the respect they deserve via opportunities to demonstrate leadership skills

⁹⁹ Eagly, Alice H., and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the labyrinth of leadership," in *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, ed. William E. Rosenbach (London: Routledge, 2018,) 147-162.

¹⁰⁰ Katie R. Place dan Jennifer Vardeman-Winter, "Where are the women? An examination of research on women and leadership in public relations," *Public Relations Review* 44, no. 1 (2018): 165-173.

¹⁰¹ atie R. Place dan Jennifer Vardeman-Winter, "Where".

both now and in the future.¹⁰² Therefore, they can significantly contribute to political, economic, and sociocultural growth.

Conclusion

Islam is different from other religions in terms of championing the destiny of women. Women received various rights, including in the field of leadership. Societal changes and differences must be considered to respect Shariah's suitability at any time and place. The Muslim-Malay society in the Malay Archipelago has a cultural development background compared to other societies. Therefore, this classic culture that allows women leadership must be re-polished to empower the position of women nowadays so that women can enjoy the rights that were denied in the history of the nation's central leadership. A gender analysis study may be conducted in the future by evaluating gender stereotypes and barriers to women holding prominent leadership roles in Islamic countries and empowering measures to position women as key figures in the country. That is because there are no obstacles to women being appointed political leaders in Islam.

¹⁰² Khurram Sharif, "Transformational leadership behaviors of women in a socially dynamic environment," *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 27, no. 4 (2019): 1191–1217.

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