

An Examination of Women Political Participation and Representation in Selected Asian Democracies

VICTOR VINCENT OKPE^{1 2}

School of International Studies, Universiti Utara Malaysia
Sintok, Changlun Kedah

AYO OYEKOLA³

General Studies Department, Lautech, Ogbomosho
Oyo State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study assessed women political participation in selected Asian democracies of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines. It is not a comparative study. The essence is to bring to knowledge the state of women political representation in the democracies. To realize the above objective, the study used only secondary resources like journal articles, academic books, and descriptive qualitative method. The Theory of Liberal Democracy was also used to support the analysis to arrive at a reasonable conclusion. From the analysis, findings show that women are politically underrepresented and marginalized in decision-makings and appointments in the democracies. Also, factors like religion, culture, and traditional beliefs, poor family support, education and economic deprivation were observed as responsible. These negative indices do not reflect the doctrine of liberal democratic theory and cannot consolidate democracy in those countries. Based on the findings, therefore, the trend must be addressed to allow women fully enjoy their political rights. The governments must reserve more space for women in the decision-making processes, as well, comply with their constitutional provisions. The doctrine of democratic governance must be seen in practice and more political education promoted amongst the womenfolk to enjoy better representation in government. They should also be supported financially and treated with respect as mothers and managers of future leaders. Finally, as the study contributes to the body of knowledge, it will benefit policymakers, women, and researchers. Similar study can also be replicated in other democracies to consolidate knowledge in this field.

¹ Corresponding author: victorenugu47@gmail.com

² Victor Vincent Okpe is a MSc holder in Strategic Studies and Ph.D. in Political Science. He has a special interest in political science and security studies.

³ Ayo Oyekola is a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, Lautech, Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria

Keywords: Asia, democracy, political participation, representation, women

INTRODUCTION

As political participation remains one of the ingredients and hallmarks of a democratic governance (Olasunkanmi, 2016), its effectiveness and consolidation depends on the extent to which effective and equal participation is made available to all citizens (Kumar, 2020). This is because, in a democracy, citizen participation in governance remains the most important avenue to contribute to, and influence, state policies that affect their wellbeing (Liu, 2020). With respect to women participation, Noreen et al. (2019) observed that women constitute half of the global population; however, in politics, their participation and representation remain low at 24.3 percent as of 2019 (The World Bank, 2019) which indicates underrepresentation. Notably, Liu (2020) stated that gender issue in political participation has tremendously diminished in western democracies, but much remains unknown about how gender affects political participation of women in Asia. They remain underrepresented and marginalized in democratic governance and public leadership even though their socioeconomic status amongst other political rights and freedom has improved tremendously in recent decades (Choi, 2018).

The above situation of Asian women in politics does not reflect the teachings of a democratic system. According to True et al. (2012), there is great resistance to women's political participation in public governance. Indeed, religion and culture amongst other traditional beliefs is often leveraged to deny women their rightful place and exclude them from politics. This practice against women in political spaces and decision-making in Asian democracies, contradicts the ethics of a democratic system. It is on the above revelations, therefore, that this study examined the actual state of women political participation and representation in Asian democracies of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines. Several studies have also been carried out regarding this matter, such as the works of Kumar (2020), Choi (2018), Liu (2020) and Louis (2020), but none was found to focus on the Asian democracies selected in this case. According to Liu (2020), unlike in western democracies where much is known concerning women political participation and decrease in gender gap, little remains known about Asian women in politics. Based on the above, therefore, understanding the state of women political participation and representation in the selected Asian democracies is timely and significant for research. This study filled the existing gap in literature as well as contributes to the body of knowledge.

REVIEW OF IMPORTANT LITERATURE

To consolidate knowledge on the topic of interest, the study reviewed concepts and phrases like political participation and democratic governance; women and political participation in a democratic governance; and women political participation and representation in Asian democracies below.

Political participation and democratic governance

While democracy involves a political organization that exists on legal arrangement between the government and the governed (Okpe & Taya, 2018), governance involves using public machineries or institutions to achieve the interest of the people. According to Inokoba and Kumokor (2012) and Fatile and Adejuwon (2016), governance involves due process, respect for constitution, basic liberty, public accountability, respect to the people and democratic consolidation. Also, while democracy and governance remain exceptionally unique and independent, they are equally connected in promoting good life for the ordinary man in a democracy (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016). Democratic governance, therefore, beholds a political situation where the institutions of the state such as the parliament, the judiciary, political parties, and the executive exist and carry out their legal duties in line with the dictates of democratic philosophy (Isma'ila, 2016). It equally entails the political participation or inclusion of common citizens, including women, in the decision-making and governance processes of the state. In democratic governance, common citizens remain the focus.

In a democratic governance, political participation simply means the engagement and the inclusion of the common citizens in governance and decision-making processes of their state. According to Conway (2000), political participation entails the non-exclusion of the ordinary people including the women in state governance or operation. It involves engagement in active roles in the state to influence decisions and policies of government alongside involvement in elections by contesting or freely electing public leaders. It is about the people and good governance (Rotberg, 2014; Graaf & Paanakker, 2015), which represents the performance achievement of any government and its public policies. Additionally, in any democratic governance, democratic consolidation, development, and political stability can only be attained when there is a genuine inclusion, participation, and engagement of the people in public decision-making amongst other governance processes of the state (Falade, 2014). This is because the government belongs to them and all public policies and programs affect them directly or indirectly and, therefore, deserve inclusion. From the forgoing, political participation simply means the inclusion of the ordinary citizens in the decision-makings of their government. On this note, women political participation and representation in Asian democratic governance cannot be an exception.

Women and political participation in a democratic governance

Women political participation is usually to promote good governance in a democracy which often represents the concrete achievement of government public policies (Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019; Graaf & Paanakker, 2015). Also, while democracy and governance remain critical independent variables, they also intersect to ensure better life for the democratic society (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016). Democratic governance, according to Isma'ila (2016), involves running the political democratic system by the actors involved in line with the dictates and ethics of democracy. It is the execution of good governance by state machineries (Agunyai & Olawoyin, 2019), and this involves the engagement and inclusion of the women amongst other citizens in the decision-making and leadership processes of the state. Accordingly, women political participation, especially in a democratic governance, simply portrays gender parity in public governance amongst other political processes in a democracy. In a democracy or politics, gender parity simply involves the equal opportunity and participation of men and the womenfolk in the governance and leadership processes of their community. It informs the inclusion of women in leadership positions in a democracy.

According to Kumar (2017), active engagement and equal representation of women as their menfolk in public decision-making in a democracy is required for economic development, political and democratic stability. He added, however, that women still encounter all degrees of political marginalization and underrepresentation around the contemporary world. This is notwithstanding their capacity to positively contribute to public leadership and governance processes in their countries. Aligning with Kumar's revelation, Barnes and Burchard (2013) disclosed a wide gender gap in public political representation between men and women but diverges from country to country and within countries practicing democracy. Despite several conversations in the global arena on how countries should promote women representation in government, the quest remains far from realization (Community of Democracy, 2017). In 2019, in Malaysia, for example, Louis (2020) opines that despite the huge enrollment of women in higher institutions which stood at 50.3 percent against men with just 37.8 percent, their representation in the law-making chambers and other senior positions in government remains 24.7 percent. In many democracies, women remain marginalized and underrepresented in public leadership. Even the 30 percent women inclusion in public office advocated in 1995 in Beijing Conference remains far from actualization. This acts against democratic practice and cannot ensure democratic consolidation in democracies.

Women Political Participation and Representation in Asian Democracies

Asia is one of the major six continents of the world. It equally has many democracies with a huge women population. In terms of women political participation in democracies, also, Asian democracies are not exempted. This is because democratic governance, as noted by Choi (2018), portrays a huge belief that the common people, including women, are availed opportunity for political participation, fair representation, and pursuit of career in public life. In concurrence with Choi above, Liu (2020) revealed that political participation of all citizens including women remains a vital ingredient of democratic governance as it allows them to participate and relate with political leaders. Liu (2020) added that, while many variables can be used in assessing political participation in several democracies, the place of gender remains undisputable. It shows the importance of gender balance in public life. In Western democracies, for example, available literatures continue to show that gender gaps in politics between men and women continues to diminish (Bode, 2017; Burns et al., 2018). In the continent of Asia, however, women political participation and representation continue to read low in comparison to men in politics and leadership appointments (Coffe & Dilli, 2015; Espinal & Zhao, 2015; Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011). The above shows stronger democracy in the West than on the Asian continent with respect to women pursuing political career.

In Asian democracies, for instance, using 2010 Barometer Survey, Liu (2020) disclosed that women and their menfolk massively participate in voting during elections, but gender discrepancy and underrepresentation continue to act against the women in political appointment amongst other public top leaderships in the 13 democracies of East and Southeast Asia. Marginalization and non-inclusion of the women in political appointments often emanate from traditional, cultural, and patriarchal inclinations that politics is exclusively for men. Similarly, True et al. (2012) revealed that women representation and inclusion in politics remains low on average in South Asia, East Asia, Southeastern Asia and in the Pacific Island region of Asia. They are the lowest with 3.65 percent in the pacific sub-region excluding Australia and New-Zealand. In the East Asia, women representation is 17.6 percent, 18.09 percent for Brunei and Southeastern Asia while South Asian women enjoyed 19.76 percent. Women political participation and representation is very low in the four regions and does not fit into the world benchmark required. What this portrays is low representation of women in politics in the Asian continent.

Further to Liu (2020), True et al. (2012) disclosed that factors like cultural practices and religious inclinations are often used to discriminate against women in politics while men believe that the political arena is not for women. They further disclosed that factors like gender quotas and reservation

of spaces for them are increasing the percentage of women in public life in Nepal, Mongolia, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, and New Caledonia amongst other countries. Also, in unstable regimes like in the Asia-Pacific, political parties serve like ventures controlled by wealthy families which allow fortunate women within such families easy access to politics but remain a barrier to the poor and the non-elite women in the society. Political violence against the womenfolk who dare to defend women's rights or speak-up in their communities against political marginalization or dare contest public office is common in the Asian continent especially in regions affected by conflict. The marginalization leads to women underrepresentation and continues to discourage women from pursuing careers in politics (True et al., 2012). The authors conclude that religious organizations, civil society groups, women wings, and political parties would do well in resolving the ugly situation of women in the region. Drawing from the above, the submission of the authors is an expose of the political predicament of women in the Asian continent. Therefore, quick redress is imperative for women in Asia to enjoy their full rights in democracy.

Similarly, relying on ethnographic survey and samples from democracies in Southeast Asia of Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, Choi (2018) discloses that women's legal rights, economic and social status have improved tremendously in recent decades in the democracies but women in the region remain politically marginalized and underrepresented in leadership appointments. According to Choi (2018), while it is strongly believed that democratization and power decentralization offer women the opportunity to advance their career in politics, such presumption is yet to become a reality in Asian democracies. The author concluded that, across the region, political structures and other public institutions look formidable, but equally continue to serve as a strong instrument through which women are discouraged and marginalized in public leaderships and appointments. Findings from literatures point to women underrepresentation, participation and marginalization in public decision-makings and politics generally. Such situation cannot advance democracy and the interest of the Asian women in pursuing public career in politics. Their underrepresentation is also against the doctrine of a liberal democratic system. The points need to be addressed for women in the Asian continent to enjoy more representation and participation in the public sphere as espoused by liberal democratic doctrine.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The study used descriptive qualitative design to assess the state of political participation of women in the selected Asian democracies. This research method, Wright, and McKeever (2000) observed, stands out in exploring and understanding human social issues like women in politics. The research

method furnishes researchers with deep insight and comprehensive understanding of social phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Magilvy, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2013). Also, politics and economics amongst other social human phenomena are usually complex and can easily be studied through qualitative approach rather than quantitative for better understanding. The above submissions affirm the credibility of the research method and justify its application in this study to understand the state of women political participation in the selected democracies of Asia. Materially, the study relied only on secondary literature like books by Fashagba et al. (2019), Agunyai and Olawoyin (2019), and academic articles amongst others. To build connection, it adopts liberal democratic theory as its analysis framework.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted liberal democratic theory as its framework of analysis to explore and assess the state of women political participation in the selected Asian democracies of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines. The earliest drivers of this theory were Adam Smith, John Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau (Othman & Okpe, 2021; Vincent & Tunde, 2018). The theory enjoys a wide acceptability and occupies the needed capability to explore and explain the form of democratic exercise being enjoyed in different democracies (Vincent & Tunde, 2018). In this case, therefore, the selected Asian democracies cannot be exempted in the application of the theory. The major anchor of the theory lies in its assumption that all democracies must promote and encourage political participation of every citizen including the womenfolk in terms of participation during elections, elect leaders and being elected without discrimination on grounds of gender or race (Mohammed, 2013; Kwasi, 2013). The theory encourages a dynamic and active political system where every member of the society, including women, would be represented, and allowed to participate in all decision-making processes of the society. Based on the forgoing, the application of the theory in this study remains germane as it facilitates and contributes to understanding the importance of women inclusion in politics and public governance in Asian democracies.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Several findings were made by this study sequel to exploring, understanding, and describing the state of women political participation and representation in Asian democracies of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines. The findings are revealed and discussed under the subheading of the democracies below, starting with India.

India

Findings revealed that the Indian Constitution of 1950, Articles (14) and (15) provide women with many rights which includes equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination based on race, religion, gender, or place of birth; equal opportunity in employment (Article 16); freedom of expression, speech and liberty in Articles 19 and 21 (Kumar, 2020). Despite the above legal provisions, results disclosed that women in India are underrepresented in political participation and decision-making processes. According to Fadia (2014), notwithstanding that empowerment and equal participation of Indian women in politics would influence women, their children, and the Indian democracy positively, women in India remain marginalized and indifferent to political issues. In the 2011 census in India, women were 586.5 million, which represented 48.46 percent, but they remain less represented in the national assembly (Fadia, 2014). Even in 2020 elections, Krisnaswamy (2020) revealed that only 25 women, which is slightly over 10 percent of 245, emerged in the parliament. From this, it is evident that women political participation in India is low. It does not reflect the doctrine of liberal democracy and cannot strengthen democracy if women continue to remain in the background in Indian democracy.

Indonesia

Indonesia returned to democracy in 1999 and women have 132 million in a population of 265 million (Firdaus, 2019). With regards to political representation of women, the Indonesian constitution introduced gender quota in 2003 and, in 2008, mandated the political parties to ensure 30 percent space for women (Hillman, 2017). This result however disclosed that while Indonesian women possess good campaign skills, they remain poorly-represented in the parliament amongst other political leadership positions. Also, while gender quota raised their percentage in the parliament from 9.6 to 17.86 percent, it decreased to 17.36 percent after 2014 elections contrary to the expectation of increase (Hillman, 2017; Satriyo, 2014). In 2019-2020, their percentage in the national parliament increased from 17.4 to 20.3 percent out of the total available seats but decreased in ministerial level positions (Statistica, 2021). The findings show that women are poorly represented because of religious and cultural beliefs. The situation is undemocratic and cannot strengthen democracy in Indonesia if not addressed. The findings also corroborate with the findings of Prihatini (2019) and Rhoads (2012), showing the need for more women participation in the Indonesian politics and democracy.

Malaysia

Malaysia has a good population of women. However, in terms of women political representation, findings indicate that the Global Gender Gap Index

in its measurement in areas of political empowerment, health, education, and economic opportunity, placed Malaysia 111 out of 145 states in 2016 (Azmi, 2020). Results further revealed that Malaysia scored low in political representation due to poor percentage of women in public decision-making positions. This was despite Article 8(2) of the Malaysian Constitution which established equal representation of all citizens in the political processes and its 30 percent target of women inclusion in public governance. Also, while women have the capacity to decide who comes to public office and remains there, they continue to experience poor representation. In 2019, for example, statistics show that the number of women in the national parliament amongst other top office in the government was only 24.7 percent. It did not represent the percentage of their enrollment in education which is 50.3 against 37.8 percent for men. That corresponds with the findings of Sukhani (2020) and Krishnan (2020). It is evident that women were appointed into top government offices only after the 2018 election. The revelations show that women are marginalized in Malaysian democracy. Their situation does not support democratic ethics, neither would it consolidate Malaysian politics. Malaysian women need better treatment and more political representation in all political circles of the country to consolidate her democracy.

Pakistan

Like Malaysia and Indonesia, findings revealed that Pakistan has a significant population of women, but they face low political participation and representation often caused by religion, patriarchal attitude, and economic deprivation. The above corroborate the findings of Latif et al. (2020) and Rubab et al. (2020). Pakistan gained independence in 1947, and political quota was introduced in 2000-2002 to enhance women representation in all public institutions. The political move led to 33 percent increase in women representation in the local government and 17 percent were elected to the legislature. Despite the development, the number fell short of the 30 percent global recommendation (Nooreen et al., 2019). According to Khan and Naqvi (2020), in 2013-2018 for example, only 51 women served at the national government, while only 18 served in the senate. This shows low women representation in Pakistani politics.

Furthermore, even after the 2018 general election, further results revealed that only few Pakistani women were elected to general seats despite 2017 electoral reform that mandates all political parties to allot five percent space for women (Khan & Naqvi, 2020; Nooreen et al., 2019). The above poor representation of women, as results established, are caused by existing societal structures and socioeconomic and cultural factors which continue to bar women's political progress in Pakistan. Women in Pakistan are not fully represented in political life. It is against the ethics of a democratic system and

cannot consolidate a working democratic governance in Pakistan if the flaws remain unaddressed. Their situation should be addressed.

Bangladesh

In respect to women representation in public life, results revealed that the Bangladeshi Constitution under Article 28(2) establishes equal political rights for women amongst other citizens (Chowdhury, 2009). Based on the above provision, results revealed that, a woman, Khaleda Zia, served as Prime Minister in Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996, while Sheikh Hasina served in 1996-2001. Zia returned in 2009 and has remained the incumbent. Also, while another woman is the Speaker of the parliament, the leader of the strong opposition party is also a woman. In 2011, also, the Bangladeshi Constitution 15th amendment, raised reserved 45 to 50 seats for women in public life. Holding to the above amendment, therefore, after the 2014 election, it was found that, 50 women went into the national parliament on reserved seats and 19 were directly elected. In comparison to other democracies in Asia, the above result can be seen as positive to women political empowerment in Bangladesh. However, some scholars argue that despite the achievement, women face gender marginalization in politics as their total representation remains 19.71 percent in the Bangladeshi parliament (Ali, 2014, as cited in Ferdous, 2019; Ferdous, 2019).

Further findings also revealed that gender disparity is brutally rooted in the whole political arrangements as the role of majority of the women in Bangladesh remains that of wife, mother, daughter and limited to the walls of the house against democratic teachings of equal representation. Ara and Northcote (2020) supported the above, noting that gender barriers like culture, history, weak institutions, and economic deprivation affect women's political representation in the country. He added that patriarchal beliefs continue to foster marginalization of women notwithstanding the affirmative policies and the influence of modernization. Social barriers and societal expectations discourage educated women from politics in Bangladesh (Folke & Rickne, 2016; Zamfirache, 2010). The above challenges cannot promote women representation to strengthen democracy. Women are still poorly represented in the parliament and factors such as religion, illiteracy, and absence of experience continue to work against them (Ferdous, 2019; Islam, 2012). From the foregoing, findings prove that women occupy top government positions in Bangladeshi democracy which reflects democratic governance and a welcome development though they continue to suffer gender imbalance which negatively affects them. Their political situation of gender imbalance needs to be addressed as democracy must reflect the representation of all and sundry in all climes including Bangladesh.

Thailand

This is a democracy in Southeast Asia like Indonesia, and with a good population of women. To preserve the rights of women in politics, the 1997 Thai Constitution created equal rights for the citizens (Romanow, 2012). However, findings reveal that Thai women still encounter enormous challenges of marginalization and poor representation in the decision-making processes of the country. As of January 2017, for example, findings made it clear that women occupied only 4.9 seats in the parliament. In terms of women representation in 190 countries globally, Thailand ranked 184, making her one of the lowest countries of the world in gender-parity politics (Mala, 2018; Madsen et al., 2019). Compared to other democracies under discussion, Thailand appears to be the lowest in women political representation; the situation does not reflect democracy at work. The above corroborates the findings of Buranajaroenkij et al. (2018). They noted that women representation is gradually growing compared to the 1990s, however, they remain marginalized. In 2020, for instance, based on further result, the total women representation in the parliament was 15.7 percent. The above shows that women are still marginalized in Thai politics and the flaw cannot consolidate democracy in the country. The condition of women in Thai politics needs a serious redress to promote their participation in public life.

Philippines

In Philippines, findings reveal men's population to be 50.9 percent while it is 49.1 percent for women. In terms of women representation and participation in politics, evidence revealed that, just as in other democracies, the Filipino government made various legislations to protect women's interest in public space (Dressel, 2011; Hughes, 2011). Also, while the Filipino Constitution established principles to encourage a dynamic and just order for gender balance in politics, findings revealed that democratic governance in Philippines continues to exist as a paradox (Dressel, 2011). Women often turnout massively to vote, but flaws in the democratic practices continue to serve as limitation against women in public life (Dressel, 2011). If the democratic measures and laws for women's rights exist but does not reflect women representation, it contradicts the ethics of liberal democratic theory which encourages free representation and participation of all citizens in public life.

Though Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo served as the President of Philippines in 2001-2010, which was a sign of democracy at work, results further revealed that men still control several realms of Philippines politics to the detriment of women. Also, while women who contest for public leadership usually do so to enhance positive development at their society levels and promote gender parity in the country, their motivation often comes from their families (Dressel, 2011; Zapata, 2018). Findings further disclosed that, not

belonging to a political family, poor public experience, gender bias, corruption, institutional weakness, elite dominance, and economic deprivation work against women. In the national parliament of Philippines, for example, findings show that women enjoyed only 28 percent representation as of 2020 (Statistica, 2020). According to IPU (2020), in the past 29 years of Philippines democracy, 29.80 percent women representation in the parliament in 2016 was the highest value, and it dropped to 27.96 percent in 2019. Considering the above disclosures, though Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was President of Philippines from 2001 to 2010, 27.96 percent women representation compared to men does not show gender balance and equity, neither does it reflect the genuine ethics of a liberal democratic government. A lot still needs to be done to give women better representation in Filipino politics.

DISCUSSION

From the above revelations, results proved that women's participation and representation in public politics in the selected Asian democracies is still very poor and underrepresented. This happens notwithstanding several constitutional provisions instituted to ensure gender balance and fair representation of women in public life. In India, evidence proves that only 25 women out of 245 MPs served in the parliament as of 2020. This was just 10 percent of the total seats in the parliament, thus validating the findings of Kumar (2020) and Krisnawamy (2020). The scenario cannot be considered fair to representation of women in Indian politics. In Indonesia, also, women are poorly represented. Between 2019 and 2020, for example, evidence shows that only 20.3 percent of women were present in the Indonesian parliament. This also corroborates the findings of Statistica (2021). The situation of women in both India and Indonesia contradicts the ethos of liberal democracy that encourages the full representation of all citizens in government. Their situation calls for immediate political attention and must be addressed.

In Malaysia and Pakistan, also, the state of women representation appeared not different from India and Indonesia. In Malaysia, for example, the percentage of women representation in the parliament amongst other top positions in government read 24.7 percent as of 2019. This was despite the provision in Article 8(2), and 50.3 percent women enrollment in education against men with 37.8 percent. It was even after the 2018 general election that more women were seen in top government positions. The above signified total underrepresentation and corroborates the findings of Sukhani (2020) and Krishnan (2020). In Pakistan, for example, only 18 women served in the national parliament and their total number in the national government was 51 between 2013 and 2018. This was despite the 2017 electoral reform that mandated all political parties to grant women 5 percent seats. From the above, therefore, women are underrepresented in both Malaysia and

Pakistan. It cannot augur well for democratic consolidation if unaddressed as the poor representation contradicts the ethos of a liberal democratic system.

In line with the above, evidence from Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines were not different from other states in this study. In Bangladesh, women have achieved exalted public positions like the Prime Minister, head of parliament and head of opposition party, but their representation continues to read low in terms of gender balance. The total number of women in the parliament was just 19.71 percent out of the total seats as of 2019. This also corroborates the findings of Firdous (2019), and Ferdaus (2019). It is a sign of underrepresentation in public life. In Thailand, also, the total number of women in the national parliament, for example, stood at 15.7 percent out of the total number of seats as of 2018. Though, there is an upward growth compared to what was obtainable in the 1990s, the above proves underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes in Thailand. This was not different from what was obtainable in the Philippines. Though Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo rose and became the president, available evidence still proved marginalization against women in Filipino politics. In the parliament, for example, the total number of women in the legislature stood at 27.96 percent as of 2019. The state of women underrepresentation in Thai and Filipino politics agreed with the findings in Buranajaroenkij (2018), IPU (2020), and Statistica (2020). The above represents underrepresentation and marginalization of women.

In all the above discussion, women are underrepresented in all the selected Asian democracies of India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Philippines. Their political marginalization and underrepresentation contradict the doctrine of liberal democratic theory, democratic governance, and consolidation of democracy. In a democracy, as espoused by the liberal democratic theory, it is the right of all citizens including women to have fair participation and representation in the political processes and decision-making in the society. Only when the above is achieved can the system be deemed democratic. Also, much evidence showed that several factors like religion, male dominance, economic deprivation, and poor family support are responsible for marginalization and underrepresentation of women as they continue to work as a glass ceiling against the victims' interests. Other factors include the role of political parties, education, absence of political experience and political will on the part of the political leaders to protect the right of women in the public space. The above challenges aligned with the findings of Prihatini (2019), Hillman (2017), Sukhani (2020), Krishnan (2020), and Louis (2020). There is the need to address the above challenges to allow women enjoy their full rights in public life in the selected Asian democracies. The development thereafter would, expectedly, help to consolidate the practice and teachings of liberal democratic theory and the interest of the Asian women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As nations continue to engage democracy as a form of political governance, discussion on political participation and representation of women in such democracies also continue to occupy public discussions. This is because government belongs the people in a democracy (Isma'ila & Othman, 2016), and it offers the citizens the legal freedom to take part in the governance of their democratic societies (Liu, 2020; Choi, 2018; Mohd Sani, 2008; Olasunkanmi, 2016). And complementary to that, democracy is integrally a way of life (Murugasu, 2020). Based on the above submissions, this study explored the state of women political participation in the selected Asian democracies of India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Philippines. Relying on descriptive qualitative research technique, secondary information, and liberal democratic theory as a framework for analysis, several findings were made. The findings showed that women are not only underrepresented in the selected democracies, but they are hugely marginalized in comparison to their male counterparts. There is a poor representation of women and high gender disparity as they are hardly appointed into top government positions. Their situation is attributed to several factors of male dominance, religion, cultural belief, negative role of political parties, education, and the lack of political will by the political leaders to respect and protect the rights of women in their democracies.

Based on the above shortcomings, therefore, there is need for the political leaders to pay more attention to challenges facing women in their democracies so that they can enjoy their rightful place in politics. The number of reserved seats in parliament should be increased and the provisions of the constitution be obeyed. Political education of women should be promoted, and families should be able to give women support in their political pursuit. The above recommendations are vital in a democracy as women are part of the political system and deserve opportunity to participate in strengthening democracy in the political realm. Finally, the novelty of this study is that it has effectively addressed its objective as it exploited the gaps in previous studies and filled them. It has also contributed to the body of knowledge by bringing the political situation of women in the selected Asian democracies to public knowledge. Equally important, it is expected to help Asian women understand their political predicament. While the study would also benefit parliamentarians, researchers, and the public, it can also be replicated in other democracies in Asia and elsewhere in other continents inclusive of Africa.

REFERENCES

1. Agunyai, S. C., & Olawoyin, K. W. (2019). Legislative-executive corruption and good governance in Nigeria: Insights from Buhari's administration in the Fourth Republic. In Fagbadebo, O. & Ruffin, F (Eds.), *Perspectives on the legislature and the prospects of accountability in Nigeria and South Africa* (105-119). Gewerbestrasse, Switzerland: Springer, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93509-6>
2. Ara, F., & Northote, J. (2020). Women's participation in Bangladesh politics, The gender wall, and quotas. *South Asia Research*, 40(2), 266-281. DOI: 10.1177/0262728020915562
3. Azmi, Z. (2020). Discoursing women's political participation towards achieving sustainable development: The case of women in Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies*, 38(0), 67-88.
4. Barnes, T. D., & Burchard, S. M. (2013). "Engendering" politics: The impact of descriptive representation on women's political engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(7), 767-790. Doi: 10.1177/0010414012463884
5. Bode, L. (2017). Closing the gap: Gender parity in political engagement on social media. *Information, Communication & Society* 20(4), 587-603. [https://doi: 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1202302](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1202302)
6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. SAGE Publications.
7. Buranajaroenkij, D., Doneys, P., Kusakabe, K., & Doane, D. L. (2018). Expansion of women's political participation through social movements: The case of the red and yellow shirts in Thailand. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 53(1), 34-48. [Doi.org/10.1177/0021909616654508](https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909616654508)
8. Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., Jardina, A., Shames, S., & Verba, S. (2018). What has happened to the gender gap in political participation? How might we explain it? In McCammon, H. Banaszak, L. A. (Eds.), *100 Years of the Nineteenth Amendment: An Appraisal of Women's Political Activism* (69-104). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Choi, N. (2018). Women's political pathways in Southeast Asia. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21(2), 224-248. Doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.152368
10. Chowdhury, F. D. (2009). Problems of women's political participation in Bangladesh politics. *The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 98 (404), 555-567. DOI: 10.1080/00358530903151748
11. Coffe, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2011). Gender gaps in political participation across sub-Saharan African nations. *Social indicators research*, 102(2), 245-264. Doi:10.1007/s11205-010-9676-6
12. Coffé, H., & Dilli, S. (2015). The gender gap in political participation in Muslim-majority countries. *International Political Science Review*, 36(5), 526-544. [https://doi: 10.1177/019251211452822](https://doi.org/10.1177/019251211452822)
13. Community of Democracy. (2017, March 9-10). *Advancing women's political participation: African consultation on gender equality and political empowerment*. Paper Presented in Johannesburg, South Africa. <https://community-democracies.org/app/uploads/2017/09/WPP-African-Consultation.pdf>
14. Conway, M. M. (2001). Women and political participation. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 34(2), 231-233.
15. Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, USA, CA: Sage.
16. Dressel, B. (2011). The Philippines: how much real democracy? *International Political Science Review*, 32(5), 529-545.
17. Espinal, R., & Zhao, S. (2015). Gender gaps in civic and political participation in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(1), 123-138.
18. Fadia, K. (2014). Women's empowerment through political participation in India. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 60(3), 537-548.

Victor Vincent Okpe, Ayo Oyekola– **An Examination of Women Political Participation and Representation in Selected Asian Democracies**

19. Falade, D. A. (2014). Political participation in Nigerian democracy: A study of some selected local government areas in Ondo State, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science*, 14(8), 17-23.
20. Fashagba, J. Y., Ajayi, O. R. M., and Nwankwor, C. (Eds.). (2019). *The Nigerian National Assembly*. Gewerbestrasse, Switzerland: Springer, Cham. Doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11905-8.
21. Fatile, J. O., & Adejuwon, K. O. (2016). Legislative-executive conflicts and democratic governance in Nigeria's fourth republic. *International Journal of Innovation Research in Social Science and Management Techniques*, 3(1), 91-110.
22. Ferdous, J. (2019). Representation of Women in Parliament of Bangladesh: Is It Hopeful? *Journal of Governance and Public Policy*, 6(2), 110-125. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18196/jgpp.62111>
23. Firdaus, F. (2019). The long struggle of the women's movement in Indonesian politics. *The Interpreter*. Retrieved from <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/long-struggle-women-s-movement-indonesian-politics>
24. Folke, O. & Rickne, J. (2016) 'The Glass Ceiling in Politics: Formalization and Empirical Tests'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49 (5): 567–99.
25. Graaf, G., & Paanakker, H. (2015). 'Good Governance: Performance Values and Procedural Values in Conflict'. *American Review of Public Administration*, 45(6), 635–652.
26. Hillman, B. (2017). Increasing women's parliamentary representation in Asia and the Pacific: The Indonesian experience. *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 4(1), 38-49.
27. Hughes, M. M. (2011). Intersectionality, quotas, and minority women's political representation worldwide. *American Political Science Review*, 604-620. Doi:10.1017/S0003055411000293
28. Inokoba, P. & Kumokor, I. (2012). Electoral crisis, governance, and democratic consolidation in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science*, 27(2), 139–148.
29. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2020). Philippines-proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (%). *Index mundi*. <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/philippines/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS>
30. Islam, S. T., & Islam, E. (2012). Barriers and scope of political participation of women in local government of Bangladesh: Union parishad perspective. *Journal of International Social Issues*, 1(1), 71-85.
31. Isma'ila, Y. (2016). *Malpractices in Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections: Challenges of democratic governance* (Doctoral dissertation), Universiti Utara Malaysia.
32. Isma'ila, Y. & Othman, Z. (2016): Globalization and democratization in Nigeria's quest for democratic governance in the Fourth Republic. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Science*, 7(1), 386-396.
33. Khan, A., & Naqvi, S. (2020). Dilemmas of Representation: Women in Pakistan's Assemblies. *Asian Affairs*, 51(2), 286-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2020.1748414>
34. Krishnan, D. B. (2020). Malaysian women still behind in politics, workforce participation. *New Straight Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/12/645829/malaysian-women-still-behind-politics-workforce-participation>
35. Krishnaswamy, T. (2020). Female parliamentarians at a historic high, but parties must do more. *The Wire*. Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/women/women-parliament-lok-sabha-rajya-sabha-political-parties>
36. Kumar, D. (2017). Participation of women in politics: Worldwide experience. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 22(12), 77-88. Doi: 10.9790/0837-2212067788
37. Kumar, I. (2020). Political participation of women in India. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(10), 31-36. Doi: 10.9790/0837-2510043136
38. Kwasau, M.A. (2013). The challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *European Scientific Journal*, 9(8), 181-192.

Victor Vincent Okpe, Ayo Oyekola– **An Examination of Women Political Participation and Representation in Selected Asian Democracies**

39. Latif, A., Usman, D. A., Kataria, J. R., & Abdullah, M. (2020). Female political participation in South Asia: A case study of Pakistan. *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30(2), 201-213.
40. Liu, S. J. S. (2020). Gender gaps in political participation in Asia. *International Political Science Review*, 00(0), 1-17. Doi: 10.1177/0192512120935517.
41. Louis, Y. M. (2020). Women in Malaysian politics: Are politicians missing a point? *Malay mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2020/10/21/women-in-malaysian-politics-are-politicians-missing-a-point-vanitha-meena-1/1914822>
42. Madsen, C. Preece, J. & Selway, J. (2019). *Thai female political representation in the 2019 elections*. THAI DATA POINTS. Retrieved from <https://www.thaidatapoints.com/post/thai-election-pending-6>
43. Magilvy, J. K. (2003). Qualitative designs. In K. S. Oman, M. Krugman, & R. Fink (Eds.), *Nursing research secrets* (123-128). Philadelphia, USA: Hanley & Belfus, Inc.
44. Mala, D. (2018). Women poorly represented as lawmakers. *Bangkok Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/politics/1571138/women-poorly-represented-as-lawmakers>
45. Mohammed, U. (2013). Nigeria's electoral system: A challenge to sustainable democracy in the Fourth Republic. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 2(2), 567-581.
46. Mohd Sani, M. A. (2008). Deliberative democracy: A Malaysian Perspective. *Journal of International Studies*, 4, 18-34.
47. Murugasu, S. C. (2020). Democratizing local government: What Malaysia can learn from Mexico and India. *Journal of International Studies*, 16, 183-194. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jis2020.16.11>
48. Noreen, N., Zakar, Z., Ali, A., & Yousaf, U. (2019). An overview of Women Representation in National Assembly of Pakistan and their career persistency. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 56(2), 211-218.
49. Okpe, V. V., & Taya, S. (2018). Institutional perspective: Legislative-executive relations under Nigeria's democratic dispensation. *International Journal of Research*, 5(22), 828-851.
50. Olasunkanmi, O. O. (2016). Democracy consolidation and governance of the security sector in Nigeria: Trends and challenges. *Journal of International Studies*, 12, 127-143.
51. Othman, F. M. and Okpe, V.V. (2021). Assessment of Political Participation and Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum.* 29 (1): 547- 563. <https://doi.org/10.47836/pissh.29.1.30>
52. Prihatini, E. S. (2019). Women who win in Indonesia: The impact of age, experience, and list position. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 72, 40-46. Doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.10.003
53. Rhoads, E. (2012). Women's political participation in Indonesia: decentralization, money politics and collective memory in Bali. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 31(2), 35-56.
54. Romanow, L. (2012). The women of Thailand. *Global Majority E-Journal*, 3(1), 44-60.
55. Rotberg, R. I. (2014). Good governance means performance and results. *Governance*, 27(3), 511–518. [Doi.org/10.1111/gove.12084](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12084)
56. Rubab, M., Mustafa, D. G., & Nawaz, A. (2020). Conundrum of women political participation in Pakistan: Impediments and Opportunities. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 4(2), 135-149.
57. Satriyo, H. (2014) "The 30%." *New Mandala*. Retrieved from <https://www.newmandala.org/the-30/>
58. Statistica. (2021, June 21). Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament in the Philippines from 2009-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/730298/the-philippines-proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliament/>

Victor Vincent Okpe, Ayo Oyekola– **An Examination of Women Political Participation and Representation in Selected Asian Democracies**

59. Statista. (2021, April 7). Proportion of seats held by women in parliament in Indonesia 2011-2020. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/730286/indonesia-proportion-of-seats-held-by-women-in-national-parliament/>
60. Sukhani, P. (2020). Women's political representation: Progressing in Malaysia? [Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Research Report]. Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Retrieved from <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CO20009.pdf>
61. The World Bank. (2019, March 8). *Survey of female parliamentarians around the world. Who we are?* Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/03/08/survey-of-female-parliamentarians-around-the-world>
62. True, J., Niner, S., Parashar, S., & George, N. (2012). Women's political participation in Asia and the Pacific [Research Report]. SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum. Brooklyn: USA.
63. Vincent, O. V., and Tunde, S. R. (2018). Nigeria and 21st century democratic dispensation. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 6 (1), 121-125.
64. Wright, J. G., & McKeever, P. (2000). Qualitative research: Its role in clinical research. *Annals of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada*, 33, 275-280.
65. Zamfirache, I. (2010) 'Women and politics – The glass ceiling'. *Journal of Comparative Research in Anthropology and Sociology*, 1 (1): 175–85.
66. Zapata, A. D. (2018). Women's Leadership and Political Participation: Fair Access to Political Spheres in the Province of Bulacan, Philippines. *African Educational Research Journal*, 6(4), 334-341. Doi: 10.30918/AERJ.64.18.102