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Grassroots Leadership Amid Political Constraints: YB Salamiah's Challenges and Contributions as Malaysia's Opposition MP

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Abstract
Women in opposition politics face unique challenges, particularly in developing democracies like Malaysia, where political structures limit their access to resources and visibility. While extensive research exists on women leaders in Western democracies, studies on Muslim women opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) in Southeast Asia remain scarce. As an opposition MP from PAS representing Temerloh, Pahang, YB Salamiah Mohd Nor operates under systemic constraints, limited federal funding, and reduced media coverage, raising concerns about how opposition MPs can effectively serve their constituents despite unequal government resources. This study aims to analyze the challenges and contributions of YB Salamiah by assessing public perception, grassroots engagement, and alternative governance strategies, offering a holistic understanding of the realities of being an opposition MP in Malaysia, particularly as a Muslim woman committed to her fundamental values while actively engaging in governance. A mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating a quantitative public survey assessing public satisfaction across demographic variables, qualitative interviews thematically analyzing community perceptions of leadership, and content analysis examining social media engagement, parliamentary speeches, and media coverage. Findings revealed that 62% of respondents expressed satisfaction with YB Salamiah's leadership, while 38% reported dissatisfaction. Younger voters and more educated respondents showed higher approval, whereas those with lower education levels had higher expectations for direct aid and infrastructure support. Direct engagement via face-to-face meetings and service counter correlated with higher satisfaction, while indirect communication through JKKK and social media correlated with lower satisfaction. Content analysis showed limited media coverage, making social media a crucial outreach tool. These findings highlight the structural barriers and public expectations of opposition MPs, demonstrating that despite political constraints; YB Salamiah has maintained public trust through grassroots engagement and social media visibility. The study underscores the need for institutional reforms to ensure equitable resource distribution and fair political representation.

Keywords: grassroot leadership; Malaysia; opposition MP; political constraints; women in politics; Muslim women

Introduction

Political representation in democratic governance ensures that elected officials serve the needs and aspira-

tions of their constituents. However, opposition Members of Parliament (MPs), particularly women, face unique challenges that remain underexplored in the literature. While extensive studies exist on female political leadership in developed democracies such as the United States and Europe (Krook, 2010; Lovenduski, 2016), the experiences of Muslim women opposition MPs in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, remain largely undocumented. These Western contexts offer insights into female representation, yet they operate within different cultural, economic, and political environments where grassroots priorities may differ significantly.

Moreover, the intersection of religion and politics further complicates the landscape for Muslim women MPs in Malaysia. While some Islamic parties have been criticized for gender disparities in political participation (Tanuwidjaja, 2020; Bano & Kalmbach, 2012), figures like YB Salamiah Mohd Nor demonstrate that Muslim women MPs can effectively contribute to community development despite systemic constraints. However, their commitment to fundamental religious values and their roles in policy-making are often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Despite these gaps, studies on opposition MPs in Malaysia highlight broader structural limitations, particularly in access to funding and government support. Opposition leaders often face bureaucratic challenges, reduced visibility in state-controlled media, and limited financial resources (Weiss, 2020; Case, 2017). These commonalities and differences in opposition MPs struggle across Malaysia. By integrating these methods, this study offers a holistic understanding of the realities of being an opposition MP in Malaysia, particularly as a Muslim woman committed to her fundamental values while actively engaging in governance.

Literature Review

The role of women in politics has been extensively studied in Western democracies, where female representatives often navigate institutional barriers, gender biases, and political challenges. However, research on women MPs in opposition parties, particularly in non Western contexts, remains limited. While studies on European and American female politicians (Krook, 2010; Lovenduski, 2016) provide insights into their struggles and successes, the cultural and political dynamics in regions such as Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East introduce distinct challenges.

Women in opposition politics often face additional barriers compared to their counterparts in ruling parties. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, for example, female MPs encounter structural limitations in accessing financial resources and have less influence over policy-making (Bari, 2005). Similarly, in African countries (Tamale, 2000), women politicians must rely on grassroots support to establish political legitimacy, particularly in opposition parties that lack government funds. Studies on non-Western female leaders (Budianta, 2020) highlight cultural expectations that shape public perceptions of women politicians, where they are often expected to prioritize social and welfare issues over economic and governance-related matters. This expectation influences how female MPs are evaluated by their constituents and the political strategies they adopt.

In countries with strong Islamic political landscapes, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and parts of the Middle East, Muslim women MPs navigate both political and religious expectations. Islamic political parties have been criticized for their gender disparities in leadership positions (Bano & Kalmbach, 2012), yet some female MPs, like YB Salamiah, have demonstrated strong community engagement and policy advocacy despite these barriers. Unlike in Western democracies, where women MPs often advocate for gender equality and feminist policies, Muslim women in politics may balance fundamental religious values with

modern governance approaches. Their leadership is often framed around family, community service, and moral governance, which may appeal to both conservative and progressive segments of society.

Malaysia's opposition MPs face significant constraints compared to their counterparts in the ruling coalition. Research by Weiss (2020) and Case (2017) documents how opposition politicians struggle with funding limitations, restricted media access, and administrative roadblocks. These challenges shape their political strategies, requiring them to rely on alternative funding sources, grassroots mobilization, and social media outreach to remain visible to constituents.

For opposition women MPs like YB Salamiah, these limitations are compounded by gendered political biases, making it more difficult to secure policy wins or government-backed development projects for their constituencies. The literature on opposition politics in Malaysia remains underdeveloped, particularly concerning the role of women leaders in opposition parties.

While Western and South Asian literature provides insights into the struggles of women in opposition politics, there is limited documentation on how Muslim women MPs in Malaysia navigate these challenges. This study fills this gap by examining YB Salamiah's experiences, public perceptions of her leadership, and her strategies for overcoming political constraints. The findings contribute to a broader understanding of how opposition MPs—particularly women—engage with governance, community service, and public expectations in Malaysia's political landscape.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of YB Salamiah's leadership challenges and contributions. The research integrates multiple data collection methods to triangulate findings, ensuring a more nuanced understanding of her impact and public perception. The study combines quantitative survey analysis, qualitative interviews, content analysis, and comparative review to assess how opposition status, gender, and political structures influence YB Salamiah's leadership role.

Quantitative Component: Public Survey

A public perception survey was conducted to gauge satisfaction levels, expectations, and concerns regarding YB Salamiah's leadership. The survey targeted residents of Temerloh, comprising diverse demographic groups to ensure a representative sample.

Participants

The survey involved 400 respondents, selected through randomized sampling across various segments of the constituency. Participants represented different gender groups, age brackets, employment statuses, and educational backgrounds.

Data Collection

The survey was administered via multiple channels, including face-to-face interviews, online forms, and community engagement sessions. Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with YB Salamiah's leadership on a Likert scale and provide feedback on her effectiveness, accessibility, and governance style.

Materials Used

The survey questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale ratings, and open-ended response sections. The instrument was designed based on previous studies on opposition MPs and grassroots leadership.

Procedure

Responses were collected anonymously and analyzed statistically. The study examined public satisfaction trends across different demographic groups, using t-tests and ANOVA to assess whether differences in perception were statistically significant.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed to determine whether variables such as gender, age, employment status, and education level influenced public perception. The study also examined whether prior interactions with YB Salamiah (e.g., receiving aid) affected respondents' evaluations.

Qualitative Component: Interviews

To supplement the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected community members, local leaders, and political analysts. The objective was to explore in depth narratives regarding YB Salamiah's leadership style, challenges as an opposition MP, and public expectations.

Thematic Analysis and Participant Selection

Interviews were thematically coded based on recurring patterns and key insights. Themes were identified iteratively, focusing on structural barriers, grassroots engagement, opposition challenges, and policy advocacy. Interviewees were selected from different demographic categories to explore varied perspectives.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted in person and via phone/video calls to accommodate participants' availability. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize recurring narratives. Responses were compared against survey findings to identify consistencies and contradictions in public perception.

Content Analysis

The content analysis of social media posts, parliamentary speeches, and media coverage reveals key trends in how YB Salamiah engages with the public and how she is perceived in the broader political discourse.

Media Representation and Public Discourse

An analysis of online news articles and parliamentary debates shows that YB Salamiah receives limited media coverage compared to government-aligned MPs. When she is mentioned, the focus is often on opposition challenges rather than her contributions.

One recurring theme in media coverage is her advocacy for community programs, particularly those focused on women's welfare, education, and economic empowerment. However, sentiment analysis of online news articles and social media posts indicates a mix of positive and neutral sentiments, with relatively few negative portrayals.

Social Media Engagement

To assess YB Salamiah's online presence, this study examined public interactions on her official Facebook page and discussions in community-based WhatsApp groups. The analysis included Facebook Page: Posts from January to December 2024 were analyzed, focusing on engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments. Also, WhatsApp Community Groups: Three active groups were selected—'Temerloh Community Forum,' 'Suara Rakyat Temerloh,' and 'Jalinan Muslimat Pahang.' Discussions from the past six months were reviewed to identify dominant topics and public sentiment.

Parliamentary Speeches and Policy Advocacy

A review of Hansard records was conducted to assess YB Salamiah's legislative contributions and policy advocacy. This study analyzed six parliamentary speeches delivered between March 2023 and November

2024. The selected speeches focused on:

- Budget allocations for opposition constituencies (March 2023)
- Women's empowerment policies (July 2023)
- Infrastructure and rural development in Pahang (October 2023)
- Education and youth engagement (February 2024)
- Healthcare access for underprivileged communities (June 2024)
- Critique of government funding disparities (November 2024)

Findings from content analysis were triangulated with survey and interview results to identify patterns in public sentiment and leadership perception.

Results

The results of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of YB Salamiah's leadership as an opposition MP, based on public perception surveys, qualitative interviews, and content analysis. The findings offer insights into her effectiveness, accessibility, and the challenges she faces in governance.

Quantitative Component: Public Survey

The results of the public survey provide an insight into how YB Salamiah is perceived by her constituents based on various demographic factors. The analysis includes a breakdown of public perception by gender, age, employment status, education level, communication method, and prior assistance received.

Overall Public Perception

Survey results indicate that 62% of respondents are satisfied with YB Salamiah's leadership, while 38% express dissatisfaction. The mean rating for overall satisfaction was 3.7 (on a Likert scale of 1-5), indicating a generally positive/moderate perception.

Public Perception by Gender

Male respondents reported a satisfaction score of 1.29, while female respondents reported 1.24.A statistical comparison using a t-test revealed no significant difference (p-value = 0.32) in perception between male and female respondents.

Public Perception by Age

The highest satisfaction level was observed in the 18-24 age group (58%), followed by the 25 54 age group (22%), while the 55+ age group showed the lowest satisfaction (20%). A one-way ANOVA test was conducted, indicating that age groups do not differ significantly in perception (p-value = 0.15).

Public Perception by Employment Status

Public sector employees reported the highest satisfaction (1.0), while self-employed individuals showed the lowest satisfaction (1.33). A chi-square test for independence indicated a non-significant relationship (p-value = 0.21) between employment status and perception of YB Salamiah.

Public Perception by Education Level

Respondents with higher education levels (PhD or master's degree) reported slightly lower satisfaction, whereas those with SPM and below exhibited higher satisfaction (1.36). The trend suggests that education level influences expectations regarding political leadership. However, a one-way ANOVA test indicated that differences in satisfaction across education levels were not statistically significant (p-value = 0.325).

Public Perception by Communication Method

Respondents who engaged via servis counter reported the highest satisfaction (1.32), while those using

village representatives (JKKK) reported the lowest satisfaction (1.75). This suggests that direct interaction through service counters contributes to higher satisfaction, while indirect communication through JKKK results in lower perceived effectiveness.

Public Perception by Prior Assistance Received

Respondents who had received assistance from YB Salamiah's office reported a higher satisfaction score (1.0) compared to those who had not (2.0). A chi-square test confirmed that there is no statistically significant difference (p-value = 0.56) between these two groups, suggesting that while those who received assistance reported slightly higher satisfaction, the lack of statistical significance implies that other factors contribute more significantly to public perception.

Table 1: Summary of the statistical findings

Factor	Highest Satisfaction	Lowest Satisfaction	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Gender	Female (1.24)	Male (1.29)	0.32
Age	18-24 (58%)	55+ (20%)	0.15
Employment Status	Public Sector (1.0)	Self-Employed (1.33)	0.21
Education Level	PhD/Master's (1.00)	SPM/Below (1.36)	0.33
Communication Method	Servis Counter (1.32)	JKKK (1.75)	0.92
Prior Assistance Received	Yes (1.34)	No (1.11)	0.56

These findings provide a comprehensive statistical understanding of how different segments of the population perceive YB Salamiah's leadership.

Qualitative Component: Interviews

The qualitative component of this study, derived from semi-structured interviews, provides deeper insights into public perceptions of YB Salamiah's leadership. The responses were categorized into key themes through thematic analysis, allowing the study to explore recurring narratives regarding governance challenges, grassroots engagement, and public expectations.

Theme 1: Barriers in Political Representation

Many respondents highlighted the structural and political barriers that opposition MPs, particularly women, face in Malaysia.

P#12: *"I think YB Salamiah is doing her best, but without the proper funding from the government, how much can she really do? It is unfair that opposition MPs have to work with fewer resources".*

P#98: *"If she were in the ruling party, she would have better access to financial allocations and government projects. Right now, she has to depend on NGOs and party support".*

Theme 2: Grassroots Engagement and Accessibility

Respondents noted YB Salamiah's strong presence in local events and her willingness to directly engage with people.

P#250: *"She often visits villages and listens to our issues. I have seen her sit down with people and discuss their problems without hesitation".*

P#4: *"Unlike some MPs who only appear during elections, she has made an effort to be available. I met her at a mosque program, and she actually took time to listen to my concerns".*

Theme 3: Perception of Opposition Leadership

Some respondents expressed skepticism regarding the effectiveness of opposition MPs, citing their limited influence over government policies.

P#133: *"She is very hardworking, but at the end of the day, can she really make a difference? The ruling government controls most decisions".*

P#187: *"Her role is more about highlighting issues rather than solving them. Without strong backing, there is only so much she can do".*

Theme 4: Public Expectations and Service Delivery

The public's expectations of an MP varied, with some emphasizing policy advocacy, while others expected direct financial and infrastructural assistance.

P#7: *"What I want is someone who can help improve our roads, schools, and healthcare services. The MP should focus on these things, not just speeches in Parliament".*

P#276: *"I don't expect her to fix everything, but she should be able to bring more programs for youth and women. Maybe more funding for small businesses?"*

Content Analysis Results

Media Representation and Public Discourse

An analysis of online news articles and parliamentary debates shows that YB Salamiah receives limited media coverage compared to government-aligned MPs. When she is mentioned, the focus is often on opposition challenges rather than her contributions.

However, within Harakah Daily, the official publication of PAS, YB Salamiah receives more consistent and favorable coverage, particularly highlighting her advocacy on socio-political issues. For example, in January 2024, Harakah Daily reported on her criticism of the Pahang state government's slow response to persistent water issues. In February 2025, she was featured discussing the inadequacy of the RM 1,700 minimum wage in addressing the rising cost of living. Additionally, in March 2024, the publication covered her emphasis on Islamic principles as a foundation for racial unity.

These reports indicate that Harakah Daily serves as an alternative platform for YB Salamiah to communicate her initiatives and viewpoints, compensating for her limited exposure in mainstream media. The contrast between Harakah Daily's focus on her activities and the relative neglect by national media highlights the disparity in media representation for opposition MPs.

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Social Media Engagement

Findings indicated that posts related to community visits and social welfare programs received the highest engagement, while discussions in WhatsApp groups often revolved around requests for assistance, policy debates, and grievances about government allocations. YB Salamiah actively uses social media platforms to connect with constituents, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp groups. Posts related to direct community engagement, charity efforts, and constituency visits tend to receive the most engagement. However, comments on these posts frequently mention the limited impact of her initiatives due to funding

constraints, with some users expressing frustration over the challenges faced by opposition MPs in securing resources.

Examples of social media comments:

"YB Salamiah is one of the few MPs who actually visit the people regularly, but without enough funding, her hands are tied".

"She raises a lot of good issues in Parliament, but does the government listen to her? That's the problem with being in the opposition".

"At least she tries. Many MPs disappear after winning, but she is still around, helping where she can".

Parliamentary Speeches

Analysis of Hansard's records shows that her speeches focused on women's rights, social welfare, and rural development. However, her proposals often faced resistance from ruling party MPs. The content analysis revealed that YB Salamiah consistently raised concerns over opposition MPs' access to development funds, advocating for equitable resource distribution and increased focus on marginalized groups.

In parliamentary debates, YB Salamiah has focused on women's rights, social welfare policies, and infrastructure development in rural areas. Her speeches emphasize the need for fair allocation of government funding to all MPs, regardless of political affiliation. However, content analysis of Hansard's records indicates that her proposals often face resistance from ruling party MPs.

For instance, in a parliamentary session discussing budget allocations, she raised concerns about the unequal distribution of constituency development funds, arguing that opposition MPs should not be excluded from receiving necessary resources. This issue was echoed in social media discussions, with many users agreeing with her stance.

Discussion

These study findings align with broader discussions on women in politics, opposition leadership, and grassroots governance. By examining YB Salamiah's experiences, this section contextualizes the study results within the existing literature on female MPs, particularly in opposition politics.

Structural Barriers and Gendered Challenges in Opposition Politics

The limitations faced by YB Salamiah reflect challenges encountered by women opposition MPs globally. Studies on female parliamentarians in Europe and the United States (Krook, 2010; Lovenduski, 2016) highlight how resource constraints, political marginalization, and systemic biases hinder their effectiveness. Similarly, research on female MPs in Pakistan and Bangladesh (Bari, 2005) indicates that restricted financial allocations weaken their ability to serve constituents.

Survey results confirm that Malaysian opposition MPs face comparable struggles, particularly concerning funding limitations and restricted access to development allocations. Respondents emphasized that YB Salamiah relies heavily on party resources, NGOs, and alternative funding mechanisms, reinforcing the global trend where opposition women MPs must work harder to secure resources and legitimacy.

Grassroots Engagement as a Key Strategy

Despite these constraints, YB Salamiah's emphasis on grassroots engagement mirrors successful strategies employed by women MPs in developing nations. Research on female leaders in Africa and Indonesia (Tamale, 2000; Budianta, 2020) demonstrates that direct community engagement fosters public trust and political longevity.

Interviews highlighted that frequent village visits and active participation in community programs positively influenced public perception, particularly among women and younger voters. However, content analysis indicated that these efforts were largely absent from mainstream media coverage, reaffirming the visibility challenges faced by opposition MPs globally.

The Role of Social Media in Opposition Politics

The study found that YB Salamiah effectively utilizes social media to maintain public engagement, a strategy increasingly adopted by opposition politicians worldwide. Research on women MPs in non-Western democracies (Sakib, Shishir & Rahman, 2024) indicates that digital platforms serve as alternative political arenas, bypassing traditional media barriers.

Survey respondents acknowledged YB Salamiah's strong social media presence, yet some expressed skepticism regarding its effectiveness in achieving tangible policy change. This finding aligns with previous studies that showed social media serves as an effective outreach tool but often struggles to translate into legislative influence due to government restrictions and content moderation practices (Tsichla, 2020; Pradichit & Visan, 2024). Technical censorship has limited the ability of many opposition parties to reach supporters and hindered access to independent coverage of the electoral process. This has also been reported in many other countries around the world (Funk, Vesteinsson & Baker, 2024).

Expectations vs. Reality: The Challenge of Opposition Leadership

Survey findings suggest that YB Salamiah's perception varies across demographic groups, with more educated respondents expressing greater support compared to those with lower educational backgrounds. This aligns with studies on political awareness and leadership evaluation (Fernández Guzmán Grassi, Portos, & Felicetti, 2024; Thelma & Chitondo, 2024) which indicate that individuals with higher education levels tend to evaluate political figures based on governance and policy engagement rather than direct financial assistance. In contrast, respondents with lower educational backgrounds expressed higher expectations for tangible benefits such as direct aid and infrastructure projects.

This divide reflects broader trends observed in studies on opposition MPs in Malaysia (Weiss, 2020; Case, 2017), where public dissatisfaction often stems from the limited resources available to opposition leaders. Respondents who had received direct assistance from YB Salamiah reported slightly higher satisfaction, but the lack of statistical significance suggests that additional factors shape public perception. This aligns with research on women opposition MPs in South Asia (Goetz, 2003), where constituents value visibility and engagement, even when tangible resources are limited.

Public expectations of infrastructure development, financial aid, and policy advocacy reflect the broader demand for MPs to deliver tangible benefits. However, as noted in research on opposition MPs in Malaysia (Weiss, 2020; Case, 2017), structural limitations significantly hinder their ability to meet these expectations.

Survey findings showed that respondents who received direct assistance from YB Salamiah reported slightly higher satisfaction, but the lack of statistical significance suggests that additional factors shape public perception. This aligns with research on women opposition MPs in South Asia (Goetz, 2003), where constituents value visibility and engagement, even when tangible resources are limited.

Key Takeaways from Content Analysis

Limited media visibility: Coverage of YB Salamiah in mainstream media is sparse, focusing more on political challenges than on her policy contributions. Strong social media presence: YB Salamiah leverages social media to maintain engagement with her constituents, although discussions frequently highlight the constraints faced by opposition MPs.

Consistent policy advocacy: Her parliamentary contributions emphasize women's empowerment, social welfare, and fairer budget allocations, but her initiatives often face resistance from the ruling government. The findings from the content analysis reinforce themes identified in the survey and interviews, particularly regarding public perception of opposition MPs and their limited access to resources.

Conclusion

This study offers a holistic understanding of the realities of being an opposition MP in Malaysia, particularly as a Muslim woman committed to her fundamental values while actively engaging in governance. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and resilience of women opposition MPs in Malaysia. YB Salamiah's case illustrates the global struggles of female parliamentarians in opposition politics, where resource constraints, media visibility, and systemic limitations shape public perception.

Survey results indicated that 62% of respondents expressed satisfaction with YB Salamiah's leadership, while 38% reported dissatisfaction. While some demographic groups, such as younger voters and those who engaged directly with her office, reported higher satisfaction, the study found no statistically significant difference in satisfaction across age, employment status, or prior assistance received. This suggests that other factors, such as political affiliation, media coverage, and opposition status, play a role in shaping public opinion.

Despite these barriers, her grassroots engagement and social media strategies highlight viable approaches for opposition MPs to maintain political relevance and public support. However, the gap between public expectations and opposition MPs' constrained capacities underscores the need for institutional reforms, particularly concerning fair funding allocations and equal media representation.

Future research should explore comparative case studies of opposition women MPs in Southeast Asia to further analyze the impact of grassroots political leadership in restricted political environments.

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