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WOMEN IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS: A CASE STUDY OF 2016 SARAWAK STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the women's political participation as election candidates in Sarawak. The study will centre on the 2016 Sarawak State Election. The investigation aims to contribute to the existing resource on women's political participation in Sarawak and Malaysia in general. The generated data may support the clamour for more participation of women as election candidates in Malaysian politics, particularly in Sarawak. The objectives are to produce a comprehensive gender ranking of political parties' candidates list for 2016 election and to highlight issues pertaining to women's participation in this electoral politics. Of the 226 candidates (2 male candidates had won uncontested) contesting the election, 22 are women. In the previous 2011 election, there were just 15 female candidates. It is encouraging to see so many more women contesting in the state election this year. However, only seven female candidates out of 15, won their seats in the state election in 2011. Whilst for the 2016 election, only six out of 22 female candidates won their seats. Nevertheless, the votes garnered were lesser compared to 2011's state election. Further, one of the interesting features in this election is the ability of the triumph and the defeats to gain more votes from the male candidates which also indicated their popularity even though they were fielded for the first time (that is, female candidates from DAP (won) and PAS (lost)). Thus, a candidate's gender does not seem to be a major factor for voters in deciding when they decide whom to vote for in either in the 2011 and 2016 State elections. Nonetheless, their triumph in gaining more votes does not automatically translate into more female candidates for most political parties. On that note, women in Sarawak political arena are still facing a lot of setbacks due to various social realities in our society among them political parties' undemocratic selection of candidates, gender inequality etc. Meaning, the statistics discussed above suggest that women's representation even as election candidates is disproportionate to its size in the state's population. Furthermore, half the Sarawakian voters are represented by less than 10 percent female representatives. More so, the breakdown shows that male represents ranges from 60.0 percent to even 100.0 percent in some political parties (SUPP, SPDP and PRS did not field any women candidate). These statistics further strengthened the question of how serious are the political parties in pursuing women's wish to their political participation in the government. Therefore, this study will aim or attempt to establish that it is evident that men still dominate the electoral candidatures in Sarawak.

Keywords: Gender, women's political participation, Sarawak state elections