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Introduction

Across the globe, there is a lack of gender parity in the political realm (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). Solving this important issue will ensure increased representation for women's issues (Bratton 2005), greater diversity and effectiveness in leadership styles (Kathlene 1994), and better outcomes for countries as a whole (Cole et al. 2017; Garikipati and Kambhampati 2020). In Malaysia, women rank highly on many indicators such as literacy and labor force participation ("World Bank Open Data" n.d.), but lowly in political polarization, due to cultural and religious factors (Ariffin 1992). Women are not socialized to view themselves as leaders and therefore are likely to remain primarily in the domestic sphere (Azizah 2002; Zakuan and Azmi 2017). Additionally, the country's political structures make it difficult for female candidates to obtain promotions and win elections (Cheng and Tavits 2011; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008; Sukhani 2020; Yeong 2018). Literature suggests several theoretical approaches to increasing female political participation in Malaysia, but few suggestions have been empirically tested (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Baqutayan and Abd Razak 2022; Gordon 2021; Lawless and Fox 2010; Yusoff, Sarjoon, and Othman 2016).

This study tests one theoretical approach: observing how providing women with leadership experience and positive feedback changes their openness to political participation. Through an experiment, we analyzed whether minor leadership experience in a lab setting encouraged women to feel more comfortable running for public office. The experiment tasked either all female, all male, or mixed-gender groups with piecing together a puzzle, while one participant was randomly assigned to be the group leader. Upon completing the task, each participant was given a survey that asked them about their experience in the group and their interest in running for

public office. By assigning women a small leadership role, we tested whether this experience increased their willingness to run for public office. We find that leadership experience does not significantly contribute to women's desire to run for public office, but stress caused by something other than task difficulty, group gendered interactions, and cultural norms does significantly dissuade women from expressing a desire to run for office.

Background

In Malaysia, there are lower female political participation rates than expected, given other female indicators. The female literacy rate was 94% in 2019, the maternal mortality ratio was only 21 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, and female labor force participation rates have been increasing up to 55% ("World Bank Open Data" n.d.; World Bank 2019). In comparison, globally, the average literacy rate was 83% in 2019, the maternal mortality ratio was 158.8 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, and the average female labor force participation rate was 47% in 2022 ("World Bank Open Data" n.d.; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2021). Further, female Malaysian students outperform male students on standardized assessments and over 50% of women have a college degree (World Bank 2019). Despite these positive indicators, female political participation is low. In the Southeast Asian region, an average of 23.2% of parliamentarians in the lower or unicameral chamber are female, with 13.7% of parliamentarians in the upper chamber being female (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023). In Malaysia specifically, these percentages are even lower. As of 2022, women constitute 14% of the lower house (Dewan Rakyat), 18% of the upper house (Dewan Negara), and only represent 12% of state assembly members ("Gender Quotas Database" 2023; Joshi and Echle 2022). In June 2021, Malaysia ranked 144 out of 184 countries for percentage of women in parliament, placing lower than most of its Southeast Asian neighbors (Joshi and Echle 2022). Some parties voluntarily have a 30% gender quota for party leadership positions or candidates in an election, but this is not formal legislation and is often not met ("Gender Quotas Database" 2023).

Female candidacy has been slightly increasing in recent years; the proportion of female candidates nominated in general elections rose from 10.7% in 2013 to 14.4% in 2018 (Sukhani 2020). The 2018 general election saw record-setting percentages of female representatives elected to both state and national political offices, as well as the election of the first female deputy prime minister (Yeong 2018).

Though Malaysian women have very little descriptive representation in political offices, they do have increasing substantive representation. Women's issues have been integrated into national policy since the 1970s, with a focus on equal opportunity for women. For example, the Income Tax Act 1975 allows married women to be assessed separately from their husbands and the Domestic Violence Act 1994 was the first in the region to legally protect victims of domestic violence (Yeong 2018). These substantive advancements are a product of high-quality interactions between female politicians and active women's NGOs, and the willingness of young male legislators

to represent women's issues (ibid.). This type of legislative progress may weaken women's desire and urgency to close the political gender gap and highlights the importance of increasing female political presence while simultaneously encouraging male politicians to champion women's perspectives and issues. This study chooses to focus on increasing female political presence, but notes the importance of substantive representation for women among all representatives.

Cultural and religious factors are important to consider when studying Malaysia's low female participation rates (Ariffin 1992; Chu 1994). Women traditionally work in the domestic sphere and have to break through this stereotype while balancing the burden of adding public sphere work to their preexisting domestic workload (Ariffin 1992; Azizah 2002). Cultural socialization generally causes women to view themselves as volunteers and supporters in the political realm, rather than as leaders (Zakuan and Azmi 2017). Conservative and ethnic politics also tend to diminish efforts to increase female participation (Azizah 2002; Welsh 2019). Additionally, most women lack the financial resources needed to run for office (Yusoff, Sarjoon, and Othman 2016; Zakuan and Azmi 2017) Malaysian society, and therefore politics, are very male dominated, making it difficult for men to be enthusiastic about inviting women to share valuable political power (Azizah 2002; Yeong 2018). The political environment in Malaysia is also considered to be aggressive, intense, and uninviting to women (Azizah 2002).

The political structure in Malaysia creates further difficulty for women to thrive in the political environment. Institutional barriers within parties keep women from being candidates for winnable seats because of male bias on the part of party gatekeepers (Cheng and Tavits 2011, Yeong 2018). Additionally, the presence of coalition politics requires all parties to push forward female candidates in order for increased female leadership to increase. This creates an uneven power balance between the coalition parties especially since only some parties have female candidates to choose from (Sukhani 2020). Furthermore, women across the world generally perform worse in first-past-the-post voting, which is the type of voting system Malaysia uses (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2008).

Many commentaries note the need for increased female political participation in Malaysia and suggest methods to do so, such as increasing education levels (Azizah 2002; Baqutayan and Abd Razak 2022), reforming the political system to include quotas or proportional representation (Yusoff, Sarjoon, and Othman 2016), or working with women's NGOs to connect with women (Ramli and Hassan 2009). However, there have been few experiments measuring the direct impact of these things on political aspirations. This study investigated how giving leadership experience and positive feedback to Malaysian women impacted their desire to engage in politics.

Literature Review

There is a global need for increased female presence in political offices and the puzzle of how to attract more women to the political sphere attracts many political

scientists. Globally, there are consistently lower numbers of female elected officials than male (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994). In worldwide parliaments, the average percent of female members in any chamber is between 26–27% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2023). Having more women in office is beneficial for the advancement of women's issues (Bratton 2005; Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Thomas 1991) and for increasing diversity of thought and leadership styles in political spheres (Kathlene 1994; Fox and Schuhmann 1999). The positive externalities of having more women in political offices extends past women themselves and benefits the whole society; countries led by women fared better in the Covid-19 pandemic (Garikipati and Kambhampati 2020), have lower perceived corruption, and higher amounts of foreign direct investment (Cole et al. 2017). Women are shown to rank higher than men on leadership attributes (Zenger and Folkman 2019), showing that lack of capacity or skill is not what is preventing women from political participation. So, why are numbers of female political leaders not rising faster? Early scholarship hypothesized that voters do not prefer women; while this is often true, prior to being tested with this issue, the first hurdle is that women face is making the choice to stand for election, which is a decision involving a plethora of considerations (Lawless and Fox 2010; Schwarz and Coppock 2022). Thus, the current debate is focused on how to encourage women's desire to run for public office.

Several hypotheses have been presented for how to bring about more political aspirations among women. Some literature suggests the mere presence of women in office inspires other women and girls to want to run as well (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Ladam, Harden, and Windett 2018; Lawless 2004). Other literature suggests the need for political parties to play a role (Yusoff, Sarjoon, and Othman 2016) or collective activism and mobilization (Gordon 2021). Even extracurriculars, like placing more girls in childhood sports, may stir political aspirations (Lawless and Fox 2010).

Theory

Literature suggests that lack of confidence and inability to consider themselves leaders blocks many women from reaching for leadership (Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller 2003; Athanasopoulou et al. 2018). This experiment gave women experience making strategic decisions under pressure, an important attribute to leadership (Vroom and Yetton 1973). Because this put them in a unique situation that stretched them beyond their perceived abilities, it was an environment conducive to increasing self-confidence (Hollenbeck and Hall 2004). Further, positive feedback following a leadership task has been shown to diminish women's tendencies to rate themselves critically (Heilman, Lucas, and Kaplow 1990). Thus, the positive reinforcement provided by the experiment was hypothesized to increase their self-confidence. As this leadership experience gave women more confidence in their leadership abilities, we expected to see their willingness to run for office increase (Appelbaum, Audet, and Miller 2003; Baqutayan and Abd Razak 2022; Kolb 1999).

However, leadership experience does not come without stress for women in Malaysian culture. Women are socialized to view themselves as submissive, play a supporting role to men (Baqutayan and Abd Razak 2022; Zakuan and Azmi 2017), and focus their work in the domestic sphere (Ariffin 1992). This follows gender schema theory, which suggests that individuals are socialized from childhood to understand gender roles based on their culture (Bem 1983). In this study, it will be uncomfortable for women to go against their socialized roles and be in a leadership role, so we hypothesize that more women than men will feel discomfort and stress while being a leader. In addition to breaking cultural gender roles, this leadership stress will come from women's aversion to competitive environments—the same aversion that dissuades them from pursuing leadership (Preece and Stoddard 2015). However, gender schema theory recognizes sex typing as a learned thought process, so there is the potential for it to be modified (Bem 1983). Thus, perhaps if women gain small experiences making decisions in stressful environments, they could overcome this socialization and view themselves in new capacities.

Stress can also come when women are in group settings with men. Research shows that gender imbalances within a group can impact how members of each gender behave (Kanter 1977; Karpowitz et al. 2023). Those in the minority group are called "tokens" because they are seen as representatives of their gender and not as unique individuals (Kanter 1977; Gardiner and Tiggemann 1999). Tokens can experience stress in these group settings because of the increased attention they receive by standing out and often feel pressured to overperform. When tokens are keenly aware of their differences from others, they often become isolated from participating in the group and experience gender stereotyping (Gardiner and Tiggemann 1999). This is especially true for women; even when they engage in group deliberations, they still face discrimination in perceived influence (Karpowitz et al. 2023). In a small group setting, these interactions will still be present. We expected to see the gender composition of the group, and whether the woman was assigned to lead or not, impacting women's stress level and their feelings about future political leadership. Men typically do not have these same experiences when they are in the minority of female-dominated groups, so we did not expect to observe them feeling stress during the task.

There are two different ways the mind generally responds to this type of stress. As outlined by psychologists, the first response is to become overwhelmed and fearful, while the other response is to become motivated to press through uncomfortable or new situations (Javanbakht and Saab 2017). In this experiment, it seems likely that the biggest inhibitor to women increasing their self-confidence is feelings of stress. Should stress not seem to be a predictor of leadership interest, then women must have been able to use the second stress response discussed above and prevent negative leadership experience from dissuading their interest. Conversely, if stress is a predictor of political leadership interest, that means that women have the first response and stressful leadership experience further decreases their interest in future leadership opportunities.

Hypotheses

H1: Providing leadership experience for women will increase their willingness to run for public office.

When women gain experience in a leadership environment, see their ability to make decisions, and lead others in a stressful environment, they will see that they are capable leaders and thus increase their willingness to consider running for office. We expected that providing leadership experience for women would increase their willingness to run for public office.

H2: Women are more likely than men to rate being a leader as a stressful experience.

Women have been shown to find leadership stressful (Blackburn 2020; Nelson and Burke 2000). Our results will be in agreement with this literature. In addition, this study places Malaysian women in situations that go against common cultural norms by assigning them as leaders, and this will increase their stress levels. We expected to see women considering leadership experience to be stressful more often than men.

H3: Women are more likely to indicate the task as a stressful experience when they are leading at least one man.

Women in groups with at least one man are less likely to be seen, by themselves or others, as influential in the group. This stems from innate beliefs and behaviors that men and women portray when participating in group settings. Subconsciously, women are more likely to defer to men as the leaders. Thus, when women are put into leadership positions over men, they will most likely view the experience as uncomfortable and stressful. Further, women serving in leadership positions goes against cultural norms that say women are less suited for leadership; going against this norm will also induce stress. We expected to see women who led at least one man rate the leadership experience as more stressful than women who did not lead men or male leaders.

H4: Women who find leadership stressful are less likely to indicate a willingness to run for public office than women who do not find leadership stressful.

If women find the leadership experience to be stressful, they will most likely extend these perceptions to the idea of running for public office in the future. This will either discourage their aspirations or reinforce previously held ideas that they do not wish to hold political office. We predicted that women who found leadership stressful would be less likely to indicate a willingness to run for public office, compared to women who do not find leadership stressful.

Research Design

Measures

The first main independent variable is gender. Gender was measured using a combination of self-identification and observation by the researchers through ID assignment. We verified that all researcher-identified gender observations in ID assignments matched the self-identification from the survey, so missing self-identified gender variables were filled by researcher ID assignment.

The second independent variable is leadership experience. This is the treatment condition in the experiment, with equal numbers of male and female respondents randomly selected to be the group leader. Because leadership was block randomized ahead of time according to the unique identification number, we created a variable that indicated whether the participant was a "leader" or a "blindfolded" follower. We also allowed participants to self-identify their role on the survey by asking, "What role did you have?" This was cross-checked with the variable we created to ensure everything was entered correctly. We verified that all participants entered their role correctly, so the self-identified role variable was used in the analysis.

The main dependent variable is willingness to run for public office. There are several questions on the survey that ask the respondent to rank their likelihood of running for various political positions. Specifically, the respondents were asked about the following scenarios: "How likely are you to [run for local office/run for state office/run for national office (such as the legislature)]?" Respondents could then rate their likelihood using a five-point Likert scale of "Very Unlikely," "Somewhat Unlikely," "Unsure," "Somewhat Likely," and "Very Likely." Our goal was to analyze the likelihood that women would run for office regardless of level, so these variables were combined into a single indicator. Factor analysis results loaded the three variables together into a single factor, allowing us to aggregate the responses into an additive index to indicate a respondent's overall likelihood of running for any political office.[1] We then converted the data to a numeric scale, ranging from "Very Unlikely," with a value of 1 to "Very Likely," with a value of 5. Scores on the additive index ranged from 3 to 15, with the top 25% of respondents scoring an 11 or above. A respondent answering "Somewhat Likely" each time would score a 12 on the scale, meaning that only the top quarter of respondents consistently indicated at least a small desire to run for office. Of these respondents, 59% were male and 41% were female. The average score was an 8.4, meaning on average respondents were generally more hesitant about running for office. Of respondents in the bottom 25% (a score of 6 or below), 42% were male and 58% were female.

Another important variable to the analysis is stress. Respondents were asked, "How stressful was the task for you personally?" The responses were measured using a three-point scale including "Not stressful at all," "A little stressful," and "Very stressful." In some models, we used stress as an independent variable to analyze how

[1] Factor loadings: Local Office: 0.84, State Office: 0.97, National Office: 0.89. Cronbach's alpha = 0.926

the presence of stress impacts other outcomes. In other models, we investigated stress as a dependent variable to uncover which scenarios were more likely to cause stress.

We first controlled for how easy each participant found the task to be. This is an important variable to account for in the regression analyses because it removes the confidence created from how simple or complex they viewed the task to be, so that we were able to view confidence in leadership skills independently. The variable was measured by simply asking respondents to rate, "How easy was the task?" Individuals were allowed to respond using a four-point scale of "Very easy," "Easy," "Difficult," or "Very difficult." The majority of women (78%) and men (79%) said the task was easy or very easy; notably, no men and only 3% of women rated the task as very difficult. For inclusion in analysis, the categories were consolidated into one "Easy" and one "Difficult" category. The variable is binary with a value of 1 correlating to the "Easy" category.

Another relevant control variable is the gender of the blindfolded followers for groups with female leaders. To create this variable, we used the pre-assigned groupings that were created based on gender to know which groups had three women, two women and one man, two men and one woman, or three men. The gender and role variables were then used to create a categorical variable that indicated if a female leader led a group of two women, a woman and a man, or two men.

A final important control variable is Malaysian cultural norms. These beliefs are operationalized in our survey through two questions. Respondents were asked to "Rate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements" on a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree" for the following statements: "Men are better suited emotionally for politics than are most women," and "Men are better suited than women for leadership outside of the home (e.g. religion, politics, the workplace, etc.)." These two statements were presented alongside several other statements about desires to see more women in politics, whether the respondent could or should run for office, and women's roles in the home in a randomized order. However, only these two statements were selected for use in the analysis because they cover broader societal views rather than the respondent's personal opinion (e.g. "I would like to see more women run for local office").

Method

The experiment gave women minor leadership experience along with positive reinforcement to see if this increased their openness to running for political office in the future. Twenty-three sessions of twelve participants each (divided into four groups of three) were studied by a local research company in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, between July 21 and July 22, 2023, for a total sample size of 276. Unique identification numbers were created ahead of time using information such as the day, session, and participant number. To block randomize gender into groups, it was decided ahead of time that numbers ending in a 1–5 or 7 would be randomized to female participants and numbers ending in 6 or 8–12 would be randomly distributed to male participants. Group numbers were also assigned using the genders associated with

each number so that in each session there was one group with all women, a second with two women and one man, a third with two men and one woman, and a fourth with all men. Randomly generated numbers were used to decide whether the first, second, or third group member would be the leader for each group. This way, gender of group members and leadership were block randomized.

Upon arriving, participants were randomly assigned one of the unique identification numbers according to their gender, which decided their group and role.[2] The two participants not chosen as the leader were blindfolded. The leader was tasked with providing instructions to the blindfolded participants to complete a puzzle while being unable to touch the blindfolded participants or the puzzle pieces. After completing the puzzle, the group was informed that they had a fast time regardless of the actual time elapsed. Before the experiment, each participant completed a pre-survey with demographic information and a consent form. Following the experiment, participants completed a survey about their experience during the task, their desire for future political participation, and their views on female political participation in general. Full question wording for both surveys are included in the appendix along with sample summary statistics.

We analyzed the results using OLS regression models. First, we examined the main treatment effect by regressing willingness to run for office on leadership and gender. Second, we explored the interaction of gender and leadership on willingness to run for office to see if the impact of leadership varies by gender. Third, we examined how the participant's gender and role in the group impacted their stress during the task. Fourth, we regressed willingness to run for public office on role, gender, and stress, while controlling for how easy they found the task. Fifth, we ran the previous model separately by gender to see if stress impacts men and women's interest in office differently. Next, we regressed willingness to run for public office on the interaction between leadership and stress by gender to see if stressful leadership impacts men and women's interest in office differently. Then, we examined how the gender of group members impacts the stress felt for female leaders and their willingness to run for public office while controlling for how easy they found the task. Finally, we ran a model by gender subgroups examining willingness to run for office when accounting for Malaysian cultural norms, group member genders, role, stress, and difficulty.

[2] A question on the pre-survey asked respondents to self-identify their gender as male or female. However, we found that many respondents did not answer this question, leaving us with missing data. Before the survey, we assigned unique identification numbers to each participant partly based on their gender, the full details of which are described above. This meant that certain unique identification numbers were set aside for members of each gender, allowing us to use these numbers to create a new gender variable and obtain full data for this question. The caveat to this is it means some values for our gender variable are based on the gender identity assigned by interviewer observation. Investigation of the data does not find any discrepancies with the expected ID numbers and gender for those who self-identified on the survey. It was important to have as much data as possible because gender is a key element to the study.

Results

We began by examining the main treatment effect. To see whether leadership experience influences leaders to aspire for public office, we ran an analysis of willingness to run for office regressed on leadership and gender. Next, we looked at if this effect was different when we took the gender of the leader into account. Table 1 provides a regression table summarizing these results. We found that after controlling for the participants' role in the task, female participants are 0.79 units less likely than men to indicate a willingness to run for public office. The interaction between gender and leadership shows that female leaders and followers have no difference in their likelihood to run for public office, but male leaders are surprisingly 1.2 units less likely to consider public office than male followers.

Table 1: The impact of gender and role on willingness to run for public office

	Dependent variable:		
	Willingness to Run for Public Office		
	All	*Women*	*Men*
Female	-0.79*		
	(0.42)		
Leader	-0.61	-0.01	-1.20*
	(0.45)	(0.62)	(0.64)
Constant	9.02***	8.03***	9.22***
	(0.33)	(0.36)	(0.37)
Observations	270	135	135
R^2	0.02	0.0000	0.03
Adjusted R^2	0.01	-0.01	0.02
Residual Std. Error	3.46 (df = 267)	3.42 (df = 133)	3.48 (df = 133)
F Statistic	2.70* (df = 2; 267)	0.0003 (df = 1; 133)	3.57* (df = 1; 133)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. The first model uses the full sample of respondents, the second model uses a subset of female respondents, and the third model uses a subset of male respondents.

Next, we examined the role that stress played in the experiment. We began by using stress as a dependent variable and investigating how the participant's gender, role in the group, and ratings of the task's easiness impacted their stress. Including easiness as a control variable allowed us to isolate the stress that might come from the difficulty of the task itself and better examine stress from other factors. Table 2 provides a regression table with models separated by gender in which the independent variable is the participant's role and the dependent variable is the participant's rated

stress. For both men and women, leaders experienced more stress than blindfolded participants by nearly equal amounts (0.29 units for women and 0.26 units for men). When we controlled for task easiness, we found that leaders still had 0.23 units of higher stress. Finding the task easy did decrease stress among all participants by 0.42 units, but did not impact men and women's stress differently. Despite similar stress from their roles, this begs the question of whether this stress impacts political aspirations differently for men and women.

Table 2: Impact of the interaction between gender and role, interaction of gender and easiness of the task on stress

	Dependent variable:			
	Stress During the Task			
	All	*Women*	*Men*	*All*
Leader	0.27***	0.29***	0.26***	0.23***
	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.06)
Easy				-0.42***
				(0.10)
Female	0.04			0.11
	(0.06)			(0.13)
Female x Easy				-0.09
				(0.15)
Constant	0.34***	0.38***	0.34***	0.69***
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.10)
Observations	270	135	135	269
R^2	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.19
Adjusted R^2	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.17
Residual Std. Error	0.53 (df = 267)	0.54 (df = 133)	0.51 (df = 133)	0.49 (df = 264)
F Statistic	8.23*** (df = 2; 267)	8.50*** (df = 1; 133)	7.42*** (df = 1; 133)	14.98*** (df = 4; 264)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. The first and fourth models use all the respondents. The second model includes only female respondents and the third model includes only male respondents.

We then examined stress as an independent variable that could impact willingness to run for public office. Results from this analysis are shown in Table 3. The first model uses the full set of respondents and includes gender and role as additional control variables. We saw that for respondents who found the task easy, meaning they had assumedly low stress from the task itself, gender and stress from other causes are

the most significant dissuaders of willingness to run. This shows that participants felt a stress separate from the difficulty of the task itself that dissuaded them from future leadership. Next, to see if this stress is felt stronger among women than men, we ran the same regression separately by gender. The results show that stress negatively dissuades both men and women from running for public office similarly.

Table 3: Impact of role, stress, gender, and difficulty on willingness to run for public office

	Dependent variable:		
	Willingness to Run for Public Office		
	All	*Women*	*Men*
Leader	-0.45	0.12	-1.02
	(0.46)	(0.64)	(0.65)
Stress	-0.87**	-0.97	-0.79
	(0.43)	(0.59)	(0.62)
Female			-0.72*
			(0.42)
Easy	-0.55	-0.86	-0.25
	(0.55)	(0.77)	(0.79)
Constant	9.78***	9.15***	9.70***
	(0.62)	(0.83)	(0.83)
Observations	269	134	135
R^2	0.03	0.02	0.04
Adjusted R^2	0.02	-0.0004	0.02
Residual Std. Error	3.43 (df = 264)	3.39 (df = 130)	3.48 (df = 131)
F Statistic	2.37* (df = 4; 264)	0.98 (df = 3; 130)	1.73 (df = 3; 131)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. The first model uses the full sample of respondents, the second is only female respondents, and the third is only male respondents.

Next, to see if this stress effect varies by the participant's role, we ran an interaction between stress, role and gender shown in Table 4. While the small sample size may contribute to insignificant results, we found that for women, being a leader and experiencing more stress decreased their desire to run for public office, while for men, a stressful leadership experience pointed to an increased desire to run for public office. This is especially interesting considering that leadership by itself increased women's desire to run for office, while significantly dissuaded men from wanting political office. These results show the importance of considering the impact of stress on political aspirations as well as its different behavior by gender.

Table 4: Impact of difficulty and the interaction between role, stress, and gender on willingness to run for public office

	Dependent variable:	
	Willingness to Run for Public Office	
	Women	*Men*
Leader	0.93	-1.54*
	(0.91)	(0.90)
Stress	-0.50	-1.15
	(0.70)	(0.76)
Easy	-1.01	-0.18
	(0.78)	(0.80)
Leader x Stress	-1.43	1.04
	(1.15)	(1.23)
Constant	9.10***	9.76***
	(0.82)	(0.84)
Observations	134	135
R^2	0.03	0.04
Adjusted R^2	0.004	0.01
Residual Std. Error	3.39 (df = 129)	3.49 (df = 130)
F Statistic	1.13 (df = 4; 129)	1.47 (df = 4; 130)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. The first model uses only female respondents while the second model uses only male respondents.

Next, we investigated the women who were chosen to lead and how this impacted their stress and political interest. The gender of the followers in their groups was an important element to understanding their responses. Because of social norms in Malaysia, women are likely to feel more comfortable leading other women than men. We ran a regression with stress as the dependent variable and follower genders as the independent variable in order to analyze whether female leaders felt more stress from leading men than leading women. The sample was limited to female leaders because of the composition of the follower genders variable. Easiness was included to account for stress that may come from the task itself. The results are presented in the first model of Table 5. We can see that there was no difference in the stress that female leaders felt based on the follower genders. As would be expected, participants feel less stress when they view the task as easier. Next, to see whether follower genders impacted the leaders' interest in public office, we ran a regression with willingness to run for office as the dependent variable and follower genders, stress, and difficulty as the independent variables. This is included as the second model in Table 5. While the

results are not significant, we do see a trend that, compared to women leading two other women, women leading at least one man indicated less desire for future political leadership. This suggests that interaction with men in a leadership setting could dissuade women from leading again in the future. Interestingly, more than follower genders or difficulty of the task, stress from other causes is the thing that best predicts female leaders' distaste for future political leadership. As they rated the experience as more stressful, their willingness to run for public office decreased by 2.11 units.

Table 5: Effect of Follower Genders, Difficulty, and Stress for Female Leaders

	Dependent variable:	
	Stress	*Willingness to Run for Public Office*
	(1)	*(2)*
	Women	*Men*
1 Woman, 1 Man	0.27	-0.35
	(0.16)	(1.23)
2 Men	0.04	-1.62
	(0.20)	(1.51)
Easy	-0.66***	-1.73
	(0.16)	(1.43)
Stress		-2.11*
		(1.18)
Constant	1.04***	11.06***
	(0.16)	(1.74)
Observations	45	45
R^2	0.36	0.10
Adjusted R^2	0.31	0.01
Residual Std. Error	0.47 (df = 41)	3.53 (df = 40)
F Statistic	7.59*** (df = 3; 41)	1.16 (df = 4; 40)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. Both models use a subset of female leaders. From the follower genders variable, "2 Women" is the omitted category.

A final control variable to consider is cultural norms. We set out to analyze if they affect the stress that is dissuading women from political aspirations. Cultural norms are first included in a regression of female leaders and then analyzed on all women, followed by all men, along with all the covariates discussed so far. The results show that the stress is not caused by cultural norms because the stress variable remains significant. For female leaders, experiencing stress decreases their desire for political leadership by 2.8 units, while agreeing with the norm that men are better

leaders increases desire by 1.23 units. It is unclear what to make of the latter variable, but we see that stress still plays an important role in political aspirations. When analyzing all women, we see that again, stress is the one thing that significantly decreases likelihood to run for office, in this case decreasing likelihood by 1.06 units.

Table 6: Effect of cultural norms, follower genders, role, stress, gender, and difficulty on willingness to run for public office

	Dependent variable:		
	Willingness to Run for Public Office		
	Female Leaders	*Women*	*Men*
Men Better Politicians	-0.55	0.19	-0.23
	(0.54)	(0.35)	(0.32)
Men Better Leaders	1.23**	0.31	0.21
	(0.51)	(0.31)	(0.32)
1 Woman, 1 Man	-1.48		
	(1.51)		
2 Men	0.33		
	(1.19)		
Leader		0.03	-1.06
		(0.64)	(0.67)
Stress	-2.80**	-1.06*	-0.87
	(1.16)	(0.59)	(0.64)
Easy	-2.14	-0.79	-0.36
	(1.39)	(0.77)	(0.81)
Constant	9.03***	7.54***	9.88***
	(2.61)	(1.24)	(1.44)
Observations	45	134	135
R^2	0.23	0.05	0.04
Adjusted R^2	0.10	0.01	0.01
Residual Std. Error	3.36 (df = 38)	3.38 (df = 128)	3.50 (df = 129)
F Statistic	1.84 (df = 6; 38)	1.25 (df = 5; 128)	1.14 (df = 5; 129)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Coefficients represent OLS slope coefficients. The first model uses a subset of female leaders, the second a subset of women, and the third a subset of men. From the follower gender variable, "2 Women" is the omitted category.

Discussion and Conclusion

This experiment aimed to analyze if giving women leadership experience would increase their willingness to run for political office. We theorized that the puzzle leadership experience would build women's confidence in their ability to handle stress and group decision-making, and thus increase their willingness to engage in future political leadership. We further theorized that women would feel more stress than men in leadership positions. This would most likely stem from group interactions with men because of cultural beliefs that men are more suited for leadership roles than women. However, because gender schema theory suggests that socialized cultural views can be changed, and because research shows that stress can either be a motivator or a deterrent, we posited that women might use the stress of moving past cultural norms as a motivator rather than a deterrent, thus allowing the stressful leadership experience to still increase political aspirations.

Analysis found that leadership experience did not have an impact on political aspirations, but the participant's gender and stress felt during the task did. Both male and female leaders reported feeling nearly equal amounts of stress, but only in women did this stress cause a decrease in willingness to run for office. Stress remained significant regardless of the group gender composition, perceived difficulty of the task, and belief in gender biased cultural norms. Further, while stress dissuaded women from political aspirations, insignificant evidence showed that male leaders who experienced stress indicated higher willingness to run for public office.

Contrary to the theory, stress, rather than newfound confidence in leadership experience, turned out to be the key variable impacting willingness to run for office. Of the two responses to stress we outlined in the theory section, our results indicate that women had a fearful rather than motivated response to stress. Additionally, our theories about what would cause the female participants' stress proved to be wrong. Stress on its own remained a significant predictor even after the genders of group members, task difficulty, and assigned role were accounted for. There was some stress that only existed for women that did not arise from leadership, the task itself, the other group members, or breaking traditional cultural gender norms. This stress was the strongest cause for women to shy away from the potential of future leadership opportunities.

Future research should unpack what the root cause of this stress is and how it can be mitigated in order to overcome its negative impact on women. Additionally, further research should improve upon limitations present in this study. A small sample size led to difficulty seeing significant results and thus a repeated study with more participants would allow us to verify that these patterns remain. Moreover, this study operationalized leadership experience as directing a group through a short, one-time task. Perhaps longer and more significant leadership experience would have a different impact. Further, there is no pretreatment measure of interest in running for office, so we were not able to measure the change in interest from this experiment. Finally, the survey questions used to operationalize cultural beliefs about men's suitability

for leadership and politics were perhaps not as robust as they could be and further refinement of these questions may provide a better measure of these beliefs for analysis. Despite these limitations to the study, it is clear that women in Malaysia are choosing not to run for political office because of an ambiguous stress. Further investigation of this and other variables is important because of societal benefits, like issue and leadership style diversity, from women's political leadership participation. These results represent a small step in understanding why women in conservative cultures choose not to run for political offices, and as more research in this area is done, society as a whole can one day reap the benefits that come from diversified policy leadership and increased awareness for women's issues.

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