

# Women's Political Representation in a Hybrid and Patriarchal Regime: Evidence from Singapore

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This article investigates women's political representation in a hybrid and patriarchal regime—Singapore. Specifically, it examines whether female legislators in Singapore put more emphasis on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than male legislators. We answer this question through conducting content analyses of the questions raised by legislators at the plenary meetings during the 10th–12th Parliaments of Singapore (2002–2015). Our results demonstrate that female legislators in Singapore were more likely to provide substantive representation on women's interests than male legislators. Besides gender, this study shows that legislators' political affiliation crucially affected the likelihood of them to represent traditional women's concerns *but not* women's rights. Opposition legislators were more likely than People's Action Party legislators to ask questions on traditional women's concerns. Finally, legislators' ethnicity mattered, given that ethnic minority legislators (Malay, Indian and Eurasian legislators) were more likely to raise questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns (except environment) than Chinese legislators.

Keywords: Gender, Ethnicity, Legislator Policy Preferences, Political Representation, Singapore, Women's Representation

## 1. Introduction

Does the presence of women in politics make a difference to the substantive representation of women? Does the gender of legislators affect their representational behaviour? Does it matter which women hold seats in the legislature? For example, are ethnic minority women legislators more likely to promote women's interests than non-ethnic minority women legislators? This study of Singapore seeks to address the foregoing questions on gender and political representation.

Scholars of political representation have long interested in studying the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation. Much of the literature relates to the USA, Western Europe and Latin America. In their overview of the field of gender and politics, Paxton *et al.* (2007, p. 275) encourage researchers to devote more effort to analyse women's representation in non-Western regions like Asia.

Inspired by Paxton *et al.*'s call, a growing literature on women's political representation in Asia has been produced. Costa *et al.* (2013), Tam (2017a,b), Jacob (2014) and Rai and Spary (2018), for example, have examined the impact of legislator gender on women's substantive representation in Timor-Leste, Hong Kong and India, respectively. This article contributes to this growing body of research on women's political representation in Asia by examining women's political representation in Singapore—a hybrid and patriarchal regime. Specifically, it explores whether female legislators in Singapore put more emphasis on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than male legislators. We answer this question through conducting content analyses of the questions raised by legislators at the plenary meetings during the 2002–2006, 2006–2011 and 2011–2015 sessions of the Parliament of Singapore (i.e. the 10th–12th Parliament). Apart from adding to the growing literature on women's representation in Asia, our study also sheds new light on two areas. First, this article explores an important and yet under-researched topic in Singapore's parliamentary politics, namely the representational behaviour in a hegemonic-party dominated parliament. Most studies on Singapore's parliamentary politics focus on parliamentary elections and overlook the actual behaviour of legislators after they are elected. Secondly, responding to Simien (2007), Smooth (2011) and Taylor-Robinson's (2014) call for incorporating intersectionality more fully into research on political representation, particularly the impact of intersectionality of gender and ethnicity on political behaviour, this study addresses how gender and ethnicity of Singapore's legislators interacted to influence their representational behaviour.

This article proceeds as follows. First, it reviews the literature on women's representation in the political process, gender differences and legislator policy preferences, and Singapore's parliamentary politics. Secondly, it discusses the Parliament of Singapore, focusing on its hegemonic-party dominated nature, and gender and ethnic composition. The third section outlines the data and methods of this study. The fourth section presents the major findings of this study. There is then a discussion before the final section concludes.

## 2. Literature review

The literature review discusses important works on three major themes: the significance of women's descriptive representation to the political process, the effect of gender differences on legislator policy preferences paying particular attention

to whether female legislators put more emphasis on women's interests than male legislators, and Singapore's parliamentary politics.

### *2.1 Significance of women's descriptive representation to the political process*

Existing works on political representation have demonstrated the importance of women's descriptive representation to the political process. [Lawless \(2004\)](#), for example, finds that women represented by women tend to have more favourable assessments of their members of Congress. [Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler's \(2005\)](#) analysis of the data from 31 democracies in the mid-1990s shows that both male and female citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the legislature were improved by increased numbers of female legislators. According to [Barnes and Burchard's \(2013\)](#) analysis of Afrobarometer data from 20 African countries, increases in women's presence in the national legislature are associated with enhancement of women's political engagement relative to that of men. This helps to narrow the gender gap in political engagement. Women's descriptive representation in legislature can also increase women's belief in women's ability to govern, as argued by [Alexander \(2012\)](#). More importantly, the relationship between women's presence in legislature and women's beliefs in their ability to govern is a virtuous cycle of mutually reinforcing changes in women's empowerment as political leaders. Finally, [Moreland and Watson's \(2016\)](#) study of capital punishment laws in 125 countries show that women's legislative representation is significantly correlated with the abolition of capital punishment.

### *2.2 Gender differences and legislators' policy preferences*

A rich body of research has contended that the identities and life experiences of legislators shape their preferences and representational behaviour. [Burden \(2007\)](#), for example, argues that legislators' preferences depend partly on their personal traits and backgrounds, among which is 'gender'. It is assumed that the different life experiences and perspectives that women possess (e.g. motherhood and the traditional caretaking responsibility) contribute to differences in policy preferences between female and male legislators. Compared to male legislators, female legislators are expected to put more efforts to advancing 'women's rights' and 'traditional women's concerns'. Before reviewing existing literature, we elaborate the concepts of 'women's rights' and 'traditional women's concerns'. [Molyneux's \(1985\)](#) study of 'strategic gender interests' and 'practical gender interests' offers a useful framework. Strategic gender interests center on eliminating women's subordination by promoting gender equality, women's emancipation like the rights to abortion, and ending violence and discrimination against women. Women's rights are a central component of strategic gender interests.

Practical gender interests focus on the practical concerns that women face within the gender division of labour. Issues related to children and families, healthcare, education, social welfare and environment are practical gender interests.

Numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate whether female legislators put more efforts to advancing 'women's rights' and 'traditional women's concerns' than their male counterparts. In her analysis of the lower houses of 12 state legislatures, Thomas (1991, 1994) finds that female legislators introduced more bills on women's rights, children and families. However, compared to their male colleagues, female legislators did not assign a higher priority to healthcare, education, welfare and environment. Jones' (1997) study of the Argentina Chamber of Deputies and the US States House of Representatives in the 1993–1994 legislative year also observed that female legislators in these legislatures were significantly more likely to introduce bills related to women's rights and children and families than male legislators. But there was not much gender difference regarding other traditional women's concerns. Swers' (2002) research of the 103rd and 104th US Congress shows that female legislators were more likely to support and vote for women's issue bills, such as abortion and protection of women against violent crimes than their male counterparts. In their analysis of floor speeches in the US Senate during 1999–2000, Osborn and Mendez (2010) highlights that female senators devoted a significantly higher percentage of their speeches to women's rights and families. However, when it came to discussion of other traditional women's concerns like welfare and education, there was no significant difference between female and male senators. MacDonald and O'Brien (2011) also show that female members of the US House of Representatives sponsored feminist bills more frequently than male members during 1973–2002.

Gender differences in legislators' policy preferences are also observed in Britain and Latin America. Childs and Withey (2004) find that labour women members of parliament (MPs) were more likely than labour's men to sign both women's and feminist women's early day motions in the 1997 UK parliament. Catalano's (2009) study of the British House of Commons during 2005–2007 shows that female MPs participated disproportionately in debates on healthcare issues (a traditional women's concern) than male MPs. More importantly, female MPs used these debates to raise women's concerns, like protection of women from violence and sexual exploitation. Regarding Latin America, Htun *et al.* (2013) find that between 1983 and 2007, female legislators of the Argentina Congress were more active than male legislators to initiate bills on women's rights. Contrary to the positive impact of women's descriptive representation on substantive representation as reported by Htun *et al.* (2013), Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) and Franceschet (2011) highlight the importance of the broader institutional environment in affecting the efforts of female legislators to promote women's interests. Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) investigate how the

institutional features and gender bias in the legislative environment have undermined the effectiveness of gender quotas to enhance women's substantive representation in Argentina. Franceschet (2011) adopts a gendered institutionalist approach to explore how the formal and informal organisational rules in legislatures such as the location of policy gate-keepers and the norm of consensus-seeking and conflict avoidance have shaped the process and outcomes of women's substantive representation in Argentina and Chile.

The foregoing literature has a strong focus on cases in the USA, Western Europe and Latin America. Inspired by Paxton *et al.*'s (2007) call for more research on women's political representation in Asia, a growing body of scholarship on this topic has emerged. Tam (2017a,b) examine the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation in the semi-democratic legislature in Hong Kong. His research shows that women legislators are more active than men to advocate women's rights. Costa *et al.* (2013) find that the establishment of a cross-party parliamentary women's caucus in Timor-Leste played a crucial role in enabling women legislators in that new democracy to pass a parliamentary resolution on gender-responsive budgeting in 2009. Jacob (2014) and Rai and Spary (2018) investigate the dynamics of the efforts by women MPs in promoting women's interests in the most populous democracy in the world—India.

Political representation scholarship has also examined Asian democratic regimes that are patriarchal such as South Korea and Japan. However, this scholarship focuses on women's descriptive representation rather than the link between women's descriptive and substantive representation. Park (1999), for instance, explains women's political under-representation in South Korea in the first decade after the country embarked on democratisation in the late 1980s. Chin (2004) investigates the reasons behind the failure of Korean feminists to increase women's descriptive representation in local legislatures during the 1990s. Finally, Lee and Shin (2016) study how the clientelist practices by party leaders in South Korea have undermined the effectiveness of candidate gender quotas in enhancing women's political representation in elected offices. Concerning women's political representation in Japan, Bochel and Bochel (2005), Eto (2010) and Kage *et al.* (2018) study the major factors contributing to under-representation of women in elected offices in Japan, such as the conservative attitude towards gender equality and socially mandated family roles for women. Nevertheless, these studies pay little if any attention to the question of gender and women's substantive representation in Japan.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that a growing literature on women's political representation in Asia has emerged. While providing important insights into the dynamics of women's representation in Asia, there is still much fruitful ground for research on this topic. First, given the diversity of socio-political

systems in Asia, women's political representation in many Asian countries is under-studied. Secondly, except for [Costa \*et al.\* \(2013\)](#), [Jacob \(2014\)](#), [Tam \(2017a,b\)](#) and [Rai and Spary \(2018\)](#), the existing studies focus on women's descriptive representation, especially the major hurdles to election of women to parliaments. The impact of gender on women's substantive representation is under-researched. Our study contributes to the growing body of work on women's political representation in Asia not only because this topic is unexplored in the Singapore context but also because it provides an opportunity to examine the relationship between gender and women's substantive representation in a hybrid and patriarchal regime.

Are female legislators more likely to promote women's rights and traditional women's concerns than males under a hybrid and patriarchal regime like Singapore? The next paragraphs review the major features of Singapore's political system and the existing works on Singapore's parliamentary politics so as to provide an informed context for our discussion later.

### *2.3 Singapore: a hybrid and patriarchal regime*

Students of democratic development like [Diamond \(2002, p. 25\)](#) have described Singapore as a hybrid regime. One salient feature of the hybrid regime is hegemonic electoral authoritarianism whereby a hegemonic party repeatedly secures overwhelming electoral victory under unfair conditions. Singapore has a hegemonic party system as the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) has won the vast majority of the parliamentary seats since Singapore's independence in 1965. This enduring dominance resulted from various measures adopted by the PAP, including calibrated coercion (press controls) ([George, 2007](#)), tightening restrictions on civil society ([Lyons, 2000](#)), clientelism ([Chua, 2000](#)), and manipulation of electoral rules like the introduction of the group representation constituency scheme ([Mutalib, 2002](#); [Tan and Grofman, 2018](#)). Singapore's opposition parties, thereby, face severe institutional disadvantages. As mentioned by [Tan \(2015b, p. 55\)](#), except for the Workers' Party (the leading opposition party), opposition parties in Singapore are inactive between elections and under-institutionalised. Only the Workers' Party and the National Solidarity Party have functioning committees.

The aforementioned repressive measures in turn have denied opposition parties in Singapore any meaningful opportunity of competing for power. [Slater \(2012, p. 19\)](#) highlights that meaningful amounts of power never change hands in Singapore's hybrid regime. The lack of meaningful electoral competition is likely to weaken the hegemonic party's incentive to whole-heartedly appeal to women's votes. This may help to explain why the PAP-dominated parliament did not actively promote women's rights during the period of this study. As will be

discussed later, the number of parliamentary questions on women's rights almost remained unchanged during the period of our study, whereas other types of parliamentary questions experienced dramatic growth.

Singapore adopts a unicameral parliamentary system. Before 1984, all MPs were elected by universal suffrage. The Singapore government introduced two new paths to become MPs in 1984 and 1990, respectively. In 1984, the non-constituency MP (NCMP) system was adopted. Under the NCMP system, when the opposition failed to capture any seat in the election, the three highest-scoring opposition candidates would become MPs through the NCMP scheme. In 1990, the government introduced the nominated MP (NMP) scheme under which up to nine NMPs will be seated in the Parliament. NMPs must not be members of any political party. They serve a two-and-a-half-year term and may be reappointed for another term only. The general public and seven functional groups can submit names of individuals for consideration to become NMPs. An eight-member Special Select Committee, chaired by Speaker of Parliament and dominated by PAP MPs, makes the decision (K. P. Tan, 2014).

Singapore is a patriarchal state. The PAP government has championed the patriarchal value of man as the head and primary provider of household (E. Tan, 2008). A variety of gender-biased policies have made women subordinate to men in different spheres of public life and three cases are discussed here. The first concerns unequal benefits for female civil servants. Until 2004, only male civil servants were entitled to benefits for their spouses and children. Responding to demands for change, the government extended the benefits to female civil servants in 2004. However, in announcing this decision, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong pointed out that women still had to 'make sure your husband looks after you' (Teo, 2007, p. 429). The second concerns a gender-biased citizenship law. Before the 2004 constitutional amendment, female Singaporeans could not pass on citizenship by descent to their foreign-born child. The child would be granted citizenship only if his/her father was a Singapore citizen by birth. Rather than promoting gender equality, the removal of this gender-biased citizenship law in 2004 was mainly caused by continued decline of population growth in Singapore and the subsequent need to attract foreign talents. After the constitutional amendments, the PAP government still emphasised that Singapore remained a patriarchal society (E. Tan, 2008, pp. 79 and 85). The last case concerns the introduction of paternity leave by the government in 2013. The paid paternity leave is only 1 week, which is hardly matched by the 16-week maternity leave. The difference shows that women still take up the major responsibility for childcare. A key message revealed by these three cases can be captured by K. P. Tan's (2009, p. 45) comment: 'Singapore women are still being considered (by the PAP government) as responsible for reproducing the nation, their bodies seen as machines for

producing the future workforce . . . Women's concerns, however, do not have serious attention from the government.'

Singapore is a largely conservative society as well. According to a survey conducted with about 4000 Singapore residents in 2013, for example, many of the respondents opposed pre-marital sex, having a child out of wedlock, and homosexual relations (Yuen-c and Mokhtar 2014). More importantly, male dominance over women is a salient feature of Singapore's society and culture. As put forth by Purushotam (1997, p. 542), submissiveness to males (e.g. daughter to father and wife to husband) is common in everyday life in Singapore. Wives, for example, have to negotiate with their husbands before they can seek employment. Accordingly, women are not autonomous individuals. The possible impact of Singapore's conservative social values on women's representation will be explored in Sections 4 and 5.<sup>1</sup>

Women were seriously under-represented in the Parliament of Singapore before 2001. Between 1970 and 1984, there was no female legislator (Tan, 2015a). From the sixth to ninth Parliament, elected female MPs accounted for less than 5% of the total number of MPs. It was not until the 10th Parliament that there was an obvious increase in women's presence, as elected female MPs accounted for close to 10% of the total number of MPs. If female NMPs are included, the figure went up to 17.5% (Table 1). Women's presence witnessed further improvement in the 11th and 12th parliamentary sessions, as elected female MPs increased to 16.7% and 18.5% of the total number of MPs, respectively. The figure increased to about 26% if we include female NMPs and female NCMPs (Table 1). The Parliament of Singapore has not adopted gender quota to guarantee female legislative representation. As argued by Tan (2015a), the increase in women's presence in Singapore's Parliament was caused by the adoption of a *party quota* for female candidates by the PAP in 2009 and the growing number and sizes of the group representation constituency.

The ethnic composition of the Parliament of Singapore also merits our attention. As will be discussed later, ethnicity of MPs is an important factor affecting an MP's likelihood to advance women's interests. Singapore is a multi-ethnic country. According to the General Household Survey 2015, Singapore consisted of ethnic Chinese (77%), Malays (12%), Indians (8%) and others including Eurasians (3%). The government introduced an ethnic quota policy in 1988 with the adoption of the electoral system of group representation constituencies (GRCs). Under GRCs system, voters cast their votes for an entire team of three to

<sup>1</sup>Given that both regime and society in Singapore are patriarchal, the findings of our study (the representational behavior of MPs in Singapore) can either be caused by the patriarchal regime or society, or both. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a definite answer to this question and it will be left for future research.



**Table 1** Number and percentage of female MPs in the Parliament of Singapore (1985–2015)

Parliamentary session	Total number of female MPs	Elected female MPs	Female NMPs	Female NCMPs	Percentage of elected female MPs as total number of MPs	Percentage of total number of female MPs as total number of MPs	Total number of MPs
Sixth parliament	3	3	0	0	3.8	3.8	79
Seventh parliament	4	4	0	0	4.8	4.8	84
Eighth parliament	4	2	2	0	2.2	4.4	91
Ninth parliament	8	4	4	0	4	8.1	99
Tenth parliament	18	10	8	0	9.7	17.5	103
Eleventh parliament	27	17	9	1	16.7	26.5	102
Twelfth parliament	28	20	7	1	18.5	25.9	108

Source: Calculation based on <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/history/list-of-mps-by-parliament>. Accessed on 8 April 2018.

**Table 2** Ethnic composition of the Parliament of Singapore (2002–2015)

Parliamentary session	Chinese MPs	Malay MPs	Indian MPs	Eurasian MPs	Percentage of ethnic minority MPs as total number of MPs	Total number of MPs
Tenth parliament	77	12	13	1	25.2	103
Eleventh parliament	75	12	12	3	26.5	102
Twelfth parliament	81	14	12	1	25	108

Source: Calculation based on <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/history/list-of-mps-by-parliament>. Accessed on 8 April 2018.

six candidates of a single party, with at least one candidate from an ethnic minority community (K. P. Tan, 2014). Table 2 shows the ethnic composition of the 10th–12th Parliaments. Ethnic minority MPs (Malay, Indian and Eurasian MPs) accounted for about one-fourth of the total number of MPs.

Having outlined the major features of Singapore politics and its parliament, we review the existing works on Singapore's parliamentary politics. The extant research on Singapore's parliamentary politics focuses on parliamentary elections, including the electoral systems, campaign strategies, and factors influencing the electoral outcomes (Chong, 2012; N. Tan, 2014; Singh, 2016; Weiss, Loke and Choa, 2016). While providing insightful analysis of the dynamics of parliamentary elections, the aforementioned works have two limitations: first, they have seldom examined the actual behaviour of MPs after they are elected to the Parliament. Indeed, scholars of legislative studies have highlighted the

importance of studying the actual behaviour of legislators once they are elected (Martin *et al.*, 2014). Secondly, the existing studies have not investigated the behaviour of Singapore MPs from a gendered perspective. Specifically, are female MPs in Singapore more likely to advance women's interests than their male counterparts under a hybrid and patriarchal regime? This article addresses this important but under-researched question.

### 3. Data and methods

This study covers the 10th–12th Parliaments of Singapore (2002–2015). The dependent variable is the policy preferences of MPs, which is measured by analysing the questions (both oral and written) raised by MPs at the plenary meetings. The parliamentary Question Time generally lasts for one and a half hours and each MP may ask up to five questions at any plenary meeting and not more than three of these questions shall be for oral answer. Questions should be sent to the Clerk in writing not later than seven days before the sitting day on which the answer is required. The Speaker of the Parliament, however, can permit a question to be asked without notice if it is of an urgent character or concerns a matter of public importance.<sup>2</sup>

This study uses parliamentary questions raised by MPs to assess their policy preferences. As argued by Martin (2011, p. 260), analysis of the contents of parliamentary questions allows researchers to understand the policy preferences, interests and agenda of individual legislators.<sup>3</sup> Students of legislative politics in both authoritarian and democratic regimes have demonstrated the usefulness of this research method. Malesky and Schuler (2010) conduct content analyses of questions asked during the 12th session of the Vietnamese National Assembly, in order to examine the policy preferences of the delegates in an authoritarian parliament. In his study of whether female legislators are more likely to represent women's interests than their male counterparts in Hong Kong's semi-democratic legislature, Tam (2017b) conducts content analyses of the parliamentary questions asked at the plenary meetings as well. Scholars of legislative politics in Western and Asian democracies have also utilised parliamentary questions to measure the policy preferences and interests of individual legislators. Based on examination of the parliamentary questions tabled by MPs, Saalfeld (2011) and Kolpinskaya (2017) investigate the impact of minority ethnic MPs on the

<sup>2</sup>Clause 20 of the Standing Orders of the Parliament of Singapore, accessed at <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/standing-orders-of-the-parliament-of-singapore.pdf> on 24 August 2018.

<sup>3</sup>Lovenduski (2014) argues that Question Time in Britain is performative rather than substantive, although she focuses on Prime Minister's Question Time.

substantive representation of minority-related issues in the British House of Commons. Finally, Jacob (2014) relies on parliamentary questions raised during the Question Time to investigate the impact of the gender of legislator on their legislative activities in the lower house of the Indian parliament.

The PAP is a cadre party and the party leadership exercises strong party discipline over its MPs (Tan, 2015b, p. 63). It is likely that PAP MPs may not have complete autonomy regarding the parliamentary questions they raise. Thus, the questions asked by individual MPs may be assigned by the party, rather than indicating their policy preferences. It is also possible that PAP's female MPs may feel more obliged to ask questions on women's interests because of the adoption of a party quota for female candidates by the PAP. While these possible influences of the party cannot be dismissed, we found no evidence that the PAP has restricted its MPs concerning the types of parliamentary questions that can be raised. In our review of the literature on Singapore's politics and the websites of the Parliament of Singapore and the PAP, we only noticed that the PAP leaders have emphasised that the party must ensure that its MPs vote according to the party's line in the debates of motions and bills. For example, on the website of the Parliament of Singapore, the PAP mentions that the party whip is to ensure that there are enough party members in the Chamber to support the party's position and that MPs vote according to the party's line.<sup>4</sup> Party control over the content of parliamentary questions has not been mentioned. This may be because MPs are not required to vote during the Question Hour. Concerning opposition parties, we likewise found no evidence that they have exercised control over the questions that their MPs asked. The leading opposition party, the Workers' Party, does not have shadow ministerial positions.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the parliamentary questions asked by opposition MPs should reflect their policy preferences, instead of their shadow ministerial positions.

Although studies of women's political representation like Rai and Spary (2018) and Catalano (2009) have adopted introduction of bills and participation in debates to assess the policy preferences of individual legislators, our study of Singapore does not use these measures for the following reasons. In Singapore, bills are virtually always drafted by the government's legal officers and introduced by a cabinet minister. Though MPs are allowed to introduce Private Member's Bills, this has merely happened three times in Singapore's history (K. P. Tan, 2014, p. 31). Accordingly, bill introduction does not enable us to investigate the policy preferences of the majority of MPs (PAP backbenchers, opposition MPs

<sup>4</sup>See the following webpage of the Parliament of Singapore, accessed at <https://www.parliament.gov.sg/about-us/structure/party-whip> on 24 February 2019.

<sup>5</sup>See the official website of the Workers' Party, accessed at <http://www.wp.sg> on 24 February 2019.

and NMPs) in Singapore. While recognising the value of debate participation in helping us to understand MPs' policy preferences, space limitation makes it difficult for us to include this measure in the present study. We will examine gender and women's political representation from the perspective of debate participation in further research.

The questions asked by Singapore MPs were coded according to seven policy areas. The first was women's rights. The next five—children and families, health-care, education, social welfare and environment—are traditional women's concerns. The final category included all other types of questions. Two examples are provided here to show how the questions were coded. In the parliamentary meeting on 20 January 2014, MP Lee Bee Wah asked the Minister for Social and Family Development whether the government has done any study to find out the reasons for low female representation on the boards of public-listed companies in Singapore and whether the Ministry has any plans to encourage companies to invite more women to serve on the board of directors.<sup>6</sup> Since this question focused on the status of women (gender equality) and women's participation in public affairs, it was coded as 'women's rights'. The second example is concerned with social welfare. On 8 July 2013, MP Mary Liew asked over the past five years how often the payouts of Public Assistance and ComCare funds have been adjusted in tandem with inflation, and whether the payouts are adequate for daily sustenance for the recipients considering inflation.<sup>7</sup> Since this question is concerned with the adequacy of Public Assistance and ComCare scheme in protecting the livelihood of the disadvantaged, it was coded as 'social welfare'.

This study has three independent variables: an MP's gender, party affiliation of an MP and ethnicity of an MP. Regarding an MP's gender, female MPs were coded as '1' and male as '0'. Given the different identity, experiences and perspectives that women possess like motherhood and the traditional caretaking role, the first hypothesis of this study is:

*Hypothesis 1: Female MPs were more likely than male MPs to raise parliamentary questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns.*

This study includes MPs' party affiliation as an independent variable. Existing research like Catalano (2009) and Osborn and Mendez (2010) investigates whether party affiliation by itself can influence MPs' policy preferences. In the case of Singapore, would the PAP MPs devote less efforts to promoting women's rights

<sup>6</sup>The *Singapore Hansard*, 20 January 2014, accessed at <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/home> on 24 April 2018.

<sup>7</sup>The *Singapore Hansard*, 8 July 2013, accessed at <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/home> on 11 April 2018.

than opposition MPs, given that the PAP is a socially conservative party that champions the patriarchal view of man as the head of the household and woman as the family's caregiver (see Section 1; E. Tan, 2008; Tan, 2015a).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the hegemonic electoral authoritarian regime and subsequent lack of meaningful electoral competition may have weakened the incentive of the PAP to wholeheartedly appeal to women voters. The PAP MPs, thereby, may have less incentive than opposition MPs to advocate women's rights. To address these issues, this study treats an MP's party affiliation as an independent variable, with the PAP MPs coded as '1', opposition MPs as '2',<sup>9</sup> and NMPs as '3'.<sup>10</sup> The second hypothesis of this study is as follows:

*Hypothesis 2: Compared to opposition MPs, PAP MPs were less likely to ask parliamentary questions on women's rights.*

This study also hypothesises that opposition MPs were more likely than PAP MPs to ask questions on traditional women's concerns and other types of questions. This is because compared to PAP MPs, opposition MPs have more incentive to use parliamentary questions as a tool to hold the governing party accountable like extracting information for scrutiny (Martin, 2011; Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2011).

*Hypothesis 3: Compared to PAP MPs, opposition MPs were more likely to ask questions on traditional women's concerns and other types of questions.*

This study includes ethnicity of MPs as an independent variable and examines how ethnicity and gender of MPs interacted to affect representational behaviour of MPs in Singapore. Intersectionality has received increasing attention from scholars of gender and representation in the past decades. Weldon (2006, p. 236), for example, argues that any complete gender analysis must incorporate analysis of race, class, sexuality and other axes of inequality, and examine interactions

<sup>8</sup>Singapore's opposition parties can almost be all characterized as left-leaning parties. They are much less patriarchal than the PAP. The Workers' Party, for example, opposed the PAP's patriarchal Graduate Mother Scheme in 1983, which sought to promote marriage and child bearing of highly educated women (Ortmann, 2010, pp. 62 and 169). Indeed, some studies such as Tremblay and Pelletier (2000) and Htun and Power (2006) have shown that left-leaning parties tend to be more likely and active in supporting feminist rights.

<sup>9</sup>During the period of our study, Singapore's Parliament only had 12 opposition MPs. Nine came from the Workers' Party, two from the Singapore Democratic Alliance and the remaining from the Singapore People's Party. In view of the small number of opposition MPs and the fact that most of them came from the Workers' Party, we grouped all opposition MPs together in the data analysis, so that the significance of being an opposition MP can be statistically examined.

<sup>10</sup>Nominated members of parliament are non-partisan, as they must not belong to any political party.

among them. This is because these interactions shape gender norms and practices in many ways. In her review of the field of gender and legislatures, [Taylor-Robinson \(2014, pp. 256 and 259\)](#) highlights the need to incorporate intersectionality more fully into study of representation, in order to understand how intersectional identities affect representation and definitions of women interests. For legislators who wear multiple representational hats (e.g. women legislators from minority groups), their intersectional identities may have important implications for their policy priorities. [Smooth \(2011, p. 438\)](#) likewise urges students of women's representation to pay more effort to assess how differences among women according to their race, class and other categories of difference can influence the definition of women's interests and the representation of such interests.

Scholars of women's representation, including [Lovenduski \(1998, p. 351\)](#), [Simien \(2007\)](#), and [Reingold and Haynie \(2014\)](#), highlight that race, ethnicity (and other personal traits) are closely intertwined with gender to shape political behaviour. An increasing number of studies on gender and legislator policy preferences in multi-ethnic countries such as [Fraga et al. \(2006\)](#), [Orey et al. \(2006\)](#) and [Reingold and Smith \(2012\)](#) have analysed how ethnicity of MPs had intertwined with gender to affect political outcomes. Given that both women and ethnic minorities are politically minority groups in Singapore (and many countries), it is likely that ethnic minority MPs in Singapore may be more sympathetic with women's interests than Chinese MPs.<sup>11</sup> Thus, we test the fourth hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 4: Ethnic minority MPs (Malay, Indian and Eurasian MPs) were more likely to raise parliamentary questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than Chinese MPs.<sup>12</sup>*

<sup>11</sup>It should be noted that there may also be cases where intersectionality between gender and ethnicity can undermine women's interests. The literature on gender and nationalism has demonstrated the conservatism of ethno-territorial nationalist discourse. [Racioppi and See \(2001\)](#), for example, find that intersectionality between gender and ethnicity (Protestant women) in Northern Ireland helped to maintain male hegemony within unionism and create a gender regime that was highly conservative. [Thapar-Bjorkert \(2013\)](#) provides an excellent overview of how ethno-territorial nationalism had undermined women's rights. One example concerns the development of Serbian nationalism within Yugoslavia. In view of the fear that Serbia might lose Kosovo to Albania, the reproductive potential of women was emphasized. Women's contribution to Serbian national rebirth came from her ability to produce little Serbs and to bear fighters. Abortion was thus often projected as a threat to the nation ([Thapar-Bjorkert, 2013, p. 812](#)). For a broader discussion of the impact of ethno-territorial nationalism on gender regime, see [Walby \(2006\)](#) and [Thapar-Bjorkert \(2013\)](#).

<sup>12</sup>Malay, Indian and Eurasian MPs were grouped together as ethnic minority MPs in the data analysis. Chinese MPs were coded as '1' and ethnic minority MPs as '2'.

Following Hypothesis 4, this study proposes the fifth hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5: MPs with dual identity, specifically female ethnic minority MPs, were more likely to raise parliamentary questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than female Chinese MPs, male ethnic minority MPs and male Chinese MPs.*<sup>13</sup>

The demographic variables of MPs, including their tenure (years serving as an MP), age and the education level, were controlled in the data analysis. Our analysis included tenure of MPs because research has demonstrated that MPs' tenure is a crucial factor affecting their legislative performance and behaviour. [Jeydel and Taylor \(2003\)](#), for example, show that MPs' tenure substantially influences legislative effectiveness (turning a bill into law), since longer tenure enables an MP to acquire useful experiences of the legislative process. [Beckwith \(2007\)](#) suggests that newly elected women MPs may be less likely to support progressive or radical legislative proposals than incumbent MPs. In the case of Singapore, we would like to examine whether the length of tenure affects an MP's likelihood to ask parliamentary questions on women's issues. Our analysis included MPs' age as well. Age matters in the study of legislative behaviour because legislatures are often characterised by strong hierarchies based on seniority ([Erikson and Josefsson, 2019](#)). The hierarchical situation may be more serious in the Parliament of Singapore in light of the hybrid and patriarchal regime. We would like to explore whether MPs' age has affected their representational behaviour. For example, has the strong hierarchy in the Parliament of Singapore discouraged younger MPs from pursuing women's rights?

Existing research on women's political representation has included the class background of MPs as an independent variable. In their comparative study of India and the European Union, for example, [Hoskyns and Rai \(1998\)](#) argue that researchers cannot fully understand the dynamics of feminist politics without considering the dimension of class. Class differences among women MPs affect how interests are identified and how problems can be negotiated. Our study of Singapore, however, does not include MPs' class as an independent variable. This is because the class variation among Singapore's MPs is very small. The ruling PAP is an elitist and pro-capitalist party and most of its MPs have the upper middle class background. Only a very small proportion of them have substantial trade unions and working-class experience ([Tan, 2015b](#); [K. P. Tan, 2008](#)). Therefore, given such a small variation in MPs' class background, its significance cannot be statistically examined.

<sup>13</sup> [Reingold and Smith \(2012\)](#) and [Reingold and Haynie \(2014\)](#) also find that female ethnic minority legislators in the USA stand out in introducing bills related to women's interests.

The data for this study were primarily collected from the official website of the Parliament of Singapore, which provides rich detail about the operation of the Parliament, including the proceedings of the meetings (*Singapore Hansard*) (see <https://sprs.parl.gov.sg/search/home> on 5 March 2018). The *Singapore Hansard* records verbatim the proceedings of every plenary meeting. Information about the questions raised by MPs at the plenary meetings was collected from the *Singapore Hansard*. One coder read the proceedings of every plenary meeting during the 10th, 11th and 12th Parliaments and coded all the questions. Twenty per cent of the parliamentary questions (out of the total 6678) were randomly chosen for coding by a second coder. Cohen's  $\kappa$  was run to determine if there was agreement between two coders' judgment on the categorisation of policies on 1336 cases. There was strong agreement between the two coders' judgments,  $\kappa = 0.82$  (95% CI, 0.7986–0.8414),  $p < 0.001$ . Information about MPs like their demographic backgrounds came from the websites of Parliament and the Singapore government. Finally, the two major newspapers in Singapore—*The Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao*—served as supplementary sources of information.

It should be noted that our data analysis excluded the Speaker of the Parliament because the Speaker is responsible for presiding the parliamentary meeting and does not raise any questions. MPs held ministerial positions were also excluded because they did not ask any questions.

#### 4. Findings

**Table 3** reports descriptive data on the questions raised by MPs. In total, MPs raised 6678 questions between 2002 and 2015 and they were included in our analysis. Two important findings are highlighted here. First, although accounting for between 17.5% and about one-fourth of the total number of MPs during the period of our study, female MPs asked almost 80% of women's rights questions (**Table 3**). The figures provide preliminary support that Singapore's female MPs put greater emphasis on women's rights than male MPs. Secondly, the number of women's rights questions did not experience any growth during the period of our study (remained at about 30), whereas the number of questions on traditional women's concerns and other issues witnessed a tremendous increase (**Table 3**). Such huge differences between the trend of women's rights questions and that of all the other categories of questions may imply that women's rights (elimination of women's subordination) was not among the top concerns of the majority of MPs in Singapore.<sup>14</sup> We will come back to this question in Section 5.

<sup>14</sup>It should be noted that analysis of parliamentary questions is just one major method to assess legislator policy preferences. Researchers have also examined legislator policy preferences through other perspectives like introduction/sponsorship of bills and participation in parliamentary debates.



**Table 3** MPs' gender and initiation of questions by thematic area in the 10th–12th Parliament of Singapore (2002–2015)

Parliamentary session	Gender	Number of women's rights questions	Number of children and families questions	Number of healthcare questions	Number of education questions	Number of social welfare questions	Number of environment questions	Number of others questions
Tenth parliament	Female (n = 18)	25 (81)	29 (59)	68 (44)	87 (71)	28 (64)	19 (79)	363 (44)
	Male (n = 85)	6 (19)	20 (41)	86 (56)	35 (29)	16 (36)	5 (21)	453 (56)
	Total (N = 103)	31 (100)	49 (100)	154 (100)	122 (100)	44 (100)	24 (100)	816 (100)
Eleventh parliament	Female (n = 27)	23 (77)	56 (75)	121 (60)	85 (56)	54 (64)	29 (45)	665 (51)
	Male (n = 75)	7 (23)	19 (25)	81 (40)	67 (44)	30 (36)	35 (55)	631 (49)
	Total (N = 102)	30 (100)	75 (100)	202 (100)	152 (100)	84 (100)	64 (100)	1296 (100)
Twelfth parliament	Female (n = 28)	23 (77)	73 (53)	133 (37)	96 (30)	63 (39)	37 (37)	753 (31)
	Male (n = 80)	7 (23)	65 (47)	225 (63)	220 (70)	100 (61)	63 (63)	1677 (69)
	Total (N = 108)	30 (100)	138 (100)	358 (100)	316 (100)	163 (100)	100 (100)	2430 (100)

Notes: Values are represented as n (%). Total number of questions asked: 6678, of which 1240 in the 10th Parliament; 1903 in the 11th Parliament; 3535 in the 12th Parliament.  
Source: *Singapore Hansard*.

**Table 4** Determinants of Singaporean legislator policy priorities (as shown by the number of questions raised) during 2002–2015

Variables	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald	Exp( <i>B</i> )
Women's rights				
Gender				
Female	2.35	0.28	72.05***	10.49
Political affiliation				
PAP	−0.49	0.38	1.65	0.61
NMP	−0.84	0.41	4.10*	0.43
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.87	0.24	13.66***	2.40
Age	0.03	0.02	3.60	1.03
Tenure	−0.11	0.03	9.58**	0.90
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	−0.22	0.22	0.99	0.80
Children and families				
Gender				
Female	1.28	0.13	93.13***	3.59
Political affiliation				
PAP	−0.96	0.17	30.26***	0.38
NMP	−1.66	0.22	54.75***	0.19
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.40	0.15	7.39**	1.50
Age	0.02	0.01	3.49	1.02
Tenure	−0.13	0.02	41.61***	0.88
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	−0.06	0.13	0.21	0.94
Healthcare				
Gender				
Female	0.73	0.08	85.01***	2.07
Political affiliation				
PAP	−1.08	0.10	119.98***	0.34
NMP	−2.14	0.16	185.72***	0.12
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.18	0.09	3.95*	1.20
Age	0.00	0.01	0.25	1.00
Tenure	−0.10	0.01	87.92***	0.90
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	−0.25	0.08	9.96**	0.78
Education				
Gender				
Female	0.49	0.09	30.18***	1.64
Political affiliation				
PAP	−0.96	0.12	65.91***	0.38
NMP	−1.44	0.15	90.46***	0.24
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.25	0.10	5.89*	1.28
Age	0.01	0.01	2.21	1.01

*Continued*

**Table 4** Continued

Variables	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
Tenure	-0.15	0.01	107.60***	0.86
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	-0.20	0.09	4.93*	0.82
Social welfare				
Gender				
Female	0.88	0.13	48.91***	2.42
Political affiliation				
PAP	-1.29	0.15	71.78***	0.28
NMP	-2.17	0.23	91.81***	0.11
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.53	0.14	14.69***	1.70
Age	0.00	0.01	0.17	1.00
Tenure	-0.13	0.02	46.58***	0.88
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	0.06	0.12	0.25	1.06
Environment				
Gender				
Female	0.75	0.16	22.03***	2.11
Political affiliation				
PAP	-0.56	0.26	4.71*	.57
NMP	-0.56	0.28	3.98*	.57
Ethnicity				
Minority	0.28	0.18	2.36	1.32
Age	0.03	0.01	5.66*	1.03
Tenure	-0.12	0.02	24.88***	0.89
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	-0.27	0.16	2.95	0.76
Others				
Gender				
Female	0.35	0.03	118.87***	1.43
Political affiliation				
PAP	-1.16	0.04	869.26***	0.31
NMP	-1.65	0.05	911.80***	0.19
Ethnicity				
Minority	-0.11	0.04	8.02**	0.90
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.53	1.00
Tenure	-0.10	0.00	517.38***	0.91
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	-0.06	0.03	3.54	0.94
Ethnic minority related				
Gender				
Female	0.55	0.29	3.55	1.73
Political affiliation				
PAP	-2.41	0.29	71.04***	0.09
NMP	-2.78	0.47	34.77***	0.06

*Continued*

**Table 4** Continued

Variables	B	SE	Wald	Exp(B)
Ethnicity				
Minority	3.08	0.35	79.61***	21.79
Age	−0.00	0.02	0.01	1.00
Tenure	−0.07	0.04	3.95*	0.93
Education level				
Undergraduate or below	−0.24	0.23	1.09	0.79

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

To study the impact of gender, party affiliation and ethnicity of MPs, I conducted a series of Poisson regression analyses controlling for tenure, age and education level of MPs. Table 4 reports the results of these analyses.

Our results show that MPs' gender, party affiliation and ethnicity significantly predicted the number of questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns asked during the plenary meetings. Our results support Hypothesis 1, given that female MPs were more likely than male MPs to raise questions on women's rights and *all* traditional women's concerns. The magnitude of gender difference was largest in women's rights, as female MPs were 10.49 times more likely than male MPs to raise questions about women's rights. The smallest gender difference was in education, as female MPs were 1.64 times more likely than male MPs to ask questions related to education (Table 4).

Our results reject Hypothesis 2. There were no significant differences in the number of women's rights questions raised between PAP MPs and opposition MPs,  $p = 0.20$ , as well as NMPs,  $p = 0.23$ . Our results support Hypothesis 3. Compared to PAP MPs, opposition MPs were more likely to ask questions on *all* traditional women's concerns and other types of questions. The magnitude of difference was largest in social welfare, as opposition MPs were 3.57 times more likely than PAP MPs to raise questions related to social welfare. The smallest difference was in environment, given that opposition MPs were 1.75 times more likely than PAP MPs to ask questions about environment (Table 4).

Our results also largely support Hypothesis 4. Except for questions on environment, ethnic minority MPs (Malay, Indian and Eurasian MPs) were more likely to raise questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than Chinese MPs. The magnitude of difference was largest in women's rights, as ethnic minority MPs were 2.40 times more likely than ethnic majority (Chinese) MPs to raise women's rights questions. The smallest difference was in healthcare,

as ethnic minority MPs were 1.20 times more likely than Chinese MPs to ask questions about healthcare.

#### 4.1 Interaction effect of gender $\times$ ethnicity

Given that both MPs' gender and ethnicity were significant predictors of the number of questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns (except environment), it would be interesting to examine whether MPs with these two personal traits (being female *and* ethnic minorities) were more likely to advance women's interests. In other words, we explore whether MPs' gender had intertwined with their ethnicity to influence their representational behaviour in the Parliament. A series of  $2 \times 2$  analysis of variances (ANOVAs)<sup>15</sup> were conducted, with gender (female and male) and ethnicity (ethnic minority and Chinese) as independent variables and the number of questions raised as dependent variable. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the number of questions raised categorised by gender and ethnicity of MPs.

Our results partially support Hypothesis 5. The interaction effect of gender  $\times$  ethnicity was significant for women's rights, healthcare and social welfare. For children and families, education and environment, there was no significant interaction effect of gender  $\times$  ethnicity. The details are discussed below.

In terms of women's rights, there were significant main effects of gender ( $F(1, 254) = 68.67, p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.21$ ) and ethnicity ( $F(1, 254) = 14.42, p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.05$ ) on the number of questions asked. The interaction effect of gender  $\times$  ethnicity was significant as well ( $F(1, 254) = 16.52, p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.06$ ). The results of Tukey post hoc tests revealed that female ethnic minority MPs asked more questions about women's rights than female Chinese MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ), male ethnic minority MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ) and male Chinese MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ). Female Chinese MPs also asked more women's rights questions than male ethnic minority MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ) and male Chinese MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ). However, male ethnic minority MPs and male Chinese MPs did not differ in the number of women's rights questions asked ( $p = 0.99$ ).

Regarding healthcare, significant main effects of gender ( $F(1, 254) = 27.10, p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.10$ ) and ethnicity ( $F(1, 254) = 7.79, p = 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) were found, while their interaction effect was also significant ( $F(1, 254) = 17.80, p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.07$ ). The results of Tukey post hoc tests indicated that female ethnic minority MPs raised more questions about healthcare than female Chinese MPs ( $p = 0.001$ ), male ethnic minority MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ) and

<sup>15</sup>ANOVA is a statistical technique that examines whether there are any significant differences in a scale-level dependent variable among the nominal-level independent variables that have two or more categories.

male Chinese MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ). Female Chinese MPs, male ethnic minority MPs and male Chinese MPs did not differ in the number of questions raised related to healthcare ( $p > 0.05$ ).

Concerning social welfare, there were significant main effects of gender ( $F(1, 254) = 23.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.08$ ) and ethnicity ( $F(1, 254) = 7.20$ ,  $p = 0.01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ) on the number of questions raised. The interaction effect of gender  $\times$  ethnicity was significant as well ( $F(1, 254) = 4.29$ ,  $p = 0.04$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ). The results of Tukey post hoc tests suggested that female ethnic minority MPs raised more questions about social welfare than female Chinese MPs ( $p = 0.04$ ), male ethnic minority MPs ( $p = 0.001$ ) and male Chinese MPs ( $p < 0.001$ ). Female Chinese MPs also raised more questions about social welfare than male Chinese MPs ( $p = 0.01$ ). Male ethnic minority MPs and male Chinese MPs did not differ in the number of questions raised about social welfare ( $p = 0.92$ ).

Finally, our results show that MPs' tenure, education level and age mattered. First, MPs with longer tenure tended to raise fewer questions on women's rights, traditional women's concerns and other types of questions than MPs with shorter tenure. Secondly, MPs with higher education level (master's or Ph.D. degree) were 1.22 times more likely than MPs with lower education level (undergraduate or below) to ask questions about education. Thirdly, older MPs were more likely than younger MPs to raise questions about environment in which there was a 3% increase in the number of questions raised for each year of age increased. We will come back to these insights in Section 4.

## 5. Discussion

This study investigates whether female MPs in Singapore—a hybrid and patriarchal regime—are more likely to act for women's interests. Our results confirm Hypothesis 1, as female MPs were significantly more likely to raise questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than their male counterparts. The impact of gender on women's substantive representation was particularly obvious in women's rights, as female MPs were 10 times more likely than male MPs to ask women's rights questions. This is a notable finding in two ways. First, like their counterparts in Western democracies, female MPs in Singapore were also more likely to represent women's rights even under a hybrid and patriarchal regime. Secondly, compared to male MPs, female MPs in Singapore were more likely to ask questions on *all* areas of traditional women's concerns. This finding is different from many studies on Western democracies, which show no major difference between female and male legislators on issues considered of traditional women's concerns, including healthcare, education, social welfare and environment (Thomas, 1991, 1994; Jones, 1997; Osborn and Mendez, 2010).

**Table 5** Descriptive statistics of the number of questions raised categorised by gender and ethnicity of MPs during 2002–2015

Type of questions		Female		Male	
		Ethnic minority (N = 13)	Chinese (N = 58)	Ethnic minority (N = 52)	Chinese (N = 135)
Women's rights	Mean	2.00	0.78	0.08	0.12
	SD	2.71	1.21	0.27	0.46
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	8	5	1	3
Children and families	Mean	3.23	2.00	0.63	0.53
	SD	3.49	2.69	1.44	1.57
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	10	12	8	14
Healthcare	Mean	9.77	3.36	1.15	2.46
	SD	12.27	5.03	2.26	5.12
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	35	21	10	41
Education	Mean	5.15	3.47	1.67	1.74
	SD	5.05	5.17	2.78	5.07
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	14	19	12	46
Social welfare	Mean	3.46	1.72	0.94	0.72
	SD	3.64	2.38	2.64	1.46
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	11	10	17	8
Environment	Mean	1.54	1.12	0.46	0.59
	SD	3.57	2.35	1.45	1.25
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	13	11	9	7
Others	Mean	23.08	25.53	13.17	15.38
	SD	18.71	29.89	21.29	24.39
	Min.	1	0	0	0
	Max.	62	120	85	126
Ethnic minority related	Mean	1.08	0.10	0.98	0.04
	SD	1.61	0.31	3.04	0.21
	Min.	0	0	0	0
	Max.	4	1	20	1

Our results demonstrate that female MPs in Singapore were more likely to provide substantive representation on women's interests than male MPs. This finding may be caused by the fact that female MPs possess different backgrounds like motherhood and gender role socialisation experiences from men (Burden, 2007). Thus, female MPs may be more likely than men to sympathise with the cause of women and feel a duty to advance it. NMP Kuik Shiao-Yin's explanation for her advocacy for single mothers to receive equal welfare benefits as married

mothers is an illustration. In an interview with mass media, Kuik elaborated her reasons for supporting the cause of single mothers as follows: 'As a mother myself . . . I am grateful that I receive subsidies from the government. At the same time, it got me thinking, what about all the single mothers out there who are not entitled to such subsidies? We are mothers, all the same . . . I could personally identify with the struggles of motherhood' (Das, 2016).

Besides gender, this study shows that MPs' political affiliation crucially affected their likelihood to represent traditional women's concerns *but not* women's rights. Our results do not support Hypothesis 2, as there were no significant differences in the number of questions asked about women's rights between PAP MPs and opposition MPs. However, our results confirm Hypothesis 3, as opposition MPs were more likely than PAP MPs to ask questions on traditional women's concerns and other types of questions. A possible factor of this finding could be that opposition MPs had stronger incentive to hold the governing PAP accountable by using parliamentary questions to criticise the PAP policies, press the government for actions and demand information from the government for scrutiny.

Our results also find that MPs' ethnicity mattered, given that ethnic minority MPs (Malay, Indian and Eurasian MPs) were more likely to raise parliamentary questions on women's rights and traditional women's concerns (except environment) than Chinese MPs (Hypothesis 4). A possible factor could be that both women and ethnic minorities are politically minority groups in Singapore, therefore ethnic minority MPs may be more sympathetic with women's interests than Chinese MPs. Following this line of argument, we should have found MPs' gender and ethnicity worked in tandem to influence their representational behaviour. In other words, MPs with *dual identity*, specifically female ethnic minority MPs, would be more supportive of women's rights and traditional women's concerns, when compared to other types of MPs (Hypothesis 5). Our results partially confirm Hypothesis 5, as female ethnic minority MPs were more likely to ask questions related to women's rights, healthcare and social welfare. This is one contribution of this study that highlights how intersectionality between gender and ethnicity has affected MPs' representational behaviour in Singapore.

Our results show that MPs with longer tenure tended to ask fewer questions on women's rights, traditional women's concerns and other types of questions than MPs with shorter tenure. One possible factor is that compared to MPs with shorter tenure, MPs with longer tenure are more secure in their parliamentary seats. Thus, they feel less need to use parliamentary questions to signal effort to their constituents and enhance their chance of getting re-elected (Kellermann, 2016). Our data do not allow us to evaluate this tentative answer and we leave it for future research.



This study also finds that MPs with higher education level (master's or Ph.D. degree) were more likely than MPs with lower education level (undergraduate or below) to ask questions about education. Two possible factors may explain this finding. First, for MPs with master's or Ph.D. degree, their substantial education experiences enhance their insight and interests in educational issues. Secondly, some of them are teaching in universities or colleges. Their working experiences are likely to prompt them to focus on educational issues especially those concerned with tertiary education while serving as an MP. NMPs Ong Soh Khim and Eugene Tan Kheng Boon who are teaching at National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University, respectively, for example, had raised 19 and 28 questions on education while serving as an NMP. Many of their questions were related to tertiary education.

Finally, our study shows that older MPs were more likely than younger MPs to raise questions about environment. This finding is contrary to some existing studies which contend that younger people tend to hold a more supportive attitude towards environmental protection and possess a higher level of environmental awareness than the older generation (Liere and Dunlap, 1980; Honnold, 1984; Dietz *et al.*, 1998). Our data do not allow us to fully explain why older MPs in Singapore were more likely than their younger colleagues to ask questions on environment. It is certainly an important issue for further research.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examines women's political representation in a hybrid and patriarchal regime—Singapore. Specifically, it investigates whether female MPs in Singapore are more likely to promote women's rights and traditional women's concerns than their male colleagues. This study makes three contributions. First, it adds to an emerging scholarship on women's political representation in Asia by analysing the impact of gender on women's substantive representation in Singapore—a hybrid and patriarchal regime. Secondly, this study enriches the literature on Singapore's parliamentary politics by examining what MPs have actually done once they are elected. There were substantial differences in the representational behaviour—regarding policy preferences towards women's interests—between female and male MPs. Thirdly, responding to Simien (2007) and Taylor-Robinson's (2014) appeal to spend more effort to analysing how ethnicity and gender interacted to affect political behaviour, this study investigates how ethnicity and gender of MPs in Singapore interact to influence their representational behaviour.

This study finds that female MPs put greater emphasis on substantive representation of women's rights and traditional women's concerns than their male colleagues. However, there may be limitations of advancing women's rights

(a central component of Molyneux's strategic gender interests) in Singapore through the Parliament. As shown in Table 3, the number of women's rights questions did not experience any growth during the period of our study (remained at about 30 in each parliament), whereas the number of questions on traditional women's concerns and other issues witnessed a tremendous increase. This may imply that women's rights were not among the top concerns of the PAP-dominated parliament. Singapore MPs have paid increasing attention to the practical concerns that women encounter in their daily life (e.g. caring their children and family, healthcare and education). However, when it comes to removal of women's subordination, Singapore's conservative social values (e.g. opposition to having a child out of wedlock and women's submissiveness to males) and PAP's patriarchal viewpoints might have discouraged MPs, especially male MPs, from raising more women's rights questions in the Parliament. If this is the case, female MPs may be facing substantial hurdles in pursuing women's rights in the Parliament. Finally, the lack of meaningful electoral competition under the hybrid regime may have weakened the incentive of the PAP's MPs to wholeheartedly appeal to women's votes. This may also explain why women's rights questions did not experience any growth during the period of this study.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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