

Women's participation in political life in the Arab States

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Abstract:

The level of political representation of women in various legislative bodies around the world varies widely, and recent decades have seen a marked increase in the frequency of calls for women's empowerment and for their participation in political life. Despite these calls, efforts to involve women in political life still face many obstacles, especially in Arab countries. This study compared the participation of women in political life in the Arab countries of North Africa and the rest of the Arab countries of South-West Asia, noting the great importance of the role of women in political life, especially after the constitutional amendments of most Arab countries.

key words: Women - Political Life - The Kota System - Elections - The Principle of Gender Equality.

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Introduction :

The level of political representation of women in different legislative bodies around the world varies greatly (The Arab quota report: selected case studies, 5-6 December 2004) , The women in the Arab world, is that as in other areas of the world, have throughout history experienced discrimination and have been subject to restriction of their freedoms and rights. Many of these practices and limitations are based on cultural and emanate from tradition and not from religion as many people supposed, these main constraints that create an obstacle towards women's rights and liberties are reflected in the participation of women in political life. Although there are differences between the countries, the Arab region in general is noted for the low participation of women in politics. Universal suffrage has become common in most countries, but there are still some Arab women who are denied such rights (Sabbagh, 2005) .

There have been many highly respected female leaders in Arab history, such as Shajar al-Durr (13th century) in Egypt, Queen Orpha (d. 1090) in Yemen. In the modern era there have also been examples of female leadership in Arab countries. However, in Arabic-speaking countries no woman has ever been head of state, although many Arabs remarked on the presence of women such as Jehan Al Sadat, the wife of Anwar El Sadat in Egypt, and Wassila Bourguiba, the wife of Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia, who have strongly influenced their husbands in their dealings with matters of state. Many Arab countries allow women to vote in national elections. The first female Member of Parliament in the Arab world was Rawya Ateya, who was elected in Egypt in 1957. Some countries granted the female franchise in their constitutions following independence, while some extended the franchise to

women in later constitutional amendments (council, 25 November 2014.) .

1-Importance of the subject: The importance of studying this subject is in several points, including:

- The importance of this study affect an important member of the community which is Women, in addition this subject is related to the application of a constitutional rule of law, which is the principle of equality between genders.
- In Arab countries women make up a numerical superior category.

2-Objectives and goals of the study:

- Highlighting the special international efforts to the advancement of women's rights conventions and international conferences.
- Determine the progress of the Arab countries in the field of human rights, and specifically women's participation in political life.
- Stand on the results of their national plan to activate the political participation of women.
- Indicate the most important legal mechanisms that would activate the political participation of women. "Such as the Quota system".
- Indicate the obstacles that stand in the face of women's participation in political life.
- Indicate the above with the differences between women's participation in political life in the North African Arab countries and the rest of the Arab countries located in Southwest Asia.

3-Reasons for choosing this subject of research:

a- Subjective reasons:

- Scientific curiosity in dealing with topics related to women and political life.
- Attempting to provide a clear view about what is actually happening in the Arab countries with regard to this topic, where I noticed the ignorance of many of you about the fact of the situation there, especially with regard to women's issues.

b- Objective reasons:

- The modernity of subject.
- The evolution of the legal status of Arab women at the international level in terms of a set of rights that other legislation still did not reach the minimum of it.
- The great importance of the role of women in political life, especially after the constitutional amendments after the independence of most Arab countries, which was colonized.

4- The research method:

I used both quantitative and qualitative methods, by analyzing the ideas, and giving statistic, and show the historical development of women's participation in political life.

5- The plan: we divided our research studies into three chapter as follow:

Chapter one: women's participation in political life in Southwest Asia Arab states.

Chapter two: women's participation in political life in North African Arab States.

Chapter three: obstacles that hinder Arab women in political participation.

**CHAPTER ONE : WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN
POLITICAL LIFE IN SOUTHWEST ASIA ARAB STATES.**

We are going here to deal with the most important countries in Southwest Asia Arab states, Intruders the Saudi Arabia, then United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Iraq

1-Saudi Arabia:

King Abdullah has granted women the right to vote in the 2015 municipal elections. The king also appoints 30 women to the top advisory body, the Shura Council (ZohraTaourit, 2014-2015) . The body cannot legislate and its male-dominated chamber has so far not taken up a request by three female members to discuss the issue of

allowing women to drive. The Saudi government also has rolled out a law penalizing domestic abuse, including neglect. The law does not address the guardianship system that grants male family members authority over their female relatives (Topic guide for human rights council) .

2-United Arab Emirates:

The UAE is among the most socially liberal of the Gulf States and authorities have made an effort to hire women to prominent government roles. However, traditional attitudes toward women have run up against the country's modern image. In the UAE, in 2006 women stood for election for the first time in the country's history. Although just one female candidate - from Abu Dhabi - was directly elected, the government appointed a further eight women to the 40-seat federal legislature, giving women a 22.5 per cent share of the seats, far higher than the world average of 17.0 per cent (Women in parliament and politics in the UAE: A Study of the first federal national council elections).

3- Kuwait:

Women earned the right to vote for the first time in 2005, and in 2009, four women won seats in parliament. As in nearby Qatar, they aren't able to convey citizenship to their children. Those born to Kuwaiti mothers do get the same benefits as Kuwaiti citizens up until they're 21. That includes free education, health care, and monetary benefits. Unlike in neighboring Saudi Arabia, women can drive and travel on their own. They aren't required to cover their heads, though expectations of modest dress remain as in other Gulf countries (Shalaby, 2015) .

4- Iraq:

There are no laws focusing on domestic violence against women. The country's 2005 constitution states that a quarter of parliament

seats and government positions must go to women. This later was extended to provincial and local councils.

Arab women are under-represented in parliaments in Arab states, although they are gaining more equal representation as Arab states liberalize their political systems. In 2005, the International Parliamentary Union said that 6.5 per cent of MPs in the Arab world were women, compared with 3.5 per cent in 2000. In Tunisia, nearly 23 per cent of members of parliament were women. However, the Arab country with the largest parliament, Egypt, had only around four per cent female representation in parliament. Algeria has the largest female representation in parliament with 32 per cent (The Arab quota report: selected case studies, 5-6 December 2004).

It was held a workshop in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2004, which reviewed the experiences of quotas in the Arab world ((UNDP)), since the workshop in 2004, a lot has happened in the Arab region. Women in Kuwait were given the right to vote for the first time in 2005. In the parliamentary elections.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE IN NORTH AFRICAN ARAB STATES.

We are going here to deal with the most important countries in North African Arab states, Intruders Algeria, then Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt.

1- Algeria:

Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Women's Algerian congratulated the decision to appoint seven women ministers in the new Algerian government, saying that the new government recorded a historical precedent presence of seven female ministers and ministerial staff, which is the first time that this issue of the appointment of women in the executive Algerian device ((UNIFEM)., 2014).

It is commendable and striking is that the proportion of women ministers, women in this government equal to 20%, the ratio serves as a precedent not only in Algeria but on the Arab level and even international, particularly those characterized by the new government, the attribution of the Ministry of significant size of the education sector to a woman for the first time opens up in front of the biggest female element spaces after the law of women's participation in political life in 2012, a law that contributed to the entry of more than 100 women to parliament in accordance with the quota system, which was enacted in this regard (Anscher, 2014) .

She was with a spokeswoman in the same context of the wishes of the ministers of the new female success in their posts and Algeria further progress in the areas of political participation and empowerment of women as an ideal role model among Arab countries in this regard, pointing out that the decision of the Algerian shows the faith of the Algerian state energies of women's existing investment in order the advancement of the state by ensuring that women's political participation and the assumption of decision-making positions, To indicate the ministers who belong to that Algerian government are Nouria bin Gabrit Minister of National Education, Delilah Boujemaa Minister create the region and the environment, Nadia Labidi, Minister of Culture, Monet Muslim minister of national solidarity, family and women's issues, flower Drdora Minister of Post and Technologies of Information and Communication, Nouria Yamina Zerhouni as Minister of Tourism traditional industry, Aisha Tagabo Minister Delegate to the Minister of Tourism and Handicraft expensive traditional industry .

Despite the many gains of Algerian women at all levels, but there is still a clear deficiencies in all forms and participation in various

political institutions of the local or national levels boards and even in the political parties ,the parliament , the government and the ministry.

The Algerian women's participation alongside men in elected councils , local or legislative ones , of the most important conditions of democracy , when we talk about democracy today , we must recognize that one concentrates is equality , and to give the opportunity for all without distinction or discrimination between the sexes (Titilia, Zed El Khir Titilia, Upgrade Algerian women's representation in elected councils, Submission to complete the Master Certificate Requirements, Under 2013/2014, p. 48) .

The Inter-Parliamentary Union announced that Algeria recorded the largest percentage of progress on women's representation in the National People's Assembly and the National Assembly compared with the rest of the region where he highlighted the importance of maintaining the percentage of quota "quotas" in the elections to increase women's participation in political life.

Annexation of the report, seen by "leading" a copy of which Algeria among the top three countries that have seen progress in the parliamentary elections, in terms of the application of the quota imposed by the law in addition to Senegal and "Timor-Leste", while Algeria is the first Arab countries that have crossed the 30% of the post women in parliament, where the turnout was 31.6%, and this is a remarkable achievement in a region that has failed to maintain the hope of democratic change in the Arab spring countries, but Egypt and Libya have the lowest level of participation of women in all countries the ratio is less than average and stood at 13.2%.

2- Morocco:

Increased representation of Moroccan women in political life in general and in local councils in particular has now become a reality.

Recently, the Moroccan Parliament amended the local election law to raise female representation from 12% to 27% in municipal councils.

On June 12 2009, 3,324 women were elected to local councils throughout the Kingdom of Morocco, representing nearly 12 percent of the total seats under contention. Thanks to an electoral quota system pursued by women's rights advocates, this percentage dramatically increases the representation of women in elected government. Winning electoral campaigns is likely the easiest hurdle these courageous women will have to overcome.

Although women's rights in Morocco are guaranteed in the country's constitution drafted initially in 1962, and supported through the teachings of Islam, cultural traditions have contributed to much higher illiteracy and poverty rates among women when compared to men. The Kingdom started tackling this problem in the 1990's through debate on family law legislation, which was passed by King Mohammed VI in 2004. The King also passed the nationality code in 2006, allowing women to pass Moroccan nationality to their children. Additional reforms in the judicial and education sectors are currently being discussed to maintain the momentum of women's active political participation. For example, reforms are being made on the communal charter to mandate quotas for the number of women sitting on the councils' executive boards and advisory bodies. The King recently stated that the need for women to have a presence within the upper ranks of the Kingdom's judicial system is paramount, reflecting his sentiment behind these reforms (Broomell, 2010).

The Moroccan government is also actively investing resources in programs that support the implementation of these reforms. For example, the Ministry of Interior recently launched a local governance program that supports the active participation of women in the political process. In addition, the Ministry devoted 10 million dirhams

(\$1,25m) to finance projects of Moroccan political parties and civil society representatives that seek to increase women's participation.

Through ongoing governmental reforms, training programs and resource allocation, women's equal representation in Moroccan politics can become a reality.

3-Tunisia:

Women from all walks of life, age groups and regions of Tunisia took to the streets in the December 2010 – January 2011 uprising that led to the ousting of former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. Women also participated in large numbers in the October 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections as candidates and campaigners, Considering that Tunisia has long been on the frontlines in gender politics, electoral lists for the parliamentary elections that took place on October 26 have proved a disappointment; female candidates led 11 percent of electoral lists. Given that women made up 50.5 percent of registered voters (up from 45 percent in October 2011), the low percentage of female candidates sparked outrage among female activists who had a leading role during the Tunisian revolution in 2011 and who, over the last three years, have stood steadfastly against trends that threatened to derail the democratic movement. Despite their increasing political participation and the constitutional and legislative protection for women's political and civil rights (such as Article 24 of the Tunisian Electoral Law ensuring parity in electoral lists), Tunisian women find themselves almost excluded from "real" political opportunities (Yahia, 2012).

Equally important, statistics show that female political participation is remarkably lower in the interior regions than the coastal ones—particularly surprising given that voter registration among women in the interior governorates is higher than for men. The exclusionary stance is particularly clear, for example, in the Tataouine governorate

located in southern Tunisia, where female candidates led no electoral lists, despite the fact that vertical parity and alternation was guaranteed by the Fundamental Law 16/2014 on Elections and Referenda, enacted in May 2014.

Unfortunately, the absence of “real” political representation of Tunisian women was not restricted to electoral lists. Men also dominated the media exposure discussing the 2014 elections. According to The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), every candidate had three minutes on a national channel to deliver his/her electoral program. However, even those TV sessions provided for candidates to briefly present their electoral programs were male-dominated programs, obstructing women's opportunity to demonstrate their political leadership skills. “Unless [there is an] impediment, only the head of list can present its political program on national media,” said ISIE. Accordingly, women only enjoyed 11 percent or less of national media time (Fdhil, 2014) .

4-Egypt:

Women's political rights in Egypt is a subject that is rarely discussed by the general public. While most ministries, governmental positions and political candidates are predominantly male, women who do participate are not given the same support and confidence that is usually given to men.

During the 2008 local council election, the parties nominated low percentages of women candidates. Out of the National Democratic Party's (NDP) 52000 candidates, only 6000 were women. The Wafd Party nominated 24 women out of their 520 candidates. El Tagamo'a Party nominated sixteen women out of their 234 candidates, and the Generation Party (El Gil) nominated seven women out of their 74 candidates. The Nasserist party nominated only five women out of 151 total candidates, and out of the Republican Party's (El Gomhory) fourteen candidates, two were women. Only 2335 women were

elected, totalling 4.4% of the total local council members. The 2008 report of the International Parliamentary Union on Women's Status ranks Egypt 134 in women's participation in parliament out of 188 countries. Rwanda, Sudan, and Cuba come in first, second and third respectively (Amany Khodair, p. 4).

When you had the quota system of 2010 with 64 seats for women, it was just an idea for tokenism. It was just to fulfill Egypt's international commitments; it was not about real implementation.

In the 2011 parliament, which was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamists, the quota system was very weak and even counterproductive. "We barely had a quota, "There was a quota of one woman on each party list -which was nothing because the law did not put a clear statement around where to put the woman on the list. So of course, every party had women towards the bottom because they wanted to win more seats and knew the general public would never vote for a list that has women as a priority."

In spite of the January 25 Revolution has witnessed active participation of Egyptian women, but the subsequent legislation on the Revolution had abolished the quota system resulted in the representation of low for women in the parliamentary elections in Egypt, where he has won (9) ladies only and represent the percentage of no more than 7 to 1% of the the current parliament seats.

CHAPTER THREE: OBSTACLES THAT HINDER ARAB WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The role of women in politics in Arab societies is largely determined by the will of these countries' leaderships to support female representation and cultural attitudes towards women's involvement in public life. Dr Rola Dashti, a female candidate in Kuwait's 2006 parliamentary elections, claimed that "the negative cultural and media attitude towards women in politics" was one of the

main reasons why no women were elected. She also pointed to "ideological differences", with conservatives and extremist Islamists opposing female participation in political life and discouraging women from voting for a woman. She also cited malicious gossip, attacks on the banners and publications of female candidates, lack of training and corruption as barriers to electing female Member of Parliament.

And there are many others barriers like:

- Starting from the patriarchal culture of the society which is reflected on the social and economic situation of women ending by the offensive discriminatory laws and practices of the authoritarian ruling regime the obstacles that hinder Arab women from political participation is lying in between. while educational and income levels do not have a direct impact on voting, they tend to enhance the participation of women in campaign organizations and in the memberships of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Tiltne, 2000).
- Under authoritarian rule, political activities are held secretly and it is difficult for women to get involved in secret work due to norms and traditions.
- Legislature are unwilling to increase and empower women political participation and their attainment of political rights as well as social, cultural, civil and economic rights and utilizing Islamic religion to exploit and discriminate against women, Sudanese women up to date are controlled by their husbands and families by law.
- The quality and Intensity of women political participation is also an obstacle, because of the fact that women represent their parties in the first place and not women, they do not fight for women rights and for better status and their participation in decision making process is usually nil and not real (Musaddaq, 2000, p. 244).
- Cultural and social norms confine politics to men and bind women with the domestic sphere.

- Women do not own the social capital and the economic resources to advance their position or to participate in politics usually (Margaret, 2000).
- Lack of training to women in political parties and the exclusion of women issues in their programs.
- Political parties are targeting women as voter, not as actors and can play enormous role in politics.
- The media is playing an important role in erasing the modest women political participation, in Sudan women is rarely presented as politician in the media, even when they image a politician woman they impose their domestic roles and neglect their public activities. This false portrait ensure to the society the gender division of labor and express the vision of women never succeed if they are not mothers and wives although if they are politicians.

Conclusion:

Women in the Middle East and North Africa did not witness only a social transformation, but also a political transformation in the contemporary Arab world. Among their legal rights is voting, which grants them the right to put their choices and opinions into consideration concerning political decisions.

The contemporary political system is based on elections in many Arab countries. Women were granted the full right to vote on a universal and equal basis in Lebanon in 1952, Egypt in 1956, Yemen in 1967, Iraq 1980, where Syria in 1949 with restrictions or conditions lifted in 1953 and in Kuwait in 1985 but later removed and re-granted in 2005, Tunisia in 1959, Mauritania in 1961, Algeria in 1962, Morocco in 1963. After one year, women in Libya and Sudan were able to vote also in 1970, Bahrain in 1973, Jordan in 1974, and Oman in 1994.

As a sum up, we can say, In spite of these efforts and the progress achieved in recent years, the substantive participation of women in political life is still limited.

We hope with this entirely positive changes in the legislation of the Arab states and accession to international treaties aimed at promoting women's rights, will be realized in the future in women's access to what they wish in the political field.

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