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The Underlying Causes of Women's Lack of Political Participation in Jordan



Jordanian woman protests for her rights - Jordanian Parliament: MEE/M Ersen

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The Underlying Causes of Women's Lack of Political Participation in Jordan



Jordanian parliamentarians fight in Amman, December 2202 over vote on women's rights (AFP)

Women's participation in politics in Jordan is quite scarce and a very important topic considering women's overall role in Jordan. Not all women are given the education or opportunity to voice their opinions regarding politics. The Jordan Times has written about the percentage of female participation in the Parliament. Raya Al Muheisen mentions how 9 percent of women in Jordan participate in the Cabinet and 12 percent in the national legislature.¹ She has thus demonstrated the underrepresentation of women in politics within Jordan. With further research, in the article titled, "Women's Political Participation in Jordan: The Experiences of Female Candidates in the 2010 Parliamentary Elections" written by Marta Pietrobelli, she talks about where Jordan stands in regard to women's political participation. The article states, "Women's

¹Rayla Al Muheisen, "Jordan Ranks Sixth in Arab World on 'Women's Power Index'," Jordan Times, July 11, 2021, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/jordan-ranks-sixth-arab-world-'womens-power-index'>

representation in the Jordanian Parliament is very low: according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union ranking, Jordan is placed 107th out of the 187 countries in terms of the percentages of women in parliament.”² With the lack of women's political participation in Jordan, there are many reasons behind why this may be. Progress in women’s political participation in countries such as the United States has been moving slowly, and in the Middle East it is even more difficult to get women involved. There are multiple factors that go into the lack of women’s political participation including the lack of support from men along with the lack of support from other women. In addition, there are also an abundance of cultural and tribal ties that make it difficult to vote women into office. Unlike popular belief, political participation is not based entirely on knowledge but has a very strong relationship with gender as well as tribalism.

Women’s Role in Society:

The rights of women throughout Jordan are limited due to cultural norms as well as what is written in the Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Specifically, in the Constitution women are not given the same rights as men and that is still implemented today. This Constitution and the rules made are one of the impacts of why women are not involved in political participation.³ Not only is there a written document that is presenting that women should not be involved in politics, but the social aspect of Jordanian society is also not in support of this change. On the Jordanian National Commissions for Women website, they talk about how women do not have the right to vote and if given the right, they do not vote for other women. An example of this in the Middle East is the elections in Bahrain, “one of the female candidates received one vote meaning that she did not win except her voice alone and not even her husband, children, brothers and sisters elect her...even women do not want to elect women”.⁴ In Jordan specifically, this also occurs and this causes women to fear that they will not be able to run for office or get into a position without additional help.

²Marta Pietrobelli, "Women’s Political Participation in Jordan: The Experiences of Female Candidates in the 2010 Parliamentary Elections," *Bulletin for the Council for British Research in the Levant* 7, no. 1 (2012): [PAGE, 24], accessed November 30, 2021, doi:10.1179/1752726012z.00000000003

³ "Women's Quota and Community Participation," The Jordanian National Commission for Women, December 18, 2016, [PAGE], accessed November 30, 2021, <https://women.jo/en/node/6987>)

⁴ Ibid.,<https://women.jo/en/node/6987>

Within the past two years, Jordan's Parliament was in the process of updating the constitution. This caused major controversy in the courtroom once this was announced. With the update to the constitution, they would be adding the feminine form to specific words rather than just having them in the masculine form.⁵ The commission suggested adding the female Arabic noun for Jordanians to the constitution in order to involve women within politics.⁶ Specifically, they wanted to change Article six which states, "Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them in regard to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion."⁷ Since this does not mention anything about sex or gender, this does not originally pertain to women being equal to men. However, out of 120 individuals, 94 of them voted for it while 26 voted against it.⁸ Although this is one step closer to change in regard to women in politics, this is something that still causes a lot of controversy making it difficult for women to be involved in politics



A Jordanian woman protesting for women's equality outside of parliament. Photo Credit: Middle East Eye

⁵ "Jordan: The women's rights row behind *that* brawl in parliament", Middle East Eye, January 7, 2022. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordan-parliament-brawl-womens-rights-row-behind>

⁶ Ibid., <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordan-parliament-brawl-womens-rights-row-behind>

⁷ Ibid., <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordan-parliament-brawl-womens-rights-row-behind>

⁸ Ibid., <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordan-parliament-brawl-womens-rights-row-behind>

Tribalism:

With tribalism being so present in Jordan specifically, this has impacted women positively and negatively in regard to being elected to any political office. The ‘one person one vote system’ benefits most strong tribes that are usually pro-regime.⁹ Marta Pietrobelli defines tribe as it is important in understanding why it has a strong presence in Jordanian politics. Tribes are best defined as “a group of people distinguished from other groups by notions of shared descent, whether real or imagined.”¹⁰ Tribalism is favored within political parties to the point where this helps make the decision as to who could potentially get the most votes in office. In the article written by Pietrobelli, she talks about the impact tribalism has on Jordanian society and how this is not consistent for everyone in Jordan. Pietrobelli writes, “My respondents considered that tribes and cultural stereotypes are among the strongest impediments to women’s political participation in Jordan, especially because tribes - in the majority of cases - put forward a man as a candidate.”¹¹ Following this, she states an example where a woman was running for a position in politics and she faced an abundance of difficulties without the support of her tribe.

Women’s Financial Stability:

Not only are women not getting votes in politics because of tribal relations and gender, but they are not able to get as far in politics due to their reliance on their spouse for finances. It is common that some husbands, as well as the husband's family, do not allow the wife to work or earn more money than he does. This in many situations is what causes women in Jordan to stay home and are not able to have their own career. In the article by the New York Times titled “Women, 86 Percent Absent From Jordan’s Work Force, Are Left Behind” written by Rana Sweis this year, she talks about a woman named Marwa Alomari who lives in Amman, Jordan and her experience with trying to work and her husband and in-laws disagreeing with her goals. She writes, “Even though she contributed to the household with both money and housework, he and his family discouraged her

⁹Marta Pietrobelli, "Women’s Political Participation in Jordan: The Experiences of Female Candidates in the 2010 Parliamentary Elections," *Bulletin for the Council for British Research in the Levant* 7, no. 1 (2012): [PAGE, 26], accessed November 30, 2021, doi:10.1179/1752726012z.0000000003)

¹⁰ Ibid., page, 27

¹¹ Ibid., page, 27

from working and the marriage nearly fell apart, she said ".¹² This is one representation of why women in Jordan are not participating in politics.

Although in this situation women are more dependent on men for their future career paths, this can make it difficult for them to have the desire to run for office. In the article "Women's Rights in Jordan" they talk about how much of an impact economics has on women going into politics in Jordan. The author talks about how dependent women are on their spouses due to legal, cultural and religious value systems.¹³ Economics is another reason for women not participating as heavily in politics as you may think they would. In the article "Attitudes of University Students Toward Women's Work: The Case of Jordan" by Mohammad Issa Barhoum, he discusses the economic importance of women being involved in politics in the Middle East and how this changes the economy of this region. Mohammad writes, "According to the social deviance framework mentioned earlier, customs and values determine the manner of economic performance and shape the attitudes of people toward participation of women in the labor force."¹⁴ With women being involved in politics, this shapes the view of women differently here and has an impact on the economics of the country. This is a reason as to why women may not involve themselves in politics because of the impact this has on the economy.

A lot of women are intimidated by men in politics because this is seen as a male dominated field. Although many males are in this field, this is impacting the Jordanian economy by not involving as many women and their thoughts on relevant topics. The Arab Women Organization writes "The low participation rates of women in the economy and in the private sector present a high cost to the Jordanian society especially when many of its women, particularly the young and

¹² Rana F. Sweis, "Women, 86 Percent Absent from Jordan's Work Force, Are Left Behind," *New York Times*, April 3, 2021, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/03/world/middleeast/jordan-women-work-force.html>)

¹³ Ibid.,3

¹⁴Mohammad I. Barhoum, "Attitudes of University Students Toward Women's Work: The Case of Jordan," *International Journal on Middle Easter Studies* 15:[PAGE 371], accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www-cambridge-org.proxyau.wrlc.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/3E655D491C508C70F59F0BDFBDE71836/S0020743800050984a.pdf/attitudes-of-university-students-toward-women-work-the-case-of-jordan.pdf>)

the active, are highly educated”.¹⁵ This has been negatively impacting the Jordanian economy and has caused many women to feel intimidated by this male dominated field.

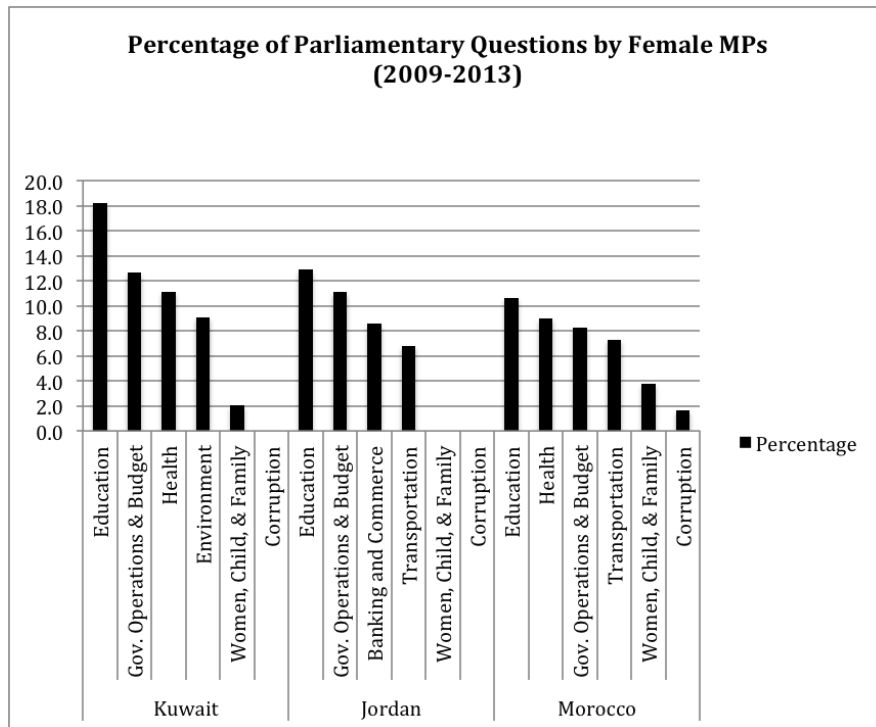


Figure 1: In this graph, it shows the Comparison of Parliamentary Questions by three Middle Eastern countries.¹⁶

Jordan's Quota System

The quota system in Jordan is a very controversial system for everyone and has a serious impact on women when running for political office. The reason for the quota system is to ensure that women are involved in Parliamentary elections. While reading the Gender Quota Database from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, they discuss the quota system in Jordan as well as the involvement of women in this system. They write, “In Jordan’s mixed-member proportional electoral system, 108 members are elected from 45 single or multi-member districts, 15 seats are reserved for women (Article 8(B)) from 12 governorates and 3 bedouin

¹⁵ Arab Women Organization, "Women's Rights in Jordan," *The UPR Report on Women's Rights in Jordan*, February 2013, [PAGE 3], accessed November 30, 2021)

¹⁶ Shalaby, Maraw, “Women’s Political Representation and Authoritarianism in the Arab World”, 2016. <https://pomeps.org/womens-political-representation-and-authoritarianism-in-the-arab-world>

districts and 27 members are elected through a proportional representation system.”¹⁷ Although women are in the system, this is not a representative number of women proportional to the population. Quota systems are used to model the appearance of progressiveness but do not actually allow women to have a voice in politics.

Although the quota system was created to help women, it is doing the opposite for many females in politics. This system only makes it possible for women to be involved in the Parliament or any other political system to create more diversity. With women in Jordan not being seen as equal to men, the quota system does not help in showing otherwise. This system is a prime example of the inequality between men and women. In the journal article, “Quotas as a ‘fast track’ to equal representation for women” Drue Dahlerup writes about the quota system as a whole and the impacts it has on various countries. Dahlerup writes, “Advocating the use of quotas thus represents a shift from one concept of equality to another”¹⁸ and this is something an abundance of men and women may view as “equal”.

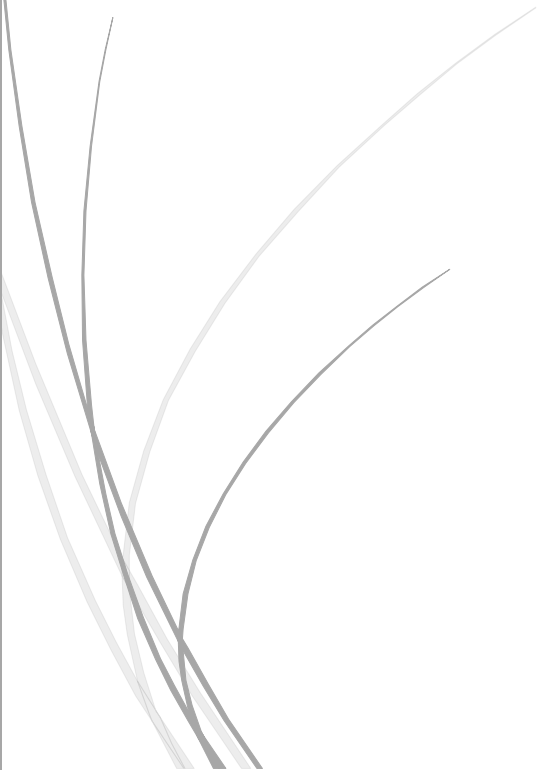
Many women have been trying to get involved in politics, however, there are far too many factors making this nearly impossible. Starting with the Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Continuing to have these laws implemented is one way that women are deterred from running for office. Not only is the constitution a crucial part, but the societal expectations of a woman’s role in the family and the lack of access to personal finances also contribute to the issue at hand. Both of these factors together makes it more difficult for the female running to convince the voters to support her. With this being such a pertinent issue, the quota system was supposed to make this a fair election. However, there is still a way that the government gets around it causing women to still struggle during elections. With all of these reasons, it is nearly impossible for a woman to be elected to office which is what deters many Jordanian women from running. Once this can get resolved while balancing cultural norms as well as politics, this will help Jordan create a more diverse cabinet.

¹⁷ "Gender Quotas Database," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, [PAGE], accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/154/35>)

¹⁸ Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidnvall, "Quotas as a 'fast track' to Equal Representation for Women," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, August 16, 2006, [PAGE 30], <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324673>)

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