

## Gender Disproportion And Political Representation: Case Studies Of Egypt And Morocco

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### Abstract

The study was carried out Gender Disproportion and Political Representation: Case Studies of Egypt and Morocco. It is the topic which encompasses socio-political-economic conditions of the women in Arab countries, and their different obstacles in achieving the appropriate status in society.

This paper investigates the role of Arab women in politics. Content Analysis was used as a methodology for analysis of different theoretical approaches. Morocco and Egypt were selected as a case study in order to analyze women political conditions in Arab world. Combinations of patriarchy, conservative religious interpretations and cultural stereotypes have built a very strong psychological barrier among Arab population regarding women's participation in the public sphere. The hierarchy of patriarchal tribal structure of several Arab societies in the history was another factor that contributed to this state of affairs. It is argued in the paper that the quota system is the only solution which may provide better representation of women in political sphere. At the end, researcher summed up by giving some suggestions for the prosperous future of Arab world.

### تلخیص

یہ تحقیق عرب معاشرے میں جنسی عدم تناسب اور سیاسی نمائندگی کے مسئلہ کا تفصیلی جائزہ لیتی ہے۔ یہ تحقیقی مقالہ نہ صرف مصر اور مراکش کے سماجی، سیاسی اور معاشی ڈھانچے کا تجزیہ کرتا ہے۔ بلکہ یہ مقالہ عرب عورتوں کا معاشرے میں کردار اور انکوائے متعلقہ مرتبہ حاصل کرنے میں پیش آنے والی رکاوٹوں کا بھی احاطہ کرتا ہے۔

اس مقالے میں موادی تجزیے کو بطور منہاج استعمال کیا گیا ہے۔ اور عمرانیاتی اور بشریاتی نظریات اس مطالعہ کو فکری اور علمی ڈھانچہ فراہم کرتے ہیں۔ اس تحقیقی مقالہ کے نتائج یہ ظاہر کرتے ہیں کہ پدری نظام، دقانونی مذہبی تشریحات اور سماجی دقانونیت مجموعی طور پر عورتوں کی سماجی حلقہ میں شرکت کے حوالہ سے عرب باشندوں کے ذہنوں میں شدید نفسیاتی رکاوٹیں پیدا کرتے عرب معاشرہ کی تاریخ میں موجود قبائلی پدری درجہ بندی کے نظام نے بھی اس موجودہ صورت حال میں اہم کردار ادا کیا ہے۔ اس مقالہ میں یہ بھی تجویز کیا گیا ہے کہ کوئٹہ سسٹم عورتوں کی سیاسی نمائندگی کے لئے واحد حل ہے۔ آخر میں نتائج کے پس منظر میں محقق عورتوں کے روشن مستقبل کیلئے کچھ تجاویز بھی پیش کرتا ہے۔

**Keywords:** Gender, politics, political participation, content analysis, patriarchy, cultural stereotyping, quota system.

## **Introduction**

The era, in which we are living, women are striving for prominent social starts in every sphere of life. They are not only competing men, rather they have also some challenges against the system, social values, rigid norms, political and social culture. Though there are many countries which are economically, socially well developed, but still women deprivation in every sphere of life is quite low. Especially when we talk about political participation or representation of women in politics then we come to know that these developed countries have lot to do in this field.

It is quite true that the socio-economic factors, political culture and institutes create space for women. If these factors are not supportive for women, then civil society also fails to enhance the women participation. We can only expect there will be any revolution, or any big intellectual movement will bring out change in the society at grass root level.

This paper will give you some overview of Arab states, that what is the current situation of women in politics. Mainly, in this paper, researcher focused on two countries which are Egypt and Morocco. Historical context, cultural barriers, unsupportive political institutions and lack of willingness of women are also discussed with reference to gender and politics.

Research on gender and politics has nonetheless evolved significantly over the years. In the first stage, gender and politics approaches were critical of the biases of mainstream political science and its virtual exclusion of women from the category of political actor. In the second stage, studies sought to 'add women and stir' by undertaking the first systematic analyses of women's under representation. In the third and current stage, feminist political scientists raise more fundamental questions about political science methods/approaches, the conceptualisation of politics and the 'gendered' nature of political institutions and processes (Randall, 2002). Far from being narrow and partial, contemporary research on gender and politics is therefore extensive, diverse and rich, so much so that the major component parts of political studies – political theory, government, comparative politics and international relations – could each have a 'state of the art' essay devoted to them. Further, studies within each of these sub-fields are sufficiently varied to permit several distinct interpretations of their main contributions and likely directions for future research.

## **An Over View of Arab Countries**

In the history, Arab women have always been a highly sensitive issue in the region. We have seen that in past women have pathetic situation in Arab world. Their political and economic participation and their access to health and education have been major concerns in last few years. And now this sensitivity has boast up due to some good changes in

regions. These issues were firstly identified by UNDP (2000) in its Arab women development report.<sup>1</sup> After this, different social and political scientists thought seriously about this issue and then media played a vital role in last few decades for creating awareness in masses.

After the AHDR many reports and piece of papers were produced at national and regional level. Like Egypt's national council for human rights issued its first annual report (2005),<sup>2</sup> Jordan's National Center for human rights also published its first annual report; Bahrain issued a decree requiring that democracy and human rights be taught in State's schools and in the UAE, human rights association was formed. Morocco's efforts to purge a long history of oppression move forward when its Justice and Reconciliation Commission (JRC) submitted its final reports proposing legal, institutional and cultural reforms. The president of Algeria announced a simile of initiative in national reconciliation in his country.

In addition, nine Arab states appointed women to parliament positions at the national, provincial levels and municipal levels in more to increase women's empowerment.

### **Methodology**

In this paper researcher analyzed two countries as case studies from Arab states– Egypt and Morocco. Content analysis was used as a methodology in order to have holistic overview of gender and politics in Egypt and Morocco.

The thematic areas which are focused by researcher: overview on political conditions of women, their participation in electoral procedures and economic activities, political system, social and cultural barriers of women in political participation. Different reports like The Arab Quota Report: Selected Case Studies (2004),<sup>3</sup> Introducing Quotas in Africa: Discourse in Egypt (2003),<sup>4</sup> The Implementation of Quotas: African Experience (2003),<sup>5</sup> and Women's Political Participation: The Case of Morocco (2003)<sup>6</sup> were evaluated in order to have qualitative data that could explain the above mentioned themes. These reports were the output of the series of regional conferences and workshops which were held by International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in different countries. Researcher vigilantly examined these reports to a discussion of political status of Arab women, highlighting their representation in legislation. Moreover, researcher also endeavoured to look at the key challenges that confront women, and at the end to recommend the mechanisms that have been employed to enhance women's participation.

### Historical Background of Arab States

The condition of women in Arab countries results from a number of cultural, social, economic & political factors which interact to affect levels of human development. Some factors problematic in nature and thus call for a close analysis of various components of Arab society.

In the history of Arab states women have been socially suppressed in Arab states from many decades. Patriarchy has been a major force hindering Arab women's advancement. A combination of patriarchy, conservative religious interpretations and cultural stereotyping has built a very strong psychological barrier among Arab population regarding women's participation in the public sphere. The hierarchy of patriarchal tribal structure of several Arab societies in the history was another factor that contributed to this state of affairs.

In the history of Arab countries, Islam has often been cited as the main force behind the slow incremental development of the status of women in the region. It is been rightly pointed out that:

“What is at the issue is not so much the religion, but a broader aspect of new patriarchy... it is not cultures alone that imparts on women's political participation, but a whole host of other factors combine to render the situation it is” (Case Study: The Arab States, as cited in Azza, 1999 p. 8)

Evidence have shown that exploitation of human rights have also been there in the history. Women have often faced deteriorating conditions, spread by lawlessness and hardships that brought to them by the isolation of male bread earners from their families. Conflicts or long period of detention were another threat to human rights.

In this region freedom of opinion and expression is also violated by the government agents. Conflict between Iraq and Palestine continued to undermine human development and human rights in Arab world. By the time lot of changes has been occurred in the societies of Arab countries which have changed the status of women. First, they define the status of women in terms of traditional roles, but then rapid transformation brought by the Jihad & terrorism in Arab societies changed their status under social pressure. Now they are active in *Jihad* movements in some of the conflicting states of Arab. The issue of terrorism also created many internal and external issues for this region. The war on terror campaign also stereotyped the Arab states and Islamic movements; it made this region more prominent in the eye of the world.

### **Different Changes in Recent Years**

In recent few years some modifications took place in Arab societies. They adopted firm positions through independent press, on satellite televisions, public and private meetings and through internet. Besides this, many political changes and some time activists took initiatives. Like in Lebanon, some pressure groups protested against state and then it resulted it in the constitutional reforms in favour of citizens. In Syria, different opposition groups united to issue the Damascus declaration insisting that the ruling party adopt more thoroughgoing changes to the constitution, the conduct of presidential referenda and the alternation of political power. The recent example of Egypt has totally changed the discourse of politics in the region, which resulted in the revolutionary changes not only in politics, but in the whole social, cultural and economical structure.

Some Arab states declared to adopt the mechanism of good governance and targeting freedom. But some states could achieve this ambitious agenda, while other connived to violate human rights. The fair election also creates a marginalized difference in the political condition of Arab states, although there was some external pressure but somehow they were able to manage some representation of women in politics. In Iraq 2005 elections, in National Assembly there were 31.6 percent women representation in lower house. Saudi Arabia conducted municipal council elections for the first time, a progressive step that was undermined by the exclusion of women and by restrictions on the proportion of council members chosen by election. In Egypt, article-76 of the constitution was amended to permit multi candidate presidential elections.

Besides this, the establishment of the US-Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) towards the end of 2002 is another contributing factor. Their basic purpose is to bring reforms within Arab states, like changing the role of women, consolidate their rights, encouraging their role effective participation in development and their role in political, economic, social and cultural fields. This was the very first reference to women in the history of Arab summits.

### **Case Studies of Egypt and Morocco**

#### **Egypt**

Egypt a country which has long history in which women have always been suppressed and always seen in a face corner in the history (IDEA, 2003). First time in 1956,<sup>7</sup> Egyptian women got the right of vote and to be nominated for office. Then in 1979 it become mandatory to vote and two women were nominated first time in 1957.<sup>8</sup> This achievement came in the result of long struggle and political history of women. This movement started in 1919, when the concept of Egyptian women federation emerged

which sought political and socio economic rights for women, then many movements and activities started in the different spheres of society. Women got more aware about their social and political rights; they started to protest against the system within their circles.

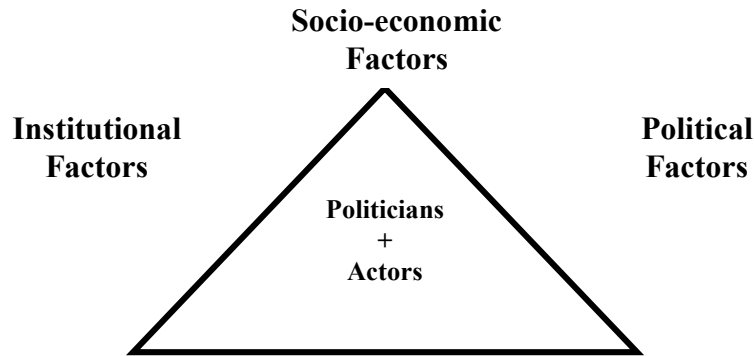
During 1975 and 1995 many international conferences were held in Egypt. The end result of all conferences gave some recommendations on the inclusion of women in politics globally. In this regard in 1979 the Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>9</sup> was agreed. In this scenario first lady Gihan Al Sudat (1970-81) plays a very vital role as social and political activist (IDEA, 2003). She tried to demand supportive laws for the betterment of women condition by using her political weight and by calling different NGOs at one plate form. 1970s was the era that brought many changes in the context of women participation and empowerment at many levels of society. Most importantly women were directly granted political rights through the allocation of a quota system in parliamentary seats.<sup>10</sup>

At the parliamentary level, in 1979 quota system was introduced and 30 seats out of 369 were reserved from 30 zones, which contained one seat for each zone. It was a remarkable change that brought 9 percent participation, due to the change of electoral law, electoral system and the change in government actors.<sup>11</sup> But unfortunately, in the year 2000 women representation fell to only 2.2 percent.<sup>12</sup> The same conditions prevailed at the local level when quota system was introduced; there was 10 to 20 percent women representation in the first two circles (a four year circle). And then it started to fell down subsequently. According to recent data there was only 1.2 % women representation at local level in 1997.<sup>13</sup>

There is another council that is Shura Council which was established in 1980.<sup>14</sup> The purpose of this council is to provide advice on different laws and politics as well as any other decrees submitted by the president. In beginning there was no reserve seats for women, but by the time rise of women representation increased to 4.7 percent till 1992.<sup>15</sup> But president favored women indirectly and in 1992, 91 percent of the president appointed seats went to women, and then it increased to 100 percent in 1998.

### **Analysis of Quota System in Egypt**

Egypt was one of the first country implemented quota system in Arab states. I have already mentioned that quota system was introduced in 1979 and then dashed in 1986 properly. If we analyze the reasons for the failure of quota system then we come to know that again there are many reasons that can be explained in this Golden Triangle.



When quota system was introduced it was introduced by higher authorities and masses that were not prepared for these social and political activities. After implementing quota, there was no input from grass root level for upcoming years.<sup>16</sup>

Besides this it was also observed that women had less political participation rather than male colleagues. There was no capacity building programs for women. Only presence does not matter, rather their influence must be there so that they could be able to work and perform parliamentary duties. Another problem was observed after selection of women that their parties did not also support women, and they always tried to engage them in social areas.

In Egypt, there were two groups one is in favor of quota system that is proponents that include a number of progressive forces, women's activists, and human rights organizations and they demand equality. On the other hand, the group which is opposed to quota system that is opponents who include group of legal specialists and a large sector of society that want women to remain at home. They believe that men have sufficient political experience and they can address the issues related with women and can be defend as the interests of women.

### **Need of Time**

Women participation is still big problem in a country like Egypt. It is a need of time that all institutions with the society play positive and constructive role to encourage women's participation. There must be change in grass root level. There must be transactional change in society. Educational system must be modified according to the global needs. In this scenario media can play a vital role and can drastically change the status of women. Here media should play a dual role, one for awareness in masses and second from the government side to show people their policies. Different NGOs, pressure groups, social activists, political activists and civil society organizations must work for the betterment of women in society so that Egypt could be able to mark themselves according to the global standards.

## **Morocco**

The political situation in Morocco is stable; there is a semi-democracy as a half-hearted attempt of bringing the system of Morocco closer to the European Union (EU), which Morocco wanted to cooperate with under the excuse of the need to control Islamism (IDEA, 2003).

If we look at the government system of Morocco then we come to know that there has been monarchy from many years. The monarch appoints the prime minister and council of ministers to wield the executive power under his supervision. A series of modifications have been made to the 1992 constitution concerning the bicameral legislature. The chamber of representatives comprises 325 members, of whom 295 are elected by proportional representation in multi seat constituencies. The remaining 30 seats were reserved for women and elected from national lists.<sup>17</sup>

Morocco had one of the lowest rates of women's participation in government and politics globally, with only one female minister and no female parliamentarians. In 2001, the UN gender agency UNIFEM worked with gender agency in Morocco and forced them to increase participation in electoral bodies. The prime minister of Morocco Abderrahmane Youssoufi gave some positive measures like quota system, voting using a system of proportional representation and ending the practice of elected officials holding more than one office concurrently.

The introduction of the nationalist viewed as positive and encouraging step. This was because female representation on the local list was weak: 269 women out of total of 5,873 candidates (5 percent<sup>18</sup>). After this most of the political parties believed that they did not need to include female candidates on the local list (IDEA, 2003).

The absence of women from decision making circle, they are not in position to influence the process of change. Women need to mobilize on a large scale within or without political parties. There is need for the state to play its significant role in enhancing women participation. The quota system will only contribute to improving the level of female representation if it is institutionalized.

## **Conclusion**

In this piece of paper researcher tried to present a picture of diversity, social action, and change. Researcher addressed the women issue in Arab world by giving the clear picture of historical background and then towards the current scenario.



This paper provides a snapshot of some of the main obstacles facing women in Arab world. The conditions are changing by the time, and many Arab states are moving towards the stable political environment with no internal conflicts. New measurements, different dimensions and new tools are being used to enhance the women participation in every walk of life. Special arrangements are being made by the state to increase women political participation. As Arab women's representation in legislature is the lowest in the world, with the world average standing at 16 percent, while in the Arab world it is only 6.5 percent.<sup>19</sup> So, still many things to do in the region so that the main section of the population i.e. women could ignored and violated.

There are many Arab states which have still no women's representation in legislatures e.g. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE. The countries like Iraq (31.6 percent), Morocco (10.8 percent), Tunisia (22.8 percent),<sup>20</sup> and Syria (12.0 percent) have comparatively better women representation. But again we should not only look at the figures, we should also be able to seek the effectiveness of women in these countries.

Absence of democratic process in this region can be another reason of less women participation. Few countries have implemented quota system, as this is the only best system from which initially these countries can involve women in political process.

In sum, the factors that hinder the promotion of Arab women in all fields of life are complex. There are very few small opportunities available that vary from country to country. In this condition all the actors of state will have to play their role, state will have to ensure political liberalization and create such an environment so that people willingly participate in political and electoral activities. Political parties should make such a platform that attract women and create opportunities for women. And then the women can actively participate in the political activities. In last but not least Arab women themselves will have to develop some movements to sensitize the state and masses. Here women politicians can play a significant role and can become a role model for upcoming women politicians.

## End Notes

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## Acronyms

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UAE	United Arab Emirates
AHDR	Arab Human Development Report

IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
MEPI	Middle-East Partnership Initiative
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination against Women
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
EU	European Union
UN	United Nation
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
JRC	Justice and Reconciliation Commission
Jihad	It is an effort to practice religion in the face of oppression and persecution

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