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WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS IN THE ARAB WORLD: THE CASE OF JORDAN

INTRODUCTION

Female political participation—both as candidates and voters—has stirred one of the most heated debates over the past few decades not only in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), but also in many parts of the world. Acknowledging the considerable gap in female political representation, numerous countries around the globe have adopted significant measures to promote the presence of women in the political arena. Including women in the decision-making process is widely considered one of the most effective institutional mechanisms to advance women's interests and concerns, improve policy outcomes in favor of women, transform cultural stereotypes in regard to women's roles in the public sphere, and create more equitable and just societies where all citizens are equally represented.

While women have made substantive gains in the political arena—not only on the institutional level but also on the societal level in many democracies—women across the MENA region are still struggling to achieve parity in the political realm. The fact that not a single Arab country has been rated as “free”¹ over the past few decades, combined with the lack of genuine representative democracies in the region, has greatly affected the status of women in the political arena. Currently, the Arab region continues to have one of the lowest percentages of women members of national parliaments, with very slow improvement compared to any other region in the world.

Despite the fact that the political and social stagnation across the region in the past

few decades has led to deteriorating levels of women's overall participation in the political process, since the Arab Awakening, women across the region are demanding greater roles in the political arena and defying decades of marginalization in the decision-making process. Nonetheless, numerous institutional, cultural, and structural obstacles must be directly addressed and remedied to give women in the region the opportunity to participate actively and equitably in the political sphere.

This report will mainly focus on Jordan, as it is currently one of the region's leading models for women's political representation. Jordanian leaders have experimented with numerous institutional mechanisms to promote the inclusion of women in the decision-making process in the past few decades (e.g., a certain number of seats reserved for women members of parliament, quota regulations, and national closed-party lists).

The first section of this report outlines the theoretical framework of the various forms of women's political representation and the significance of women's presence in the political arena. The second section of the report sheds light on the societal and political context of women's political participation in Jordan—with a special focus on the changes in the country's electoral system over the past few decades and their impact on women's political representation in Jordan. The third section of the report highlights the obstacles facing women in the legislative arena and offers insights from Jordan's most recent parliamentary elections. While previous studies and analyses focused on the issues of tribalism and personalistic politics as the main impediments for

Table 1. Women in National Parliaments by Region (2013)

Region	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses Combined
Nordic countries	42%	---	---
Europe – OSCE* member countries including Nordic countries	24.6%	22.6%	24.2%
Americas	24.2%	23.8%	24.1%
Europe – OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	23%	22.6%	22.9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.1%	18.7%	21.7%
Asia	19.1%	13.8%	18.5%
Arab States	17.8%	7.7%	15.9%
Pacific	13.1%	38.6%	15.9%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2013; Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single house.

*OSCE = Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

women’s access to power, this report argues that the widespread perceptions of corruption and the general lack of trust in the electoral process as a whole are instead the main impediments to the political empowerment of women. The report concludes with an overview of the lessons learned from the Jordanian experience and offers specific policy recommendations for promoting women’s political representation that can be applied not only in Jordan, but also in other parts of the region.

WOMEN’S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: AN OVERVIEW AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Political representation stands out as a pivotal concept in the study of politics, yet it continues to stir much controversy across the discipline. The ongoing struggle between idealistic views and realistic views of political representation has repeatedly surfaced over the past few decades in the work of many social scientists. In her groundbreaking work, *The Concept of Representation*, Hanna Pitkin² offered one of the most comprehensive theoretical frameworks on the study of political representation. Pitkin defines political representation as “A public, institutionalized arrangement involving many

people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements.” She also argues that representation should be the final outcome of the structure and functioning of the whole system and the patterns emerging from the multiple activities and multiple players in the system.

According to Pitkin, political representation is mainly classified into three forms: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. Descriptive representation is conceptualized as “the politics of presence” and is generally considered a “mirror”³ for the population from which the representatives are drawn. The argument for descriptive representation is based on the premise that elected officials are more likely to represent those with whom they share personal characteristics.⁴ Therefore, descriptive representation is not only important for the legitimacy of elected bodies⁵ but it is also crucial to remedy the issue of marginalization of minorities and women. According to this view, there is a strong need for devising institutional mechanisms (such as gender quotas, legislative mandates, and proportional electoral districts) to ensure that marginalized groups are fairly represented by people who share their policy positions on important issues.⁶

Moreover, proponents of descriptive representation argue that increasing the number of women in legislative assemblies is crucial for ensuring substantive representation.⁷ In theory, substantive representation is directly related to the degree to which representatives seek to advance the interests and the preferences of the group—or in other words, the translation of policy preferences into legislative outcomes in favor of the represented group.⁸ Despite the fact that the empirical relationship between substantive and descriptive representation has been strongly debated among scholars, recent studies lend substantial support to the theory that the identities of legislators have a positive impact on the types of measures prioritized, proposed, and passed on behalf of different groups.⁹ What’s more, scholars argue that increasing the number of women in decision-making institutions is also expected to have a strong impact on the substantive input of women in relation to national budgets, the ideological direction of government policies, and policy priorities as a means to remedy the underrepresentation of women in elected office. As maintained by Jane Mansbridge,¹⁰ “descriptive representation by gender improves substantive outcomes for women in every polity for which we have a measure.”

Furthermore, increasing the presence of women in the legislative arena (i.e., descriptive representation) is also closely related to the symbolic representation of women—though less studied compared to the two previous forms of representation. Defined as “the attitudinal and behavioral effects that women’s presence in positions of political power might confer to women citizens,”¹¹ many studies show support for a positive relationship between institutional mechanisms—such as quota policies—and females’ mass political attitudes and behavior in a number of established and developing democracies.¹² Other studies focus on the benefit of the symbolic role of female legislators and on the idea of “virtuous circles of representation”¹³—higher levels of representation are expected to promote political activism, signal a greater openness in the system, and enhance its legitimacy. Female legislators may also serve as role models or symbolic mentors for women

in the public, sending signals that politics is no longer a male-dominated field and that their participation is important and valuable.¹⁴ Despite the plethora of research in the context of established democracies, the symbolic impact of women’s presence in the political arena in the Arab world has remained largely unexplored.

Acknowledging the importance of women’s presence in legislative bodies over the past few decades, countries across the globe have introduced a variety of affirmative action policies to promote women’s presence in legislatures. However, gender quotas continued to be one of the most widely used institutional mechanisms to promote women’s descriptive representation. The most direct benefit of gender quotas is that they efficiently address the claim to political inclusion by imposing a significant number of new actors into political institutions, thus disrupting male monopolies in legislative bodies.¹⁵ There are three main types of quota systems that have been widely used across the MENA region: voluntary party quotas, reserved seats, and statutory quotas.¹⁶ First, voluntary party quotas are the most common type of gender quotas in the region. Political parties adopt these policies and commit to include a specific number of female candidates to political office (i.e., Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia). These mechanisms vary across the region in regard to placement mandates and non-compliance sanctions. When combined with a proportional representation system and a significantly large party magnitude (i.e., the number of seats a party wins in a specific electoral district), party quotas are believed to be the most effective way to advance women’s political representation.

Second, a reserved seat mechanism (either by appointment or election) is also used in many parts of the MENA region to promote women’s political representation. This mechanism is normally established by means of a constitutional reform or amendment, or by electoral laws that designate specific seats or districts for female candidates only (i.e., Jordan, Egypt in 2010, and Morocco). The main difference between this type of quota and voluntary party and legislative quotas is that the former mandates a minimum number of female legislators, rather than simply a percentage of women among political candidates.¹⁷ This

type of quota becomes specifically important in contexts where it is difficult to achieve gender parity through political party structures and rules.¹⁸

Finally, statutory or legislative quota mechanisms are widely used in developing democracies and Latin America. Similar to party quotas, statutory gender quotas require a minimal proportion of female legislators in elected bodies. However, they introduce broader processes of reform focused on changing the language contained in constitutions and electoral laws, rather than just changing the specific parties' governing laws. Unlike voluntary party quota provisions, legislative quotas actually contain sanctions for noncompliance and are subject to considerable oversight from external bodies such as electoral commissions. In Iraq, the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) adoption of a new constitution that created the Iraqi Governing Council in 2003 is a good example of gender statutory quotas in the Middle East. Twenty-five Iraqi representatives from five different ethnic groups were appointed, with women representing about 12 percent.¹⁹ Replaced in 2005 by the Iraqi National Assembly, the direct elections of the assembly members resulted in the election of 86 women out of 273 MPs.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT IN JORDAN AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The Jordanian legislative system has two main branches: The Chamber of Notables (Majlis al-Ayan) and the House of Representatives (Majlis al-Newab). While the appointment to the Chamber of Notables is exclusively by royal decree, the lower house is selected through popular elections. Despite the fact that a royal decree has granted women in Jordan the right to vote and run for office in the Parliament since 1974,²⁰ women were not able to exercise their political rights due to the imposition of martial law in Jordan (since the defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1967) and the three-decade ban of political parties (since 1957, following a very brief political opening in 1956 under the influence of President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab nationalist project in Egypt).²¹ The extensive restrictions

on political life and on different channels of expression have significantly contributed to the rise of tribal and Islamist forces in Jordanian society²²—a caveat that explains much of the political realities in the Jordanian political context at present.

It was not until the early 1980s, with the deterioration of economic and social conditions in the monarchy coupled with a severe decline in international and regional support for the monarchy, when King Hussein initiated a series of limited political reforms under enormous societal pressure.²³ Most importantly, the king in 1984 recalled the Jordanian Parliament, which had been suspended for decades and replaced in 1977 by the National Consultative Council.²⁴ This brief period of political liberalization also witnessed a proliferation of civil society organizations, including those representing women's issues, as well as the revival of electoral politics in Jordan where women were able to exercise their full political and legal rights in choosing their political candidate and running for office. In addition, this era was marked with the electoral rise of the Islamist parties and a significant adaptation on the tribes' part to become an integral part of the political process in the country, which in turn had a great impact on women's prospects to be in power.

Notably, the first parliamentary election took place in 1989 using the block vote/proportional representation system (i.e., the number of Parliament members [MP] elected from each district must equal the number of votes each person can cast).²⁵ Citizens were also able to vote for both individual candidates and for party lists.²⁶ Twelve female candidates ran for office for the first time in Jordan's history amid severe criticism from the Islamist forces; not a single female was elected to office.

Despite the fact that the voter turnout was relatively high (53 percent) during this round of elections, family relationships and tribal affiliations heavily influenced voters' choices. The main winners of the 1989 elections were the Islamist parties, which managed to secure more than one-third of the seats in the Parliament thanks to their organized campaigns and on-the-ground presence for decades (in other words, the Islamist parties that had been working at the

Table 2. Women in National Parliaments in the Arab World (2012)

Country	Election Year	Type of Quota	Women in National Legislature, 2012 (%)	Electoral System
Algeria	2012	Voluntary Party	8%	List Proportional Representation (PR)
Bahrain	2012	No Quota	10%	Two-Round System (TRS)
Egypt	2010	Reserved Seats	12%	TRS
	2012	Quota revoked	2%	List PR
Iraq	2012	Statutory	25.2%	List PR
Jordan	2012	Reserved Seats	10.8%	Single Non Transferable Vote (SNTV)
Kuwait	2012	No Quota	8%	Block Vote (BV)
Lebanon	2009	Quotas existed	4.7%	BV
	2012		3%	
Morocco	2012	Reserved Seats and Party Quota	16.7%	List PR
Palestinian Territories	2005	Statutory Quota	12.9%	Parallel (both PR and majority components)
Oman	2012	No Quota	1.2%	First Past The Post (FPTP)
Qatar	2012	No Quota	0%	NA
Syria	2012	No Quota	12.4%	BV
Saudi Arabia	2012	No Quota	0%	NA
Tunisia	2012	Voluntary Party	27.6%	Parallel
United Arab Emirates	2012	No Quota	17.5%	Other
Yemen	2012	Voluntary Party	.3%	FPTP

Source: *Women in National Parliaments 2013*, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

grassroots level for decades as charity/solidarity organizations with a nonpolitical agenda offering educational and health services for the needy and refugees).

The Political Parties Law, drafted and promulgated in 1992,²⁷ formally legalized political parties in Jordan,²⁸ making the 1993 elections the first multi-party election in Jordan since 1956. About 30 new political parties emerged on

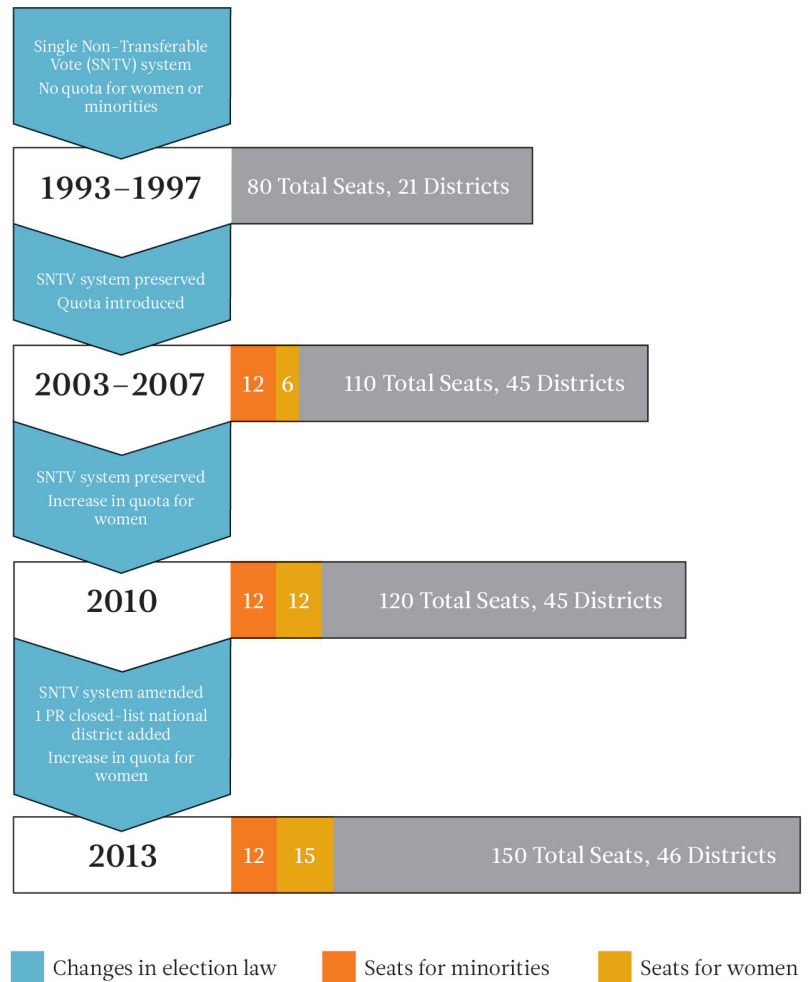
the electoral scene with a wide array of political and ideological stances; however, the majority of candidates ran as independents, most with a tribal affiliation.²⁹ The 1993 elections also witnessed the shift of the voting system to voting by single non-transferrable vote (SNTV), where voters can cast only one vote regardless of the district magnitude—also known as “one-person-one-vote” system. This election also witnessed significant

gerrymandering in which many districts were skillfully designed to allow minimal power for opposition and non-state affiliated forces.

The aforementioned changes in the electoral system significantly curbed the success of the Islamists in the lower house due to the fact that most voters chose candidates with a strong tribal background and close ties with the existing regime and who were capable of delivering tangible services to their districts. In regard to female political representation, the 1993 elections witnessed a feeble presence for women with only three women running for office. One woman, Toujan al-Faisal, won an ethnic quota seat to be the first female MP in the Jordanian lower house (Amman, District 3). In contrast, women were totally absent from the municipal elections³⁰ despite the fact that women were granted the right to vote and stand for municipal elections in 1982.³¹

The victory of Toujan al-Faisal in the 1993 elections inspired more women to run during the 1997 elections. Despite the fact that 17 women ran for office, none succeeded in winning a single seat in the Parliament.³² This round of elections also witnessed a significant decline in the number of Islamist candidates from the legislative arena (this can be mainly attributed to the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood’s political arm—The Islamic Action Front (IAF)—decided to boycott the elections demanding electoral and constitutional reforms). In addition, voter turnout significantly plummeted compared to 1993 elections (47.5 percent versus 55 percent in 1993). Some of the main reasons for women’s inability to win seats during these elections can be attributed to the fact that women ran as independents with minimal tribal or political party support, female candidates’ lack of financial resources to manage their own campaigns, voters’ lack of confidence in women assuming political leadership roles,

Figure 1. Electoral System in Jordan (1993–2013)



general lack of political expertise, the SNTV voting system that was introduced in 1993, and the overall popular discontent with the economic and social conditions in the Jordanian context that persisted few years prior to the 1997 elections (i.e., specifically after the Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty in 1994).

The 2003 election³³—the first since the death of King Hussein in 1999 and the dissolution of the lower house at the end of its four-year term in June 2000—witnessed a significant shift toward increased women’s political inclusion in Jordan. In response to the discouraging failure of female candidates to garner support during the 1997 elections—coupled with mounting pressure from international donors, women’s movements,³⁴ and activists³⁵—a 16-member committee was

tasked in early 2003 to study the applicability of the quota system in the Jordanian context. A few months later, the recommendations of the committee led to the formulation of the 2003 Election Law No. 11.³⁶

According to the amended law, six seats were reserved for women regardless of the geographical distribution or electoral district.³⁷ In other words, women were selected according to the percentage of votes they received in their respective constituencies rather than the total number of votes that they acquired (Amended Election Law for the House of Deputies 2003).³⁸

Despite the fact that the six “open quota” seats were allocated as a minimum threshold so that women could still win additional seats, not a single woman was able to win any seats beyond the quota seats. This was an issue that was mainly attributed to the persistence of the single-member electoral system (i.e., the candidate with the largest number of votes wins) that largely favors tribal candidates and independents with tribal backing. The appointment of women was also restricted to smaller districts with the least population density, giving these female MPs minimal political influence and decision-making power.³⁹ Finally, despite the fact that the number of MPs increased from 80 to 110 during the 2003 elections (with the increase of the number of districts from 21 to 45),⁴⁰ women MPs only represented 5.5 percent of the total number of MPs in the Jordanian Parliament (see Table 3 for more details).

During the 2007 elections, women were able to retain the six quota seats acquired in 2003; however, one female MP⁴¹ was able to win an additional seat through competition for the first time in Jordanian parliamentary elections since 1993. It is also worth noting that a 20 percent women’s quota in municipal councils was also introduced in early 2007,⁴² giving women more power in the Jordanian legislative arena. The 2007 Parliament was dissolved in November 2009 following complaints of corruption and inefficiency among the MPs, and new elections took place in late 2010.

The 2010 elections for Jordan’s 16th Parliament took place under the new temporary election law of 2010.⁴³ This election witnessed the introduction of six additional quota seats for women (thereby increasing the quota from six to 12 seats); several seats to Palestinian-majority urban districts; and some “sub-districts,” for an increase of total seats from 110 to 120 seats. Initially, the main purposes of this electoral amendment (as well as the 10 regulations of 2010) were to mitigate the effect of tribalism, open the political arena to fair competition, and promote political inclusion across the kingdom. Dissatisfied with the electoral amendment and with the persistence of the one-man-one-vote electoral law, the opposition (mainly the IAF and other leftist parties) decided to boycott the 2010 elections, opening the political arena for even more tribal and loyalist politics.⁴⁴ However, one independent Islamist female, Wafa Bani Mustafa,

Table 3. Women in Jordanian Parliament (1993–2013)

Election Year	Quota	Total Seats	Elected	Percent Elected	Women Candidates	Percent Women Candidates
2013	15	150	18	12%	213/>1,500	<14%
2010	12	120	13	10.83%	134/763	17.6%
2007	6	110	7	6.36%	199/880	22.6%
2003	6	110	6	5.45%	54/765	7.1%
1997	0	80	0	0%	17/524	3.2%
1993	0	80	1	1.25%	3/534	0.6%

Source: Author’s data.

Table 4. Determinants of Voting in the Jordanian Parliamentary Elections (2007 and 2011)*

Likelihood of Participation in Elections	Jordan (2007)	Jordan (2011)
Elections are fair and free	.179 (0.000)	.290 (0.000)
Choice based on candidate's Family/tribe	.037 (0.36)	.203 (0.000)
Choice based on candidate's ideology	0.067 (0.19)	-.085 (0.03)
Choice based on candidate's party affiliation	-.108 (0.01)	.072 (0.13)
Female voter	-.348 (0.000)	-.135 (0.105)
Constant	-.621 (0.002)	.422 (0.07)

Source: Arab Barometer, "Instruments and Data Files," <http://www.arabbarometer.org/instruments-and-data-files>.
 *Table shows odds ratios for each independent variable and below in parentheses the p-values for the z-test indicating significance levels. See Appendix on page 13 for variable coding and questions.

successfully won a quota seat. Moreover, one female, Mudar Badran, successfully won an additional seat without the quota, for the third time in Jordan.

In 2012, King Abdullah dissolved the Parliament for the second time in three years in the aftermath of massive protests in 2010 and 2011 that called for economic and political reforms and the eradication of corruption. The election law changes of June 2012 introduced for the first time in the Jordanian lower house elections one additional national closed-list district, with 27 additional seats open for party candidates (i.e., voters would cast one vote for one candidate under the SNTV system at the district level and an additional vote for candidates competing under the proportional electoral system at the national level). The 2012 electoral changes⁴⁵ also led to the increase of the women's quota from 12 to 15 seats to include three Bedouin districts⁴⁶ (the 15 seats reserved for women go to the female candidates who acquire the greatest number of votes in their district). In addition, women can also be elected outside of the quota system if they win the greatest number of votes in a district. If this occurs, the quota seat would be given to the woman candidate with the second

highest number of votes. Finally, women can be nominated by a party to take one of the 27 seats reserved for political parties, with no impact on the quota seats.⁴⁷

In addition, the 2013 elections (17th Parliament) witnessed the boycott of the Islamist parties⁴⁸ (IAF) and a number of smaller leftist and youth parties (i.e., National Progressive Party, Popular Unity, and the Communist Party) in opposition to the extension of the SNTV electoral system. According to the opposition forces in the country, the changes in the electoral law grant the tribal candidates and independents the perfect opportunity to dominate the electoral arena. Despite the opposition boycott, the 2013 election was widely hailed by most national and international observers as being fair and free under the supervision of the Independent Election Committee (IEC).⁴⁹ Fifteen females acquired the reserved quota seats, and three additional women succeeded in winning seats outside the quota system by competition. Two won their seats under the SNTV system⁵⁰ while one female candidate, Rula Al Huroub, won a seat under the national party list; she was the only female candidate to win a seat in a political party (i.e., the Stronger Jordan Party).

BARRIERS TO FEMALE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN JORDAN

Numerous obstacles in the Jordanian electoral arena prevent women from achieving their full potential. Many of these obstacles are social and cultural, such as mass perceptions of women's roles in the public sphere as well as their decision-making capabilities, the rivalry between different women's movements in Jordan, lack of coordination between female politicians and women's organizations, and, most importantly, the female candidates' lack of political expertise and financial resources to run successful campaigns to mobilize voters and compete in traditional, male-dominant electorates. Women in the electoral arena also face a number of institutional impediments, such as the current single-member electoral system, the disproportional electoral districts, the general mistrust in the political system and the fairness of the electoral process, and the state's coordinated efforts to weaken political parties by reinforcing the ethnic divide between citizens of Trans-Jordanian and Palestinian origin.⁵¹

Sociocultural Impediments

Female candidates in Jordan face numerous challenges on the societal level that substantially impede equal participation in the political arena.⁵² First, attitudes toward female political participation have continued to be predominantly negative over the past two decades, even following the introduction of the quota system in 2003. A 1994 survey conducted by the University of Jordan investigating the attitudes of Jordanian citizens toward women as political leaders showed that 70 percent of Jordanian males and females agreed they would choose a male politician over a female politician, even if both held similar political qualifications.⁵³ According to the same survey, the most cited reason for this view was the dominant belief that males have better decision-making abilities than females. In addition, a 2007 World Values Survey⁵⁴ conducted in Jordan a few years after the introduction of gender quotas in the country showed that more than 80 percent of respondents agreed "men make better political leaders than women," compared to 88 percent in 2000, before the introduction of the quota system. This is partial evidence that perceptions

are changing in a favorable direction in regard to women's political leadership in Jordanian society, though very gradually.

Second, there is a significant lack of coordination and collaboration among women's movements and informal groups in Jordan. This fragmentation has significantly impacted their relationships with female politicians. Also, there is a deep schism between the state- and nonstate-affiliated women's organizations. As maintained by Brand, "the weakness [of women's movements] derives from the fact that these organizations see themselves as rivals: bickering and maneuvering for position are the real problems."⁵⁵ What's more, there is a substantial lack of communication and coordination between the female politicians themselves—an issue that is further complicated by female politicians' lack of political savvy to reach out to female constituents and garner their support. As shown in Table 4, females were generally less likely than males to vote in parliamentary elections in 2007. However, the situation seems to be different in 2011, as there is no statistically significant difference between males' and females' likelihood to vote in legislative elections. Female candidates should seize this opportunity to propose and work on important issues that directly touch women's lives to win the female constituents in their districts and build wider support bases.

Finally, the predominance of patronage and personalistic politics continues to pose a serious challenge for women's access to power in Jordan—not only on the institutional but also the societal level. This political reality is further complicated by the fact that women lack the experience and financial resources to run successful campaigns. Studies have shown that women are more likely to struggle to raise the funds needed to run for election.⁵⁶ Women are also less likely to be financially supported by their tribes or political parties, especially if there are no strictly enforced placement mandates or noncompliance sanctions. The Jordanian government must work on imposing placement mandates and noncompliance sanctions to guarantee women's placement on closed lists.

Institutional Impediments

The electoral system in Jordan suffers from many shortcomings that continue to substantially affect not only women's political representation, but also

the political reform process as a whole. First, the issue of the disproportionate electoral districts has been, for decades, a major stumbling block on the path toward electoral integrity and accountability in Jordan. The fact that electoral districts are skillfully engineered to politically empower citizens of Trans-Jordanian origin over citizens of Palestinian origin and to give more political weight to tribal (Bedouin) areas over urban areas continues to greatly impact the shape of the electoral map as well as the balance of power across the kingdom.

Because the Palestinian-majority districts (mostly urban areas) are significantly underrepresented compared to districts with Trans-Jordanian and Bedouin populations⁵⁷ (for instance, the Karak governorate, with a population just over 200,000, is currently represented by 10 MPs while the governorate of Zarqa, with a population over one million, is currently represented by 11 MPs⁵⁸), the majority of the Palestinian-origin voters are left mostly disenchanted with the electoral process and are unwilling to participate in the legislative elections. As shown in Table 4, citizens' perception of the electoral system as being fair and free has been one of the most powerful predictors of their likelihood to participate in parliamentary elections over the past decade.

This political reality has also impacted the electoral success of women in these under-represented areas. Citizens tend to cast votes for the most influential candidates (i.e., both politically and financially) with strong ties with the state or with strong tribal allegiances. Constituents mainly support candidates deemed capable of delivering services to the voters' districts regardless of the candidate's policy preferences or political party affiliation. Most of the time, women candidates are not the favored choice for voters because they lack financial resources, strong tribal backing, and close proximity to the state; this is exactly why they were not able to achieve many victories outside the quota system. It is also worth mentioning that these factors (i.e., tribal backing, support of the Islamist opposition, proximity to the state) were indeed the determining factors for electoral success, even for female candidates running under the quota system.

Second, the one-man-one-vote electoral system is one of the most glaring weaknesses of

the electoral system in Jordan. The legalization of political parties in 1992 and the shift from plurality voting to the single nontransferable system (the monarchy's design to curb the Islamist opposition and give more power to the tribal forces across the country) continue to have paradoxical effects on the electoral process in Jordan. While the 1992 Political Parties Law No. 32 gave the parties in Jordan—for the first time—the ability to organize, compete, and mobilize for seats in the lower house, the SNTV system has significantly led to the fragmentation of these parties and to their inability to compete against the well-established tribal and state-backed candidates in most parts of the kingdom.

Undeniably, the ban of political parties over the last few decades—not only in Jordan but also in many parts of the region—has substantially weakened their organizational and mobilizing capacities. Most of the relatively new parties in Jordan (with the exception of the IAF and the Jordanian Communist Party [JCP]) lack political expertise, clear policy stances, a structured platform, clear ideological positions, and most importantly, loyal supporters. Their task becomes even harder when considering the deep involvement of the state in citizens' lives that has left little room for political parties' leaders and candidates to play a significant role in the decision-making process. As stated by Shteivi,⁵⁹ "The state, particularly the agencies of the executive branch, has dominated the Jordanian society since the early 1920s; the agencies of the executive branch have played an important role in the make-up of society itself." As a result, there is significant mistrust between the public and most nonstate-affiliated politicians. These politicians and political party candidates are mostly perceived as corrupt, self-interested, and inefficient.⁶⁰ Subsequently, elections in Jordan have witnessed the rise of tribal and personalistic politics, as well as candidates who prefer to run as independents rather than risk affiliation with a specific political party, with the fear of being sanctioned by the electorate. As evident in Table 4, the general public has very low levels of trust in political parties' candidates and would rather vote based on family or tribe instead of a candidate's party affiliation. In fact, respondents are less likely to vote if they have to choose a candidate based on party and ideology (as was the case in the 2011 elections).

Even with the promulgation of the electoral reform in June 2012 and the introduction of the closed national party list along with the SNTV system in the most recent parliamentary elections in Jordan, the 27 seats⁶¹ added to the lower house were not sufficient to overcome the dilemma of tribal dominance and the severe fragmentation of party politics in Jordan. Furthermore, the three additional quota seats that were allocated for women in the 2013 elections were actually Bedouin (tribal) seats, which further solidified the power of the tribes and the influence of the state.

Finally, the ethnic and ideological divides across Jordan’s society pose a real challenge for establishing an all-inclusive political system in the kingdom. Evidence from the past few elections clearly shows that the electoral system in place is actually emphasizing these differences and divisions rather than mitigating them. This division puts female candidates in a precarious position. On the one hand, the Islamist forces in the country were initially skeptical about women’s presence in the political arena; their later acceptance to the presence of women in politics was highly contingent on their own views about women’s roles in society and their contribution to public life. On the other hand, current political party and tribal leaders are not willing to include women candidates either under the SNTV system or with the closed national list for fear of losing their seats.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that Jordan continues to be one of the leading models in the Arab world for introducing and implementing female quota systems, numerous challenges must be concurrently resolved to achieve full gender parity in the country’s electoral arena. The following section offers a number of recommendations to further empower women in leadership roles that can be applied not only in the Jordanian context, but in most parts of the region as well.

- Given the structural and sociocultural challenges facing women in the region—especially in tribal societies like Jordan—state-sponsored initiatives and international electoral assistance programs are much needed to provide programs and training sessions that educate, assist, and promote the representation

of women in these societies, both on the country-wide level and among women seeking to run for office. Moreover, female candidates’ lack of financial resources and experience in campaign management are among the main impediments to electoral success. Therefore, women’s movements and civil society-led initiatives should join efforts to provide financial assistance and campaign training to ensure the candidates’ visibility in the electoral campaign. Female candidates should also work on developing strategies to attract female voters and focus on issues that are most relevant to their female constituents instead of advancing political agendas and platforms similar to their male competitors.

- Tribal structures and the ensuing political culture pose serious challenges to the political empowerment of women and to the establishment of genuine electoral competition in Jordan. In order to overcome this hurdle, strictly enforced institutional mechanisms should be introduced to strengthen the role of political parties in the electoral arena. Despite the fact that there is an ongoing debate in Jordan on reformulating the electoral law, however, there are still strong disagreements among the political forces in the country about the form and the limits of these amendments.⁶² The state should also focus on building trust in political parties and political figures, and guaranteeing fair and free elections to the public.
- There is a strong need to amend the electoral law in Jordan and to introduce a more inclusive electoral formula that would ensure a demographically and geographically balanced electoral system. Previous research has unequivocally shown that political structures, specifically electoral rules, have an immense impact on promoting women’s representation in different parts of the globe, and the MENA region is no exception. For instance, studies have shown that electoral systems applying proportional representation (PR) are more likely to have three to four times more women in legislative assemblies.⁶³ Despite the fact that Jordan has introduced the national lists (27 seats) based on proportional representation, most seats were still taken by “local notables and tribal candidates over political parties and

non-tribal groupings.”⁶⁴ There is a strong need to introduce a PR system in Jordan to strengthen political parties and overcome the tribal hegemony of the electoral arena.

- District magnitude continues to have a substantial impact on women’s representation in Jordan’s Parliament. Under the current SNTV system, electoral districts with larger magnitude still pose a serious challenge for female candidates because of the way quota candidates are selected. A proportional representation system is an effective solution to this major issue as the larger the electoral district, the more seats candidates can actually win. Studies also show that party magnitude (i.e., the number of seats allocated to each party in the district) plays an important role in promoting women’s representation,⁶⁵ especially in contexts where low levels of sociocultural acceptance of female parliament members dominate.
- Despite the fact that Jordan is one of the first countries in the region to introduce gender quotas in the legislative branch, the number of seats allocated for women is very limited (10 percent of total seats in 2013) and does not give women an equal opportunity in the decision-making process.⁶⁶ Acknowledging the injustices facing women in the electoral arena, some countries in transition, such as Tunisia, took serious steps in early 2014 to promote women’s political representation in newly drafted constitutions. Presently, women represent 50 percent of all legislative assemblies in Tunisia; this is widely considered a sweeping victory for women’s activists across the country. More Arab countries should follow Tunisia’s footsteps to achieve gender parity in the decision-making process.
- Efforts should be geared toward establishing a strong quota system in the Jordanian context. Most recent research has shown there is a significant difference in terms of women’s impact in the political process in cases of weak versus strong quota systems. Moreover, successful outcomes in regard to women’s representation are strongly contingent on the ability of political parties to place a minimum number of women on their lists⁶⁷ and enforce placement mandates, as well as

the strict adoption and implementation of quota mechanisms on the local and national levels.⁶⁸ Women should also play an active role in party leadership and the party nomination committee to ensure equitable candidate recruitment and placement. A closer look at the Jordanian political scene clearly shows that the necessary factors to make the quota system successful are not currently present in the Jordanian context.

- Finally, eradicating corruption and patronage in the political system and reinstating confidence in the parliament and political parties in Jordan must be among the top priorities for the Jordanian government over the next few years. The rise of patronage as well as personalistic and tribal politics in the electoral arena are mainly the result of widespread corruption and a general lack of confidence in political institutions and agencies—a statement that can be safely applied to many parts of the MENA region.

ENDNOTES

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Appendix. Coding of the Variables in Table 4

Main Dependent Variables	Prompt	Coding Key
Vote (Dichotomous)	Did you participate in the elections?	1 = Yes 0 = No
Key Independent Variables		
Fair and Free Elections	In general, how would you evaluate the last parliamentary elections?	4 = Completely free and fair 1 = Not free and fair
Candidate Selection	What factors would you consider when voting for political office?	
	Choice based on candidate's ideology (Index)	3 = Very important 0 = Not important at all
	Choice based on candidate's family or tribe (Index)	3 = Very important 0 = Not important at all
	Choice based on candidate's party or faction affiliation (Index)	3 = Very important 0 = Not important at all
	Choice based on voter's gender (Index)	1 = Female 0 = Male

Source: Arab Barometer, "Instruments and Data Files," <http://www.arabbarometer.org/instruments-and-data-files>; author's coding.

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18. Pippa Norris, "Opening the Door: Women Leaders and Constitution Building in Iraq and Afghanistan," in *Women Who Lead*, ed. Barbara Kellerman (New York: Jossey Bass, 2007), 197-226.

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20. The first female minister, In'am Al Mufti, was appointed in 1979 as the minister of social development. Later, the king appointed several women to the Senate: Layla Sharaf (1989), Naila Rasdhan (1993), Subhieh Al Ma'ani and Rima Khalaf (1997), and May Abul Samen (2003). Also, the first female judge in Jordan was appointed in 1996.

21. It is also worth mentioning the Jordanian Parliament was suspended from 1974-1977 after the Rabat Arab League summit's decision that the

PLO was the only legitimate representative body of the Palestinian people. With half of the seats representing Palestinians, King Hussein seized the opportunity and dissolved the Jordanian Parliament as being contradictory to the Rabat Agreement. The Parliament was soon replaced by a National Consultative Council with nominal powers.

22. Laurie Brand, *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization: Middle Eastern and North African Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

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24. The National Consultative Council, established in 1977, comprised of 60 members whose sole responsibility was to discuss laws with the king but was never given the powers to legislate or to introduce bills.

25. Jordanian Elections Committee, <http://www.entikhabat.jo/Public/DefaultAr.aspx>.

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28. The Political Parties Law is also known as Law No. 32. It defines a party as “a political organization made up of Jordanian members in accordance with the Constitution and political participation regulations. Parties should have specific goals related to political, economic, and social affairs, and they should operate by legitimate and peaceful means.” Islamist parties were allowed for the first time to participate in elections, and they formed the Islamic Action Front Party (IAF) in December 1992.

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33. The 2003 parliamentary elections were scheduled to take place in November 2001, but it was postponed for about 15 months in reaction to the political turmoil in the region and the situation in Iraq.

34. The establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) in 1992—under the auspices of Princess Basma—marks one of the most significant milestones for women’s success in the political arena. The JNCW’s main goals were to promote women’s issues and to integrate women into the decision-making arena. Despite the fact that JNCW was established originally as a NGO, the organization enjoyed “royal leadership,” oftentimes acting as the mouthpiece for the regime.

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36. Law No. 11 of 2003 on women’s parliamentary quota law; The Jordanian Parliament’s official website, <http://www.parliament.jo>.

37. Husayn Abu Rumman, “Qirra’a Awaliyya fil-Intikhabat al- Niyabiyya al- Urduniyya” (“A preliminary reading of Jordan’s parliamentary elections”), *Civil Society Issues* (Amman: New Jordan Center for Studies, 2003).

38. Ibid.

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40. Jordan is divided into three main electoral divisions and 12 governorates: Northern Jordan, Central Jordan and Southern Jordan. Northern Jordan (Irbid, Jarash, Ajlun, and Mafrq) has 14 districts and is allocated 30 seats. Central Jordan (Al-Zarqa, Al-Balqa, Ma’daba, and Amman) has 18 districts and is allocated 50 seats in the lower house. Finally, Southern Jordan (Karak, Maan, Al-Tufayla, and Aqaba) has 13 districts and 23 seats.

41. Falak Jamani, who won a quota seat in 2003, succeeded in garnering support and competing in the 2007 elections to win a non-quota seat for the district of Madaba.

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44. R. Curtis Ryan, "Deja vu all over again? Jordan's 2010 elections," *Foreign Policy*, November 15, 2010, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/11/15/jordanians_go_to_the_polls.

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48. The Islamic Centrist Party participated in the 2013 elections and managed to win three national seats and 14 individual seats.

49. King Abdullah established the Independent Election Committee in 2012 after the dissolution of Jordan's 16th Parliament in response to massive protests across Jordan demanding fraud-free elections and an end to the nepotism and vote buying that dominated Jordan's past few elections.

50. The first female is Mariam Lozi (Amman, 5th District) who won 3,631 votes, acquiring the most votes in a 3-member district. The second female who won under the SNTV system is Wafaa Bani Mustafa (Jarash North, 1st District), who won 3,989 or 7.66 percent of the votes. Bani Mustafa was an independent Islamist who occupied a quota seat in the 16th Parliament.

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