No Democracy without Women's Equality: Middle East and North Africa[1]

By Zeina Zaatari[2]

Key Findings:

- Despite many advances and women's organizing efforts in the Middle East and North Africa, women's visibility and ability to exercise power in the public sphere as well as women's political participation continues to be limited.
- Women's political participation and representation is intricately connected to and impacted by women's social, economic, sexual, reproductive and familial rights.
- In general, parliaments and other governmental institutions continue to enact 'masculine' practices infused with the various manifestations of patriarchy that limit women's effective participation.
- Some of the main obstacles to women's participation in the political process include: the 'masculine' political model, the lack of political parties' will to change, the double burden born by women, unfavorable electoral laws, poverty, violence, social regard of 'politics' as a dirty game, the proliferation of negative and stereotypical discourses on women in the media (religious and secular), corruption, and the widespread dominance of patriarchy (age and gender hierarchy).
- The devaluation of women's humanity, sexual harassment and other kinds of gender-based violence in the public and domestic spheres, inequality in family and personal status laws, and outdated religious discourses that see women as lacking in reason and inappropriate for ruling (justified by concepts such as 'qiwaama') continue to tremendously impact women's capacity for meaningful and effective participation in political life.
- Parliamentary quotas do succeed in increasing the number of women in parliament. However, they do not necessarily increase women parliamentarians' effectiveness or their true representational power. Additionally, quotas that are not coupled with crucial political changes and democratic practices often lead to more 'proxy' women (related to those in political power) entering parliament and the cooptation of women's groups and priorities simply to mobilize female voters.
- The arrival of political Islam into the halls of government in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere via 'democratic means' has begun to pose some serious challenges to women's rights and equality. While initially proclaiming liberal rhetoric supportive of notions of freedom and democracy, declarations from government officials and parliamentarians in the past year have made clear the kinds of challenges they will

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[1] I use the terms MENA and Arab World interchangeably in this paper. In addition to reviewing scholarly work, journalistic and political publications, and reports by NGOs, I also conducted interviews with local women's rights activists and international practitioners (including UN personnel) during the course of three months Dec 2012 to Feb 2013.

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pose; including reneging on signed UN treaties (Muslim Brotherhood statement on CEDAW) and annulling previously approved legal reforms introduced through years of struggle by women's movements (Egypt and Morocco).

- The high level of impunity that those in power (including newly elected governments, police forces, the military, and political and tribal leadership and their entourage – including armed militias) in most countries of the region have meant increased violence against women and specifically against women human rights defenders with little or no recourse to any justice mechanisms; this poses a tremendous threat to the future of democracy and women's rights in the region.

Key Recommendations

- The UN bodies and other international actors must develop gender sensitive evaluative measurement tool of democracy. This entails rating democracy/democratic practices (such as elections/electoral laws, governance structures, budgetary allocations, etc.) using women's substantive equality and access to their rights in the political and other spheres as a benchmark.
- The UN must seriously implement mechanisms to monitor and hold new governments in the region accountable to ensure their adherence to signed UN treaties and removal of treaty reservations.
- UN agencies should support and governments should enact reforms in family/personal status laws to remove all discriminatory clauses against women.
- Political parties must evaluate their internal structures and take long and short term steps to build the capacity of women cadres, develop women's rights agendas/programs, ensure women's participation in the party is meaningful and not paternalistic or stereotypical, enlist women into the executive offices of the party, and nominate more women on electoral lists.
- Governments need to seriously reassess and reconstitute the current masculine governance structures and processes to foster women's participation and a shift in normative gender roles and practices (i.e. ensuring parental leave, supporting collaborative vs. competitive practices, ending corruption, addressing violence, and ensuring women's capacity to travel, etc).
- Governments should identify skilled and experienced women and appoint them as Ministers, ambassadors, and in other vital public sectors (including natural resource, media, and educational institutions and in public companies, including within the gas and oil industries).
- Governments and political parties should advance political structures and electoral laws most proven to support and increase women's participation in politics (proportional representation, women quota or other temporary measure, effective positioning on electoral lists, incentives and penalties for not abiding by new regulations).
- Governments and international actors must invest adequate resources to promote women's equality in the economic, social, legal, in addition to the political spheres.
- Governmental and executive institutions should ensure women's safe access and utilization of the public sphere including for employment, educational, political, and recreational purposes.
- End the culture and practice of impunity for political and military leadership for sexual assaults and other kinds of violence committed against women and women's human

rights defenders. This entails supporting national and international tribunals to try the perpetrators.

Introduction

The images of women on the streets of Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, and even Libya and elsewhere in the Arab world have become daily recurrences on television screens, computer monitors, and newspaper pages. Questions were still raised by many western journalists and spectators about women's presence in some of the more conservative countries, like Yemen and Libya. However, the reality of a quick online search will unveil endless images of women joining protests, marching in street demonstrations, organizing medical shift units in and around protest squares, writing blogs, organizing legal teams, and much more.

Women's political participation in the broadest sense has become very visible since at least 2011 and onward. Yet, rarely do any of the important timelines listing the progress and milestones of these revolutions across the Arab world mention women specifically, address the role they played as women, or credit the significance of their political participation. This invisibility in the larger story—even when some credit is mentioned in a separate paragraph or a special story—is at the crux of some of the challenges and problems of political organizing, governance, and society's understanding and valuing of women and the roles they play. This invisibility can be understood in two arenas. First, it can be seen through women's invisibility in general in society, even when they are actually highly present. Women's very visible roles and responsibilities as caretakers, for example, are assumed and thus easily ignored by the larger narrative of society and history. When they are active in the political sphere, their participation is seen as an exception to the rule. The second is women's invisibility in political governance positions of post-revolution governments. While women participated in large numbers in the elections, this was not reflected in adequate representation in parliament, ministerial positions, or constitutional committees in most countries in the region.

Political Participation and Political Representation

It is important to understand political participation as one not only entailing electoral processes or simply representation, i.e. numbers of women in political governing systems, parliament, cabinets, etc. Women's political participation takes many shapes and forms, many of which are trivialized as constituting "the women's arena" or "women's work." Yet mobilization around political issues, organizing efforts within NGOs, civil society associations, unions and syndicates, as well as political advocacy on women's rights is also political participation. Efforts on the local level through city councils and committees are important spaces where women participate in shaping and changing the political culture and processes of governance.

It is also a mistake to assume that these activities are all women are 'good' for, that simply by recognizing their efforts in these areas as political participation, we can disregard the major grievances in terms of their political representation. While I do not prescribe to the notion that only women can represent women, enduring patriarchy and a historic imbalance necessitate strategies and analyses until a time when men and women can equally represent all citizens. As one expert has noted: "Patriarchy, subordination of

women, and the deep-rooted perception that the public domain is reserved for men and that the social contract is about the relationship between men and government and not citizens and government, come together to exclude women—notwithstanding rights guaranteed in law and the political rhetoric of good governance and participatory democracy" (Ginwala 2005, 15). Research also indicates that women in office, given possibilities for success (discussed below), for the most part do make a difference in terms of the kinds of policies they introduce. Women in office are more likely to sponsor bills that promote women's rights and issues relevant to women, including education and healthcare (Paxton et al 2007, 273-274).

Women's movements, feminists, and women's rights activists in the Arab region have issued the slogan "there will be no democracy without women's equality/women's rights". At first, this statement appears to be rather obvious. Many researchers and theorists of democracy and governance have reiterated such principles where the governing polity has to reflect the needs and rights of ALL of its population. "The seed of democracy lies in the principle that the legitimacy of the power to make decisions about peoples' lives, their society and their country should derive from a choice by those who will be affected" (Ginwala, 2005, p. 14). The equal participation of women and men in public life, including governance, has been consecrated in the various UN treaties, including those particularly addressing discrimination against women such as the Convention Eliminating All Forms of Disrimination against Women (CEDAW). Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and signed by 99 countries as of March 2013, the CEDAW's yearly reviews clearly speak to the lack of full implementation of many of its clauses, including the ones focused on political participation and representation[3].

Thus, the significance of the slogan "no democracy without women's equality" is pertinent on multiple levels. *First*, it is a response to the ongoing debates and notions of invisibility that continue to exclude women from 'significant' spaces of political participation, most importantly those connected to decision-making, power, and governance. *Second*, it is a response and a call to heed the historic lessons of the previous era of state-building projects in the post-revolutionary period of the 50s and 60s. While women participated actively in the liberation struggles of their countries, they found themselves once again invisible in the post-colonial moment after independence. History and school textbooks do not speak of or tell the stories of women's political participation. Generations of Tunisians, Algerians, Egyptians and others have no information and narratives of the courageous women who participated in liberating their countries, except for the few sparks or glimpses of token celebrations on International Women's Day or some other national occasion. When such stories are told, women are often tokenized and portrayed as exceptions.

Additionally, women were also written out of political governance after liberation from colonial rule when nation-states of the Arab region began forming. Almost none entered the halls of governance as presidents, ministers, or parliamentarians. Their

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[3] CEDAW permitted ratification with reservation, which has allowed many countries to sign CEDAW and include a list of reservations on particular articles or concepts. In some instances these are minor, however, in many others these may lead to in fact nullifying the effect of signing the treaty making it ineffectual. For additional information on country by country reservations on CEDAW check: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm.

political parties excluded them from candidacy lists and expected them to continue to play their prescribed gender roles as caretakers and supporters. Most significantly, women's equality rarely emerged in law or practice. While revolutionary women dreamed of a free and equal society, it quickly became clear that equality was considered only nominally for women. In most instances, constitutions drafted after liberation did mention equality of all citizens regardless of sex, ethnicity, and religion; however, at the same time, constitutions often also included discriminatory clauses against women, thus contradicting this principle. Moreover, all legal frameworks from family, to nationality, to labor, to penal codes were/are in contradiction with equality and largely continue to discriminate against women across the region.

Third, the cry for democracy and women's rights requires a continuing struggle against current and future invisibility, marginalization and exploitation of women. *Fourth*, the significance of this slogan lies in its becoming the main tool or measure to evaluate and assess whether democracy is attained or attainable. "The exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society, hindering economic development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality" (Shvedova 2005, 33). Creating mechanisms to monitor and hold new governments in the region accountable to ensure their adherence to signed UN treaties and removal of treaty reservations[4] affecting women and other excluded populations (ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities) is an important avenue and role for international agencies to strengthen democracy, foster democratic practices, and support responsive and transparent state building projects.

Women's equality, including political equality, is a necessary (though not sufficient) component of a democracy. This should translate into real measures that take gender into account at all levels of governance. For example, in evaluating elections, we must consider women's rights in our assessment of whether an election was free and fair. Elections cannot be deemed free and fair if/when women are not (or are under-) represented as voters or candidates; they do not have the freedom of mobility or the visibility and financial resources they need to launch a successful political campaign; they continue to bear the vast majority of invisible but time-consuming responsibilities of care work; and they are coerced or threatened into making a voting decision. Building a democracy must engage these issues and help lay the groundwork for women to act as political subjects and engage in political processes.

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[4] All Arab countries have entered reservations on CEDAW often centered around the supremacy of religious law over international treaties where contradiction may occur. This mostly affected personal status laws, nationality law, sexual and bodily rights, and right to independent living and travel (mobility).

Women's Representation in Numbers

Women's political participation in formal politics in the Arab Region continues to be low, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments database[5]. The world's average for both upper and lower houses combined in February 2013 stands at 20.4%. The Arab region has the second lowest regional average rate at 13.8%. However, this is a significant increase since 2005 when women made up only 6.5% of parliaments in the region, and with many countries at zero percent, both in the upper and lower houses, lagging far behind the target of 30% set by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. In 2013, women make up 6.8% of upper houses and 15.7% of lower houses, with the average sitting at 13.8%. National numbers indicate an increase in number of women in the parliament potentially attributable to the recent quota measures and uprisings that have brought with them more democratic election processes.

Percentage of Female Representation in Parliament 1984 - 2013
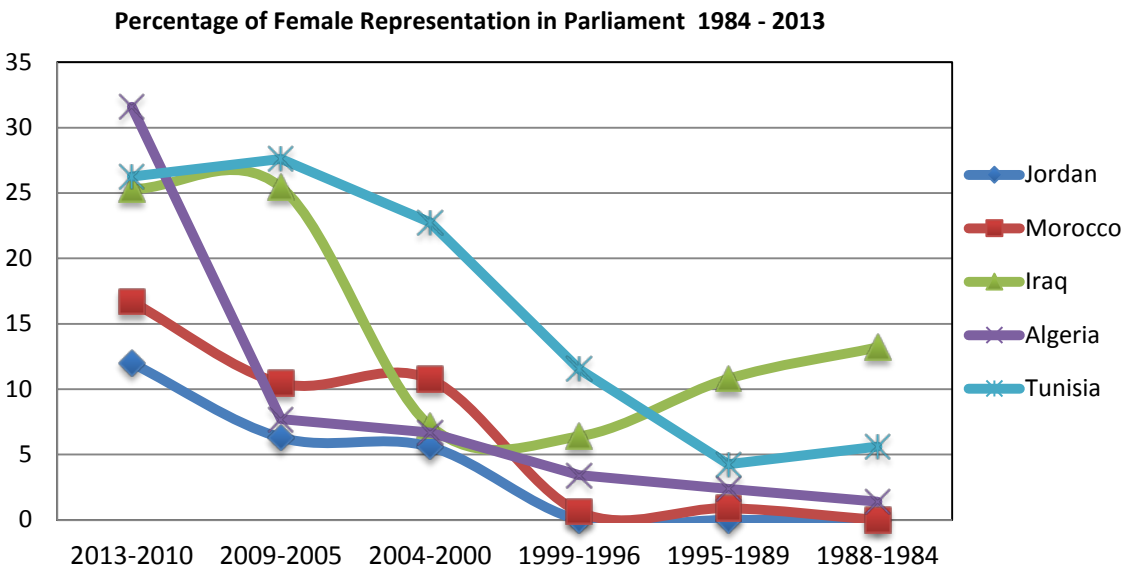
        An increase of women in parliament is often evidenced when quotas are introduced. The recent elections in Algeria, Jordan, Iraq, and Tunisia reflect such trends. ***Algeria's*** dramatic shifts were most impressive despite many analysts viewing it as a populist strategy by the president. The May 2012 elections brought a record 146 women to parliament, representing 31.6% of parliament, the highest number in Arab countries and an increase from 7.7% in 2007. In ***Iraq***, the quota requires parliament to be at least 25% women. In the last elections of 2010, 82 women were elected, representing 25.23% and in 2005, 70 women were elected (25.45%). Under Saddam's rule, women made up 7.2% of parliament in 2000, 6.4% in 1996, 10.8% in 1989, and 13.2% in 1984. Prior to the imposition of the sanctions and the effects of the wars that ravaged Iraq, women's participation in

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[5] The Inter-Parliamentary Union Section on Women in National Parliaments: http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm. All data regarding election results and statistics comes from the Inter-Parliamentary Union PARLINE database http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp and most data on quotas was gathered primarily from the Quota project http://www.quotaproject.org/index.cfm; unless otherwise indicated.

parliament was much better than in many other countries in the region. The Lower House in **Tunisia** implemented a voluntary 30% quota on electoral lists in 2009, leading to the election of 59 women or 27.6%. A similar percentage was attained in the 2011 elections. Tunisia has had a stronger representation of women historically with 22.75% in 2004, 11.54% in 1999, 6.74% in 1994, and 4.25% in 1989. **Mauritanian** women made important inroads as a 20% quota[6] was instituted in 2006, which resulted in 17% women in parliament, in comparison to only 3.7% for the 2001 elections, and 1.2% in 1996. The senate, another elected body, featured a total of eight women, or 14.1%, in 2009.

Country	Most Recent Election	No. / % of Women elected to Parliament	Election Quota Year	No. / % of Women elected to Parliament	Prior Election Year	No. / % of Women Elected to Parliament	Type of Quota / Notes
Algeria			2012	146 / 31.6%	2007	30 / 7.7%	Organic Law: 20-50% of candidates to be women depending on the number of seats in each electoral district.
Egypt	2012	10 / 1.97%	2010	65 / 12.7%	2005	9 / 1.98%	Legislative Amendments in 2009 increased number of seats from 454 to 518 and created 64 reserved seats for women and 10 appointed by president. The most recent election in Egypt did not abide by the women quota (requiring only one female candidate per electoral list).
Iraq	2010	82 / 25.23%	2005	70 / 25.45	2000	18 / 7.2 %	25% of elected Parliament (reserved seats) was set in 2005 and reaffirmed in 2010 and for the upcoming elections - Note that in 1984 the percentage of women in Parliament was 13.2% (higher than in most countries in the region). Numbers started declining with wars and sanctions
Jordan	2013	18 / 12 %	2003	6 / 5.45 %	1997	0%	Reserved seat quota for Parliament began in 2003 with six seats, it was doubled in 2010 to 12 seats, and increased in 2013 to 15 seats.
Mauritania			2006	17 / 17.89%	2001	3 / 3.7 %	President decreed a 20% female quota for candidates in Parliament and Municipal elections. This also included full parity for districts with two seats and financial incentives for political parties that exceed quota. There has not been any recent elections in Mauritania but a series of protests, political unrest, and failed national dialogues in the past two years, with elections postponed indefinitely.
Morocco	2011	66 / 16.71%	2002	35 / 10.77%	1997	2 / 0.62 %	In 2002, political parties agreed to reserve 30 seats for women on a special National list elected nation-wide. The new electoral law of 2011 extended the number of reserved seats for women to 60.
Tunisia	2011	57 / 26.27%	2009	59 / 27.57%	2004	43 / 22.75%	A Voluntary quota system (30%) was adopted by the ruling party in 2009. The 2011 electoral law ensured at least half of the party-lists were women, requiring alternating positions of names of candidates on the list (which was not adhered to strictly)

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[6] See references in works cited: Khayar (2007), WLP (2007).

Countries with newer electoral possibilities also demonstrated some increases. In *Libya*'s most recent election, 33 women, making up 16.5%, won parliamentary election. Similarly in *Kuwait*, the December 2012 elections brought three women, or 6%, to parliament by direct election[7], and the 2009 elections led to four women entering parliament for the first time. Elections in *Syria* have consistently yielded a 12% female representation in the parliament since 2003. Elections of the Legislative Council in *Palestine* in 2006 lead to a 12.8% female representation rate.

The Shura Council of *Saudi Arabia*, a body that is appointed by the King, made efforts to include women up to 20% in its membership. In 2013, 30 women were appointed amounting to 19.8%. Similarly the Federal National Council of the *United Arab Emirates* is half appointed and half elected. In 2011, the Council had seven female members (one elected) amounting to 17.5%.

Numbers of women parliamentarians continue to be low in other countries of the region, even when some improvements have been made. In *Bahrain*'s 2010 election, only one woman was elected for the Council of Representatives; however, the King appointed 11 women to the Shura Council. In *Egypt*, the last parliamentary election saw an unprecedented number of voters, including a large number of women. However, the results were disappointing with only 10 winning female candidates (eight elected and two appointed), constituting a mere 1.97%. In 2010, in line with the recently approved quota of 64 seats reserved for women, 65 women were elected (one appointed), constituting 12.7% of parliament. In the elections of 2011/2012, the rate returned to its earlier records prior to the administration of the quota, as the decree was not observed[8]. In the 2005 elections, women won 1.98% of seats, 2.42% in 2000, 2% in 1995, and 2.2% in 1990. In *Lebanon*, despite advances in other areas, women drastically lag behind in political representation, with only 3.1% (four women) winning office in 2009, 4.7% in 2005, and 2.3% in 2000. In *Oman*, despite many female candidates (76), only one (1.19%) won a seat at the Consultative Council in 2011. Fifteen women, or 18%, however, constitute the State Council, which is appointed directly by the Sultan.

The executive branch of government is the space of least regulation and where formal quotas are non-existant. The presence of women in Cabinets or Ministries is often much less than that of representative bodies such as the parliament. These are often appointed positions as Prime Ministers create their own ministries, which then must receive the approval of the Parliament. In this arena, political will is deeply important. A shift has occurred in the last five years towards a greater tendency to appoint at most one

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[7] However, on June 19, 2012, the Constitutional Court invalidated the Emir's decrees of December 2011 dissolving the legislature and calling for new elections in February 2012. As such the previous Assembly (parliament) elected in 2009 is currently in session with 8% female representation.

[8] As the quota was a decree by Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forced decided to abolish the 64 seats reserved for women, but was reluctant to cancel the occupational quota as it had been enshrined in the constitution much earlier. This decree had brought only women from the National Party (the party of Mubarak) to power and thus it was seen by many parties including the feminist movement as deeply problematic. For more information, please consult Nazra's report at:
http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/nazra_she_and_elections_report_april2012_en.pdf and the IFES Briefing at:
http://www.ifes.org/~/media/Files/Publications/White%20PaperReport/2011/Analysis_of_Egypts_2011_Parliamentary_Electoral_System.pdf

to three women in some cabinent posts across the region[9]. Women are often appointed to ministries that are assumed to be consistent with traditional gender roles, such as the Ministry of Education, of Human Rights, of Women's/Women's and Family Affairs, and of Social Services. There have been very few exceptions over the years; these include appointments in the Ministry of Finance in Lebanon and the Ministry of Economy in Syria. Meanwhile, Tunisia has had a consistent record of 3-4 women in the cabinet, with this last government appointing three: the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Family, and the Secretary of State for Housing (FIDH).

It is noticeable that in some instances, campaigning efforts and/or quotas at the local level can be more effective in ensuring women enter decision-making positions. A position such as the city or municipal councilmember may in some cases be of lesser political value, but allows women to have a better chance of competing with men. Additionally, the local level is often where women are best known in their communities. For example, women in Mauritania were effective at the local level, with 37% women winning the 2007 municipal council elections. In Lebanon, the 2004 elections resulted in 215 (out of 10646) women municipal council members (2.02%), and 21 women mukhtars (out of 2362), while in 2010 municipal elections resulted in some increases with 526 women elected as council members out of 11424 (4.7%)[10]. The year 2008 witnessed the first woman mayor in Egypt and an increase in local council representation to 4%[11]. In Yemen, women's representation in local councils was dismal at only 0.5% in 2006. Low level representation in Egypt and Yemen at the local level is consistent with low level representation in national and parliamentary elections. Additionally, both countries have high rates of illiteracy and poverty particularly among women that act as major hindrances in addition to social and historical patriarchies.

It is also rare to find women appointed to important roles in the judiciary. In Egypt in 2003, there was only one female judge appointed to the Supreme Constitutional Court, but without the ability to hold hearings. In 2007, this ban was lifted leading to the appointment of 30 female judges to civil courts but none appointed to criminal, prosecution, or administrative courts (FIDH). While Southern Yemen was the first country in the Gulf region to appoint a woman judge in the 70s, women have in essence been prevented[12] on religious grounds from entering the High Judicial Institute, a degree from which is essential to obtain a position. In Morocco in 2010, women represented 21% of judges and 11.8% of prosecutors. A newly created Moroccan Association of Women Judges plans to submit claims to the Supreme Court to increase representation. In 2010 in Tunisia, women represented 27% of judges.

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[9] There is close to no centralized databases or statistics on women's numbers and percentages in Cabinets, within Ministries, Ambassadorships, or other vital institutions such as Army, Police, Resources (Petroleum, Mining), or Media (public television or radio stations).

[10] Data source from the National Council on Lebanese Women (nclw.org.lb) and the Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (crtda.org.lb).

[11] Data according to FIDH's (International Federation for Human Rights) Arab Women Spring Site: http://arabwomenspring.fidh.net/index.php?title=Main_Page to be cited in the paper as FIDH.

[12] While there is no direct law that forbids women entry into the High Judicial Institute, those who control admissions, a number of religious male scholars, have refused to admit any female students using orthodox religious rationale.

Obstacles to Women's Political Participation

Research has identified obstacles that limit women's political participation and representation. Shvedova (2005) identified a set of political, socio-economic, ideological and psychological obstacles, the nature and intensity of which varies in different countries. Paxton et al. (2007) analyze women's low level of representation in political office by looking at three explanations: supply-side, demand-side, culture and the role and power of international actors and institutional regulations. Most of this analysis is pertinent to the Arab World. According to Shvedova, the political obstacles that affect women include:

- the prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and of elected government bodies;
- lack of party support, for example, limited financial support for women candidates, limited access to political networks, and the more stringent standards and qualifications applied to women;
- lack of sustained contact and cooperation with other public organizations such as trade (labor) unions and women's groups;
- lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general, and for orienting young women towards political life; and
- the nature of the electoral system, which may or may not be favorable to women candidates. (Shvedova, 2005, p. 35)

Political life and political institutions around the world are dominated by a *'masculine model'* and the MENA region is no exception. This does not only mean that men are the dominant sex in these institutions but that institutional processes, systems of governance, electoral laws, and strategies for election are essentially dominated by "masculine practices." "Men largely dominate the political arena; largely formulate the rules of the political game; and often define the standards for evaluation. Furthermore, political life is organized according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male lifestyles" (Shvedova 2005, 35).

In Kuwait women were denied the right to stand for election until 2005, even though they'd been demanding suffrage for years. Many women were prepared to jump on the opportunity and submit their candidacies. However, elections were held in a very short turnaround time in 2006, thus allowing little time for planning and capacity building. One important obstacle was having access to voters and having to compete with traditionally male campaigning strategies. Men in Kuwait utilize the diwan, which candidates visit or host, where they engage in conversations, deals, and networking, addressing issues of concern to them and society. While the diwan is a common feature of Kuwaiti homes, particularly those of wealth, it is for the most part a gender-segregated space. It is the location that allows for consolidation of power, thus easily excluding women from the networks, relationships, and mobilizing potential that the diwan offers. During elections, diwans, elements of a male lifestyle, play an important role of mobilizing voters. Women candidates had to make decisions, building alliances with influential male elite who provided them access to their diwans to meet potential voters, or in some cases creating their own diwans and finding ways to encourage people to attend them[13].

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[13] A documentary film titled A Storm from the South, directed by Walid al-Awadi and Jehane Noujaim documents the challenges that Kuwaiti women candidates faced in the first election in 2006.

Additionally, most parliaments make little accommodation for the *double burden* that women MPs carry. Society has not changed enough in terms of parental responsibility, which is not seen as a shared responsibility but rather solely that of women. These pervasive arrangements free up male MPs to spend all of their time in competing for election and growing their skills in politics and governance. Parliaments do not make adjustments in terms of when sessions are organized, how long the sessions and committees run, and the travel needed to accommodate doubly-burdened women parliamentarians. Women in parliament are in essence expected to act and be like men if they are to succeed or be taken seriously – a reinforcement of the masculine model of governance.

In many countries in the region, politics is seen as a *'dirty game'*; a game of competition between men of power, economically and politically. Historically speaking, men gained status and governance positions (wali, emir, or bey) during the Ottoman rule through enforcing taxation systems, to be then rewarded with land (to become feudal lords, thus gaining more economic power, leading to entry to Parliament after independence). *Violence* as a key feature of politics has also added to the notion that politics is war. This is sometimes literally true where assassinations are routine and a competitive mentality taken to extremes. Today in Iraq and Lebanon, fears of violence and assassinations are real. While several parliamentarians have been killed to date in both Lebanon and Iraq, women parliamentarians and women rights activists in Iraq have received death threats for their agendas and work[14].

Corruption has many faces in these contexts including bribery, extortion, and provision of services. Campaigning costs have increased, and candidates are often sponsored by 'businessmen'. "Corruption inevitably results in the creation of favorable conditions and opportunities for the existence of the most negative manifestation of organized crime. These factors combine to scare women and provoke their fears of losing members of their families, all of which militate against their political involvement or their standing for elected bodies" (Shvedova 2007, 46).

An important step in changing the masculine model of the political process would be to address the nature and process of parliament and cabinets to increase more collaborative style politics. Parliament should promote practices for parental responsibility and care to be more equally shared. This can be done through policy change (parental leave, sick leave availability for childcare, parliament session taking into account parental responsibilities including school year, school hours, and holidays, provision of childcare at parliament and during travel, etc.) and by advocacy and modeling new behavior (talking about the importance of fathering as well as mothering in various media outlets). Implementing these strategies, alongside work with women parliamentarians and women's rights activists, would help reduce the bias women face in fully participating in political life.

Women play an important role in the rank and file of *political parties*-mobilizing and campaigning on the ground but rarely occupy leadership and decision-making positions. They receive few financial resources to support their candidacy. They are often not

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[14] For examples check reports by Iraqi women's rights organizations, funders, and journalists on death threats and other intimidation strategies used against outspoken women and MPs including: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/17/world/middleeast/17iraqwomen.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0; http://old.kvinnatillkvinna.se/en/women-candidates-in-the-iraq-election-are-facing-resistance.

positioned on electoral lists in prominent positions[15] leading to victory. Parties are still dominated by men and party candidates are mostly men. Women often find themselves behind the scenes and gain little name recognition, an essential ingredient for winning votes. Even in political party membership women perform their stereotypical, 'traditional' gender roles as caretakers. Many women members of various political parties across the region have left their parties due to frustrations that they never get serious tasks, but often are relegated at best to mobilizing the 'female vote'. "It is all too common during political party debates and discussions when someone raises the importance of women's presence in decision making and leadership positions, someone always responds by raising the question of women's skills and qualifications. However, no one ever raises the same questions when we talk about men's participation. It is as if men are *de facto* qualified to run for political office based on their person, while women are qualified to run based on their gender" (Hawari 2011, 25).

Among the few deviations from this *status quo* include the Tajamoa (National Democratic Assembly) Palestinian political party inside Israel. The party has had several feminists among its founders and those who continue to be active at all levels. They "insisted since the establishment of the party on the need to create a powerful feminist group within it" (Hawari 2011, 24). This group founded a Progressive Women Union to "foster a feminist agenda within the party, increase women's participation in political life, and work against the cooptation of women by narrow political agendas" (ibid, 24). While the political office had several women, they continued to feel the push of masculinist tendencies inside the party. In response, they established "quotas for women, where one third of the electoral list of the party must be of women" (ibid, 25). This allowed for the candidacy and eventually the win of Haneen Zoabi to the Knesset, Israeli parliament, in 2009. Haneen insisted on pursuing her feminist politics and worked closely with the Palestinian feminist movement. She was recently re-elected to the Knesset and has come to be known as one of the most formidable Palestinian parliamentarians and the "most hated woman[16] in Israel" (Karpel 2013).

In most of the region, there is close to *no cooperation* between governments, political parties, and trade unions with women's organizations unless they represent the state machinery, 'state feminist' institutions, or GNGOs or RNGOs[17]. This poses a challenge to advancing women's rights and increasing women's political participation. For example, sometimes the relationship between women's rights activists and organizations and women parliamentarians can be antagonistic, given that the latter may get elected due to their affiliation with a large political party or the state women's machinery. Feminists have argued that the state uses these women and co-opts their voices precisely so it does not have to engage honestly and directly with organizations and activists who are demanding

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[15] Many activists have argued that when women are positioned on the bottom of a long electoral list their chances of winning are drastically reduced. The most celebrated model has been the Swedish one where there is a requirement to alternating names between male and female candidates. See more: http://nazra.org/sites/nazra/files/attachments/nazra_she_and_elections_report_april2012_en.pdf

[16] She is seen as the most formidable by Palestinian (Israeli citizens) and the most hated by right wing Jewish citizens due to her outspokenness and fearlessness in the Israeli parliament when speaking about Palestinian rights and women's rights.

[17] GNGOs, refers to governmental Non-Governmental Organizations (in essence somehow affiliated to government), while RNGOs refers to Royal Non-governmental Orgs (affiliated with the royal family of a country).

and working for long term change who may challenge the ruling elite's authority. Many women who enter parliament and other councils are appointed, or if elected are often handpicked by the party due to familial association with important men in political parties. This is by no means always the case but nevertheless seems to be a common phenomenon where women's party affiliations are compromised, where there is a 'fast-track' quota system for newly 'democratizing' states, and/or where strong gender-segregation is preferred. The majority of these women had had no political or organizing experience. They are less likely to have been invested in public issues and, as such, have little to no contact with women's rights organizations or civil society associations. Thus they also carry loyalty to their 'men' of the party and are not likely to carry the women's rights agenda forward. This leads to alienation of qualified women (often running as independents but not able to win elections or be part of the quota). It also allows for the continued cooptation of female MPs by their parties as women's rights organizations miss the opportunity to engage, train, and build stronger relationships and future agendas with them, which could foster more women's participation in the future.

"Research indicates that *political structures* can play a significant role in women's recruitment to parliament. The system of elections based on proportional representation (PR), for example, has resulted in three to four times more women being elected in countries with similar political cultures" (Shvedova 2007, 35). While democratic systems of governance generally allow for more women's participation in politics and over the long run higher levels of representation (consider the Nordic countries), autocratic or monarchic system have such levels of concentrated power that it may often take simply the political will of the top leader to increase women's participation in systems of governance, as we have seen with the tendency to appoint women to Shura councils and Ministries common in the Gulf countries and other monarchies (like Jordan). Walsh (2012) argues that the quality of a democracy, particularly open and inclusive debate conditions and women's access to public spaces including media, legislature, and civil society is important in enabling an environment supportive of women's political participation and legal reform.

The type of *election law* that is applied affects the level of women's political participation and determines the number and quality of their political representation. In several countries, electoral laws often change multiple times prior to every election period. Jordan and Lebanon provide good examples of rapid changes prior to elections, strategies designed to figure out how to best distribute potential results and to ensure the most gains. Currently, Parliamentarians and politicians in Lebanon are debating and discussing various scenarios for a new election law; where at least six drafts have been submitted. This includes an "Orthodox" Law suggested by the Christian Orthodox Leadership which requires each individual vote on the basis of their religious sects for candidates of that sect. Few progressive voices are arguing for a unified voting district with a representational model, removal of sectarian quotas and instating of a 30% women quota[18]. If, though highly unlikely, a new law can break through the traditional political elite coalitions and the sectarian confessional system, it would have significant positive implications for the increased participation of women as voters, candidates, and likely representatives. In Jordan a delicate power balance between the royal family, tribal leadership, and the Islamists continues to be an important feature in formulating an election law, including

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[18] For More information, Please check the Take Back Parliament Site: http://vote2013.org/2013/01/17/electoral-reform-2/

ensuring that historical balances of power within the current demographic[19] battleground are preserved. While the quota of reserved seats for women seemed promising, especially given the historic exclusion of women, coupled with the particular election law that was drafted, have meant that the women who reached parliament were mostly tribal candidates with little experience in governance.

Concrete *socioeconomic factors* affect women's ability to participate in the political process in general, let alone run for office and enter the halls of governance. Lack of financial resources through the feminization of poverty and high rates of unemployment are important factors. The MENA region has the lowest rate of women's participation in the formal labor force, where the majority of women dominate the service and informal sectors. Women make much less than men for the same job in all sectors. A large number of women are either fully or partially dependent on men for their livelihoods or receive low salaries and live in poverty. The poorer economy countries like Egypt, Yemen, and Morocco have high rates of female headed-households as poverty has become feminized[20]. Richer economies such as the GCC countries, women contribute less in the labor force due to cultural attitudes. However, this is also changing with economic policies that aim to nationalize the work force[21] and where women are important in business and commerce. Similarly illiteracy rates vary across countries, with Yemen, Morocco, Egypt, and Mauritania showing the highest rates. Some candidacy procedures require literacy and a minimum level of education thereby excluding many women from participation. Matland's findings indicate that the closer women are to men in terms of their literacy rates, workforce participation levels, and university education level, the more equal they are perceived to be in social spheres and thus the more likely their political representation is to increase (Matland 2007, 40-41). This is an important link between the overall situation of women in a country and their capacity to fully exercise their political rights.

"The *ideological and psychological* hindrances for women in entering parliament include the following: gender ideology, cultural patterns, and predetermined social roles assigned to women and men, women's lack of the confidence to stand for election, women's perception of politics as a 'dirty' game, and the way in which women are portrayed in the mass media" (Shvedova 2007, 44). Women's primary role is often seen as limited to the domestic space and in relation to men that is as "mothers, wives, and daughters." This role restricts their ambition and limits their mobility. At the same time, however, it is often also the only avenue for their public participation. This 'culture of motherhood' (Zaatari, 2006), has historically provided women with the rationale/excuse needed to take on many activities otherwise seen as transgressive of their normative roles. Combined with the national liberation period—where women could play the role of mothers of the nation—this familial role extended to the public space to allow for some political participation. However, it is also extremely limiting as it often relegates women to corresponding roles within governments and political parties.

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[19] Ensuring that despite the growing number of Palestinian-Jordanians, Jordanians proper continue to have the upper hand in parliament.

[20] For exact data, check the World Bank statistics http://data.worldbank.org/indicator

[21] Saudification is one such program that had started in the mid-1990s. Similar programs are now under way in UAE and Bahrain.

So not only this culture of motherhood restricts women's ability to engage in politics and enter the public sphere, it also limits what they can or cannot do once they enter cabinet or parliament. Ministries of Education, Women's/Family Affairs, or Social Services, and not Ministries of Defense or Interior are seen to be in line with women's traditional roles and their assumed "natures". Feminists and women in politics have had to reiterate that "the ability to make decisions and implement them is not a gender-specific trait, but a common human one; in other words, it is as natural for a woman to hold power as for a man to hold power" (Shvedova 2007, 45). Norris and Inglehart (2001) have argued that most of the world still has not achieved the postindustrial phase where a true shift towards great gender equality can be had. While women begin to contribute more in the paid labor force, additional cultural shifts have yet fully materialized impacting the potential for political participation.

Visual media in the MENA region rarely reflects positively on women and women's rights. Many stereotypical images and reporting dominate all forms of mass media from the purely journalistic to the fictional. Women are objectified in the media. Their bodies are used as tools of advertisement. They are also often portrayed with little to no mental capacities thus making it impossible for them to be accepted as governors, legislators and leaders. It is only recently where women have begun hosting political shows where they interview guests on topics of interest. However, they appear as 'expert' guests dramatically less than men. In other television programming, we also see the emphasis on women's roles in the domestic sphere and primarily as nurturers. Women's rights organizations from Morocco, Lebanon, and Egypt have done extensive research supporting these findings of how women are represented in the media[22].

Though rarely discussed, given its sensitive nature, the fact that all countries in the MENA region manifest discriminatory and often egregious violations of the rights of women in family laws hinders women's political participation. The challenge with addressing each right distinctly—in order to create specific programs to guarantee them—is that we tend to forget that all rights are interconnected. While economic, social, and educational rights are often mentioned as deterrents or incentives to women's political participation, women's rights within the family, the locale of the most violations, is rarely discussed as a contributing factor. This is a difficult topic to address due to its entrenchment in religious discourses and continual use as a mark of cultural difference and identidy vis-à-vis the 'West'.

Many believe (and increasingly many promote via the new Islamist satellite television and various media outlets) that "*arijal qawwamuna 'ala an-nisa*'" translating it to mean that women are *subservient, legally, socially, and politically*, to men or at time that men are women's guardians. This simple, partial verse of the Qur'an is used to indicate that women cannot be governors or rulers. Amina Wadud (1999), Asma Barlas (2002) and other scholars have argued that the word *qawwamuna* has been interpreted wrongly to mean guardianship or rule over; while in the Qur'an it actually refers to breadwinners or those who provide in terms of livelihood. Women scholars are not the only ones who have interpreted the verse as such. In fact, "some exegetes of the classical period, like al-Tabari, also read the Ayah [verse] as referring to men's financial duties vis-à-vis women and not their ontological status as males" (Barlas 2002, 187). Additionally, this partial verse is often

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[22] See for example the work of KherrBerr, http://kherrberr.org/en/

cited out of context and is used to refer to that status of all men vis-à-vis all women. However, if one were to continue reading the full verse, it becomes clear that it is referring to wives and husbands. Scholars have argued that the Qur'an expects men to be breadwinners, but this does not mean that women could not or that all men will be. Additionally, Barlas argues that "even though the Qur'an charges the husband with being the breadwinner, it does not designate him head of the household, especially as the term has been understood in Western Feudal cultures" (Barlas 2002, 187), meaning as the ruler of the house. Those who oppose women's leadership in political office also often cite a supposed hadith (a saying by the prophet Muhammad) stating that no society is going to succeed if ruled by a woman. The source of this saying is not very strong, making it less likely to have been true. Additionally, this ignores several other sayings and verses in the Qur'an that reiterate the significance of women. It also ignores historical facts such as the political, military, and spiritual leadership of Aisha, Muhammad's wife, particularly after his death and the participation of numerous women leaders during the time of Muhammad in battles[23]. Essentially, Islamic feminist scholars have argued that the Qur'an inherently argues and promotes equality between men and women. While it may recognize few biological differences, it does not see those as dictating social or spiritual inequality. Barlas reiterates that "in the Qur'an, men and women originate in the same Self, at the same time, and in the same way; that is, they are ontologically coeval and coequal" (Barlas 2002, 136). The only hierarchy that exists is one of faith and morality among individuals, meaning the one-male or female-who acts ethically and morally is preferred by God.

In *family laws or personal status codes* across the region (with the exception of Morocco and Tunisia), Christian, Jewish, or Muslim marriage is seen as a contract of unequal partners. The Moroccan family law reform of 2004 did advance the notion of partnership as one that is mostly—though not totally—equal. Tunisia's civil marriage also comes close to full equality. Family laws across the region, often derived through religious jurisprudence, grant more rights to men in marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance with varying degrees. Without exception shari'a laws are defined and interpreted by men, historically and today. While alternative interpretations have historically been persecuted, today it has become even harder for women to participate in such projects. Nonetheless, Islamic feminist scholars have provided alternative interpretations of the most challenging issues, such as polygamy, guardianship, sexuality, veiling and segregation, inheritance, and wife beating (Ahmed 1993, Barlas 2002, Ali 2006, Wadud 1999). These unfortunately remain in the halls of academia and have not been yet uses as resources in creating laws. The patriarchal legacy of male interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith into Islamic law has strongly discriminated against and disempowered women. If women are not able to file for divorce but can easily be divorced via a text message and have her children taken away from her, then how can she debate legislation in parliament? If in some instances, she cannot leave her country without a permit from her husband, then how can she participate in international political work? If she cannot leave her village without a brother, husband, or son, as is the case in some tribal areas of Jordan due to customary laws, then how can she campaign or engage her constituency? When women inherit half the share of men in the family (siblings), then their financial ability is diminished, further diminishing their ability to campaign and succeed politically. These are serious considerations that limit women's political participation even when they may not affect all women to the same degree.

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[23] For additional resources on women's leadership in Islam, please refer to Leila Ahmad (1992) and the various writings of Nabia Abbott; namely her biography of Aisha published in 1942.

Presenting such alternative interpretations and ideas and popularizing them in the region can accompany and support legal reform processes advocated for by women human rights activists that utilizes women human rights discourse and the universality of rights via signing and implementing international treaties and conventions.

Sexual harassment has affected women's lives all over the world, especially in moments when women begin occupying more public spaces, as in increases in their participation in the labor force or through political participation. These developments may generate a strong counter-reaction or backlash leveled by men fearing a loss of power or control. The case studies below will show how sexual violence has strong implications for women's ability to participate fully and equally in politics and must be addressed urgently. During moments of transition and social upheaval, a resurgence of criminal activity, often targeting women, is common. However, Kandiyoti argues that "whether the so-called forces of law and order, enfeebled as they may be, remain passive onlookers or choose to act as predators themselves—as was the case with assaults against women demonstrators in Egypt—constitutes a profoundly political act aimed at intimidating activists, rather than just random acts of misogyny" (Kandiyoti 2013). As women take to the streets, argue, organize, and speak up against injustices they face, they threaten the patriarchal system. The structures of patriarchy, including various state institutions such as the police and army, seek to overturn women's increasing power and do not hesitate to use *violence*.

Assessing Quotas and Temporary Structural Measures

"Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government" (Dahlerup 2007, 141). There are two common types of quotas worldwide: the candidate quota and the reserved seat. The candidate quota (applicable in Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, and Tunisia) requires political parties to recruit women as candidates in their election lists. Legislation for such a quota can be achieved via a constitution, electoral law, or political party law. In some instances, there could be a voluntary party quota adopted by political parties invested in advancing women's political participation.

The reserved seat quota (applicable in Jordan and temporarily in Egypt) sets aside a number or percentage of seats for women through legislation or through the constitution. "Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a 'critical minority' of 30 or 40 percent or aim for 'gender balance' as demanded in various international treaties and conventions" (Dahlerup 2007, 142). In rare instances, there could be gender neutral quotas (such as exists in some of the Scandinavian countries) that often dictate, for example, that neither gender can surpass 60 percent of the given body, thus ensuring an equitable representation of both genders. Most recently, we have begun to see quotas used as fast-tracks to women's political representation, especially in transition countries, intended to speed up the process of women's integration in the political process.

One challenge with the quota systems is the notion of token and proxy women. Dahlerup indicates that in certain parts of India, women who had won elections through the quota system were labeled 'proxy' women "because they could be placed in the local council as stand-ins for their husbands, who might even participate in the meetings in their place" (149). We have witnessed similar scenarios in the recent elections in Egypt. In the

parliamentary elections, several women candidates either used roses or even the face of their husbands in lieu of their own faces on campaign posters. "In other parts of the world as well, women in politics, especially those elected through quotas, might be seen as 'token women'. Research on 'quota' women has revealed many cases of purely symbolic representation of women, especially if the women elected have no power base in a constituency of their own, or in the parties or in strong movements outside the political institutions" (Dahlerup 2007, 149). Many of the women elected in Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt recently were chosen based on their party affiliation and often actual familial relationship to men in power. Ironically though, this type of representation does not result necessarily from a quota system. The women[24] who have entered parliament or cabinet in Lebanon have almost exclusively been elected based on their affiliation to men in power.

Women politicians are accused of being more loyal to their party than to women, but that is the case with men of those parties as well. Women are also accused of entering politics through their families, which once again is also often true of men. This is reflective of Lebanon where the majority of men in parliament, cabinet, or other governing bodies belong to political families, which have often inherited their power and wealth. However, women with skills and qualifications do also enter parliament and not only those who've inherited office. Additionally, those whose entry was a result of kin or political ties do have the capacity to gain skills and experience through training and networking. Karam and Lovenduski (2007) argue against the idea that few women MPs in parliament means they will likely surrogate men, enacting male practices in order to be accepted. Instead, they assert that even one woman's presence in parliament disrupts the gender dynamic and leads to men behaving differently than if women were not present. Even a small number of women can create important shifts. This notion has been contested by other researchers who have witnessed the ease with which one or two women in a large parliament can be dismissed. Thus, many have argued for the critical mass perspective of the 30% quota, which has been supported by the Beijing Platform of Action, to ensure a large enough membership to allow cross-party collaborations and acting as a voting bloc.

In 2005, fifty countries had official electoral quotas and fifty others had voluntary quotas. This has resulted in dramatic change across the globe. The most significant successes in the growth of women's political participation on multiple levels have been witnessed in the Scandinavian countries. Their experiences point to the very real possibility of a slow and steady transformative process. It also speaks to the idea that a quota by itself will not likely create miracles. Given the obstacles and factors affecting women's participation extensively discussed above, it is clear that while a quota may bring some women to Parliament or arm-wrestle political parties into bringing about women candidates, it will take a lot more than these temporary measures to ensure that women enjoy their political rights consistently and to the fullest.

One cannot deal with the problem of female representation by a quota system alone. Political parties, the educational system, NGOs, trade unions, churches—all must take responsibility within their own organizations to systematically promote women's participation, from the bottom up. This will take time. It will not happen overnight, or in one year or five years; it will take one or two generations to realize

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[24] They were referred to as the women in black due to them entering parliament after the death of their male relatives.

significant change. This is what we are working on in Sweden. We did not start with a quota system. First we laid the groundwork to facilitate women's entry into politics. We prepared the women to ensure they were competent to enter the field; and we prepared the system, which made it a little less shameful for men to step aside. Then we used quotas as an instrument in segments and institutions where we needed a breakthrough. *Birgitta Dahl, former Speaker of Parliament, Sweden* (Dahlerup 2007, 143).

Quotas may or may not be enforced, depending on the political interests and the kinds of governing structure that exists. In the recent elections in Algeria, the president and his ruling party thought it useful to encourage women voters and candidates and pushed for the quota, though it appears to have not been fully applied by the parties. A quota for candidates may not mean that women definitively enter parliament, as there often are other ways to easily exclude women by listing them on the bottom of an election list or allowing for multi-list selections. This affected election results in Egypt, where women candidates were often relegated to the bottom of the list.

For quotas to be more likely to succeed in promoting women's participation in politics, Dahlerup argues that "the type of quota system needs to be compatible with the electoral system in use," and that there have to be "rules about the ranking order of the candidates, or placement mandates" (151). Additionally, repercussions for non-compliance, such as sanctions or penalties, are essential. "Appropriate authority must be given to the implementation agency, such as the electoral management body, to reject candidate lists that do not comply with the requirements. In the case of voluntary party quotas, a high-level organ within political parties should be tasked with ensuring compliance" (Dahlerup 2007, 151). I would add that ensuring more transparency, an independent and functioning judiciary, and decreased corruption would also be essential for a quota system to work. Long lasting change requires multiple efforts, including media campaigns, promotion of women's credibility as viable candidates, financial resources, capacity building, in addition to a well-defined electoral system and democratic praxis (Walsh 2012).

While evaluations of initial effectiveness tend to look at the results of elections and the quantity and quality of the elected women, those interested in longer-term effectiveness must also take into consideration what happens after women enter parliament. These women enter a male dominated, traditionally masculine institution, with little to no critical analysis of what this means in practice. "The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables that vary from country to country. These include the economic and political context in which the assembly functions, the background, experience and number of the women who are in parliament, and the rules of the parliamentary process" (Karam & Lovenduski 2007, 188).

Case Studies

Iraq: Ruptures and Corruption

While women's organizing has a long history in Iraq, dating to the early part of the 20th century[25], the Iraq-Iran war, the economic sanctions, and the first Gulf war (1990/91) led to an almost total decimation of this vibrant movement. Initially women's groups formed by elite women and wives of politicians created the Women's Awakening movement in the 1920s and 30s with a focus on education and social issues. Among other achievements, this led to the creation of the first women's college in the 1930s (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2008, 2009) and several charitable organizations targeting poverty, disease, and illiteracy. Slowly, more political and feminist collectives began forming in the 1940s and 50s. "The Iraqi Women's Union, founded in 1945, was the most important feminist organization at the time" (Al-Ali & Pratt 2009, 24). The Iraqi Women's League, linked to the Iraqi Communist Party in the 1950s, demanded political and legal reforms, fought alongside men against the British, and organized to modernize the country. The League played an important role in the post-revolutionary era in both reform and modernization. These efforts led to the landmark passage of a unified personal status code in 1959 that was among the most radical in the region at the time.

The situation began to change with the one party system under Saddam's rule. All efforts in essence were channeled through the General Federation of Iraqi Women affiliated with the Ba'ath party. However, the early years were advantageous to women on many counts in large part due to the economic boom and state policies. The 1970s and early 80s "were the years of a flourishing economy and the emergence and expansion of a broad middle class. State-induced policies worked to eradicate illiteracy, educate women, and incorporate them into the labor force" (Al-Ali & Pratt 2009, 31). However, repression began growing as the regime sought to consolidate its power through active indoctrination and suppression of diversity. The advent of the Iran-Iraq war followed by years of sanctions, and the first Gulf war intensified repression weakened women's rights; several women leaders went into in exile. While women in the Kurdish region in the north were able to begin organizing in 1991, the rest of Iraqi women were only able to establish independent organizations after 2003 with the downfall of Saddam Hussein. At this time, there was a rush to create NGOs and associations, many with support or blessing from the US and other occupying forces; many of these groups no longer exist either due to lack of funding, skills/capacity, or genuine interest[26]. However, women's organizations formed with a genuine interest in changing society and addressing violations against women's rights had little to no resources and often a paucity of experience. Funding followed from various international sources, namely the US[27], which had its own set of problems that groups were

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[25] Women's organizing in Iraq actually dates much longer than that if one takes into account the various civilizations that constitute the rich history of Iraq. However, here I refer to the more recent women's organizing in modern-recognized forms such as organizations or associations.

[26] Many may have been attracted to the idea of creating organizations due to the financial rewards associated with that in the early phase of the US occupation. Others may have had a genuine interest but had little by way of skills and capacity to persevere faced with numerous challenges.

[27] In March 2004, the US announced the $10 Million Women's Democracy Initiative that provided grants to groups to work on democracy education, leadership training, and political participation as well as several capacity building programs. These Funds were awarded to seven US based organizations including neo-conservative groups with agendas not favorable for women's rights.

forced to address[28]. Funding trends were marred often by orientalist ideas about Iraqi women and assumed very paternalistic attitudes. US funding supported organizations, in the US implementing programs in Iraq and directly in Iraq, with anti-feminist and often regressive perspectives on women's roles (Mojab 2007). Additionally, Mojab argues, US development and donor agencies focused on cultural and religious challenges to women's rights and avoided very important structural, economic, and political obstacles given that they as promoters of capitalist and neoliberal economic policies and as occupiers were complicit in such obstacles. Funders wanting to show impact supported building centers, which women activists felt exposed them to additional dangers by being so public (Al-Ali & Pratt 2008). "Several women activists, who, in 2004, took part enthusiastically in workshops and campaigns to promote voter education, since feel bitter or frustrated by US attempts to promote democracy in Iraq according to a short timetable" (Al-Ali & Pratt 2008, 78).

Women's groups worked on practical issues and needs arising from the context of war and violence and also considered strategic and long term goals for change around women's rights. There were protests against the interim government Decree 137 that would implement Shari'a laws. This lead to an immediate coalescing in defense of women's rights and was an impetus for advocating for a 40% quota in parliamentary representation. Over the past ten years, women's rights activists and organizations have campaigned "(1) against attempts to replace the relatively progressive personal status law governing marriage, divorce and child custody with a more conservative law (Decree 137 and Article 41 of the new constitution, ratified in 2005 but under review); (2) to include a women's quota of elected representatives in central, regional and local government; (3) against Islamist encroachment by political parties and militias; (4) to limit the constitutional role of Islam to include constitutional guarantees that legislation complies with international conventions, including CEDAW; and (5) against the targeted assassinations of professional women and women rights activists. In terms of 'practical' interests, Iraqi women's groups have organized training for women in vocational skills and income-generation activities, from bee-keeping to tailoring, as well as providing healthcare services, such as mobile clinics, and humanitarian relief to women and their families" (Al-Ali & Pratt 2008, 76).

As is clear from the list above, the context for women's rights is difficult. The occupying forces emboldened tribal and religious leadership, thus implicitly supporting their social and moral agendas that strongly discriminate against women. A major obstacle to the ability of women to organize and create change is the increasing violence and lawlessness in the country. This has led to increased rates of violence of all forms, including sexual harassment, rape, abductions, sex-trafficking, and murders. "Regarded as bearers of the moral purity of their families and even their communities, women's experience of violence and the threat of violence differentiates them from men. Women are afraid to travel to seek healthcare, education, to work or even to leave the house to do shopping, let alone to participate in public activism" (Al-Ali & Pratt 2008, 80). Risks to activists double particularly as they become actors in the public sphere and when they speak up about policies or practices that challenge Islamist views. In doing so, they become targets,

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[28] Those included donor driven agendas, assumptions and stereotypes about Muslim women, and lack of knowledge of the history of Iraq among others. Additionally these funds were less than a drop in the bucket of spending on military and political support that was enabling tribal and religious leadership working counter productively to women's rights and democracy.

branded as western, or affiliated with Saddam's supposed secular regime. Women activists receive threats, which may force them to leave the country, while others have been assassinated by armed groups, including Islamist militias. UN agencies continue to operate from behind the walls, so to speak, making it also harder to implement programs and reach grassroots women.

Against this backdrop of a rise in Islamist and tribal power brokers, increased violence and lawlessness, the implementation of the quota system has faltered. While the numbers are mostly being met, the effectiveness of a quota system in such a corrupt and violent context is actually being undermined. Not all of the parties are implementing the 25% quota in their candidates list, nor are they selecting qualified women, or positioning them in winnable positions on the lists. The only exception is the Kurdistan Islamic Union who actually has implemented a 25% rating of women in all leadership positions. The party has seen it important to ensure women occupy important positions, understanding and calculating the important role that women can play in mobilizing female support by being able to visit homes and talk to women[29]. Overall the Kurdish parties are performing better, which is reflected in the fact that the Kurdistan regional parliament does have 30% women MPs. Additionally, women who are members of religious political parties appear to be more likely to win with support from their parties (Allam, 2010). Women who want to run independently face greater challenges.

The majority of female MPs, the Kurdish ones sometimes included, have been selected from relatives of high level members of prominent political parties, which in turn affects their conduct in parliament. Several interviewees indicated that many of the women are not politicians. While few are motivated by significant issues affecting the country, a good number are invested in issues of culture and cuisine. Additionally women MPs are still facing exclusion and discrimination inside the parliament itself. They are sometimes excluded from important meetings and committees (Schmidt, 2011). Recently for example, they were excluded from protracted negotiations around forming a government. Even more recently, they protested their exclusion from the Independent High Electoral Commission deliberating election laws and overseeing elections. This is not to dismiss the importance of the quota system or the tremendous efforts from local women's rights organizations and international agencies in support of women's political participation (candidate training, parliament capacity building, etc.) and women's rights in general. In fact, women are beginning to organize more actively inside Parliament around for example UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other issues to have a unified voice across party lines. The recent passage, in December 2012, of a law expanding the quota for women into other public sector institutions, with 50% employment in the Ministry of Education and Health and 30% of all other Ministries, is positive. However, the current political and security context, one that continues to be upheld and supported by the US in particular and the 'Coalition of the Willing', makes the possibilities of transformative change that much more difficult.

Yemen: The Open Wound

Women's political participation also has a long history in Yemen, especially if we consider the ancient queens that governed pre-Islam and during the early period of Islam. However,

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[29] Through interviews with activists.

these important stories often recall a rather distant past that has little connection to modern day realities of millions of Yemeni women. Like their sisters elsewhere in the Arab world, but much earlier than in the other Gulf countries, Yemeni women also began to create and form associations in the 1940s and 50s. They joined civil society through charitable and national organizations to provide services and support change.

Today, women's participation in labor and trade unions is small; their participation in the overall workforce does not exceed 23% (2003). As of 2003, they made up only 15% of leadership positions in labor unions (Mashhur 2003, p. 39). According to data of 2000, women constituted between 5% to 14% of the higher governing bodies of various political parties (most popular in terms of membership) with the socialist party (remnants of South Yemen) holding the highest percentage (Mashhur, 2003). A study released in 2010 by the Aswan Centre for Social and Legal Studies and Researches in Sana'a highlights the decline in participation of women in the political process, as candidates, elected officials, voters, and members of political parties. In addition to cultural and structural barriers, the study highlights the lack of trust in political parties indicating that "17.7% [of women polled in the study] believe that the parties view women's issues mainly as propaganda tools" (Al Qadhi 2010). This mistrust is a direct reflection of the previous elections where women felt they were being exploited to generate more votes rather than truly address women's concerns. The study found that "only 18.7 percent of the key positions among the four parties currently represented in parliament are held by women" (Al Qadhi 2010). Recently, newly formed parties, including one founded and headed by a woman-the Arab Spring Party[30]-appear to be encouraging women's membership and leadership (Al-Ariqi 2012). However, it remains to be seen whether this 'talk' will yield effective participation and representation in the coming elections for various representative bodies in 2013 and 2014.

While women felt deeply disappointed by the elections of 2003, believing correctly that they had been cheated and used by the political parties. Yet they persevered in women's organizations and through writings urging real change. Many saw the political structure as deeply flawed and in some cases irredeemable[31]. They were eager to join the ranks of the revolution as soon as it started. The "political establishment and system of rule were seen to contribute to the economic, social and security problems affecting women in their daily lives" (Shakir et al 2012, i). "Thousands of women have actively participated in the revolution as protesters, leaders, volunteers, and supporters" (Alwazir, 2012b). In participating in the activities at Change Square, many women began more actively to transgress taboos in a society that has been deemed deeply conservative. Interviews with women in Yemen but Saferworld staff demonstrated that most were proud of the contribution they made and worried about the prospect of exclusion as the national dialogue goes forward. "Women from all over Yemen and from all backgrounds overcame high social barriers in order to protest and demand a better life; many will no longer be content to let a small clique of people (women or men) speak on their behalf" (Shakir, Marzouk & Haddad 2012, ii). Alwazir cautions that "while some very basic cultural taboos have been challenged or questioned, none of the major cultural practices that stand in the way of women's rights were addressed" (Alwazir 2012c). While some have come to accept

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[30] http://nationalyemen.com/2011/12/04/yemeni-youth-form-arab-spring-party/
[31] Check writings of female bloggers and newspaper commentators such as Arwa Othman, Atiaf Alwazir, Bushra Al-Maqtari

women's political participation, the majority may still see it as an exception in troubled times or may find a need to justify support for female leadership by masculinizing it, again making it an exception. When former president Saleh criticized his opponents by claiming that they had dishonored their culture, he was relying on accepted masculine rhetoric that connects honor to women's bodies, in this particular case the presence of those bodies next to men in the square.

Women have been targeted, harassed, threatened with violence, and often tarnished through *ad hominem* attacks on their reputations (slander), instead of their arguments. Those strategies have been deployed for years against outspoken women's rights activists, journalists, and novelists. In the context of the revolution, they were redeployed for political gains. "Slander, as a means of deterring women from protesting, was a common tool used during the protests and women discuss it on the same level as physical violence" (Shakir, Marzouk & Haddad 2012, 6). In ways similar to feeling betrayed and exploited discussed above in terms of the elections, women also expressed their dismay at the behavior of particular political parties (namely the Islamic party, Islah) which seemed to promote women's participation, namely through the figure of Nobel Laureate, Tawwakul Karman, but then threaten and attack women to push them out of change square. This latter was seen as an attempt to take full control of Change Square and silence dissenting voices. The main obstacles to women's participation in politics and the enjoyment of political rights continue to be the same in the 'post-revolution' era. In some instances, the economic situation seems to have worsened with increased fighting and internal displacement. Rates of illiteracy continue to be high, particularly in rural areas, as well as poverty and unemployment. The domination of the political old guard has meant further exclusion of women. On the other hand, the GCC Initiative does dictate that women should play an active role in the process. Women already represent 25% of both the Communication or Outreach Committee and the Preparatory Committee of the National Dialogue Conference (Al-Sakkaf 2012).

Saferworld's 2012 report indicates that women raised the issues of livelihood and security as among the most important concerns they face. Additionally, women in rural and mountainous areas are largely isolated, and their mobility is severely curtailed. Many commentators have noted the significant role that tribalism plays in Yemen and its interplay with political parties that are often an extension of these tribes. Mashhur argues that "experience has shown that legislation is not enough when it comes to improving the role of women in the political process" (2005, 26). Additionally, women are seeing how they are being actively written out of negotiations, national dialogues, and almost all processes of political change brokered by the GCC (Jaafar 2013). The old guard have taken center stage again even with Saleh technically out of power. The National Committee for dialogue is getting more coopted with the new president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, focusing on the inner political elite and ignoring women and youth (Alwazir 2012). Some of the women active in the revolution sometimes see themselves as part of the youth movement and less of the women's movement. Tawwkul Karman, for example, saw herself as less concerned with women's rights as such and more with issues of democracy and political participation. They are engaging less with the older women's rights activists, of whom they are more suspicious due to generational conflicts (gate-keepers, patronizing, etc…). However as they organize sometimes using social media tools like blogging to create campaigns and programs for change working on a diversity of issues in their communities, they also face obstacles and challenges based on their gender and begin slowly to connect the various

issues they face. The degree to which these women can sustain their political activity and develop their skills will strongly depend on the outcome of the political process and whether it will continue to consolidate tribal and old rivalries or signal some real democratic shifts in the country.

Egypt: The Revolution Continues

The history of women's organizing in Egypt is probably the most researched and documented in the region. In part, this is due to the centrality of Egypt in the Arab national consciousness, particularly during the Arab nationalism era and liberation struggles. This regional significance is duplicated on some level today, as most look to Egypt and the political process there as indicators of the new trends in the region. The women's movement in Egypt grew and transformed with the changing political and social landscape surrounding it. From the late 1800s to 1923, the women's movement began developing a feminist consciousness, expanding the domain of women's public space, and calling for women's education. It was also a time when women partook in the revolt of 1919 against British colonial rule. Women began writing and creating journals to discuss their needs and eventually formed organizations like New Woman Society to address literacy, education, employment, access to public sphere, and health. The Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) started in 1923, articulating strong feminist ideas including political rights, changes in personal status laws, and equal access to education, professional, and commercial establishments. The 1940s and 50s witnessed the growth of women's organizations with diverse political visions but similar aspirations in terms of women's rights.

Women gained the right to vote and run for office in 1956, but only after a struggle and a hunger strike lead by Doria Shafiq in 1954, demanding full citizenship for women from the leadership of the Free Officers Revolution (1952). Two female candidates entered the Parliament in 1957. However, the Union was dissolved and Law 384 was issued, establishing government control over all civil society institutions. "Independent women's organizations and societies were replaced by state-run organizations that monopolized all political activism and minimized the role of independent civil society" (Elsadda 2011, 89). Women's organizing continued to take different forms after that. Women enjoyed more access to political and economic rights, even if in some cases nominally. However, Elsadda argues that, "although gaining equal rights in the public sphere, women remained subservient to male authority in the private sphere, as the PSL [personal status laws] that regulated their position within the family were left intact" (Elsadda 2011, 4).

Efforts to change these laws and redefine women's role has been engaged women's rights activism since the early 20th century. From within state structures, newspapers, universities, and associations, women continued to demand legal reform throughout Nasser and Sadat's regimes, with some reforms enacted in 1979 and then in 1985. The 1980s witnessed the growth of several new generation women's organizations also invested in changing these laws. The 1990s brought about more organizing with the ICPD process and the Beijing conference. Under Mubarak, the ability to politically organize continued to be strongly curtailed. Independent organizations, women's rights groups, and other civil society groups, faced legal and political challenges particularly when presenting viewpoints supportive of democracy and pluralism, against inheritance of the presidency, and in general were outspoken critics of the regime's corruption.

The Mubarak regime passed laws restricting the work of NGOs and their ability to receive foreign funding and implement their programs. Through the national women's state machinery, it attempted to coopt all efforts on women's rights (as in other areas as well) and most funding. It received financial support from USAID and other funding sources, which then got distributed, or regranted to local groups and community-based organizations deemed partners, in effect consolidating and reinforcing the power of the state and promoting corruption[32].

While women's groups organized and rallied and feminist academics researched and wrote, the political process in Egypt dictated particular possibilities for legal reform. "Despite the consciousness-raising campaign enthusiastically embraced by women activists, and despite the work that was put into conceptualizing and formulating projects for legal reform, the outcome was still determined by the endorsement of the First Lady as she exercised her political leverage and power" (Elsadda 2011, 92-93). This trend along with statements by female parliamentarians of the Muslim brotherhood cast some doubt on the idea that women parliamentarians always represent the interests of women. MP Azza al-Jurf[33], of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, has been very vocal about her opposition to laws prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation, sexual harassment, and other kinds of violence and her approval of removing the nationality and divorce laws that passed during Mubarak's rule. In addition, the Muslim Brotherhood recently issued a ten-point document[34] disparaging CEDAW and the recent meeting of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) that took place in February/March 2013. The document calls CEDAW a 'decadent and misleading' and its passing would lead to the destruction of society. The Muslim Brotherhood thus rejects all areas in the document that foster equality and realize women's human inalienable rights on the grounds that this is un-Islamic. In a unilateral move, Morsi, the president of Egypt, informed the National Council of Women that it will not be officially representing Egypt at the CSW. Instead, Pakinam el-Sharqawi, Morsi's aid and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, delivered the speech[35] which only highlighted praise to the Egypt's new constitution. It is a cautionary tale that requires close attention in the coming years in the region as Islamists and Salafis gain government control via democratic elections. It is important to find mechanisms to ensure that the democratic process extends beyond the simple notion of majority rule, and that governments continue to adhere to and respect the international treaties they have signed.

One of the main obstacles identified by Elsadda and others is the fact that Islamists had begun a campaign of associating important legal gains, such as family law and penal code reforms specifically the Khul'a or divorce law and forbidding female genital mutilation among others, with the "First Lady" and the old regime, thus discrediting them and the efforts of the women's movement. This accusation was also evident in the insults hurled at women protesting in Tahrir Square in observance of International Women's Day on March

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[32] The challenges of funding trends and their impact on the nature of development and human rights work in Egypt is significant and has had important implications on political work and processes of change. It is a large field that has been researched and written about but is beyond the limited confines of this paper.

[33] Check Azza's facebook page https://www.facebook.com/Azza.ElGarf, along with the many articles in the media where her ideas are articulated http://nwrcegypt.org/?p=7040, http://rt.com/news/gloom-future-egypt-women-284/.

[34] Text of the document on the Muslim Brotherhood website: http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=30731

[35] http://www.awid.org/News-Analysis/CSW-Special-Focus3/News/Egypt-s-Brotherhood-blasts-UN-women-s-document

8th, 2011, shortly after Mubarak had fallen. The day could be described as an omen of what was to come in terms of the levels of violence and sexual harassment that Egyptian women, and particularly those present in the public sphere, are now subject to on a daily basis. While the issue of sexual harassment is not new in Egypt and had just begun to be publicly exposed and addressed by women's rights organizations on the eve of the revolution, the level and intensity of the attacks seem to posit a marked shift.

On the one hand, sexual harassment has been a daily occurrence in Egyptian women's lives in the public realm (streets, workplace, and public transportation). This is not say that it does not happen in the domestic or private realm—it does, however, it often takes distinct forms in domestic spaces, most notably physical violence, sexual molestation, and rape, and is often perpetrated by men familiar to the women or girl (a member of the family or a neighbor). Additionally, practices like those recently documented in which women are singled out by a mob of men groping and molesting occurred in the past where mob action, like sports stadium and even mulids, was commonplace. On the other hand, the extent and style of the most recent acts of mob violence, and its perpetration in broad daylight in front of cameras and onlookers, is of another level. There are obviously elements of organized crime and thuggish practices in these acts. However, a major feature of this violence is its public-ness, an indication of a lack of fear of society's response/reaction or of any judicial or police intervention. I would argue that the level of impunity that the army and police have received despite the atrocious crimes they have committed by sexually harassing and raping women[36] in custody has sent a message that this behavior is acceptable, that women's bodies are the property of men, and that religious and political discourse could justify these acts.

The percentage of women in office has historically been low in Egypt. In 1978, a short lived quota system for women (reserved 30 seats) was initiated and led to the winning of 35 seats for women and 36 seats in 1984. The numbers dropped to 17 in the 1987 elections after the quota law was abolished in 1986 on grounds not connected to women (Nazra 2012, El Sayed 2007). "In June 2009, the People's Assembly law was amended to add 64 seats for women using a quota system, after which female members of the National Democratic Party (NDP) won 46 seats in the first round of the 2010 elections (100 percent of seats in the first round) and 54 out of 64 seats in the run-offs" (Nazra 2012, 3). The major critique of the quota system was in its implementation in a non-democratic system that led to the majority win of the ruling party (Mubarak's). "A flawed quota system was applied in the 2010 elections whereby new seats were added to the parliament instead of setting aside already existing seats for women, a move that raised questions about the state's seriousness about reducing male dominance in Egyptian politics. Under the quota, women competed for seats on a governorate-wide level, with the exception of four governorates, making it difficult for women without substantial financial resources and who did not belong to the NDP to run efficient campaigns in a governorate" (Nazra 2012, 3).

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[36] Though the media has referred to these crimes as 'virginity tests', I believe it is important to name them by what they really are. The banning of the so-called 'virginity tests' as a result of the massive outcry and demonstrations by women is an important accomplishment. However, there is no real evidence that this ban is in effect, no one has been tried or punished, and all this work has been at the expense of the women themselves who continue to suffer.

Additionally, there were concerns about vote rigging and intimidation tactics used in those elections[37].

Intimidation tactics were also evident during the parliamentary election and presidential elections in 2011/2012. While most of the Western world decided to award a clean bill to the Egyptian parliamentary election of 2011/2012, several NGOs issues local daily reports[38] from the field listing a large number of violations, including a strong presence of Salafi and Muslim brotherhood women intimidating and 'guiding' (via mild threats about God's wrath) other women. Perhaps there was political desire from the world to indicate a marked shift from the Mubarak regime's elections; however, previously deployed tactics and strategies, even if used by different actors, become practices and learned behaviors that don't end automatically with regime change alone.

Prior to election-day, women's participation in campaigning and party strategies was largely lacking. There were a large number of women who ran for office, some of whom had previous experience but many who had none. Their location on electoral lists generated a debate within the political party, as discussed below. Nazra for Feminist Studies, a feminist organization established by a group of young feminists in 2008 working to advance a feminist movement, began a Political Academy for Mentoring of Women Candidates[39], working with 16 female candidates from various political parties (excluding former or current NDP and Islamist parties who are more skilled and resourced) and across eight governorates. This was an innovative approach (which should be duplicated) for a long term, sustained, and effective impact on the ground, not only for the women themselves but also for their political parties and constituencies. "It is a strategy to work with candidates and their teams closely, where it doesn't suffice to train them but also to mentor them on their grounds during campaigning to analyze their strengths, weaknesses, risks and opportunities, starting by analyzing her constituency to see her needs during election campaign. This is done for each candidate individually in order to support her on the legal, political, and psychological level. And also providing the same support for their election campaign team" (Nazra 2012, 5). The current electoral law did not allow for the previous quota decree for women, but kept the 50 percent quota for workers and farmers. The legal requirement was basically only to include at least one woman on each list. Nazra indicates that the combined list-individual system, the large electoral districts, and the lack of a requirement concerning women's location on the list have made it harder for women to win. Given that the electoral law only stated that one woman candidate should be included in the lists, most parties placed the women's name at the bottom of the list. Additionally, women candidates of salafi and conservative parties did not include their photographs in the campaign posters, but instead either used a rose or in some cases the photos of their husbands. This decreases constituencies' recognition of the candidates and sends a message that there is something essentially wrong with showing women or women's faces. Due to the large number of districts, the small number of members per district, and the proportionality election process, the location of women's names on the list will strongly determine the likelihood of their win. "In smaller districts if a female candidate is not in the top two positions, she will stand little to no change of winning" (IFES 2011, 10).

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[37] See reports by NGOs monitoring elections, including Nazra for Feminist Studies: www.nazra.org and The Egyptian Association for Community Participation Enhancement at www.en.mosharka.org.

[38] http://www.mosharka.org/index.php?do=cat&category=parliamentary_elections

[39] http://nazra.org/programs/women-political-participation-academy-program

Another election is coming up for Egypt while civil unrest continues. The Muslim Brotherhood government and the presidency of Morsy have been criticized for failing to address the increased violence on the streets and the unilateral decisions around the constitution. There are debates focused on electoral lists and the position of women's names on those lists. Egypt clearly reflects the significant challenges around women's true participation in the political sphere. Government apparatuses, political parties, and international agencies declaring their interest in enhancing women's political participation have to take serious measures to ensure sustained change. For one, a serious process of accountability for those who violate women's human rights needs to take place. Women, as other citizens, have a right to access the public space without being harassed or sexually assaulted. It is important that women feel safe and protected. However, this protection cannot consist of reinforcing gender roles by the state; that is, the state must prosecute offenders (including police and other state officials), provide safety measures on the streets (including police training and hotlines), and demonstrate that it truly sees this as a serious issue through media campaigns. But most importantly, it cannot ask women to stay indoors, relegating them to the domestic sphere, under the pretext of protection.

The domestic sphere is not a *safe* space for women either, and measures are needed to ensure women's rights are not violated in the home. These can include passing the draft law for the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence prepared and submitted by Al-Nadeem Center[40]. For another, political parties have to be serious about women's representation and participation. The goal cannot be simply to ensure their win through mobilizing more female support and thus working with women in the party to do so. Political parties have to truly believe that there is a serious problem resulting from "the absence of women from the political scene and the lack of an adequate space to allow them to develop themselves politically[41]". There has to be a sense of true partnership within all spheres of life that political parties aspire for and want to implement. While many use the discourse of women's participation to increase voters' support, most do not actively walk the talk and push for major changes in their political processes and projects to achieve this full partnership and participation. "Political parties can then begin to really see the large representation of active women among their ranks and work, provide them with that space, and support their capacities and empowerment to then truly change the societal image that women are not good for politics and citizens will not elect women to govern them[42]". Political parties can mobilize women by going door to door and drafting their program from the concerns of everyday women. They can include in all of their written material (website, brochures, programs, pamphlets, etc…) an agenda on women's rights with clear goals and strategies. They can begin to address women and men in their speech, making use of the malleability of the Arabic language in this regard. Additionally, political parties can scan their rank and file membership and see where the unrecognized talents and invisible women are and appoint them to committees and executive posts. Political parties can also organize capacity building trainings and support the growth of skills among female leaders. Particularly, given the current violent challenges facing women in the streets of Cairo, political parties need to act more responsibly and ensure safety measures when they call out for demonstrations or other kinds of political activities. Finally, political parties can

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[40] https://alnadeem.org/ar.

[41] Quote from a feminist political activist from Egypt through private correspondence with me.

[42] Ibid.

take it upon themselves to reorganize their structures and processes to include women, by implementing a quota at levels of the organization and ensuring discussion and debate spaces within the party welcome and encourage women's voices.

<u>Morocco: A Candle of Hope Still Flickers</u>

Women's activism in Morocco also is not recent. Like their sisters in other countries, Moroccan women contributed to the struggle against colonization and fought for women's rights. Moroccan women activists have been the leaders in transforming family laws (passage of the new moudawana in 2004) in the modern era. On some level, this struggle dates back to the 1940s when Akhawat Al-Safa (Sisters of Purity) Association issued a document with a number of legal demands, including abolishing polygamy and increasing access to public space. Several explicitly political women's organizations were created in the 1960s, while more feminists were writing and researching women's issues and their public participation in society in the 1970s and 80s. In addition, leftist political parties took up women's rights and equality in the law, while some created women's sections (Zaatari 2010). Two important organizations played a significant role in advocating for change of the family law: the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) and the Female Action Union (UAF).

The Personal Status Code of 1957 was discriminatory against women, including defining women as minors in need of guardianship, a rallying point for women politically (Sadiqi & Ennaji 2006). Groups began campaigning to change the law since the 1990s, with UAF launching a million-signature campaign to demand reform. In 1993, Hassan II announced a few changes to the law providing women with more rights, such as the right for a woman to appoint her own legal guardian. When a socialist government came to power in 1998, women's groups saw an important opportunity to build more alliances and established two large networks to advocate for the Plan for Integrating Women in Development (PANIFD) established by the government in 1999 and coalition building and mobilizing unions, and other non-usual 'suspects' (Zaatari 2010). The Rabat march of 2000 in support of women's rights was a landmark event even though it was challenged by a large march led by Islamists groups in Casablanca.

Activists decided to create a new coalition in 2001 called the *Printemps d'Egalité*, the Spring of Equality, to work more closely advocating for a serious reform of the family law, given the receptivity of the new King, Mohammad VI, to these ideas following a meeting with 40 women activists. "A key player in the Spring of Equality coalition, ADFM utilized diverse mobilization techniques including a May 1st demonstration in which women brandished kitchenware to honor all women working in the home and their unrecognized work, a sit-in at the parliament on March 8th, 2002, and other sit-ins in front of courts, and also transforming the communication strategies" (Zaatari 2010). The coalition with only nine women's groups initially drafted a proposed law reform, articulating arguments for each clause from the Constitution, Shari'a, and International Conventions and submitted it to the King, who in turn created a Commission of Scholars, including non-religious figures and three women for the first time, to reform the Mudawana.

The *Printemps d'Egalité* kept up the pressure for change through events, advocacy, conferences, and writings. Between 2001 and 2004, the Commission held open hearings and met with over 80 women's organizations to receive feedback and suggestions. Finally, in

February 2004, the legislation to reform the Mudawana, the Family Code, was passed unanimously in parliament and included many improvements for women's rights. "The most spectacular impact of the Moroccan feminist movement resides in its gradual feminization and, hence, democratization of the public sphere" (Sadiqi & Ennaji 2006, 87). Not only are women visible in the public space, but the struggle to ensure the passing of this law had rendered women's rights and family law topics of public debate and conversation. The process of coalition-building and networking with unions, political parties, and human rights associations, as well as the active campaigning through media and public protests, had in essence meant that everybody in the country was talking about and discussing these issues. This large mobilization effort is significantly different than Egypt (until recently, perhaps), Yemen, and Iraq. These years of struggle and networking have also resulted in pushing the agenda further in other arenas of women's rights, including gender budgeting (of which Morocco is a leader in the region), rural reform, literacy, land inheritance, single mothers, and political participation.

While political change affected other countries in the region, in Morocco, the King launched a series of reforms including a constitutional reform process. This more peaceful process, compared to Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya, resulted in one of the most progressive constitutions in the region on multiple accounts. Feminist organizations regionally have been gleaning lessons from this process and the important role that the Moroccan Women's Movement played in achieving such results. The hope lies in the ability of this constitution to withstand the onslaught of the recent election results, which brought Islamists to power, and the process of drafting legal codes derived from the constitution, which can be treacherous given who dominates the parliament.

ADFM along with a dozen other Moroccan NGOs were invited by the Consultative Commission for the Revision of the Constitution to submit its propositions for reform. On March 16, 2011, a new coalition titled Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality[43] was founded by several women's organizations to ensure the constitutionalization of full and actual equality between men and women in civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights and began mobilizing and strategizing to present propositions of reform and to advocate for their adoption. The new constitution did take into consideration many of the long term demands and suggestions by the feminist movement including: "recognition of the primacy of international agreements over domestic laws, the entrenchment of equality between women and men in all rights, the prohibition of discrimination based on gender[44]". It also calls for "affirmative action and mechanisms to enact equality through the formation of the Authority for Equality and the Fight against all forms of Discrimination[45]" The preamble to the constitution has for the first time in the history of Morocco acknowledged the diversity of Moroccan identity (through ethnicity, religion, culture, etc.) and has affirmed the principles of liberty, human rights, and the obligations of citizenship. This draft constitution was then presented on July 1, 2012 through a national referendum and was approved by 98% of the voters, another significant landmark in the history of Morocco. Currently this Coalition is monitoring[46] all developments, statements, and legal processes by the current government regarding its adherence to the constitution and ratified

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[43] http://pfdemaroc.wordpress.com/
[44] Communication with ADFM members.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Example of statements on the discourse of the state: http://www.adfm.ma/spip.php?article3928&lang=ar

international treaties. The Spring of Dignity, another coalition of women's organizations advocating for a Penal Code to Protect Women from Discrimination and Violence, operating since 2008, has also been monitoring the state's progress in this regard and holding meeting with new government to present its demands.

The elections of 2011 brought 66 women to parliament, or 16.7%. Morocco's new government appointed only one female minister to lead the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, while the previous 2007 government had seven. Bassima Hakkaoui, the appointed minister has been a member of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), currently the largest Islamist party in Morocco, governing body for many years. She has already generated condemnations by the women's movement of her remarks on several issues. Hakkaoui absented from voting to remove section 475 of the penal code, which annulled any sentences should the rapist marry his victim[47]. She supported the reduction of marriage age of girls in certain circumstances (where the court can adjudicate) to sixteen. She also seems to have been reluctant to continue with the governmental program for equality as drafted in the constitution and eventually drafted a different program which groups are currently debating[48]. Finally, Hakkaoui spoke up[49] against the removal of the reservations on CEDAW, which the Moroccan government had agreed to in 2008. The struggle for women's political representation, however, has also been a long one. Errebah blames "the inadequate representation of women in local and legislative institutions … first and foremost [at] the lack of political will on the part of the political parties" (2007, 56). She explains that even as the number of candidates increased year after year, the number of women elected did not increase accordingly. In addition to the will of the political parties, Errebah also attributes these results to the overall discrimination against women in all other aspects of life and to the lack of incorporating women in other political institutions.

Debates for a women's quota began in the 1990s, and in 1996, a group of organizations advocated actively for a 20% quota, while in 2001, the demand focused on a 33% parliamentary quota (reserved seats) and for this quota to be effective in executive bodies of political parties and labor unions. The year 2002 marked a shift where parliament "approved a government draft law setting aside for women 30 seats on the national list" (Errebah 2007, 59). While most seats were to be selected through list voting in districts, 30 seats were set aside to be elected nationally. Political parties then agreed to a suggestion by women's groups to set those 30 seats elected nationally for women, which resulted in the election of 35 women to parliament (over 10%). The 2011 elections expanded the number of reserved seats for women to 60 (15%) and added 30 reserved seats for men under 40 to be elected nationally. This reserved seating and the reform of the electoral law from 2002 introducing a proportional list system were positive steps to support women's elections, while still falling under the 30% suggested by groups and CEDAW.

Conclusion

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[47] This law came to public attention when the sixteen years old Amina al-Filali committed suicide after being forced to marry her rapist. The issue generated a huge uproar and debates in Morocco in 2012.

[48] http://www.almaghrebiya.com/?p=6827, http://www.adfm.ma/spip.php?article3766&lang=ar

[49] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZTzgWhw32s

The barriers to full and meaningful political participation that women face in the MENA region are numerous, diverse, complex, and interrelated. While these obstacles vary by context, as demonstrated by the case studies presented in this paper, reflecting specific historical challenges and successes in Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, and Morocco, several general conclusions can be drawn.

Above all, ensuring women's full and meaningful political participation in countries across the region, especially those in the midst of deep and ongoing political transformations like those in MENA, depends on conceiving of democracy and political participation beyond tokenizing notions of political representation and simple mathematical equations. As this paper has shown, quantity is a vital factor and necessary measure to ensure that women are equal political actors in societies where women make up at least 50% of the population. However, the quality of political representation and participation are of equal or greater importance in measuring the fulfillment of women's political rights and quality of life. This paper has addressed the many and interconnected factors upon which the quality of women's participation equally depend: ending violence against women in both private and public life; legal reform and policy shifts that favor women's political, economic, and social independence; shifting attitudes and practices in both political institutions and society at large; supporting women's educational and employment opportunities; and challenging patriarchal norms perpetrated through any discourse, whether secular or religious, traditional or modernist.

Among the most popular of interventions over the past few decades has been the quota system, piloted in a number of different variations throughout the region and discussed in-depth in this paper. In seeking to address the need for quantitative increases in women's participation, quota systems have been moderately successful; however, where they have been successful at raising the number of women in political office, they have not adequately addressed issues related to the quality of women's political participation, nor are they sufficient for addressing the underlying social and economic causes of women's exclusion from political activity. Taking this into consideration, I suggest that efforts to ensure women's full and meaningful political participation in the MENA region, which should find support from international political bodies such as the United Nations, must include actions and programs to create meaningful change in the factors mentioned above, monitoring and accountability mechanisms to assess the development of governments towards clearly identified goals set along the lines of "No Democracy Without Women's Equality."

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