

The Journey to Empowerment: Evaluating Women's Political Progress through Jordan's Legislative Reforms

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Abstract

Objectives: This study explores the influence of the feminist movement and institutions on the empowerment of Jordanian women and their increased political participation, with focus on electoral legislation. It examines the strategies and policies advocated by Jordanian women's organizations to achieve their objectives, and assesses the effectiveness of the feminist movement in politicizing women's issues and securing their demands.

Methods: The study adopts a historical approach, by tracing the evolution of the Jordanian feminist movement and examining election laws through a legal lens to gauge their effect on women's political empowerment.

Results: The findings reveal that the feminist movement and related institutions have significantly influenced the amendment of various legislations, ensuring enhanced political and economic empowerment for women. These efforts have led to increased representation of women in parliamentary councils, facilitated by changes in the election law, including the provision for women's right to run for office and the allocation of quotas in Parliament.

Conclusions: The study concludes that the Jordanian women's movement has made considerable strides towards achieving equality and fostering political participation. Women's organizations have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights across social, economic, and political spheres. Since 2003, the implementation of quotas has been a driving force behind the progress in women's political participation, leading to a notable increase in women's representation in the House of Representatives. This success is attributed to effective lobbying for electoral law amendments and the strategic allocation of women's quotas.

Keywords: Women; Women's Movement; Women's Empowerment; Election Laws; Parliament.

الرحلة إلى التمكين: تقييم التقدم السياسي للمرأة من خلال الإصلاحات التشريعية في الأردن

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ملخص

الأهداف: تستكشف هذه الدراسة تأثير الحركة والمؤسسات النسوية على تمكين المرأة الأردنية وزيادة مشاركتها السياسية، مع التركيز على التشريعات الانتخابية. وتدرس الاستراتيجيات والسياسات التي نادى بها المنظمات النسوية الأردنية لتحقيق أهدافها، وتقيم مدى فعالية الحركة النسوية في تسييس قضايا المرأة وتأمين مطالبها.

المنهجية: اعتمدت الدراسة على المنهج التاريخي بتتبع تطور الحركة النسوية الأردنية وتفحص قوانين الانتخابات من خلال عدسة قانونية لقياس تأثيرها على التمكين السياسي للمرأة.

النتائج: كشفت النتائج أن الحركة النسوية والمؤسسات المرتبطة بها أثرت بشكل كبير في تعديل التشريعات المختلفة، مما ضمن تعزيز التمكين السياسي والاقتصادي للمرأة. وقد أدت هذه الجهود إلى زيادة تمثيل المرأة في المجالس البرلمانية، وهو ما سهّلته التغييرات في قانون الانتخابات، بما في ذلك النص على حق المرأة في الترشح للمناصب وتخصيص الحصص في مجلس النواب.

الخلاصة: خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الحركة النسوية الأردنية قطعت خطوات كبيرة نحو تحقيق المساواة وتعزيز المشاركة السياسية. ولعبت المنظمات النسائية دوراً فعالاً في الدفاع عن حقوق المرأة في المجالات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية. منذ عام 2003، كان تطبيق نظام الحصص "الكوتا" بمثابة القوة الدافعة وراء التقدم في المشاركة السياسية للمرأة، مما أدى إلى زيادة ملحوظة في تمثيل المرأة في مجلس النواب. ويُعزى هذا النجاح إلى الضغط الفعال من أجل إدخال تعديلات على قانون الانتخاب والتوزيع الاستراتيجي لحصص النساء.

الكلمات الدالة: المرأة، الحركة النسوية، تمكين المرأة، قوانين الانتخاب، البرلمان.

Introduction

The Jordanian women's movement has played a pivotal role in ushering in social and political transformations, enhancing awareness among women, and steering government policies toward greater sensitivity to issues of gender equality and equity. This movement has navigated through various phases, advocating for suffrage and equality across political, social, and cultural domains. Notably, Jordanian women secured the right to vote in 1954 and the eligibility to run for office in 1974, during a pause in parliamentary activities that began in 1967 due to the war with Israel and its ensuing complexities, notably concerning Jordanian national identity. From the revival of parliamentary life in 1989 up to the election of nine parliaments by 2022, numerous electoral laws and amendments have been introduced to enhance women's representation in parliament, significantly through the implementation of quota systems, whose numbers have seen several increases.

This research delves into the effects of the women's movement and associated institutions on the political empowerment of Jordanian women, with a particular focus on electoral legislation. It seeks to elucidate the role of women's seat allocations (quotas) in election laws in augmenting their political participation and representation within parliaments. The relevance of this study is underscored by its examination of the contribution of women's institutions to the evolution of electoral laws that benefit women, thereby elevating their representation in Jordan. Moreover, it explores the influence of the women's movement over the last fifty years on Jordanian society and the rights of Jordanian women. Hence, this study endeavors to make a scholarly contribution to understanding the factors that have influenced the increase in women's participation in parliaments. At a practical level, the research addresses a critical challenge: identifying mechanisms to boost the proportion of women in parliament. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the ongoing struggle of Jordanian women for their legitimate rights by addressing key questions: Which strategies and policies do Jordanian women's organizations advocate to achieve their aims? What have been their successes? And how effective has the women's movement been in bringing political attention to women's issues and fulfilling their demands?

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The following framework provides a structured lens through which the study investigates the evolution and impact of women's political empowerment in Jordan, highlighting the mechanisms of representation and the roles played by various institutions in advocating for women's rights and participation in the political domain.

Research Problem

The study addresses the critical challenge of understanding the impact of the women's movement and institutional efforts on Jordanian women's political empowerment, with a special focus on electoral legislation. It examines the struggle for gender equality within the context of Jordan's socio-political landscape, marked by significant legislative changes aimed at enhancing women's political representation and participation.

Research Questions

- What strategies and policies do Jordanian women's organizations advocate to achieve their goals?
- How effective has the women's movement been in politicizing women's issues and achieving their demands?
- To what extent have electoral laws and quotas contributed to increasing women's political participation and representation in Jordan?
- How have these legislative reforms impacted the broader socio-political empowerment of Jordanian women?

Research Objectives

- To explore the influence of the women's movement and institutional efforts on the empowerment and political participation of Jordanian women.
- To examine the strategies and policies advocated by Jordanian women's organizations to achieve gender equality goals.
- To assess the effectiveness of the women's movement in politicizing women's issues and securing legislative reforms.
- To evaluate the impact of electoral laws and quota systems on the political representation and participation of women in Jordan.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a historical approach to trace the evolution of the Jordanian feminist movement and examines election laws through a legal lens. This methodology enables a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the women's movement and associated institutions have influenced legislative amendments, leading to enhanced political and economic empowerment for women. The study draws on various sources, including legal documents, historical records, and previous research, to understand the development of women's rights in Jordan and the role of electoral legislation in promoting women's participation in political processes.

Significance of the Research Study

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of the transformative role of the women's movement and institutional frameworks in enhancing the political empowerment of Jordanian women, particularly through legislative reforms and electoral laws. It underscores the historical and contemporary efforts to increase women's representation in the Jordanian Parliament, marking a significant contribution to the academic discourse on gender studies and political science. This research is pivotal for several reasons:

1. **Historical Contextualization:** It traces the evolution of the women's movement in Jordan from its inception in 1921, offering insights into the socio-political landscape that shaped the movement's objectives and strategies. This historical perspective is essential for understanding the current state of women's political participation in Jordan.

2. **Legal and Institutional Analysis:** By examining the impact of electoral laws, including the adoption of the women's quota system, the study provides a critical evaluation of the legal mechanisms that have been instrumental in increasing women's political representation. This analysis contributes to the broader discourse on how legal frameworks can be leveraged to advance gender equality.

3. **Policy Implications:** The findings of this study have significant policy implications, offering evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of women's quotas and other legal instruments designed to promote gender parity in political representation. Policymakers and stakeholders can utilize these insights to refine and implement strategies that further empower women politically.

4. **Contribution to Academic Scholarship:** By addressing a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of the women's movement and institutional efforts on political empowerment in Jordan, this research enriches the academic field. It contributes valuable empirical data and theoretical analysis to the study of women's political participation in the Middle East, a region often underrepresented in global gender studies.

5. **Advocacy and Social Change:** Highlighting the achievements and challenges faced by the women's movement in Jordan, the study serves as a critical resource for activists, NGOs, and civil society organizations. It provides a comprehensive overview of the strategies that have been successful, as well as areas where further action is needed, thereby informing future advocacy efforts for gender equality.

Overall, this study represents a crucial step forward in understanding the dynamics of women's political empowerment in Jordan. It not only chronicles the journey towards greater political participation for women but also sets the stage for ongoing research and action in the pursuit of gender equality in the political arena.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have explored the candidacy of Jordanian women in elections and their growing representation in parliaments. A significant body of this research, emerging prominently after the 2003 elections and the introduction of a quota system for women, has investigated the effects of electoral laws and regulations on the legislative participation of Jordanian women. Key studies by scholars such as Kanoush and Ghawanmeh (2011), Al-Shra'a (2010), and Miqdad (2004) have primarily focused on evaluating the women's quota system and its influence on both the candidacy and parliamentary representation of women (Khawaldeh, 2016). Additionally, some researchers have delved into legal jurisprudence to address these issues (Hosban, 2006).

Further inquiries have assessed the impact of electoral systems on the candidacy and representation of women in

parliaments, revealing a preference for male representation over female in some of Jordan's electoral frameworks (Al-Saleem, 2019; Shtiwi, 1994; Al-Khatib, 2002; May Abu Al-Samen, 2006). Moreover, the role of civil society institutions in enhancing women's parliamentary presence has been scrutinized. These studies highlight the limited influence of political parties and civil society organizations in political life, underscoring their inability to fulfill the political participation demands of women and pointing out the constraints on women's institutions' engagement in the electoral process (Al-Hadhrami, 2010; Abu Rumman, 2003; Abu Ein, 2008).

Theories of Feminism

The study's exploration of various feminist theories is crucial for understanding the complexity of gender dynamics and the mechanisms underlying gender inequality. Through an analysis of liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist/socialist feminism, postmodern/poststructuralist feminism, and multiracial feminism, the research illuminates the diverse strategies feminist movements employ to address gender injustices.

Liberal Feminism, as noted by Maynard (1995), operates within the framework of mainstream society, aiming for the integration of women through legal and systemic reforms. This approach, echoing the efforts of pioneers like Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft, underscores the significance of incremental changes within existing structures towards achieving gender equality.

Radical Feminism, which Lorber (1997) describes as foundational to feminist thought, emphasizes the systemic nature of gender oppression. This perspective, advocating for revolutionary changes to dismantle patriarchy, highlights the interconnected forms of inequality women encounter, aligning with the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Echols, 1989).

Marxist/Socialist Feminism merges the critique of capitalism with feminist analysis, positing that women's oppression is closely linked to capitalist structures. This theory, elaborated by Voet (1998), advocates for the dismantling of the capitalist system as a necessary step towards ending gender oppression, offering a nuanced understanding of the economic dimensions of gender inequality.

Postmodern/Poststructuralist Feminism challenges traditional narratives about gender, focusing on the constructed nature of identity categories. This approach, as described by Crispin (2017) and Weiss (2016), provides insights into the complexities of gender and the potential for more inclusive feminist activism, moving beyond the limitations of mainstream feminist thought critiqued by Thompson (2017) and Desmond-Harris (2017).

Multiracial Feminism foregrounds the intersectionality of gender with race, ethnicity, and other identity markers. This perspective, emphasizing the varied experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, is essential for a multidimensional approach to feminist activism and theory (Kenny, 2017; Njoki Wane et al., 2014). It addresses the need for inclusivity within feminist movements, acknowledging the historical roots of exclusivity highlighted by Desmond-Harris (2017).

By integrating these feminist theories within the context of Jordan's sociopolitical landscape, the study sheds light on specific challenges and opportunities for feminist activism in the region. It contributes to the academic discourse on feminist theory, offering practical insights for activists, policymakers, and scholars working towards gender equality not only in Jordan but globally. This comprehensive analysis enriches our understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender inequality and the diverse strategies feminist movements utilize to combat these injustices, underscoring the significance of inclusivity and intersectionality in feminist theory and practice.

Concepts of the Research Study

Women's Movement: Originating in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan since 1921, the women's movement encompasses a broad spectrum of entities, ranging from governmental bodies to civil society organizations. This movement incorporates institutions that either hold legal status or operate within the interstitial spaces between the public and private sectors. It also includes general coalitions focused on women's issues and independent activists affiliated with these institutions, illustrating a comprehensive network dedicated to advancing women's rights and interests.

Women's Institutions: These are entities dedicated to addressing women's issues across the board. They include a diverse array of organizations—governmental bodies, civil society organizations, and those with legal personhood—as well

as groups that bridge the gap between the public and private sectors. Collectively, these institutions work towards the advocacy, support, and empowerment of women in various spheres.

Women's Representation: This term refers to the participation of women in the legislative process, quantified by the number of seats they occupy in the Parliament. Women's representation can be achieved either through direct electoral competition or via seats specifically reserved for them, showcasing the extent of their inclusion and influence in the political landscape.

Seats Reserved for Women (Women's Quota): Allocated based on the stipulations of Jordanian election laws from 2003 onwards, these reserved seats are a legislative mechanism to ensure women's participation in Parliament. The quota system demonstrates a structured approach to promoting gender equality in political representation, ensuring that a specified number of parliamentary seats are filled by women to balance the gender dynamics within legislative bodies.

The women's movement and institutions in Jordan: Origin and development

The women's movement and its accompanying institutions in Jordan have been pivotal in shaping the country's socio-political landscape, particularly in the realm of women's rights and participation in public life. The genesis and evolution of this movement can be traced back to early endeavors aimed at engaging women in charitable activities, marking their initial foray into public service. This movement's development has been characterized by a steady, gradual approach, often necessitating the endorsement and involvement of women from the aristocracy to advocate effectively for gender equality.

Historically, significant women's organizations in Jordan have often been led by members of the royal family, such as Queen Mesbah, Queen Zein al-Sharaf, Queen Noor Al Hussein, Queen Rania Al Abdullah⁽¹⁾, and HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal⁽²⁾. These figures have played crucial roles in aligning women's initiatives with national trends and fostering volunteerism. Their leadership underscores the intertwined nature of women's rights efforts with the broader societal and political contexts within which they operate. This hierarchical and stratified nature of women's movements in Jordan has facilitated the creation of a unique advocacy landscape. Women from upper-class and elite backgrounds have predominantly engaged in charitable work through organizations, contributing significantly to women's advancement. However, this has also meant that their participation in the active political arena, particularly in political parties that were contemporaneously active, remained limited.

The narrative of women's movements in Jordan encapsulates a blend of gradual progress, strategic alignment with influential figures, and a focus on charitable over outright political activities. This historical overview offers insights into the nuanced and complex journey of women's advocacy in Jordan, marked by both achievements and challenges in striving for gender equality and greater political participation. (Bani Salameh and Shdouh, 2018).

Women's Institutions in Jordan

In Jordan, the evolution of women's institutions has been deeply influenced by the country's shifting political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes. This journey can be broadly categorized into distinct phases, each marked by its own set of challenges and achievements.

Initial Phase: Awareness and Formation (1944–1957)

The inception of Jordan's women's movement was primarily focused on pivotal issues such as women's education, marital rights, and advocacy for the rights of married and divorced women. During this era, significant strides were made towards opening educational opportunities for women and reforming the educational system for girls. The pioneering organization in this regard was the Women's Social Solidarity Society, established in 1944 under Princess Mesbah's leadership, which later became Queen Mesbah. This society aimed to support underprivileged women by providing financial aid, vocational training, and educational lectures, though it ceased operations unexpectedly (Hammad, 1999).

In 1945, the Jordanian Women's Union was founded by Princess Zein al-Sharaf (later Queen Zein al-Sharaf), with a mission to support disadvantaged mothers through education and healthcare promotion. This organization underwent a transformation in 1948, becoming the Jordanian Hashemite Women's Association before ultimately merging with the Jordan Red Crescent Society.

The late 1940s to early 1950s witnessed a surge in charitable women's organizations, sparked by several political,

administrative, constitutional, and legal developments. Notable among these were the Young Women's Christian Association and the Jordanian Women's Development Association, spearheaded by Princess Taghreed Muhammad. These organizations represented a shift towards more structured and politically conscious women's advocacy, culminating in the Arab Women's Union's establishment in 1954, which actively campaigned for women's voting rights and political participation.

Transitional Period: Advocacy and Political Engagement (1954–1957)

This period marked a significant transition from charitable activities to more politically charged activism, aiming to secure comprehensive social, economic, and political rights for women (Bani Salameh & Darawsheh, 2018). The movement's momentum led to an increase in women's organizations, significantly impacting women's political participation. The Arab Women's Union's efforts in 1954, advocating for legislative changes to allow women to vote and run for office, marked a notable milestone in this journey. The subsequent approval by Said al-Mufti's government in 1955, granting women the right to vote, exemplified the movement's growing influence and its potential to enact meaningful change (Hourani and Hussein Abu Rumman, 2004).

However, the political unrest in 1957, leading to the imposition of martial law and the subsequent dissolution of civil society organizations, including the vibrant women's unions, underscored the volatile environment within which these institutions operated (Khader, 1996). Despite these setbacks, the foundational work during this early period laid the groundwork for the continued struggle for women's rights in Jordan, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of the women's movement in the face of political challenges (Bani Salameh, 2007).

The Second Stage: the Stage of the Decline of Women's Work (1958–1967)

During the period spanning from 1958 to 1967, the momentum of the Jordanian women's movement encountered a marked slowdown, primarily due to the imposition of martial law and a nationwide state of emergency. These constraints significantly hampered the ability of women's groups to engage in overt political activism, pushing their efforts into more covert or charitable avenues. Despite these challenges, some charitable organizations, enriched by the participation of educated women and political figures, managed to infuse their work with elements of human rights advocacy, developmental initiatives, and discreet political activism.

This era of constrained political activity persisted until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a resurgence of political openness facilitated by changing internal dynamics reignited the call for enhanced women's rights and participation. A notable milestone of this period was the conceptualization and establishment of women's unions, symbolized by the creation of the Jordanian Arab Women's Union in Jerusalem towards the end of 1959. This pioneering organization, representing a coalition of eight active women's associations, marked a significant evolution in the structure and objectives of women's advocacy efforts in Jordan.

By 1961, the momentum generated by these collaborative efforts led to the formation of the General Federation of Societies. This federation served as a legal umbrella for various social work institutions, including those focused on women's rights and development. Officially registered on April 3, 1961, the federation represented a strategic move to consolidate and legitimize the collective efforts of women's groups under a single, unified entity. This development not only underscored the resilience and adaptability of the women's movement in Jordan but also set the stage for its continued evolution in the face of political and social challenges (Al-Tal, 2008).

The Third Stage: the Stage of Political Openness and Illegal Political Action (1968–1989)

The aftermath of the June 1967 war marked a pivotal moment for the emergence of voluntary and politically motivated women's institutions in Jordan, such as the Jordanian Business and Professional Women's Forum established in 1968, and the Arab Women's Association founded in 1970. Additionally, the period saw the formation of the Arab Women's League, a collective effort by leftist forces championing Jordanian and Palestinian nationalism, alongside the Jordanian Women's Union and the National Women's Union. These organizations thrived in a relatively open political climate, often aligning with Palestinian resistance movements, various factions, and left-wing as well as nationalist Jordanian parties. The recognition of 1975 as the International Year of Women by the United Nations ignited a widespread movement advocating

for women's political rights in Jordan, including the right to run for public office. This movement's momentum was characterized by its direct engagement with governmental figures, such as Prime Minister Bahjat Al-Talhouni, to discuss amendments to the electoral law favoring women's participation in elections. A notable delegation, led by Mrs. Samiha Al-Majali, sought support from Queen Zein for these amendments, sparking a national dialogue that attracted both proponents and critics (Al-Tal, 2008).

The advocacy efforts during this period culminated in the amendment of the electoral law No. (8) of 1974, which marked a significant milestone by redefining eligibility to include both males and females, thereby extending political participation rights to women. Further progress was achieved in 1982 with the passage of a law enabling women to vote and stand for municipal council elections (Khader, 1996).

King Hussein bin Talal's correspondence with Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal, both in 1966 and again in 1973, underscored the royal family's support for women's political engagement, advocating for legislative reforms to facilitate women's participation as voters and candidates.

The Jordanian Women's Union, established under the Law of Associations and Organizations in 1974, aimed to enhance the societal and political status of women. However, its close ties with opposition parties and Palestinian resistance led to multiple dissolutions by the government, reflecting the tension between women's political activism and governmental oversight.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the emergence of ideologically driven women's groups, including the Muslim Women's Association and the Jordanian Democratic Women's Gathering. The formation of the Jordanian National Women's Committees Gathering in 1981, led by HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal, marked a significant effort to consolidate women's advocacy within a formal organizational structure, aiming to advance women's rights across a broad spectrum of societal and political domains. This era of women's activism in Jordan represents a complex interplay of ideological, political, and social forces, reflecting the diverse approaches adopted by women's groups to navigate the challenges of advocating for gender equality and political participation within the constraints of the country's political landscape (Hashd).

The Fourth Stage: the Stage of Democratic Transition (1989–2022)

This period marks the blossoming of women's institutions in Jordan, underscored by significant developments on both international and local fronts:

International Influence:

The global community increasingly recognized women's rights issues, prompting action from the United Nations and its affiliated bodies to encourage the establishment of national women's committees. A landmark moment came in 1992 when Jordan ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), heralding a new era of international legislative advancements in women's rights.

Local Developments:

Jordan's shift towards democracy, characterized by lifting the state of emergency and martial law, rejuvenating parliamentary life, and easing restrictions on political activities, including political parties, set the stage for a renewed focus on women's rights and participation (Bani Salameh and Ananzah, 2015).

In this conducive environment, the Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs was established, led by HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal. This body emerged as a pivotal national mechanism for the political and economic empowerment of women, advocating for their active engagement in public life and serving as the official representative for Jordan on matters of women's issues and activities as of 1966. The committee's mandate spans the integration of women's concerns into national strategies, policies, and budgets, monitoring discrimination against women, evaluating progress towards equality and opportunities, and elevating women's participation as a cornerstone of sustainable national development (Jordan National Committee for Women's Affairs, 2021). Since its inception, the committee has been instrumental in promoting measures to enhance women's political representation, notably advocating for the appointment of women to local councils—a proposal that saw 99 women appointed across various cities, towns, and villages in 1994, setting a precedent for women's participation in municipal and village elections.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Jordanian National Women's Committees Assembly in 1995, under the chairmanship of HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal, aimed to elevate Jordanian women's status across multiple domains by leveraging Jordan's National Strategy for Women and related strategies. That same year saw the founding of the Humanitarian Forum for Women's Rights, focusing on urgent women's issues, particularly in implementing CEDAW. This organization undertook studies on women's rights, organized awareness sessions, and provided legal advice to women. Additionally, the Jordan River Foundation, now under the leadership of Queen Rania, was established in 1995. The foundation aims to invigorate societal dynamism through long-term social, economic, and cultural programs tailored to national needs, emphasizing children's rights and community empowerment.

This era of flourishing women's institutions in Jordan reflects a harmonious blend of international support and local initiative, marking a significant advancement in the nation's approach to women's rights and participation.

The Demands of the Women's Movement (1989–2022)

Over the past seven decades, women's organizations in Jordan have tirelessly campaigned for fundamental rights, notably the right to vote and stand for election in Parliament. Despite the establishment of women's voting rights in 1955 and candidacy rights in 1974, it wasn't until 1993 that a woman finally won a seat in Parliament, highlighting the prolonged struggle for political representation⁽³⁾. This milestone followed unsuccessful attempts in the 1989 elections and a renewed push in 1997, which, despite not electing any women, catalyzed significant advocacy efforts for a women's quota in Parliament (Masalha, 2002).

The response to these feminist movements was multifaceted, leading to the Jordanian government's development of the 1999–2003 Economic and Social Development Plan. This plan aimed to eliminate discrimination and violence against women and foster gender equality in sustainable development (Naqshbandi, 2001). The culmination of these efforts was the formation of a national commission by royal decree in 2002, which introduced the transformative Jordan First Document⁽⁴⁾. This document advocated for legislative adjustments to facilitate women's political participation and ensure parliamentary access via a women's quota, intended as a temporary measure to correct imbalances (Masalha, 2009).

In January 2003, the government took decisive action by appointing a committee to scrutinize the women's quota system, resulting in significant recommendations to amend electoral laws in favor of women's parliamentary inclusion⁽⁵⁾. This legislative momentum was encapsulated in the Women's Quota Law of 2003, which earmarked six parliamentary seats for women, alongside broader efforts to ensure equitable representation across all electoral districts. These reforms were part of a broader national strategy for gender equality spanning 2006 to 2017, laid down by the Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs. This strategy aimed at amplifying women's political participation and promoting gender equality across legislative, policy, and social initiatives. The establishment of the National Agenda Committee and the launch of the "We Are All Jordan" initiative further underscored the commitment to tackling gender discrimination and enhancing women's roles in economic, political, and social spheres (The World Bank, 2013). Subsequent constitutional amendments and legislative reforms underscored Jordan's commitment to increasing women's representation in elected and appointed councils to a minimum of 30%, reflecting a broader commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women in public life. The National Strategies for Jordanian Women for 2013–2018 and 2020–2025 set ambitious targets for women's representation in elected councils, demonstrating a continued focus on gender parity in political participation (Jordan National Committee for Women's Affairs, 2021).

The formation of the "Eye on Women" coalition in 2016 by the Jordanian Women's Solidarity Institute exemplifies the ongoing efforts to monitor elections from a gender perspective and advocate for women's increased political engagement. This coalition, comprising 36 civil society and women's organizations, symbolizes the collective resolve to enhance women's political participation and underscores the significant progress made in advancing women's rights in Jordan (Sabbagh, 2004).

The Impact of Women's Movements on Empowering Women Politically

This impact can be seen in both directions. The first is their impact on empowering women in electoral laws, and the

second is their impact on implementing a quota system for allocating seats in parliament to women and then expanding their number.

Women in the Parliamentary Elections Laws 1954–2022

The evolution of women's standing in electoral legislation can be understood as a cumulative view of the performance of the women's movement through its frameworks and institutions. After entering the period of democratic transition, the women's movement began to reorganize its performance in political involvement, focusing on what ensures women's right to access parliament and equal possibilities for them to run for elections.

The formation of the National Committee for Women's Affairs by Cabinet resolution was in keeping with what has become a fundamental issue, that of equality between men and women as citizens. 1991, by rejecting sex discrimination (Sabbagh, 2004). The first national plan for women was developed in 1993 as a result of a collaboration between the National Committee and its member partners from governmental agencies and civil society organizations. It was addressed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Juraibe'e, 1996).

Jordanian women's political participation in parliamentary elections has remained low. Female candidates made up about 2% of the group of candidates in the 1989 parliamentary elections and their percentage dropped to less than 1% in 1993, but it recovered again in 1997 to 3.1%, and the percentage of candidacy soared to 7.1% in 2003. Women failed terribly in their bids to win parliamentary seats against men. During 1989, 1993, 1997, and 2003, the percentage of women in the National Assembly (representatives and notables) was relatively low. During the aforementioned years, the rate of women among total Senate members was around 5.7%, while the percentage of women among the House of Representatives members was 2% (Bani Salameh et al., 2020).

The first change in electoral laws for women occurred with the passage of Temporary Election Law No. (11) of 2003, revising law No. (34) of 2001, which contained the allotment of six seats in parliament for women (a quota for women) or 5.5% of the total number of seats. The number of seats is set at 110, the bare minimum for women's representation in parliament, while still allowing them to compete for the remaining seats in all electoral districts. The quota seats were treated as one electoral district to determine the women's quota seats, so that the seats with the highest percentages in the kingdom would be granted. This percentage is computed by dividing the number of votes received by each candidate by the number of voters in her electoral district (Bani Salameh and Shdough, 2018).

Through this law, Jordanian women were able to obtain six seats, increasing their representation in the House of Representatives to 5.5% in 2003, and the first Jordanian woman who succeeded on the basis of a quota received 10.4% of the total voters in her first constituency in Zarqa Governorate, while the last woman received 10.4% of the total voters in her second constituency in Zarqa Governorate. She won with a quota of 5.3% of the total voters in Tafilah Governorate's first election district. After the electoral legislation was revised in 2007, the number of seats allocated to women in the 2010 elections was increased to 12 out of 120, i.e., 10% of the total seats in the House of Representatives⁽⁶⁾.

With the announcement of the 14th House of Representative's dissolution in 2009 and the call for early elections, women's organizations' efforts to raise the number of seats allocated to women in the House of Representatives accelerated once more. On the one hand, the National Committee for Women's Affairs urged that the number of seats reserved for women be increased to at least 20., On the other hand, the Jordanian Women's Union demanded that the quota of women is raised to 30% through the electoral law's quota as a second stage after obtaining six seats, with the need to amend the quota calculation mechanism, and that the election law is in accordance with the proportional list system. Most women's organizations agreed on these demands, with a 20% to 30% variance in the number of seats⁽⁷⁾.

As a result of these requests, Election Law No. (9) of 2010 increased the number of seats allocated to women to 12, raising their representation from 5.5% to 10% at the very least. In contrast, Article 4 of the district division scheme states the following: in addition to the total number of legislative seats allotted to the subconstituencies listed in Article (3) of this system, 12 seats in Jordan's electoral districts are designated for female candidates (Bani Salameh et al., 2020).

Article (42) paragraph (b) clarified the mechanism for calculating the winners based on the percentage of the total votes

cast in the subconstituency in which each female candidate was nominated, and by comparing these percentages, the candidates with the highest percentages in all subconstituencies are considered the winners of these seats (Bani Salameh, 2023). The number was boosted again in the 2012 elections, bringing the total number of seats given to women to 15 out of 150 or 10% of the parliament's total seats (Abu Rumman, 2014). The number of seats assigned to women was 15 out of 130 members, or 15% of the total seats in the House of Representatives, which was maintained in the 2015 election law (Bani Salameh et al., 2020).

According to Election Law No. (6) of 2016 (Bani Salameh et al., 2020), the proportional list was adopted, and the number of parliament seats was reduced from 150 to 130, 15 of which were allocated to women, bringing the percentage of representation of these seats to 11.5% instead of 10% due to the reduction in the total number of seats in the council. The significant change in this law is that female candidates were not considered through the lists for the seat allotted to women within the upper limit of seats allocated to the electoral district (Bani Salameh et al., 2020).

As a result, the number of seats assigned to women increased from six by 5.5% to 12 by 2010 with a 10% representation and then to 15 by 2012 with a 10% representation, rising to 11.5% in 2016. Each governorate, including the three Bedouin areas recognized by the legislation as governorates, includes a seat reserved for women. With the approval of Election Law No. (4) of 2022, most of the demands of the women's movement were met, as a seat was allotted for women in each of the 18 electoral districts, bringing the total number of seats allocated to women to 18. Controls on list building in the public sector to ensure that women are placed in a competitive arrangement to avoid what happened in the electoral lists established in 2013, as demanded by many experts in this field (As-Salym, 2019).

Table (1): The evolution of the system of allocating women seats in the electoral laws.

Electoral cycle	Election law	Number of seats reserved for women
1989	Election Law No. 22 of 1986	0
1993	Election Law No. 15 of 1993	0
1997	Election Law No. 24 of 1997	0
2003	Election Law No. 34 of 2001 and its amendments	6
2007	Election Law No. 34 of 2001 and its amendments	6
2010	Election Law No. 9 of 2010	12
2013	Election Law No. 25 of 2012	15
2016	Election Law No. 6 of 2016	15
2022	Election Law No. 4 of 2022	18

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on election laws.

Women in the Jordanian Parliament, 1944–2022

Jordanian women's participation in the National Consultative Councils was through appointment from 1978 to 1984, with 11 women appointed as council members out of 75 members, representing 6.5% of the advisory councils' membership.

In 1989, 12 women ran for parliamentary seats, but none were successful (Naqshbandi, 2001). Only three women competed for office in the 1993 parliamentary elections, with one winning the Circassia seat. In the Jordanian Parliament elections in 1997, 17 women competed for office, but none were successful. The results of the legislative elections to the House of Representatives from 1989 to 1999 show that Jordanian women could not join the Jordanian House of Representatives, which had only one seat in its first three sessions, through direct elections (Mikdad, 2004).

In 2003, the proportion of women in Jordan's elected parliament increased to six or 5.5% of the total number of members (Al-Muhaisen, 2003). Seven of them were elected to the council in the 2007 parliament elections, one of them through free competition. After raising the number of women's quota seats to 12 out of 120 in 2007 and 15 out of 150 in 2013, the quota in the elected House of Representatives for 2010 was increased to 13 women and 18 women in the elected parliament for 2013 (National Report, 2011). The women's quota has enabled the entry of 39 women, accounting for 0.054 of the council's members, who would not have been able to join the council without the quota⁽⁸⁾.

Women elected to the 19th House of Representatives for the year 2020 received 15 quota seats and 11.5% of the total

number of parliament members, while no female candidate succeeded in reaching parliament through competition, in contrast to the 2016 parliamentary elections, in which women won five seats in addition to the 15 quota seats, at a rate of 15.4% of total council members.

Table (2): Rates of women's political participation in the Jordanian House of Representatives.

Council	1989	1993	1997	2003	2007	2010	2013	2016	2020	Total
Number of members of the House of Representatives	80	80	80	100	110	120	150	130	130	910
Number of candidates	12	3	17	54	199	134	217			636
Number of winners	Competition	-	1	-	1	1	3	5	-	11
	Share	0	0.012	0	0	0.009	0.008	0.02	11.5	13.7 %
	Quota	-	-	-	6	6	12	15	15	69
	Share	0	0	0	-	5%	10.5%	10%	10%	8.6%

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on the results of the 1989–2020 elections

Table 2 shows the percentage of seats won by women from parliament seats (from the Parliament of 1989 to the Parliament of 2020). Between 1989 and 2020, the number of seats won by women reached 80 out of 910 seats, of which 11 were by competition with a 13.7% rate and 69 seats based on a quota system for women with an 8.6% rate.

Challenging the Status Quo: Unraveling the Complex Barriers to Women's Empowerment in Jordan

The major obstacles to Jordanian Women's demands for women's empowerment, can be summarized as follows:

1. Absence of Political Will: A key obstacle is the lack of political will to implement reforms that significantly enhance women's political representation and participation. Despite advocacy and proposed amendments to electoral laws to benefit women, actual progress has been slow and often met with resistance from traditional political and societal structures (Bani Salameh, 2024).

2. Patriarchal Societal Norms: The document highlights that Jordanian society, dominated by conservative, patriarchal, and tribal norms, continues to pose significant challenges to women's political empowerment. These norms often restrict women's public participation and perpetuate gender discrimination, impacting their ability to engage fully in political processes.

3. Limited Impact of Quotas: While electoral laws have been amended to include quotas for women's representation in the House of Representatives, the effectiveness of these quotas in achieving genuine gender parity has been limited. The increase in the number of seats allocated to women through quotas has not necessarily translated into increased influence or participation in decision-making processes.

4. Constraints on Women's Institutions: The document indicates that women's organizations and institutions, while instrumental in advocating for women's rights and legal reforms, face limitations in their capacity to influence broader political and electoral systems. These constraints limit their effectiveness in securing sustained and meaningful changes in women's political empowerment.

5. Socio-Political Challenges: The broader socio-political landscape, including the impact of regional instability and economic challenges, further complicates efforts to promote political reform and women's empowerment. These challenges divert attention and resources from gender-specific reforms and can exacerbate existing inequalities (Bani Salameh et al 2023).

6. Fragmentation within the Women's Movement: The articlet suggests that while the women's movement in Jordan has made strides in advocating for gender equality, it faces issues of fragmentation and varying priorities among different organizations. This lack of unity can weaken the overall impact of advocacy efforts for political reform and women's rights.

7. Legal and Institutional Barriers: Despite legal reforms aimed at enhancing women's political participation, institutional barriers within the electoral system and political parties still hinder women's full engagement (Bani Salameh, M. T., & Aldabbas, K. M, 2023). These barriers include discriminatory practices and the underrepresentation of women in

leadership positions within political parties (Salameh & El-Edawan, 2016).

8. Cultural Resistance to Change: There is an underlying cultural resistance to changing traditional roles and perceptions of women in society. This resistance can manifest in various forms, including societal attitudes that devalue women's contributions to politics and decision-making processes, further hindering their empowerment and participation (Bani Hamad & Bani Salameh, 2023).

In conclusion, the obstacles to Jordanian women's demands for political reform and empowerment are multifaceted, encompassing political, societal, legal, and institutional challenges. Overcoming these obstacles requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequality and promotes inclusive political and societal change (Salameh MTB, 2021).

Conclusions and results

The women's movement and its associated institutions in Jordan have embarked on a journey marked by diverse objectives, origins, and contexts. This movement is often characterized by its class-based and elitist nature, with leadership roles predominantly filled by women from the ruling class. These women leveraged their extensive networks and media presence, except for their connections with certain decision-making centers, endowing these institutions with significant influence and decision-making capabilities. From 1944 to 2022, the movement has made notable strides toward gender equality and enhancing women's political engagement.

Women's organizations have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights across social, economic, and political domains. Their efforts have contributed to dismantling numerous social and legal hurdles to women's public participation and their rights to education, employment, and health. These achievements are the culmination of persistent endeavors and advocacy by women leaders dedicated to championing gender equality. Despite these advances, women in Jordan continue to confront discrimination within a societal framework dominated by conservative, patriarchal, and tribal norms.

Research indicates that the movement and its institutions have successfully amended various laws to bolster women's political and economic empowerment. They have significantly increased women's parliamentary representation by revising electoral laws to enable their candidacy and voting rights and by implementing a quota system in the House of Representatives. The evolution of women's quota seats is a testament to this progress, growing from none in the 1989 election law to six in the 2003 legislation, twelve in the 2010 law, and eighteen by the 2022 election law. This includes a stipulation that at least one woman must be positioned among the top three candidates on electoral lists, as well as within the subsequent trio of candidates, ensuring women's increased visibility and participation in Jordan's legislative processes.

Notes

1. The Jordan River Foundation, chaired by Queen Rania, was established in 1995. Its mission is to invigorate societal dynamism through the development and support of sustainable social, economic, and cultural programs tailored to national needs and priorities. The foundation emphasizes the protection of children's rights and needs while also empowering individuals and local communities.

2. HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal leads the Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs (established in 1992), the Jordanian National Women's Committees group (established in 1995), and the Princess Basma Center for Women's Affairs (established in 1996), highlighting the significant leadership roles women hold in addressing gender issues and advocating for women's rights in Jordan.

3. A pivotal moment in Jordanian history occurred on October 2, 1955, with a cabinet decision approving an election law that granted educated women the right to vote, though not to run for office. This milestone was further built upon in 1974 when Jordanian women gained full suffrage, including the right to run for political office.

4. The Women's Quota Committee, established by the Jordan First National Commission, has made recommendations accessible via the provided link [<http://www.pm.gov.jo/content/1405776298/>] aimed at increasing women's political participation through electoral law amendments.

5. There is a push by the women's movement to increase the parliamentary quota to 20 seats, advocating for greater

representation and empowerment of women in Jordan's political sphere. This demand is detailed further at the link: [https://www.addustour.com/articles/852249].

6. The National Report on the Progress of Jordanian Women Towards Equality and Justice 2011, available at [https://www.women.jo/sites/default/files/SystemAssets/1cd7a054-ffeb-44df-8bc3-0e864fedf9e0.pdf], provides an in-depth look at the strides made towards gender equality and justice for Jordanian women.

7. The call for an increase in the women's quota to 20 seats is reiterated, with further information and advocacy efforts detailed at the link: [https://women.jo/ar/node/4294].

8. From 1923 to 2022, Jordan has seen the issuance of 13 electoral laws, amended numerous times to address and adapt to the evolving political landscape. The most recent, the 2022 election law, earmarked 15 seats for women, showcasing a committed effort towards establishing a quota system to ensure women's representation in Jordan's parliamentary structure.

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