

“Democratization as a Requisite for Gender Political Inclusion in Arab States”

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Abstract

Gender political inclusion interacted with a variety of variables that affected its status and course. Strategies implemented to foster it could have delivered better results in Arab states, if they were incorporated in a process of democratization, embedding latter's values in institutional mechanisms addressing social inclusion. Apparently, Arab gender political inclusion evolved in an erratic manner. There were serious difficulties in synergizing the variables that would deliver gender political interests to the highest echelons of public governance, promoting competent institutions based on gender considerations. Some Arab states resorted to gender quotas to further gender political inclusion, while being opposed by certain parties forming alliances on political and religious grounds. Waged efforts did not yield the aspired results, due to contending political and social environments, as they should have been accommodated within environment of institutional democratization, since gender political inclusion could be greatly enhanced in democracies (being the case in democratic states), where freedom, rule of law, periodic elections, and equal opportunities are conducive to gender political inclusion. Having serious democratic deficit, Arab states failed to embody gender values in their policies, where (democratic) legislatures could have provided an enabling framework for their advancement and extension to other public institutions. Harnessing such strategies is a complex challenge that gender political inclusion efforts would normally experience, especially during the efforts to create, diffuse, and sustain different components of institutional policies. As such, gender political inclusion could be fostered in the Arab world, provided it is accompanied by a process of institutional democratization, limiting perpetuating economic and social disparities, furthering long-term growth, inhibiting gender impaired institutional development, and predatory acts of certain elites, while preventing gender inequalities from institutionalizing and reproducing themselves across time.

I. Introduction

Women's political rights are a controversial global issue, particularly evident in the Arab world (and in many developing countries), where despite efforts to advance those rights, achievements were quite modest, as such efforts were recently conducted in an environment of instability and armed conflict, which greatly eroded many of the simple achievements made, and derailed existing developmental priorities and objectives.

Historically and globally, women's political rights were prone to challenging variables of varied intensities, which either fostered or hampered the maintenance of political representation of women (PRW), the fact which was quite apparent in the Arab world, which harbours certain contending features (political, economic, social, religious...), rendering PRW's attainment a difficult task. There were serious difficulties in creating a synergy among the various variables that react with gender political rights, compromising efforts that tend to garner positive drivers for the advancement of PRW. Those threatened by PRW efforts had constantly resorted to new strategies to contain and avert efforts made, as one could refer to a kind of (organized) resistance to efforts made to ameliorate gender political rights in the Arab world, resistance that could be the result of domination exercised by certain parties and elites, who deny women their political rights and endeavours.

Facing the difficulties mentioned, some Arab countries resorted to certain strategies to further gender political rights, and increase women's presence in public institutions. And among the ones applied, the strategy of gender quotas is worthy of consideration, which tends to secure descriptive political representation of women, hoping to lead to substantive political representation at some point. Gender quotas were utilized as a strategy for political reform, and as a provisional measure to further women's political participation and representation, at different public (political, legislative, administrative...) institutions, despite the debate regarding their efficacy, especially in those countries that had already applied the concept but were dissatisfied with the outcome. Such efforts were accompanied by stiff resistance by certain groups, who formed alliances to maintain and preserve their own interests and privileges and deter the attainment of PRW.

Yet, despite the considerable plausibility of the application of gender quotas in the Arab region, the latter has a large democratic deficit, which raises questions regarding the feasibility of conducting pro-gender policies in environments that lack appreciation and application of democratic principles, which could create better chances for PRW to establish itself, as it is imperative to undertake a process of democracy building, so as to establish firm foundations for PRW. Inherently, the presentation bears some importance in terms urging policymakers and PRW proponents, whether domestic or foreign, to reconsider their various pro-gender initiatives and strategies, and align them along democratic principles, to render their efforts more efficient and productive.

Based on the presented facts, the presentation will analyse the nexus between women's political representation and inclusion on one hand, and democratization on the other, by focusing on Arab states, and especially on those who had applied gender quotas to move gender political rights onward, by furthering women's inclusion in the political institutions of the state, while pointing out to the various variables that have their effect on gender political representation and participation, which need to be taken into consideration when adopting certain pro-gender strategies. Thus, the basic research statement that the present presentation likes to make is that women's political representation and inclusion strategies could deliver better results, if they are preceded (or accompanied) by democracy.

After the introductory part, the paper makes a brief introduction of the basic features of the Arab world, then undertakes a literature review regarding the main variables that intersect with the theme at hand, stressing on their impact on efforts waged. Then it moves to the hypothesis, to a short discussion about the basic research question. Afterwards, there is a presentation about the methodology and data collection, i.e. the information retrieved to verify the hypothesis. Later, there is an analysis and discussion of the findings. And the last part concludes.

II. The Arab World

The Arab world is comprised of 22 Arab countries¹ of the Arab League, extending from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean in the southeast. The contemporary Arab world has a combined population of around 422 million inhabitants, over half of whom are under 25 years of age. It consists of those peoples and states that have common (Arabic) language, culture, and religion, as the majority of people in the Arab world adhere to (Sunni) Islam, in addition to other religious and ethnic groups and minorities.

Once an empire, the Arab world was overrun by several powers. It witnessed the emergence of Arab nationalism in the second half of the 19th century and throughout of the 20th century, struggling against foreign occupying powers. The Arab League was formed in 1945 to represent the interests of Arab people and to pursue the political unification of the Arab countries, the efforts of which have not been quite productive. The region has long been known for its prolonged political instability and armed conflicts, whether that been with foreign powers, or among Arab states themselves, or even within them.

Different forms of governments exist, ranging from monarchies (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), to republics (the remaining countries). Democracy and democratic elections are generally viewed to be compromised by incumbent powers, due to vote rigging, intimidation of opposition parties, and severe restraints on civil liberties and political dissent.

Finally, and as far as Arab economy is concerned, Arab states are mostly, although not exclusively, have developing economies and derive their export revenues from oil and gas, or the sale of other raw materials. Arab economies in general lack competitiveness and are constant need of development.

III. Literature Review

Studying gender political rights in the Arab world could not be done independent of the variables that affect their course, which are relevant to the methodological imperatives of the present paper, as they need to be taken into consideration regardless of the strategies applied, where among those variables, democracy building occupies an important place in facilitating the attainment of PRW.

Following is a scholarly review of some of the concepts and variables which are of direct relevance to the theme at hand.

¹ Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the Comoros Islands, Iraq, Djibouti, and the United Arab Emirates.

A. Importance of Democracy

Scholarly discourse had ascertained that democracy furthers freedom and equality of citizens, which are conducive to gender (political) rights. It reconciles conflicting values of liberty and equality (Rosema, Aarts, & Denters 2011), and it has to do with power and will vested in people, who decide what the representatives do (Karakamisheva-Jovanovska 2013; Holmberg 2011). Moreover, political systems that harbour principles of democracy and liberalism accommodate a diverse span of views expressed by both genders (Hay 2005; Samet & Schmeidler 2003). Such statements underscore the important role that democracy (and liberalism) plays in providing ample space for various groups to have their voices heard in their communities.

The need for conducive democratic environments for producing favourable PRW policies had been at the centre of attention of many scholars and organizations. ODIHR² (2007), for instance, stressed on the importance of democratic institution-building, which was met by a challenging statement noting that “the empirical evidence in support of a positive relationship between a democratic regime type and women’s representation in politics is mixed” (Stockemer 2015: 400). Such statements provide further impetus towards finding an answer to the undergoing debate regarding the relation between democracy and gender (political) rights.

Democratic political systems have the “advantage” of making periodic assessments of themselves, and thus have the opportunity to reconsider undertaken politics and policies. In that respect, the importance of political accountability and public oversight had been stressed upon by scholars (Setälä 2008; Karakamisheva-Jovanovska 2013), in face of abuse of power, which could be exercised by the political elite in many states (including Arab), to maximize interests, by preventing country’s democratic public institutions from performing effectively, and accommodating the various needs and interests of the people, including those of gender (political) rights.

Like democratic ones, liberal political systems as well could enhance the maintenance of gender political rights, where democracy assigns the powers of decision making to majorities, while liberalism requires that decisions on certain matters rest with the individual and not with society. (Samet and Schmeidler 2003) In that respect, there will be many (women) who will have an independent vision of their own, which might not align with those of others (men); and even among women, there will be some who will try to differentiate themselves from the others. It is here where liberalism steps in, trying to protect the interests of certain “minorities” in democratic societies, accommodating needs and demands which would otherwise might get lost in the crowd, the fact which is quite relevant to the political aspirations of women, including Arab.

² Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

B. Political Representation as a Strategic Objective

It is quite reasonable to refer to the concept of political representation, which constitutes one of major foundations of democracy, and of political inclusion, which could have strong connotations in terms of gender political rights, by fostering women's participation in public affairs.

Like many other authors, Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler (2005: 407) had focused upon the important work that had been accomplished by Hanna Pitkin on political representation³, which could further women's political inclusion. In the same manner there was a stress on the concept of citizenship (Williams 2003: 39-40), which provides freedom that is bound only by laws to which one could rationally consent⁴, as the principal virtue of citizenship is active participation in political activities, which is again of main concern to women and their political ventures.

Furthermore, and according to Young (1989: 250), "[m]odern political theory asserted the equal moral worth of all persons, and the social movements of the oppressed took this seriously as implying the inclusion of all persons in full citizenship status under the equal protection of the law." Although there is no direct reference to women, however they can constitute an integral part of the description offered by her, entitled to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship like their male counterparts, free from any form of undue constraints exercised by certain parties that tend to limit their political potential and inclusion.

Yet, there were some who had negative views regarding the outcome of women's political inclusion efforts. In that respect, it is noted that "political representation of women takes place in settings that are not designed to serve that purpose. For example, the main lines of division that structure political representation are territory and ideology, not gender (Celis & Lovenduski 2018: 151), the fact which leaves lesser room for women's political rights to evolve.

On the other hand, and despite the scholarly importance given to substantive political representation of women, the concept is still liable to some shortcomings. Celis (2008a: 112) had noted that "there exists no consensus about the content of the substantive representation of women", and women's "interests are as diverse as the acts involved in the substantive representation of women" (Celis 2008b: 18), as "those studying the substantive representation should walk away from assuming to know a priori what women's issues and interests are and, therefore, are in need of representation". (Celis & Childs 2012: 222) Such statements would point out to the complications associated with the efforts to maintain women political representation, compelling the adoption of certain strategies that could accommodate women's various political orientations and demands entailed.

³ "four distinct, but interconnected meanings or dimensions of representation including: formal representation, referring to the institutional rules and procedures through which representatives are chosen; descriptive representation, referring to the compositional similarity between representatives and the represented; substantive representation or responsiveness, referring to the congruence between representatives' actions and the interests of the represented; and symbolic representation, referring to the represented's feelings of being fairly and effectively represented." The Concept of Representation, 1967.

⁴ where the role of the citizen is defined by the activities of authorizing public decisions and holding government officials accountable through participation in the institutions established by the constitution.

C. Achieving Gender Equality

Gender inequality is a universal phenomenon, being especially apparent in developing countries and rural societies, which are particularly affected by conservative religious and cultural beliefs and practices. Phillips (2004) presented equality in terms of outcome – equalizing where people end up rather than where or how they begin. Gender inequality could refer to a societal imbalance of power between men and women (Inter Press Service 2002: 6), where despite efforts for its eradication, it persists in many (Arab) societies, signalling instances of male domination.

Yet, gender equality is on a challenging track, incorporating political, social, and cultural dimensions, where its achievement is a moral imperative and not just economic empowerment (OECD 2012). And as far as barriers in face of its achievement are concerned, the “cultural practices and religious norms have been frequently invoked, in international and constitutional law contexts, as a form of defence in order to oppose gender equality claims” (Raday 2003: 665). Gender inequality is further “perpetuated through interlocking economic, political, and sociocultural mechanisms, creating inequality traps”⁵, which is the case for many of Arab communities.

The status of women in legislatures, in terms of their equality with men, had also been stressed upon by scholars (Clark & Rodrigues 2009; Htun, Lacalle, & Micozzi 2013), pointing out to barriers in the form of electoral systems, quotas, socio-economic status, religion and party features (Manning 2014; Caul 1999). Given such difficulties, women must enjoy certain privileges to start their careers (Rosenbluth, Kalla, & Teele 2015), while facing institutional (Bashevkin 2014) and societal (Norris 2009) challenges. Such variables, which are a global phenomenon, are also apparent in the Arab world.

D. Democracy and Gender Political Rights in the Arab World

There were many reports and scholarly articles regarding the status of democracy in the Arab world. Ottaway (2004), Perthes (2008), Diamond (2010), IDEA (2010), Chaney (2012), Jones (2016), Khanfar (2017), and many others had criticized its status, which had negative impact on a large span of public issues, including political status of women.

Arab gender rights are influenced by the contending settings of the Arab communities, in terms of human rights (Abdelaal & Mura 2014; Norris 2009; Dudwick & Kuehnast 2016), and livelihood (Abdelaal & Mura 2014; World Bank 2004), along with other affecting variables like politics (Retta 2013; CARE 2013; Sabbagh 2005), religion (Salbi 2003; Dabbous-Sensenig 2002; Würth 2004), institutions (Rama 2013), laws (Abdelaal & Mura 2014), and civil society (Dabbous-Sensenig 2002), which mostly have a negative impact on gender issues, affecting the course and mode of women’s political participation (Abdelaal & Mura 2014; Blaydes & El Tarouty 2009) and inclusion.

⁵ World Development Report (WDR 2006: 129), World Bank.

There were frequent external pressures and some internal demands to go onward with gender political rights in the Arab world. It “falls considerably short [...] on indicators of women’s economic participation and political empowerment” (World Bank 2004: 1), even though most governments in the Middle East pledged to establish women’s rights, but the outcome was extremely modest.⁶ It should be noted that “donor commitment to women’s participation in the region remains questionable [...] the proportion of funding allocated to women’s programmes is usually quite low [...] despite donors’ insistence that women’s participation is vital in their work” (CARE 2013: 24), as such variables would indeed compromise efforts to maintain PRW in the Arab world.

There were further criticisms regarding the work done by international donors, as they were accused of following covert political objectives, where “women were often as critical as men of the perceived motives behind international aid” (CARE 2013: 20), which indicates the need to reconsider some of those efforts against which certain claims were made. However, allegations made should not be used as an excuse to hamper PRW efforts, together with the assistance allocated for them, as they should have been carried out regardless of foreign aid in the first place.

It should be mentioned that gender (political) empowerment efforts were carried out in a “region long characterized by political activity, whether in its anticolonial movements, its own regional and internal conflicts, or the various wars it has witnessed” (Sabbagh 2005: 52), and they were intertwined with the agendas of Western donors and regional actors that were driven by geopolitical imperatives. (CARE 2013: 29) Seemingly, given such facts, and especially the prevailing regional political instability, efforts that aimed to maintain Arab PRW were faced with extreme difficulties.

Recently, women had “played a prominent role in the Arab uprisings, but as the protests led to political transitions and societies entered a state of flux, the future of women’s political empowerment became uncertain.” (Retta 2013: 3) Such development came to further a pre-existing fact, i.e. “despite the achievements in terms of the increased number of women in decision-making positions, [...] the proportion of Arab women participating in elected parliaments is still one of the lowest in the world.” (Abdelaal & Mura 2014: 103) Apparently, there was some involvement by Arab women in prodemocracy movements; however they did not receive any tangible “rewards” in return.

It should be noted that “social environment also plays an important role in the disadvantaged position that Arab women have in the social and economic sectors” (Abdelaal & Mura 2014: 103). In that respect, “despite the changes in the economic and social reality of Middle Eastern women [...] traditional/religious laws continued to regulate family codes that include marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other aspects directly affecting women” (Salbi 2003: 15-16), which could have a tremendous impact in limiting, inter alia, women’s political potential.

⁶ as efforts that were made were met by stiff resistance by those whose interests were threatened, since the said efforts were not carried out in good faith, or lacked adequate means and resources. (Norris 2009)

Yet, and despite barriers mentioned and challenges faced, there were some accomplishments made, through certain institutional and administrative arrangements, which were carried out by pan-Arab (governmental) institutions.⁷ However, the progress made was not effective enough to boost Arab gender political rights, as Abdelaal & Mura (2014: 102-103)⁸ and Dabbous-Sensenig (2002: 1)⁹ gave some detailed account of the hindrances facing the efforts made, a fact which requires tremendous amount of efforts to deal with the complexities entailed, which are quite varied and diversified.

E. Strategy of Gender Quotas

Gender quotas had been quite instrumental in furthering descriptive representation of women. They could be defined as “numerical targets that stipulate the number or percentage of women that must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature.” (Dahlerup et al. 2013: 16) There were mixed reflections on their use (Dahlerup 2005: 144)¹⁰, as some consider quotas to be a form of "discrimination and a violation of the

⁷ Among the achievements mentioned, Women’s Committee, Women’s Affairs Directorate, and Arab Women’s Organization were established, along with Arab League’s specialist agencies and programme activities to enhance gender equality. (Abdelaal & Mura 2014: 104)

⁸ “[D]espite the progress made in recent years, many Arab women continue to struggle for equal treatment. Many legal provisions, in particular family and personal status laws, entail discrimination against women and give them lower status than men, especially when it comes to inheritance, custody of children, the right to divorce and property rights in general. In some countries, these laws have been reformed to achieve gender equality, but the prevailing culture of a traditional patriarchal society hinders the application of the reformed legislation, thereby continuing to allow discrimination against women.”

⁹ “[G]overnment decisions, traditional values, and dominant patriarchal interpretations of Islam [...] weakness, if not absence in some situations, of civil society in Arab countries. This weakness is mostly due to the predominantly authoritarian political systems, inexperience, and underdevelopment. In such an environment, local NGOs are left with little room for manoeuvring, and indeed may face physical or legal persecution both from authorities and disgruntled, radical religious groups protecting the status quo.”

¹⁰ Various arguments have been put forward for and against the introduction of quotas as a means to increase the political presence of women. The pros: • Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference. • Political representation should be a choice between ideas and party platforms, not between social categories. • Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected. • Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that better-qualified candidates are pushed aside. • Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women. • Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organization. • Quotas for women will be followed by demands for quotas for other groups, which will result in a politics of sheer group-interest representation.

and cons: • Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats. • Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women. • Women have the right as citizens to equal representation. • Women’s experience is needed in political life. • Men cannot represent the interest of women. Only many women can represent the diversity of women. • Election is about representation, not educational qualifications. • Women are just as qualified as men, but women’s qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a maledominated political system.

• Quotas do not discriminate against individual men. Rather quota rules limit the tendency of political parties to nominate only men. For the voters, the opportunities are expanded, since it now becomes possible to vote for women candidates. • Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily. • Several internationally recognized conventions on gender equality have set targets for women’s political representation, including the

principle of fairness, while others view them as compensation for structural barriers that prevent fair competition.” (Dahlerup 2003: 5)

Gender quotas should be accompanied by certain supporting strategies, like "changing the beliefs, institutions, and practices that structure women's opportunities to act effectively" (Htun, Piscopo, von Bergen 2015: 41). Also, it is important to study how gender quotas may or may not alter some of the barriers, which prevent women's equal participation and representation (Darhour & Dahlerup 2013: 1). Furthermore, the "importance of the electoral system and the political parties' attitudes and positions towards gender equality and their readiness to change the situation with either internal or external rules (state legislation)" is stressed upon (Dahlerup & Gaber 2017: 312), which should be taken into consideration during Arab PRW efforts.

Yet, gender quotas "do not remove all barriers for women in politics"¹¹, and "their success has not been guaranteed; some quotas have been much more effective than others"¹², as their "presence within the political sphere does not guarantee that the women's agenda will be pursued".¹³ Furthermore, there was a resentment expressed against the utilization of gender quotas, due to the allegation that they are against the principle of political elite formation based on merit, because they rely on the principle of imposition solely on the basis of gender, as "this imposition limits and denies voters' freedom of choice and is therefore undemocratic". (El-Makari 2009: 42) And in face of the application of gender quotas, Zetterberg (2008: 443-445) had referred to specific measures that are taken by male political leaders to subdue the presence of elected women.¹⁴ Apparently, there are both positive and negative views regarding the feasibility of application of gender quotas, which are liable to the setting and circumstances in which women's political inclusion efforts are conducted, in addition to the reaction of the forces that oppose women's political rights.

IV. Hypothesis

Based on the literature review made, it becomes apparent the fact that gender political rights and inclusion efforts in the Arab world are prone to different kinds of difficulties and challenges, which would hinder their advancement. Many Arab countries had adopted gender quotas to further those rights. However, despite widespread application of the strategy in question, which has been evident in good number of countries, gender quotas could deliver better results, if they are conducted within a framework of democratic political institutions. PRW efforts face a

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which 179 countries are now party to, as well as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. • How can it be justified that men occupy more than 80 percent of the parliamentary seats in the world?

¹¹ "[s]tigmatization of women politicians may even increase in quota systems. Difficulties combining family life, work life and politics still remain a severe obstacle to women's full citizenship." (Dahlerup 2005: 152)

¹² She also argued that it "is not simply having a quota but how the institution is designed that increases women's representation." (Schwindt-Bayer 2009: 22)

¹³ As other factors like political will, capacity support, re-shaping patriarchal structures, grassroots movements also matter. (Sethi 2013: 41)

¹⁴ According to him, such measures render their presence ineffective in terms of political participation and policy making, by furthering institutional constraints, restraining their activities, and marginalizing them by depriving them their independence.

multitude of variables, which impose themselves during the process of advancement of women's political rights in the Arab world, as good number of them has negative impact on the efforts mentioned. Therefore, it is up to democratic institutions to deal with those negative aspects, and flank gender quotas strategy towards the envisaged goals, otherwise waged efforts could only have a cosmetic effect on the status of the political rights of (Arab) women.

V. Methodology and Data Collection

To test the hypothesis posed, information was retrieved from the scholarly literature, and from periodic reports and indicators published by international and regional organizations regarding the status of democracy in Arab states, where among which there were the Arab Democracy Index and the Arab Barometer of the Arab Reform Initiative; Governance Assessment Portal of UNDP; rule of law indicators of World Justice Project, World Bank, and Freedom House; governance indicators of Bertelsmann Stiftung; corruption indicators of Transparency International; Fragile States Index (on human rights and rule of law) of the Fund of Peace. Most of the facts which were presented by them, and the figures that were disclosed, did not provide a favorable picture of the status of democracy (building) in the Arab world.

Also, further information has been retrieved about the status of gender quotas in the Arab world, and PRW efforts in general, from the comprehensive listing of Arab states¹⁵ that adopted gender quotas to advance PRW in their societies, i.e. data disclosed by quotaproject.¹⁶ Information had included recent data available on the elections held at the level of Arab parliaments, along with indicators that would explain the status of Arab women's political rights:

Country (election yr)	Parliament	Legislated quotas		Ratio
		Single/lower House level	Sub-national	
Algeria (2017)	Bicameral	√	√	119 of 462 (26%)
Djibouti (2018)	Unicameral	√	-	17 of 65 (26%)
Egypt (2015)	Unicameral	-	√	89 of 596 (15%)
Iraq (2018)	Unicameral	√	√	84 of 329 (26%)
Jordan (2016)	Bicameral	√	√	20 of 130 (15%)
Libya (2014)	Unicameral	√	√	30 of 200 (15%)
Mauritania (2013)	Unicameral	√ ¹⁷	√	31 of 153 (20%)
Morocco (2016)	Bicameral	√	√	81 of 395 (21%)
Palest. Ter. (2006)	Unicameral	√	√	17 of 132 (13%)
Saudi Arabia (2016)	Unicameral	√	√	30 of 151 (20%)
Somalia (2017)	Unicameral	√	-	67 of 275 (24%)
Sudan (2015)	Bicameral	√	-	130 of 426 (31%)
Tunisia (2014)	Unicameral	√	-	68 of 217 (31%)

¹⁵ Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

¹⁶ www.quotaproject.org of International IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union and Stockholm University.

¹⁷ In addition to upper house

Based on the data presented, it becomes apparent that out of 22 Arab states, only 13 have applied gender quotas (59% of Arab states), with an average score of 21.7% of women's political representation, or approximately 1/5.

Thus, the table shows thirteen Arab countries that had applied the strategy of gender quotas, achieving different results. Yet, despite such strategy, gender political rights still fell behind – to say the least – in the Arab world, a fact which has been made apparent through statements and figures produced by various scholars and organizations.

Furthermore, and taking a quick look at the table, it becomes obvious that even with the application of gender quotas, the percentage of women parliamentarians in Arab legislatures had ranged from as low as 13%, and up to 31% maximum, which could be considered relatively low, in terms of women's political representation.

It should be also noted that political representation does not occur only in legislatures, but it could also take place in other sectors of political institutions, such as government, with all its branches and agencies. However, parliaments are conventional targets of PRW efforts and strategies, and an indicator whether such strategies are delivering results.

It should be mentioned that there were no voluntary quotas adopted by political parties in the Arab world.

On the other hand, there were 9 Arab countries who did not apply gender quotas. Based on the data retrieved from both quotaproject and International Parliamentary Union (IPU), the average figure of women's representation in their case was 6.3% or 1/16.

Country (election yr)	Parliament	Ratio
Syria (2016)	Unicameral	33 of 250 (13%)
Lebanon (2018)	Unicameral	6 of 128 (5%)
Oman (2015, appointed)	Bicameral	1 of 85 (0%) ¹⁸
Yemen (2003)	Bicameral	1 of 301 (0%)
Qatar (2016, appointed)	Unicameral	0 of 35 (0%) ¹⁹
Bahrain (2014)	Bicameral	3 of 40 (7.5%) ²⁰
Kuwait (2016)	Unicameral	2 of 65 (3%)
Comoros (2015)	Unicameral	2 of 33 (6%)
UAE (2015)	Unicameral	9 of 40 (22.5%) ²¹

Taking the two results into consideration, one could realize that the average of gender political representation in Arab parliaments (quotas and without quotas) equals 14% (or 1/7), against a global average of 24% (or 1/4).

¹⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parline database.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

There is a discrepancy in the numbers provided, i.e. between data of the quotaproject and IPU. Also, the quotaproject had concentrated on figures pertaining to the lower or single house, while IPU had presented both lower and upper houses.

Anyway, and given the fact that discrepancy is not that large, and upon taking into consideration the data presented by IPU regarding regional averages, it could be observed that countries with democratic political systems like those in Europe and N. America, had scored above the world average which is 24%, while countries with significant democracy deficits (Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Arab World and Pacific) scored less than the average.

Regional Averages			
	Single House or Lower House	Upper House or Senate	Both Houses combined
Nordic countries	42.3%	---	---
Americas	29.9%	30.6%	30.0%
Europe - OSCE member countries including Nordic countries	27.9%	27.21	27.7%
Europe - OSCE member countries excluding Nordic countries	26.5%	27.1%	26.6%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.7%	22.3%	23.6%
Asia	19.6%	17.7%	19.4%
Arab States	18.6%	12.6%	17.8%
Pacific	15.5%	37.1%	17.0%
Regions are classified by descending order of the percentage of women in the lower or single House ²²			

Total MPs	46'113 ²³
Gender breakdown known for	46'113
Men	34'699
Women	10'979
Percentage of women	24.0%

Also, and taking the composition of the European Parliament, women's ratio reaches as high as 35.2% (or 1/3), which again exceeds the global ratio of 24%.

European Parliament 35.2% ²⁴			
Country	Seats	Women	Percentage
Finland	13	8	61.5%
Sweden	18	10	55.6%
Estonia	6	3	50.0%
Netherlands	25	12	48.0%
Bulgaria	17	8	47.1%
Denmark	13	6	46.2%
France	72	32	44.4%

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Austria	17	7	41.2%
Slovakia	13	5	38.5%
Latvia	8	3	37.5%
Germany	99	37	37.4%
Belgium	22	8	36.4%
Hungary	22	8	36.4%
Portugal	22	8	36.4%
Romania	33	12	36.4%

VI. Analysis and Discussion of the Findings

What results had been achieved as a result of the application of gender quotas in the Arab world, in terms of advancing of women’s political rights and inclusion?

Evidently, many countries, including Arab, adopted gender quotas to foster PRW, despite some reservations regarding that strategy, and doubts regarding the feasibility of its application in states having huge democratic deficits, like most Arab states, thus questioning the impact of that strategy on the prospects of maintaining PRW. Apparently, when considering the figures that had been showcased in the previous tables, it could be inferred that the result of its application has not been encouraging at all.

Therefore, gender quotas by themselves were not enough to make the necessary change, because there were certain variables involved in the PWR efforts that had their crucial impact on the outcome emerged.

Following is a listing of those variables:

A. Democracy

Democracy is considered an asset by many scholars for the stability and advancement of states, enhancing their political, economic and social potential and prospects. It provides a significant contribution to the maintenance of political and social justice, through maintaining equitable political representation, with the adoption of certain strategies (gender quotas for instance) towards that end, while being faced with difficulties and barriers.

Democracy could provide a favourable setting that could foster women’s political rights, including substantive political representation. It could secure the space in which pro-gender policies could be nurtured and enhanced, while confronting the challenges that could compromise the attainment of women’s political rights.

Generally, countries could achieve good numerical (political) representation of women, including those states which are not democratic. In this case, the issue of substantive representation is raised, in terms of the ability of women to pursue pro-gender policies, represent their concerns and interests, set their own agendas, and struggle for their own interests, which could be greatly facilitated in democratic political systems.

Scholars had often noted the importance of democratic political systems in providing freedom and equality of opportunity, in addition to conducive environment to citizens to exercise their basic rights and maintain gender political equality. Having the issue of efficacy of representation in mind, scholars underscored the importance of maintaining substantive representation of women, in addition to the descriptive one, while referring to gender equity and equality as benchmarks for maintaining women's political rights.

Democracy, which could apparently provide an immense input towards sustaining women's political representation and participation, is in a deplorable condition in the Arab world. Despite some significant efforts to overthrow dictatorships and to establish democratic rule during the recent years, efforts did not lead to stable democratic political systems, as many Arab states are lost in systemic mayhem, unable to find their way out from the prevailing instability and conflict. Given the present situation in the Arab world, the prospects of achieving gender political equality seem quite dim.

But what about those Arab states that did not witness such conflicts (yet), or more precisely, what about those Arab states before the eruption of the recent popular upheaval. Apparently, the picture is (or was) quite discouraging. Arab states had long been characterised by the rule of one man (king, prince, or president), ruling for indefinite periods of time, lacking transparency in his acts and policies, and free from any sort of accountability to other government branches, or to the public in general, as citizens lacked adequate mechanisms and literacy of oversight, and thus were unable to exercise their basic rights, which could have been greatly enhanced provided democratic political system was in place.

As such, it becomes apparent that i) democratic political systems are conducive to women's political rights, equality, and inclusion, ii) most Arab states are either undemocratic or have weak democratic structures, and iii) Arab women's political rights are facing a multitude of barriers and challenges, in a time when women political inclusion efforts that have been made were often stranded, given the difficult circumstances prevailing in the Arab world.

It should be pointed out that democracy is not a guarantee that women's political rights are going to be necessarily respected or maintained. However, it does not mean that democracy has no role to play in the efforts to enhance the maintenance of women's political rights. The problem is that in many (Arab) countries, despite the existence of written laws and regulations, the impact of culture (and other variables) is so strong that citizens would generally adhere to their own beliefs and practices, rather than abiding by legal principles and regulations that could be the output of democratic political systems, which are sometimes considered odd to them, leaving a negative impact on women's political inclusion in many instances.

Therefore, and given democracy could provide a credible contribution towards maintaining women's political representation and participation, and since Arab states mostly lack democratic political systems and inherent women's political rights, it is imperative to consolidate democracy building efforts in the Arab world and embed PRW efforts in it.

B. Women's Political Representation

Having spoken about democracy and its contribution to the maintenance of women's rights, including political, it is only natural to speak about one of the main components and functions of democratic political systems, which is political representation and participation of citizens, to be carried out in an effective manner, allowing all to express and exercise their (political) aspirations freely and without undue constraints. And as democracy allows the practice of political representation and participation unreservedly to all citizens, women, in their turn, will be able to reap the rewards of that political system in favour of their political aspirations.

Political representation and participation are important drivers that could bring Arab citizens' interests to an appropriate level of treatment. Being a distinctive feature of democratic systems, they constitute an outlet through which diverse needs and demands are expressed and processed. And among the various political agendas that would traffic along the theme specified, women's political rights remain one of the many contenders that wander along the course, where the existing diversity in women's needs and aspirations leads into a debate over the nature of women's interests, as proper understanding those interests is vital to conduct women's political empowerment policies.

A strong correlation exists between political representation/participation and women's (political) rights. Feminists had often tended to further their interests (political, economic, social, religious...), and broaden their goals and scope of activities, along with the different modes of representation that are put in motion, together with the role that each mode plays in furthering women's political inclusion. When deprived of political representation and participation, women's rights practices would considerably suffer, along with difficulties entailed in executing their agendas against diverse competitors.

Evidently, women are one of the weak and vulnerable elements in many societies (including Arab), being often unable to effectively raise their voice against the injustice experienced, being trapped in a vicious circle of chronic political underrepresentation. Thus, adequate measures should be taken at various levels to rectify matters and bring women's political issues to appropriate levels of representation, which could be done best in democratic political systems.

Again, the struggle for maintaining substantive political interpretation of Arab women is liable to various difficulties and challenges, due to weak democratic structures and insufficient political space to exercise human and gender related rights and activities, together with strong social tension during deliberation on such topics, as women could be considered a "minority" or vulnerable group, being subject to improper treatment, as significant role is expected to be played by Arab governments in maintaining favourable political and policy settings, which would respond to citizens' and women's different political aspirations.

C. Gender Quotas and the Arab World

Among the many strategies that have been employed to foster women's political inclusion, gender quotas seem to occupy an interesting place, both at academic and policy level, as they are a universal phenomenon, intended to treat women's political underrepresentation, especially

in developing countries, or those in transition. They had caught much attention and raised considerable controversy regarding their feasibility, notably in furthering women's political rights.

Based on the feedback retrieved from literature review, scholars were not able to give a unanimous and decisive answer regarding the feasibility of applying gender quotas. There were some who advocated their application, considering them an interim act towards maintaining women's political rights, while others criticized their focus on increasing number of women, without taking into consideration the quality of increased representation, in terms of advocating women's agendas.

Arab countries, in their turn, implemented gender quotas to further women's political inclusion, as women's political rights had been prone to prolonged challenges and difficulties, along political, economic, social and religious lines, which had led to criticisms from the international and donor community. The adopted strategy however did not yield the aspired results, as Arab countries are still witnessing substantial women's political underrepresentation, which were (already) made evident by presented scholarly input.

The primary reason for the inability of such strategy to deliver required results was not due to some of the negative features that it had incorporated, but rather to the setting in which gender quota strategies had been implemented, i.e. the political environment and other pertaining themes that intersected with it, which have already been showcased, and which compromised the chances for producing credible results. The multitude of barriers noted were primarily associated with the democracy deficit prevailing in the Arab world that hindered vast developmental policies, including women's (political) rights from evolving.

It was suggested that gender quotas could be a quick remedy to women's political underrepresentation, while others were quite critical regarding the viability of that strategy. These competing views could be harmonized by the important role that democracy would play in leveraging the inconsistencies associated with the application of gender quotas, not to mention the enabling environment that is created by it, which could greatly enhance developmental strategies, regardless of their nature, and enhance their effective application, including, of course, those in the Arab world.

Indeed, Arab countries lacked the enabling (democratic) environment in which pro-gender policies could be nurtured and advanced, especially when democratic structures are key drivers for empowering social justice ventures. Given this fact, applying gender quota strategies had a cosmetic impact in many instances, unable to deliver tangible results in terms of pro-gender policies, as there was no sense of applying such strategy, when it was deprived of the strong foundations, empowerment modes, means, and drivers that democracy could have provided, in order for women to be able to exercise their political rights effectively.

It should have been mentioned that women's rights are considered a challenging topic in the Arab world, especially when they intersect with themes like religion, customs, education, economy... which usually leave a negative impact on the efforts to sustain political rights of Arab women, denoting concept's controversial nature, together with the different views associated with its implementation.

Therefore, democracy could be considered a big asset for building women's political rights in the Arab world, where without democratic political structures, women's political rights and inclusion could not be developed, as democracy is a catalyst that could carry such ventures towards desired ends. Consequently, such findings have their leverage on PRW attainment programs, whether conducted at public policy level, or at the level of international development organizations and donor agencies.

VII. Conclusions

The presentation dealt with a highly controversial topic for an equally highly controversial region. In doing so, it had: 1. Reviewed concepts that intersect with women's political rights. 2. Addressed the status of women's political rights in the Arab world. 3. Assessed the results obtained from the strategies applied (gender quotas). 4. Appraised the hypothesis posed, verifying its viability along the findings garnered.

The presentation showcased how theories and concepts could have different manifestations in real practice, given the variety of settings that they operate in. Gender issues could not function in isolation, especially when they exist in a contending political environment that compromises efforts made to move onward with PRW efforts, whereas they should be an integral part of a process of democratization. In other words, gender strategies (including quotas) would excel in democracies, as freedom, rule of law, periodic fair and free elections, and equal opportunities, are conducive to PRW efforts, especially in instances when democracy and liberalism coexist harmoniously. Having serious democratic deficit, Arab states failed to embody gender values in their policies, while legislatures failed to provide an enabling framework for their advancement, and their eventual extension to other government branches, in the form of pro-gender policies. On the other hand, Arab religious institutions and social norms played a negative role towards the attainment of women's rights, either to further their doctrines/beliefs, or to preserve existing powers – which are usually embedded in law. Harnessing religious practices and societal norms was a complicated challenge that gender equality efforts had normally experienced, in face of prolonged alliance of political-religious complex in Arab countries.

Thus, women's political representation and participation interact with variety of variables that affect their status and course. And to foster them, scholars had proposed the adoption of certain strategies, like gender quotas. Such strategies have greater opportunity to deliver results, if they are incorporated in an overall process of democratization, as democracy provides an enabling environment for countries to amplify and consolidate their pro-gender policies, based on integrated policy interventions. There are many countries that have a poor record in democracy and women's rights, as it is the case with Arab (developing) states, whose developmental prospects are considerably compromised, mainly because of undemocratic policies pursued, where their public policies must have been aligned with democratic principles, for gender political equality policies to have better chances to deliver results. On the other hand, having democratic political system does not necessarily mean that women's political rights will be maintained, as there are other variables involved in the process. However, having democratic political system could greatly facilitate the attainment of those rights.

As such, gender political representation and participation could be fostered in the Arab world, provided gender related strategies, including quotas, are accompanied by a process of democratization, which would, inter alia, limit perpetuating economic and social disparities, further long-term growth, inhibit gender impaired institutional development, and predatory acts of certain elites, while preventing gender political inequality from reproducing itself across time. Thus, the outcome of strategies adopted depends on the fact whether they constitute an integral part of a process of democratization, which could start delivering credible results at some point.

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