The Electoral Quota—A Form of Gender Quota to Increase Women's Participation in Parliament: A Quantitative Study from a Survey in the Middle East

Sophia F. D. Lu
University of the Philippines Diliman

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The Electoral Quota—A Form of Gender Quota to Increase Women's Participation in Parliament: A Quantitative Study from a Survey in the Middle East

By Sophia Francesca D. Lu[1]

Abstract

Objective: This research focuses on the impact of political parties and electoral quotas on women's political participation within the context of Islam.

Methods: This study utilizes quantitative methods in analyzing women in eight Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. The statistical dataset was culled from Kaasem's work entitled *Party Variation in Religiosity and Women's Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective, 2008-2010,* published by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research of the University of Michigan. The statistical analysis and modeling focused on selected Middle East countries, namely: Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Turkey, Israel, and Kuwait. The sample consisted of 126 observations at the political party level

Results: Gender is construed as a classification of being a woman or a man not merely by biological identification but one that is embedded within culture, and structures of power in families, communities, and states, which have gender in itself, as an organizing principle. Woman's question (dispute of women) is identified as a complex personal and social problem, and therefore cannot be rejected as a valid search for gender sameness or equality. Based on the quantitative analysis of the dataset of the survey conducted among selected Middle East countries, electoral quotas and seats occupied in previous parliaments affect women's nominations in current parliaments.

Conclusion: The research shows that electoral quota for women has proven to increase female participation in parliaments.

Keywords: Electoral Quotas, Gender Quotas, Female Participation in Parliament, Middle East

Introduction

Islamic feminism as a social movement is recognized to have formally started during the 1979 revolution in Iran. The toppling of the Shah of Iran turned the secular government into an Islamic state, which advocated Islam as the standard rule for society (Shojaei, 2010). Historically, the status of women was based on the teachings of Islam and hadith[2]. The actual role of women during the various Islamic periods such as the Shii and Umaya caliphates and the representation of women's sexuality in the Sufi hagiography as a more fundamental type of Islam, was patriarchal (Kia, 2000). However, some Muslim feminists felt that Dar-Al-Islam had degenerated as a result

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[1] Sophia Francesca Lu is currently a Senior Lecturer at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of the Philippines Diliman. She teaches social statistics and research methods. She has done research on Muslim women and political participation since 2013. She has obtained her master's degree in Statistics at the University of the Philippines, Diliman, and is now completing her Doctorate Degree at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia.

[2] According to Moosa and Mian (2012), hadith is a collective term referring to the teachings and dialogues of the Prophet Muhammad.

of western secular values, and in order to salvage their true Quranic identity, they launched a struggle against secularization and helped establish the Islamic state. The Islamic feminists believe that Islam is the only religion that does not exploit or marginalize them. Although Islam assigns the domestic sphere to women, they could in principle participate in the political and economic affairs of society. But in practice, the social relations remained to be gendered especially the laws on marriage and families (Ungor, 1968). These forms of cultural practice gave a common project for the opposing groups of feminists—secular and Islamic—to unite, and fight for equal rights and to oppose state patriarchy.

This study aims to analyze the role of electoral quotas in women's political participation and the factors surrounding it among Middle East countries. The analysis done makes use of the political context of the Middle East as a whole and does not seek to solely analyze women's political participation for any specific nation.

Methodology

A comparative case study of Islam and its relation to women's political participation was conducted for eight countries: Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, Yemen, Cyprus and Kuwait. There are documented accounts in these countries as to the type of women's political participation, the effect of major socio-political factors that interact with Islam in affecting women's political participation.

The study makes use of the survey conducted by the University of Michigan entitled "Party Variation in Religiosity and Women's Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective, 2008-2010" published by the Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research. The statistical analysis and modeling focused only on selected Middle East countries, namely: Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Turkey, Israel, and Kuwait. The sample consists of 126 political parties at the political party level. This is also based on the article of Lu on "Women's Electoral Participation in Muslim Majority and Non-Muslim Majority Countries" (Lu, 2013) and "Formal Institutions and Women's Electoral Representation in Four European Countries- Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands" (Lu, 2016).

The study also uses secondary documents and published case studies on eight Middle East countries. Literature and data on these eight states are prevalent. Furthermore, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen and Cyprus are the centers of the Arab Spring. Iran is included in the study, as it is the only Shi'a majority state in the Middle East. Thus, in order to compare and contrast the treatment of Sunni and Shi'a blocs on women's political participation, the inclusion of Iran in the study is necessary. Also, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are included as well, as they are two of the most conservative Muslim countries in the Middle East.

The ethics in research was followed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The objectives and research design were clarified with the interviewees/experts. Since feminism (see below) is your theoretical framework, how did it influence your data collection? This is important to the JIWS—please elaborate in a paragraph.

Epistemological Position

Given the research questions, the epistemological position (theoretical position) relevant to the research is feminism. Feminism is usually described in terms of waves. The first wave of feminism during the 19th century encapsulated the sentiments of women surrounding the economic disparity between men and women in terms of job opportunities and voting. From here stemmed

the socialist and liberal feminist movement. Feminism further evolved through the help of the United Nations into the second wave of feminism, which gave focus to the rights of women from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Third-wave feminism then followed which gave emphasis to the deconstruction of gender norms and stereotypes that seemed to limit an individual's actions and means of expression. From these three waves, multiple forms of feminisms were produced; however, this study will focus on socialist feminism. The socialist feminism movement mainly focused on women's position and opportunities in society in terms of economic and political involvement. They highlighted the injustice surrounding what was lawfully permitted to men but not women. Among these were property ownership, voting, electoral participation, and working conditions (Ampofo Adjei, and Brobbey, 2015). Feminism looks into gender relations and women's issues in society. It shows how women differ or relate to men in various aspects of society such as the economy, politics, social, cultural and ideological understandings. It also shows how women address these issues for their self-empowerment. Using the socialist feminist approach, the perspectives of women, experts, and groups shall be elicited through the case studies and secondary data. Positivist quantitative methodology was used in this study.

The effect of Islam on the political participation of women in Muslim countries should not disregard the influence of political opportunities such as modernization, nationalisms and uprisings, political structures such as states and political parties, and political actors such as the women themselves, that interact with Islam in constructing women's subjectivity and women's socio-political location. In this way, we move from a reductionist focus on causal factors to a more contextualized and inclusive investigation. Also, the interaction between Islam and women's political participation is affected by the specific socio-historical contexts upon which it is articulated, as well as how the woman herself reacts to such construction of her identity and subjectivity. Political participation is investigated here to mean a range of activities including electoral participation, and political leadership in governance, which allows opportunities for political agendas of women to develop (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005).

Political participation of women also describes women's active involvement in the political affairs and mechanisms of the state, whether as part of formal institutions, such as the parliament or elective offices, or as part of informal institutions, such as pressure groups, interest groups and social movements. On the other hand, electoral quotas of women refers to the availability and accessibility of women to vote or run for elective offices (Blaydes & El Tarouty, 2009). The personal identities of women with religion and private home is expounded through the qualitative case studies, while the political participation of women is analyzed using the quantitative study.

Results and Discussion
Quantitative Results

For the quantitative method, the dataset utilized was from a survey operation conducted by the University of Michigan entitled "Party Variation in Religiosity and Women's Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective, 2008-2010". Data on women's participation in the political arena as well as in other decision-making bodies are extracted and analyzed. The sample for this study consists of 126 political parties with or without electoral quotas for women across eight Middle East countries.

The study shows that average percentage of female membership is higher in countries where electoral quotas are imposed, as opposed to countries that do not have electoral quotas for

female leaders. (See Figure 1). Again, electoral quota of women refers in this study as the availability and accessibility of women to vote or run for elective offices.

Figure 1. Average percent female membership in leadership positions by electoral quota
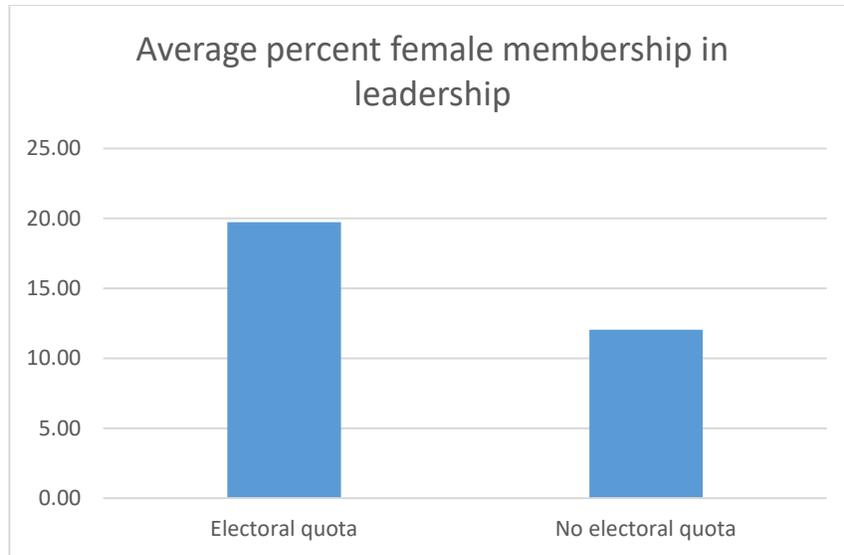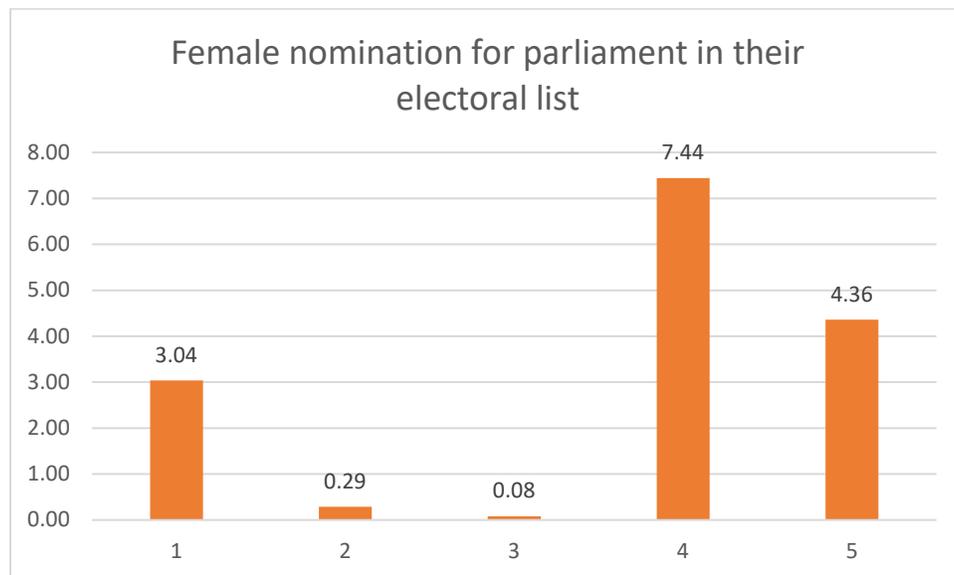

Figure 2 shows that the female nominations for parliament in their electoral lists is higher for countries that are more secular.

Figure 2. Female nomination for parliament in their electoral list by level of secularism

Governments that impose electoral quotas yield greater number of females in parliament because the purpose of an electoral quota is to increase the diversity and inclusivity of members in the government. Electoral quotas are also an attempt of the state to modernize its government

and increase representation for groups whose voices are underrepresented, women included (Krook, Lovenduski, & Squires, 2009). The adoption of an electoral quota, specifically gender quotas, are largely dependent on the beliefs and philosophies of those in power to implement this. Therefore, addressing cultural beliefs and norms are still vital in determining whether or not electoral quotas are implemented in a country. This explains why secular or non-Muslim countries have higher percentage of women members in parliament, because they are known to be more liberal. This is supported by a study that found Muslim nations who adapted more liberal and democratic practices, tend to yield greater participation among women (Spierings, Smits, & Verloo, 2009).

According to Kosmin (2007), secularism is usually associated with the separation or differentiation of each aspect of a society. This implies that religious, social, political and cultural aspects are separate from each other and are not used to influence the decisions made within each area. As a country becomes more secular, the more it adapts independence of each sphere, having less influence on each other. This is why results of this study (See Figure 2) show that those with a secularism level of 5 have the greatest female nominations. While the secularism level of 1 has a lower number of female nominations. The lowest number of female nominations in this study also coincides with the least level of secularism (Kosmin, 2007).

According to multiple studies (Lu, 2013; Crocco, Pervez, & Katz, 2009; Moghadam, 2004) patriarchal societies are prevalent in countries with lesser women in electoral parties. This philosophy alone has heavy implication on the involvement of women not only with regards to politics, but as well as the workforce. This leads to the lack of maximization of resources among these nations considering that the women are educated, yet their skills are not put to adequate use (Haghihat, 2013; Crocco et. al, 2009; Moghadam, 2004).). In Pakistan, in an attempt to show the world that their government is modernized, they have implemented electoral quotas to increase the number of women in parliament (Bano, 2009). According to Bano (2009), electoral quotas to include women were implemented by governments also as a response to globalization forces. Another study explains that politicians agreed to increase the number of women in politics to also serve as helpers or support to the male politicians (Ali, 2012).

In actuality, the religion governing Muslim nations is not the problem itself, rather the issue is its practice (Marshall, 2003). Islam originally is a religion that has always valued and included women, without seeing them as a group to be oppressed (Crocco et al, 2009). Proof that the Islam teaching itself was not the main cause of oppression but its practice and application, would be the stark contrast between two Pakistani leaders' rule over a nation. Jafar (2005) writes of a period where women's rights and independence were on the hopes of flourishing during the rule of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. In fact, a perceived victory for women during the time was the establishment of the Family Law, ironically the present means of female subjugation among Islamic nations (Crocco, 2009; Moghadam, 2004; Moghadam, 2010). When the Family Law was first passed, its parameters were there to protect and empower women such as preventing simple (verbal) means of divorcing a wife, acquiring permission from the wife to be polygamous, and giving the woman choice over marriage and divorce. However, when Prime Minister Zia overthrew Zulfiqar in 1977, progress made was halted. His attempts to appease traditional power holders and differentiate their nation from the west, was through reinforcing strict laws guised under upholding the practices of Islam. At the time, the most perceived form of western culture inculcation was the increasing involvement of women in the economic sphere. This then became Zia's focal point for producing a picture of an Islam nation free from western influence. This allowed the judgment of the law to be superseded by Islamic laws; therefore, allowing judgments

to be passed according to what was perceived by the court as not in alignment with Islam. Jafar (2005) concludes that the oppression of women should be analysed, and addressed through different lenses of society- implying that its religious context should not be the only lens to which it is studied. As time passed, the contemporary versions of Islam took over, which involved varying interpretations of its teachings (Abdullah, 2007) – including those that surrounded a woman's role in society – leading to its patriarchal application among women (Crocco et. al, 2009). Majority of the contemporary versions of Islam still perceive women to be subject to men and disagree that they should have equal rights for the fear of seeming "westernized." However, they are growing movements who demand that women have equal rights with men with the justification that, contrary to popular belief, it does not go against the teachings of Islam.[3] The presence of differing beliefs from different movements within Islam is already telling on how its practice is dependent on their interpretation of the teachings and how the degrading treatment of women (e.g. women as men's property (Moghadam, 2004)) by men is not an absolute truth of Islam (Abdullah, 2007). This is further exhibited in a study among Arab-American women found that those who strictly practiced Islam according to what was taught to them by their family, and those who believed that those teachings were without error were less likely to adapt a more feminist orientation. While those who did not practice Islam as strictly and who did not see it as absolute truth were more likely to adapt a feminist orientation. This is important to note because it shows how the propagation of the present Islamic practice is instrumental in suppressing a woman's feminist orientation. This is further supported by the fact that those who were found to marry into the same ethnicity, were also less likely to adapt a feminist orientation (Marshall, 2003). In the context of tradition and beliefs, what takes priority is the identity gained from the community as a whole, rather than individual identities which involves gender and sexuality (Moore, 2004). A Muslim woman's view on the teachings of Islam being free of error is also important to study because this gives an idea on how likely they are to question its teaching. This is observed among Islamic feminists who call for a reinterpretation of the Quran, arguing that its teachings do not see women the way it is currently being taught (Ahmed-Gosh, 2008).

The statistical analysis focuses on what variables significantly affect female nominations in parliament. Table 1 below shows the results of Model 1. Internal party quota has a significant effect on the female nominations in parliament. Hence, the equation below provides a prediction on how internal party quota affects female nominations in parliament. For every increase in internal party quota, there is a 144-fold-unit increase in female nominations in parliament.

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[3] Providing a more detailed explanation on the different versions of contemporary Islam would supply greater insight but would be too lengthy for the purpose of this paper. Abdullah (2007) attempts to classify a few (e.g. Legalist Traditionalist, Theological Puritans, Political Islamists, Secular Liberals, Cultural Nominalists, and others) but admits that it is impossible to list all due to the dynamic nature of religion.

Table 1. Results for Linear Regression of How Seat Previously Occupied in Parliament and Internal Party Quota affect Female Nominations in Parliament

Linear Regression	Coefficients	p-value
Intercept	45.3150	0.0349
Internal Party Quota	144.2950	0.0015

$$y_{female\ nominations\ in\ parliament} = 45.3150 + 144.2950x_{internal\ party\ quota}$$

Both the electoral quota and seats occupied in previous parliament have effects on the number of females nominated in current parliament. For every increase in electoral quota and seats occupied in previous parliament, there is a 342- and 2.7-fold increase in female nomination in current parliament. The equation below provides a prediction on how electoral quota together with seats occupied in previous parliament affect female nominations in parliament.

These findings are consistent with other studies that have found, in general, any type of electoral quota such as that implemented by the government or by the party produces an increase in nominated and elected females in parliament (Hughes, 2011; Krook et. al, 2009). This is because when an internal party quota, or legislated electoral quota is implemented and compliance is observed, parties are more likely to increase the number of qualified female representatives to meet the quota, therefore increasing the chances of nomination and election (Krook et. al, 2009). When gender quotas are not present, ethnic religious groups are less likely to include women in their political parties. The increase in women representation among this type of group is only observed when mandatory gender quotas are implemented (Holmseten, Moser, & Slosar, 2010). Therefore, gender quotas are necessary in helping increase the representation of women in government.

Table 2. Results for Multiple Linear Regression of How Seat Previously Occupied in Parliament and Electoral Quota affect Female Nominations in Parliament

Linear Regression	Coefficients	p-value
Intercept	58.9410	0.0032
Electoral Quota	342.1580	0.0002
Seat in Previous Parliament	2.7020	0.0430

$$y_{female\ nominations\ in\ parliament}$$
$$= 58.9410 + 342.1580x_{electoral\ quota} + 2.7020x_{seat\ occupied\ in\ previous\ parliament}$$

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of the Two Models

Models	Sum of squares
Model 1 (Internal party quota)	4,910,697
Model 2 (Electoral quota and seats occupied in previous parliament)	4,772,783

Model 2 is better at predicting female nominations in parliament as it has a lower value for its sum of squares. This finding is consistent with a study that found electoral quotas implemented by the government, rather than the political party, are more effective in increasing political female nomination and election. This is because the incentive and penalties gained from the party's status of compliance is implemented by the governing, implying a more absolute rule of law (Hughes, 2011). In internal party quotas, frequently, these are voluntarily implemented but when electoral quotas dictated by the government is adopted, the parties have no choice but to comply, directly increasing the number of women in government positions (Krook et. al, 2009). In addition to this, electoral quotas are more likely to produce greater female political representation because when these are mandated, political parties will increase their number of female members to increase their chances of party representation in government (Holmsten et. al, 2010). Historically, electoral quotas mandated by law, fought by Muslim women demanding greater representation in politics, also succeeded in increasing political representation of women (Ben Shitrit, 2016).

Electoral quotas and Gender Inclusion in the Region

The adoption of electoral quotas in the region have been symbolic for improving the plight of women. Although others (Ali, 2012; Bano, 2009) would argue that the increase in women in politics has only done minimal progress for promoting women empowerment and inclusion in the workforce, Ben Shitrit (2016) still explains that the adoption of electoral quotas have been significant in initiating discourses on women's question. In fact, since the start of implementation of electoral quotas, political parties complying with the quota began arguing that Islam never taught woman's exclusion from politics. Other politicians and parties began citing verses in the Quran that supported the idea of women in politics. Parties also began convincing their followers and potential voters that women were capable of joining the political arena. Although, they still maintained that a woman's priority is still her household and family should never be sacrificed for the sake of work. The participation of women in politics alone was challenging the traditional norms of their role in society. Husbands even begun verbalizing their support to their wives running, breaking beliefs that women are only meant for the home (Ben Shitrit, 2016). Political participation is needed to help empower women because this puts them in a decision-making position that could improve opportunities for women. This is important because the inclusion of women alone in the workforce is already a significant step in empowering them because this adds to their resources, which contribute to agency (Haghighat, 2013).

Aside from symbolic representation, electoral quotas promote substantive representation of women in politics. This refers to the ability to improve women's rights due to the increased representation in the political arena (Nanes, 2015). Since women's election into parliament, there has been an increase in legislation proposed to support women and increase their opportunities, but only few have been passed and approved. This is because the female politician's male colleagues either do not listen to them or perceive the issues they raise as not necessary or

important. Also, division between males and females is still prevalent within the political arena, as some male politicians tend to view women's debates as lacking in prestige as compared to the issues that men raise. Still, the presence of an electoral quota has made women realize that they too have a place in government and encouraged them to act and run. Their presence in government also made their male colleagues realize that women are capable of being as skilled as men. All of this contributes to normalizing women in spheres that were once exclusive to men (Nanes, 2015). It should be noted, however, that despite the increase in female participation within parliament, women are still hindered from passing legislations that could improve the placement of women in Muslim societies. Bano (2009) iterates the issues surrounding the slow progression of women's rights despite growing representation in Pakistan. First of all, the acceptance of women into parliament does not mean the eradication of the patriarchal culture that is still deeply rooted among Muslim nations. In fact, this mindset is not only present among male political colleagues but among female ones as well. Even within the political arena and on equal positions, the men believe that the women were only elected into position to serve as supporters for the males within their parties (Ali, 2012). Bano (2009) also explains the move to increase female participation within parliament was mainly so that they may be perceived by the international community as modernized and not necessarily improve the economic involvement of women. This is further supported by the study of Spierings et al (2009) which looked into gender equality through measuring women's labor marker participation (LMP). They found that the general trend of most countries was that an increase in its economic development, usually meant an increase in women's LMP. However, when it came to nations which were governed through State Islamization, increased economic development or modernization did not mean increased LMP among women. In fact, women's participation was more heavily dependent on the democratic freedoms implemented by the nation rather than its modernization (Spierings et al, 2009). This shows how culturally embedded patriarchal views are among these Muslim nations such that to improve the rights of women, would mean a cultural shift in the mindset of people. This reality should not, however, invalidate the progress made so far to encourage equality for women in the economic and political sector. At the same time, the efforts to attain equality should not end because there are women in parliament. It is hard to change the mindset and culture of people if efforts are only focused on a national level, but efforts to change the local and unit-level are neglected. Muhibbu-Din (2019) explains that to address the political participation of women – not just in terms of seats elected but legislations passed as well in support of women -- change should occur in the socio-economic and cultural factors surrounding women. He claims that it is wrong to exclusively use Islam (in any form) to justify the lack of involvement of women in politics and sites readings in the Quran which even praised certain women for exhibiting wisdom regarding social and political affairs. Therefore, Islam itself cannot be blamed for the oppression and opposition faced by women. Muhibbu-Din (2019) suggests that addressing the inequality between two genders would require differentiating cultural practice from the way Islam actually portrays and acknowledges both sexes. The author adds that the international community and Islamic feminists should acknowledge that the Quran teaches that both sexes have different roles to play. If Muslim women are to involve themselves in political and economic affairs it should be done in such a way that the roles ascribed to them are not neglected. Therefore, the changes made (e.g. legislation, support) should involve increasing women's economic significance without threatening their capacity to uphold their roles within the family (Muhibbu-Din, 2019). Musawa, a female organization in Malaysia, seeks to improve the position of women in Muslim nations by providing information on

how equality is possible within the context of Islam; and therefore, challenging the misconceived interpretations of Islamic teachings regarding women (UN Women, 2018).

The accomplishments that women have made within the economic and political sphere should also be traced back to them and given importance as well. It is not enough that they are known as female politicians but the role they play and changes they have made should also be associated with their name. How can women - in a society that perceives men to be more competent than the latter – be empowered to take on leadership roles when they are unaware of any significant changes the current-elected female politicians have made? This dilemma was also observed by Vernet and Butera (2005) regarding feminist movements. They claimed that despite the freedoms achieved due to feminist movements, the lack of acknowledgement in the role that they played to achieve these freedoms has maintained the stigma attached to these movements and subsequently the succeeding steps taken to achieve equality. This would explain why gender disparity is still present because the moves for equality are attached to feminist groups who are still stigmatized within society. However, if people are made to realize that the freedoms experienced by women, which are now normalized, are due to the efforts stemming from feminist movements, they may become more receptive to further changes for equality (Vernet and Butera, 2005). Similarly, if women sparking change in Muslim nations are given recognition, this would increase visibility towards the role women play in society. This was also noted by Basiri (2016) when he mentioned that women elected into parliament of Islamic nations need to recognize and partner with local feminist movements to pass laws supporting equality. However, this can only be possible if more women are elected into government as well (Basiri, 2016).

Another way economic and political participation among women can be increased is through supporting and encouraging their education. Education does not only increase economic opportunities for women but provides them with the resources and skill to ensure that their decisions are informed and sound. Education does not only span the traditional form from primary to tertiary but includes vocational courses as well that could increase women's skills to contribute economically. It is also through education that, beginning in the early developmental stages, the playing field for men and women may be equalized through ensuring that they are taught equally as well. Education also plays a role in addressing misconceptions and biased attitudes contributing to the inequality faced by women (Basiri, 2016).

At present day, women may still face challenges in asserting women's rights and perspectives in government but examples from other countries have shown that in the long run, this contributes to an increased number of elected female officers. An example of this was New Zealand, starting with only 16.5% female representation of government in 1990 to 21.2% in 1993 and 29% in 1996 (Norris, 2006). Progress was fast for this nation considering that their government was more liberal, but it still shows the role of electoral quotas in increasing gender inclusion. While in the Arab region progress was considered slow but still significant because of the observed increase from 3.4% in 1997 to 10.6% in 2012 (Al Maaitah et. al, 2012). A study analyzing electoral quotas for women among certain European nations have also found that they are significant in increasing the number of women – hence, representation – in the political arena (Lu, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the Middle East, the responses to the universalization of gender equality and inclusiveness has depended on several factors. In this study, however, it was shown that electoral quotas for women have proven to increase women's participation in parliaments.

The study has confirmed findings that countries that impose electoral quotas have higher female membership in decision-making bodies than countries that do not. Furthermore, using the equation from Model 2, one can predict with a statistical level of significance the probability that a female may be nominated to parliament given the presence or absence of an electoral quota and the number of seats occupied by females in the last parliament. However, as stated earlier, the efforts to improve women's political involvement should not end with women holding positions in parliament. Steps should be taken to ensure that they are given the opportunity to pass legislations that further improve the situation of other women in these societies as well. Local efforts, such as placing women into positions of leadership in terms of running organizations or local government positions, should also be pushed for as well. Increasing the resources for women to make a difference and increase visibility are important to help society realize that their roles are not only confined to the home and family. In addition to this, their pursuit of economic and political involvement should not be perceived as a hindrance to upholding their responsibilities within the household. Women will always struggle with holding public leadership positions if the sentiment of the general public is that they are incompetent to do so. In the context of Muslim nations an effort should be made to address cultural practices that support the inequality faced by women and this could begin through improving the education of women.

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