Islam, Democracy, and the Leadership Role of Women in Government

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Islam, democratic government, and the governmental leadership of women in the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey (MENAT). In order to understand female leadership in this region, the compatibility between Islam and democracy is analyzed. This occurs through the examination of Sharia Law and democratic principles within Islam. Furthermore, a statistical analysis of the successes of democracies in the region will be presented. Each nation will be categorized by the constitutional provisions entrusted to its female citizens. Thus, this thesis will present the legality of the political participation of women in each of the MENAT states. Finally, resolutions which aim to increase the political participation of women in MENAT governments are proposed.

Islam, Democracy, and the Leadership Role of Women in Government

Introduction: Islam and Democratic Compatibility

In the MENAT region of the world, comprising the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey, the rights of women are littered with human rights violations in the form of the denial of self-expression, barriers to universal suffrage, prohibition of the freedom of speech, and allegations of sexual harassment, among numerous others. Such human rights violations create a perception that Islamic governance is inherently oppressive. While such human rights infractions of both state and non-state entities must be justly prosecuted by the International Community, the modern era has also led to the formation of pro-democratic women's groups who not only advocate for voting rights, but for the right to stand for election, as well. The region in which these women reside — MENAT — is comprised of nineteen countries, including: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.[1]

In order to understand the opportunity women have to lead in a governmental capacity within these countries, the compatibility between Islam and democracy must be thoroughly examined. Democratic governments are founded upon the principles of liberty, freedom, equality, and justice. As the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights highlights, "Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections by universal suffrage are essential elements of democracy…".[2]

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[1] "Home," World Bank, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena.

[2] "Rule of Law - Democracy and Human Rights." OHCHR. Accessed April 2, 2020. https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/RuleOfLaw/Pages/Democracy.aspx.

Thus, the single greatest place for the successful existence of women in governmental leadership

positions is within the framework of a democratically structured government. While not all

nations in the MENAT region can be categorized as democratic governments, characteristics of

democracy are present in each. In order to prove the functionality of an Islamic democracy, an

examination of Indonesia, the largest Islamic democracy in the world, must be presented.

With a population of 262,787,403 citizens, the Republic of Indonesia is the largest

Islamic nation in the world and has functioned as a democratic government since the 1950s.[3]

However, it has only been since 1999 that the nation has experienced democracy with success.

Thus, though Indonesia is not privy to categorization as a MENAT nation, it provides both the

Islamic and non-Islamic world with a greater understanding of the relationship between Islam

and democratic governance. According to the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution, the

country exercises a five-fold foundational philosophy, "...the Republic of Indonesia shall be built

into a sovereign state based on a belief in the One and Only God, just and civilized humanity, the

unity of Indonesia, and democratic life led by wisdom of thoughts in deliberation among

representatives of the people, and achieving social justice for all the people of Indonesia".[4] Thus,

Indonesia, the world's third largest democracy, assists in providing a global example of the

compatibility and functionality of Islam and democracy. In order for democratic governance to

flourish in Indonesia, the nation implemented many policy changes. Such regimental changes

included: the reorganization of the national court system to provide for greater checks to

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[3] "The World Factbook: Indonesia," Central Intelligence Agency, February 01, 2018, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/id.html.

[4] "The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia." Accessed April 2, 2020. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_174556.pdf.

governmental power, the decentralization of the government to protect democratic rule of law, and the depletion of power given to the state military.[5] The implementation of such policies allowed Indonesia, the world's largest Islamic nation, to transition into a highly functional democracy. While Indonesia provides a basic understanding of the aforementioned compatibility, the Republic does not necessarily serve as an example of what should be precisely applied to every Islamic nation. What has proven to be successful in the Islamic Republic of Indonesia, may not structurally function when attempted in another country. However, while democratic policy may vary between Islamic nations, the foundational principles upon which democracy is implemented do not.

Democratic Principles in the Quran

As previously mentioned, the key principles of democracy include sovereignty, equality, liberty, and justice. By its original design, Islam is intended to preserve and protect these values. Primarily, these democratic elements are supported by the presence of *shura*, *ijma*, and *majlis*, principles found within the Islamic concepts of freedom (*al-huriya*) and rights (*al-haqquq al-sharia*). Of these, emphasis should be placed on the significance of the role of *shura*, *ijma*, and *majlis* in early Islamic society. *Shura* is defined as the consultation of the citizenry and legal counsellors which occurs in order to properly advise a sovereign on any given issue.[6] Thus, *shura*, consultative action, is the basis upon which *ijma*, or consensus, occurs. In a given society,

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[5] Lindsey, Tim, and Simon Butt. "Unfinished Business: Law Reform, Governance, and the Courts in Post-Suharto Indonesia." In *Democracy and Islam in Indonesia*, edited by Künkler Mirjam and Stepan Alfred, 168-86. NEW YORK: Columbia University Press, 2013. Accessed April 5, 2020. doi:10.7312/kunk16190.15.

[6] Adam Walker. "The Islamic Institution of Shura (Mutual Consultation)." Al Hakam, March 15, 2019, https://www.alhakam.org/the-islamic-institution-of-shura-mutual-consultation/.

consensus provides citizens with the opportunity to participate in governmental affairs on an

individual basis. More specifically, such consensus allows for the individual voices of the public

to be considered. This can be exemplified through a society's extension of voting rights to its

citizens. Finally, the Quran also places great emphasis on the occurrence of *majlis*, or forums

similar to modern day town halls. The *majlis* provided the Islamic community with a location at

which *shura*, consultative action, was able to occur among its citizens.

Furthermore, democratic principles in the Quran, specifically those relating to the

concept of *shura*, can be found in surahs including: Quran 42:38, 3:159, 4:59, and surah 38.

Particularly, surahs 42:38 and 3:159 reflect upon the importance of consultative action within the

greater Islamic society. Quran 42:38 states, "And those who have responded to their lord and

established prayer and whose affair [is determined by] consultation among themselves…", and

Quran 3:159 reads, "So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the

matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah".[7] As previously mentioned, out of

adherence to the principle of *shura* flows the other principles of *ijma* and the *majlis* wherein

consultative action is permitted to take place. These surahs, specifically 42:38 and 3:159, provide

the reader with an awareness that not only does Islamic theology encourage consultation between

the members of one's society, but also between Allah and man. This relationship is similar to

that exemplified by the Christian worldview in Romans 13. Thus, the democratic principle of

consultation is dependent upon both vertical and horizontal relationships. However, though these

surahs recognize the vitality of the rights and protection of women, some adherents of narrow

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[7] "Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم," Al-Qur'an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم, Accessed February 1, 2020,
https://quran.com/.

Islamic philosophy, including the likes of Sayyid Qutb, an advocate for jihadism and leader of

the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood during the 1950s and 1960s, base their perceptions of

women's involvement in government and the democratic form of governance itself upon a hadith

proclaimed by Islamic scholar al-Bukhari which states, "Never will succeed such a nation as

makes a woman their ruler".[8] In Islamic literary tradition, a hadith is understood as a statement or

action credited to the Prophet Muhammad. As in the case of al-Bukhari's, many hadiths were

transcribed years after Muhammad's death. Thus, the authority of hadiths is minimized to the

secondary tier of Quranic law. One of the most predominant issues with the aforementioned

hadith is that it is habitually taken out of its original context. Al-Bukhari claimed to have

delivered this message from Allah about a specific historical event in which the enemies of the

early Islamic society had appointed a woman as their leader. However, when delving into the

historical context, it is likely that al-Bukhari and the early Islamic society took greater issue with

the identity of this particular queen's father, Khosrau, than with her ability to govern as a female

sovereign. Even more discrediting to this specific hadith is the fact that the deliverer of this

hadith is said to have received punishment for committing false testimony.[9] The radical

interpretations of hadiths and other Islamic literature, by the likes of Qutb, influence

fundamentalist groups to undermine and attack democratic governments. However, Islam's

recognition of the principles of democracy, as evidenced in the Quran, have provided a pathway

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[8] Hadith - Book of Afflictions and the End of the World - Sahih al-Bukhari - Sunnah.com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم). Accessed February 1, 2020, https://sunnah.com/bukhari/92/50.

[9] Mohammad Omar Farooq, *Toward Our Reformation: from Legalism to Value-Oriented Islamic Law and Jurisprudence*, United Kingdom: International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2012.

for women to be involved in the political affairs of their societies and thus signal the invalidity of

al-Bukhari's hadith.

Furthermore, though not mentioned in the Quran, the Constitution of Medina established

the first Islamic government in modern day Medina, Saudi Arabia.[10] Established by the Prophet

Muhammed, the city of Medina was a community in which human rights (i.e. protection of

women, freedom of religion) and consultative decisions pertaining to a legal system were

formed. Muhammad orated the document for the purpose of its usage as an example of precedent

for future Islamic societies. Traditional Islamic scholar al-Farabi writes that out of the imperfect

forms for a city, democratic systems are among, "the most admirable and happy," as well as

most virtuous.[11] Al-Farabi believed that while democracy was not a perfect form of government,

it was the form of government that should be embodied in Islamic society when the Prophet was

unable to govern. Similar to the beliefs demonstrated by al-Farabi, al-Tabari, another classical

Islamic scholar, also believed in the equality granted to Islamic adherents. Primarily, al-Tabari

extended the pro-democratic sentiments of al-Farabi and noted that equal rights and protections

should be granted to women, particularly when it concerns the ability for women to pray in front

of both genders.[12] Thus, through the authority of the Constitution of Medina and scholarly

writings of both al-Farabi and al-Tabari, it is clear that women in both early and modern Islamic

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[10]Michael Lecker, *The Constitution of Medina: Muhammad's First Legal Document*. Princeton (N.J.): Darwin Press, 2004.

[11]Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "Al-Fārābī on the Democratic City," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (2003): 379–94, http://www.yorku.ca/khalidi/documents/Khalidi2003.pdf.

[12] "Women in Society: Political Participation," Muslim Women's League, September 16, 1995, https://www.mwlusa.org/topics/rights/polirights.html.

societies are to be granted inalienable human rights. Conclusively, it is evident that it is a cultural

phenomenon, rather than the Quran, which yields a message of societal inequalities.

Sharia Law and Women in Political Leadership

The status of women in the MENAT region is ever-changing. Due to the improved status

of women and quality of life in developing nations, the MENAT region has experienced a

remarkable increase in the number of women running for, and winning, elections for public

office. However, as the opportunity for women to run for public office expands, the existence of

threats and harassment, politically or otherwise, grows as well. For example, the assassination of

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 2007 serves as evidence that women in politics face

threats of rape, beatings, abduction, and even death for submitting their name to an election

ballot.[13] While this threat exists all over the world, it is a notably horrid reality for women in the

MENAT region. Even in Jordan, one of the region's most free nations, the imprisonment of

female politicians has occurred. In 2002, Toujan al-Faisal, Jordan's first female member of

parliament, was arrested after publishing an editorial accusing the Jordanian Prime Minister of

corruption.[14] One predominant reason such treatment of women occurs lies at the feet of

misinterpretation of Sharia Law. As will be discussed in the analyses of MENAT constitutions

and their provisions for female political candidates, it is essential to note that a large number of

MENAT nations frequently include the following statement in their constitutions, "[a]ll rights

are guaranteed unless prohibited by Sharia Law". Under the governance of Sharia Law, women

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[13] "Violence Against Female Politicians," Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/article/violence-against-female-politicians.

[14] "Jordan: Sentence against Toujan Al-Faisal a Blow to Freedom of Expression," Amnesty International UK, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/jordan-sentence-against-toujan-al-faisal-blow-freedom-expression.

are granted relative rights which are enforced or interpreted based upon cultural and political

aspects within an individual nation rather than upon the Islamic religion holistically. Relative

rights differ from natural rights, or those founded upon objective truths and granted by God, in

that they are not guaranteed within a given society. Advocacy groups for women's rights in the

Middle East believe that far from the protection and rights granted to women in both the Quran

and the Constitution of Medina, Sharia Law and its courts discriminate against the cause of

women.[15] Thus, Sharia Law tends to give credence to subjective realities and interpretations

rather than objective truths. Such interpretations are cause for women in some Arab nations to

experience political restrictions when running for public office. Sharia Law was originally

written with the intention of guiding a small community of Islamic adherents based upon

principles coinciding with the age in which Muhammad lived (circa 630s A.D.). In the modern

era, Sharia is used as a moral code through which traditional principles are to be applied to

modern living. Therefore, Sharia Law was not designed to stagnate society as it has perceivably

done throughout modern history.

Women in Political Islamic Leadership

The next section of this thesis seeks to present the reader with a comprehensive

understanding of the role of women in both the Quran and in the history of Islamic society. By

possessing this information, one is able to best understand Muhammad's original intent

regarding the status and role of women. The influential women in the Quran that will be

addressed include Muhammad's wives Khadijah and Aisha, along with Samrah bint Nuhayk,

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[15]Frances Perraudin, "Muslim Women 'Used as Political Footballs in Sharia Court Debate'," The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, November 1, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/nov/01/muslim-women-used-as-political-footballs-in-sharia-court-debate.

who served as the Meccan marketplace adviser. Other influential women in Islam's political

history include Queen Arwa al-Suayhi, Rawya Ateya, and Mounira Solh.

Influential Women in the Quran

Throughout the history of Islam, women have consistently been involved in the political

affairs of their communities. Unfortunately, even during the time of the writings of the Quran,

women who held positions of power were often deemed as a threat to the stability of society. For

example, Muhammad's wife Aisha faced false accusations of adultery. This harassment is made

evident in surah 24, or Sura An-Nur (النُّور), of the Quran.[16] However, many modern Islamic

scholars deem Muhammad to have been one of the earliest feminists due to his delegation of

rights to the women around him. Muhammad's affinity for the status of women is evidenced in

the Quran through the documentation of the political involvement of his wives, Khadijah and

Aisha, who assisted him with his political dealings.

While Muhammad had many wives, involvement in political affairs lies with two in

particular: Khadija and Aisha. Muhammad's first wife was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. During

their marriage, Muhammad was not married to other women. A hadith proclaimed by al-Bukhari

states, "...Khadijah is the best among the women (of this nation)".[17] Khadijah, a wealthy

merchant, garnered status with Muhammad when she hired him to work for her. Seeing as she

earned this position herself, Khadijah was highly respected within their community and was

permitted to give her opinion on the affairs of the early Islamic society. It is even believed that

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[16] "Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم," Al-Qur'an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://quran.com/.

[17] "Muslim Youth Foundation," Muslim Youth Foundation, Accessed February 1, 2020, http://myf.org.uk/2015/03/great-women-in-islam-khadijah-ra/.

Islam's early spread was due to the extensive wealth of Khadijah. As such, the religious and

political ideologies of both the Quran and Islam were formulated under her influence.[18] Some

Islamic scholars even believe that Khadijah was able to encourage Muhammad to grant women

rights relating to marriage, protection from infanticide, and other explicit rights in their

community.[19] However, Muhammad's most influential wife was Aisha bint Abu Bakr. Her name

translated literally means the daughter of Abu Bakr, who would later become the First Rightful

Caliph. Though their marriage occurred largely for political purposes, Aisha and Muhammad

demonstrated tremendous love for one another. Although the Quran does not mention her by

name, she is extensively alluded to as is evidenced in Surah 66.[20] As it relates to her involvement

in affairs of the state, Aisha's actions largely occurred after Muhammad's death. A notable

example of Aisha's involvement was leading the battle charge during the Battle of the Camel

wherein she led the opposition forces against the Third Caliph. However, she also enjoyed

political relevance during Muhammad's lifetime. Modern Islamic scholars state that not only did

Aisha serve in the capacities of "stateswoman, scholar, mufti, and judge," but also, in the event

that Muhammad was unavailable for consultation, "...he established her authority by telling

Muslims to consult her in his absence".[21] While Muhammad had other wives that were

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[18] "Chapter 19: Khadija and Islam," Al, May 12, 2015, https://www.al-islam.org/khadijatul-kubra-sayyid-ali-asghar-razwy/chapter-19-khadija-and-islam.

[19] Ibid.

[20] "Al-Qur'an Al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم," Al-Qur'an al-Kareem - القرآن الكريم, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://quran.com/.

[21] Myriam François, "The Truth about Muhammad and Aisha | Myriam François-Cerrah," The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, September 17, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/sep/17/muhammad-aisha-truth.

influential to his religious work, Khadijah and Aisha established a precedent for female political

leadership. There were also other women who served in important positions, pushing the agenda

for women's involvement in the political affairs of the early Islamic society.

One such individual was Samrah bint Nuhayk. Though Samrah was not one of

Muhammad's wives, she is mentioned in the Quran as a woman of influence during

Muhammad's lifetime. Samrah was selected by Caliph Ummar to be both the equivalent of a

modern-day policewoman in the markets of Mecca and a companion of the Prophet. Similar to

Khadijah, Samrah is mentioned in a hadith which states, "I saw Samrah bint Nuhayk — a woman

who lived during the time of the Prophet, wearing heavy armor and a thick face veil…

commanding right and forbidding wrong".[22] Thus, it does not appear that Samrah was met with

much antagonism pertaining to her selection as the monitor of Mecca's marketplace. As a result,

this hadith indicates the acceptance and normalization of women in positions of authority.[23]

Thus, many hadiths and surahs demonstrate the acceptability of female leadership in Islamic

society. As such, there is neither a hadith nor a surah which implicates that a woman cannot be a

societal leader. Similar to the leadership of Samrah bint Nuhayk, the leadership of Arwa al-

Suayhi, Rawya Ateya, and Mounira Solh demonstrate the capacity of women to govern in

Islamic societies.

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[22] "Fatawa - Women Teaching Men," Dar al-Ifta al Misriyyah, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://www.dar-alifta.org/foreign/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=445.

[23] Shukri, Abdussalam Muhammad, and Musa Yusuf Owoyemi. "Sisters in Islam's Quest for the Reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith: An Analysis of Their Views on Equality, Women Judges, and Polygamy." *Kajian Malaysia* 32, no. 1 (January 2014): 55–80.

Influential Women in Islamic Political History

Though not mentioned in the Quran, Yemeni Queen Arwa al-Suayhi, also known as Sayyida Hurra, was extremely instrumental in not only spreading Islam, but in demonstrating the effectiveness of female leadership in the early Islamic society. Thus, she acted as a trailblazer for women's political empowerment for modern heads-of-state and parliamentarians. Queen Arwa reigned as the sole sovereign from 1067-1138 A.D. As such, not only was she one of the longest rulers of early Yemen, but she was also one of the only female monarchs to have a high title in both the political and religious realms of Islamic society. More specifically, Queen Arwa was a trailblazer for modern female leaders due to her rank of *hujja,* within the Fatimid *da'wa*, or the religious hierarchical structure of the Fatimid Caliphate.[24] Historically, during the medieval era, female sovereigns attained governance solely over the political domain. Remarkably, Queen Arwa's governance reached as far as the Indian subcontinent.[25] Though Queen Arwa was not elected to public office, her status as sole sovereign during the medieval ages of Islam, *dar al-Islam*, indicates further that within Islamic philosophies, women are permitted to govern nations and take an active part in the state of affairs. Without women like Khadijah, Aisha, Samrah, and Queen Arwa, it is likely that the status of women in Muslim-majority nations would be more denigrated than it is currently. Khadijah, Samrah, and Queen Arwa are particularly unique in that their statuses were achieved through merit rather than through birthright or marriage. Their

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[24] Farhad Daftary, Sayyida Hurra: The Isma'ili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen | The Institute of Ismaili Studies, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, Accessed February 1, 2020, https://iis.ac.uk/academic-article/sayyida-hurra-isma-ili-sulayhid-queen-yemen.

[25] Ibid.

leadership not only inspired Muhammad to grant women basic rights, as evidenced in the

Constitution of Medina, but also assisted in developing one of the world's oldest societies.

In modern history, two trailblazing female politicians include Rawya Ateya and Mounira

Solh. These female leaders were among the first women to ever run for parliament in the

MENAT region. In 1957, Rawya Ateya, an Egyptian, was the first woman in the Arab World to

become a parliamentarian.[26] During her time in Parliament, she played an active role in training

women to assist in combating the United Kingdom, France, and Israel during the Suez War.[27]

Similarly, Lebanese parliamentarian Mounira Solh was also amongst the first Arab women to run

for parliamentary and presidential office. She spent the majority of her time in office establishing

the Al-Amal Institute for the Disabled which is one of the earliest mental health institutions in

the MENAT region.[28] These women paved the way for the thousands of women that would run

for elected office in subsequent years.

Current Women's Leadership in Islamic Democracies

At present, there are no women in the MENAT region that are serving as the executive

head of their government. In fact, throughout the course of modern history, there has only been

one woman to hold such a position in the region. First elected in 1993, Tansu Ciller served as the

first and only female Prime Minister of Turkey.[29] When strictly analyzing women who have

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[26] "Rawya Ateya Took Her Seat in the National Assembly: The Asian Age Online, Bangladesh," The Asian Age, July 13, 2017, https://dailyasianage.com/news/73502/rawya-ateya-took-her-seat-in-the-national-assembly.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Adnan El-Ghoul, "Charity Helps Clothe and Feed the Needy," The Daily Star Newspaper - Lebanon, October 25, 2004, https://www.dailystar.com.lb//News/Lebanon-News/2004/Oct-25/3298-charity-helps-clothe-and-feed-the-needy.ashx#axzz23yRnBXQj.

[29] "Tansu Ciller," C-SPAN.org, Accessed February 25, 2019, https://www.c-span.org/person/?tansuciller.

presided over Islamic governments, including in countries which lay outside of the boundaries of

the MENAT region, one must highlight former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, who

was elected to office in 1988.[30] While Pakistan is not a part of the MENAT region, her

leadership example, and unshakeable trust in democracy, can encourage women to run for

political office throughout both the region and the world.

       While it is essential to understand the historical implications of women's leadership in

Islamic democracies, an examination of the present state of the involvement of women in

MENAT governments is vital. During the election cycles from 2016-2018, the MENAT region

experienced a surge in the number of women serving in both parliamentary and executive cabinet

positions. According to a 2018 World Bank report, women currently hold 16.63% of seats in

MENAT national parliaments.[31] In 1990, women held a mere 3.804% of all parliamentary seats

throughout the region.[32] This is the era in which both former Prime Minister Ciller and former

Prime Minister Bhutto governed. According to the same World Bank study, the MENAT

countries with the greatest percentage of women holding parliament seats are that of Tunisia at

31.3% and Djibouti at 26.2%.[33] These percentages are larger than that of Indonesia, the largest

Islamic democracy in the world, and of the United States of America.

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[30] "Benazir Bhutto, the Muslim World's First Female Leader," The New York Times, June 21, 2016, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/obituaries/archives/benazir-bhutto.

[31] "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%)," Literacy Rate, Adult Female (% of Females Ages 15 and Above) | Data, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2018&start=1990&view=chart.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

As of January 2020, the following women are actively engaged in politics at the parliamentary level and have garnered international attention. One such parliamentarian is that of Lateefa al-Gaood. Al-Gaood was the first female to be elected into Bahrain's Council of Representatives. At present, she is the only female public official serving in this capacity. In Tunisia, where women are increasingly being elected to their parliamentary body, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People, Samia Abbou has served her constituents since 2011 and has since founded her own political party called the Democratic Current. As such, Abbou is one of the longest serving female parliamentarians in Tunisian history. Similarly, Moroccan politician Mbara Bouaida historically won an election in which she became the first woman to become a regional leader in the history of the nation. She had previously served in the Moroccan House of Representatives and in the Morocco-EU Joint Parliamentarian Committee.[34] These women showcase just a few of the remarkable achievements female politicians are capable of in the MENAT region. While this thesis has examined the historic compatibility between women's involvement in political governance and the Islamic religion, the example of the aforementioned female politicians proves that this compatibility is viable in 2020, even in the midst of threats from extremist groups and their own constituents.

Constitutional Analysis

In order to support this thesis, an analysis between the types of MENAT constitutions and the percentage of women in each nation's elected representative assembly was conducted. Each constitution was analyzed for the following terms: "women," "woman," "vote," "election,"

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[34]Sonya Chechik, "Mbarka Bouaida Wins 'Historic' Election as First Woman to Lead Moroccan Region," Morocco World News, July 9, 2019, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/07/277688/mbarka-bouaida-first-woman-moroccan-region/.

"requirements," "parliament," "gender," "political," and "rights." After reading through each

nation's constitution, five categorizations were made, including: (1) constitutions requiring

gender quotas in parliament; (2) constitutions granting women the right to run for political office;

(3) constitutions granting women basic human rights without specifying election rights; (4)

constitutions that reference electors as he/him and; (5) constitutions that do not specify gender

preferences within the framework of elector requirements. After being placed into one of the

aforementioned categories, each nation was cross-referenced with a 2018 World Bank report.

The percentage of females holding parliamentary seats was identified. The data used is current as

of the end of 2018.[35] The constitutions and their amendments are current as of April 2020.

Once categorized and presented with their percentages, the average of each category was

calculated in an effort to determine which constitutional category consists of the greatest

percentage of women in government. The results of the study are hereunder detailed. The highest

average percentage of women in parliament is found amongst countries which have mandatory

gender quotas within their constitutions. Of the nineteen MENAT countries only Iraq and

Morocco have explicitly stated requirements for gender quotas in their constitutions. The average

for this category is 23.5%. The second category, constitutions which explicitly grant women the

right to run for political office, has the second highest average of the previously mentioned

categories. Countries categorized as having this inherent right listed in their constitutions include

Egypt, Qatar, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. On average, women hold 17.4% of

the parliamentary seats in these nations. Constitutions which refer to electors as he/him rank

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[35] "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%)," Literacy Rate, Adult Female (% of Females Ages 15 and Above) | Data, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2018&start=1990&view=chart.

third amongst the five categories, with a median average of 15.6%. This category includes

Algeria, Djibouti, Lebanon, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The second lowest average, 11.67%,

belongs to the group of constitutions that do not specify gender. This category consists of Jordan,

Turkey, and Kuwait. The category with the lowest average is that of constitutions which grant

women rights, but do not offer specifications about right to stand in elections. The nations in this

category, Iran, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, have a combined average of only 8.75% of

parliamentary seats being held by women.

After reviewing the data collected during the study, there is a surprising divide between

two of the five categories — nations which explicitly grant women the right to stand for political

election and nations which grant political rights but do not specify the right to stand for political

election. In terms of percentages, it is apparent that women serving in governments with the right

to run for public office explicitly stated in their constitutions hold more parliamentary seats than

women in MENAT nations without enumerated election rights. The difference here is that by not

including that specification of rights, citizens of Islamic countries do not associate women's

rights with electoral rights. Simply stated, the absence of an explicitly stated right frequently

equates to the absence of opportunity for women to govern.

It is of utmost importance for the reader to note that data pertaining to neither Israel nor

Palestine has been included in the aforementioned constitutional analysis. This has occurred for a

host of reasons, the first of which pertains to Israel. Though Israel has the second highest

percentage of women serving in parliament in the MENAT region, this thesis focuses on

Muslim-majority governments. Thus, though Israel is home to a large number of Islamic

adherents, the CIA World Factbook indicates that nearly 75% of Israel's population adheres to

Judaism.[36] A final note pertaining to Israel is that it does not have a written constitution through

which to be properly categorized. As a result, including data related to Israel would taint the

subsequent analysis and theories pertaining to this research. Likewise, data pertaining to

Palestine can also not be permitted. Though Palestine has a written constitution, unlike Israel, the

World Bank data upon which this analysis depends does not include data about women in

Palestine's parliament. This is because Palestine has not been officially recognized as a state by

the majority of the International Community. Thus, Palestine only maintains an observatory

status to international organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank. Thus, much

like the concerns pertaining to the analysis of Israel, including data regarding Palestine when it

has not been recognized as a legitimate state would invalidate the resulting analysis.

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women

In 1953, the United Nations introduced the *Convention on the Political Rights of Women*

for the sole purpose of establishing political equality for women throughout the world. Thus,

countries that ratify this Convention agree that women are entitled to political rights and will

uphold the Articles of the Convention within the governmental framework of their country.

While the Arab World did not see its first female executive head of government until the 1993

election of the former Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, the Convention ensures that all

women who want to vote or run for public office have not only the right to do so, but are

protected from threats, discrimination, and violence in the midst of their endeavors.[37]

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[36] "The World Factbook: Israel," Central Intelligence Agency, Central Intelligence Agency, February 1, 2018, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html.

[37] United Nations General Assembly, "Convention on the Political Rights of Women," A/RES/14/1386 - Declaration of the Rights of the Child - UN Documents: Gathering a Body of Global Agreements, Accessed February 23, 2019, http://www.un-documents.net/cprw.htm.

Of the nineteen countries in the MENAT region, eight are signatories of the Convention. These countries include Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen.[38] While these countries constitute only one half of the region, they have a combined average of 18.02% of parliamentary seats that are held by women.[39] This is opposed to the 13.47% average in the MENAT countries that are non-signatories. Such countries include Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti, Iran, and Syria.[40] This difference has larger implications than it may seem. In non-signatory countries, these women may hold parliamentary seats, but their governments may not recognize that women have an absolute right to that political participation. Such women also likely face harassment throughout the entirety of their campaign process and even into their political career. 18.02% may not seem like a large success, but it represents that, on average, more women are protected from election limitations and harassment. If Yemen, a signatory country, were not in the midst of a civil war, it is likely that the percentage gap between signatory and non-signatory countries would be even greater. While Yemen has always struggled with gender inequality, the ongoing conflict has caused further humanitarian infractions against the rights of women.

Proposals for Increased Involvement

Resolutions to increase the involvement of women in positions of governmental leadership include implementations related to culture, policy, and public campaigns. Primarily,

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[38] "UN, United Nations, UN Treaties, Treaties," United Nations Treaty Collection, Accessed February 23, 2019.

[39] "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%)," Literacy Rate, Adult Female (% of Females Ages 15 and Above) | Data, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2018&start=1990&view=chart.

[40] Ibid.

cultural resolutions must be encouraged. There is no better place for a movement, such as

empowering women to run for public office, than at a grassroots level. Similarly, women should

encourage one another to attend civics classes and vote in their local elections. Women not only

have a right to political participation, but they are largely responsible for the upbringing of the

next generation. An increase in political education within the home will result in societal benefits

for the family outside of the home. A Population Reference Bureau publication states,

"Education helps women take advantage of opportunities that could benefit them and their

families, preparing women for the labor force and helping them understand their legal and

reproductive benefits".[41] Nations that limit the access women have to education should revise

their policies to permit education and enhanced political participation. Thus, cultural resolutions,

including advocacy projects for political education within the local community, set the stage for

both policy implementation and constitutional adaptations.

     Likewise, in order for a greater change to come about, the increased rate at which women

are welcome to participate as a governmental leader should be encouraged to begin at the local

office level. This may prove especially beneficial in an area in which a woman has never held

such a position. A report by the Heritage Foundation states that the most needed policy revision

revolves around the necessity for restrictions on the participation of women in the political realm

to be loosened, as has occurred in countries like Tunisia and Jordan, among others.[42] Likewise,

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[41] "Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa," Population Reference Bureau, November 20, 2003, Accessed February 25, 2019, https://www.prb.org/empoweringwomendevelopingsocietyfemaleeducationinthemiddleeastandnorthafrica/.

[42] Madyson Hutchinson Posey, "5 Reforms the Middle East Could Make for Women in 2018," The Heritage Foundation, February 12, 2018, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.heritage.org/middle-east/commentary/5-reforms-the-middle-east-could-make-women-2018.

an article published by UN Women cites that the 2018 elections, which resulted in women

winning 47% of local government seats, was, "...the result of a 2016 electoral law that includes

the principles of parity and alternation between men and women on candidate lists for all

elections".[43] In Jordan, an electoral law establishes, "...a minimum of 15 female members of

parliament, at least one from each governorate".[44] Since such systems have proved successful in

the aforementioned countries, it is highly likely that policies similar in nature would experience

success in nations throughout the MENAT region.

Likewise, MENAT nations should explicitly note within their constitutions that women

are both permitted to run for office and will be protected during candidacy at any level (i.e.

municipal, regional, national). It is also imperative to recommend that MENAT governments

should provide greater support and security for those women running for public office. Women

who serve in political capacities in the MENAT region do so in order to preserve and honor the

traditions set forth by the legacy of Islamic governance. They strive to simultaneously improve

the quality of life and increase access to opportunities within their communities as a way of

honoring and continuing this legacy. However, though these women serve honorably, their

leadership is frequently viewed as a threat to Islamic tradition. As has been discussed, female

politicians place themselves in the line of danger (i.e. threats, harassment, and even death) for

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[43] "Historic Leap in Tunisia: Women Make Up 47 Percent of Local Government," UN Women, August 27, 2018, Accessed February 23, 2019, http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-tunisian-women-in-local-elections.

[44] Olivia Cuthbertin Amman, "Women Gain Ground in Jordan Election despite Yawning Gender Gap," The Guardian, September 22, 2016, Accessed February 23, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/sep/23/jordan-election-women-gain-ground-gender-gap.

their involvement in public affairs. Thus, it is imperative for local governments to assist in providing security to both female politicians and candidates.

In suggesting further steps to be taken to increase the number of women running for elected office, it is of great importance to look at the specific policies the Tunisian government has implemented which have resulted in its government possessing the greatest percentage of female parliamentarians in the entirety of the Arab world. It is evident that the Tunisian government can attribute this success to the implementation of an electoral law wherein women and men alternate candidacy for their respective party in elections.[45] This has encouraged the concept of gender parity in political elections to occur smoothly without need for violence or protests to bring it to fruition. This concept of parity may potentially be extended to other nations in the MENAT region in an effort to provide greater access and opportunities to female candidates. However, for nations in which such gender parity may not naturally take place, a constitutional implementation of gender quotas is suggested. As evidenced by Iraq and Morocco, gender quotas grant women a seat at the political table while still preserving the integrity of local elections. Such an explicit place in parliament can promote the status of women throughout a given nation.

Finally, the ten MENAT countries that have not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women should agree to its terms. For example, though Djibouti has the second highest percentage of women serving in parliament amongst the MENAT nations, it is a

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[45] "Historic Leap in Tunisia: Women Make Up 47 Percent of Local Government." UN Women. August 27, 2018. Accessed February 23, 2019. http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-tunisian-women-in-local-elections.

non-signatory of the Convention.[46] The nation's lack of signatory status, or ratification, prevents

the United Nations from being able to hold the nation legally accountable for any potential

infraction or failure to preserve the political rights of women within its borders. Thus, if the non-

signatories agree to become signatories of the Convention and uphold their responsibilities as

such, it is likely that there would be an increase in the proportion of parliamentary seats held by

women, an increase in accountability efforts ensuring the preservation of this political right, and

a reduction of human rights violations against female candidates and politicians. Though it has

been in existence for sixty-five years, the Convention remains valid in its application to

international law. The Convention will continue to be open to ratification until it has been agreed

to, and upheld, by all.

Together, cultural and political implementations bring about a final platform for

resolution — program implementation. While there exist numerous programs and organizations

that champion the political leadership of women throughout both the MENAT region and the

world, involvement in such programs must increase. *The Global Fund for Women* and *UN

Women — Arab States/North Africa* are excellent examples of what such programs should look

like.[47] Empowerment programs through IGOs and NGOs alike will give women interested in

running for public office the tools necessary to accomplish their goals and impact the history of

their nation.

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[46] "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%)." Literacy Rate, Adult Female (% of Females Ages 15 and Above) | Data. Accessed February 23, 2019. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2018&start=1990&view=chart.

[47] "Political Empowerment for Women in the Middle East." Global Fund for Women. June 10, 2016. Accessed February 23, 2019. https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/political-empowerment-for-women-in-the-middle-east/#.XHNBRiPMyu4.

Conclusion

Regardless of where a woman is born, what religion she is born into, or her socioeconomic status, constitutional policies and religious ideologies should not inhibit her ability to participate in the political affairs of her country. The political rights of every person, particularly those pertaining to voting and the right to stand for election, should always be protected. However, in the MENAT region, a dichotomy exists. In such nations, not only is democracy compatible with Islam, but democratic governance and its principles are often encouraged by domestic governments. Further, the Western philosophies of liberty, freedom, equality and justice are evidenced within the Quranic principles of *shura*, *ijma*, and *majilis*. Yet, female politicians and candidates for election experience threats and attacks for their political activism. As the presented analysis of the World Bank data indicates, there is still much work to be done for female politicians and candidates in the MENAT region. Primarily, more nations should be encouraged to include parliamentary gender quotas and greater security methods for political candidates in their constitutions. Through the example of trailblazing female leaders throughout both the Quran and Islamic history, it is clear that MENAT women are not only worthy of basic human rights, but are deserving to run for election in their nation. Ultimately, the thesis of this work has been proven; there exists a compatibility between the existence of Islam, democracy, and the governmental leadership role of women in MENAT nations.

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