



منظمة المرأة العربية
ARAB WOMEN ORGANIZATION

Models of Arab women's participation in political life:

The effectiveness and sustainability of women's participation in political decision-making through the quota system.”

Abstract

During the past three decades, the issue of gender equality in all fields has topped the list of priorities of international concern as a main path to achieving just and comprehensive development, and this concern has resonated in the national orientations of many countries in terms of developing national plans that work to achieve this gender equality. However, there is still a wide gap between these national plans and what has been implemented on the ground, as the participation of women in decision-making centers has remained, to date, limited especially in our Arab world.

Out of its keenness to monitor and evaluate what has been achieved in the field of women's political empowerment in Arab countries and the impact of adopting the quota system in this field, the Arab Women Organization took the initiative to prepare a study under the title “Models of Arab Women's Participation in Political Life, Effectiveness and Sustainability of Women's Participation in Political Decisions through the Quota System”, which is a regional field study on positive discrimination policies in favor of women (quota) that included a number of Arab countries, and seeks to shed light on three paths:

- The effectiveness of positive discrimination policies in favor of women (quotas) in terms of ensuring their access to legislative and executive decision-making positions, by monitoring the presence of women in these various positions as a result of implementing the women's quota system.
- Sustaining positive discrimination policies in favor of women (quota) through institutionalizing and strengthening them with an integrated policy that works to address all obstacles that prevent equality between men and women, including political, legislative, social, economic, cultural, educational, and religious, leading to establishing the concept of equality in citizenship.
- The future vision for women's participation in decision-making positions through the quota system: monitoring the challenges and obstacles that women face when participating in the political space, what are the lessons that can be learned from their

experiences, and how to move women's political participation from simply seeking to increase their number to seeking effective representation that paves the way to a competitive system.

The project began in 2019 and ended in 2023 and was implemented in four phases:

The first phase included Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia

The second phase included Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, and Mauritania

The third phase included Libya, Yemen, and the Sultanate of Oman

The fourth stage included the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the Emirates

The research was based on a theoretical study that reviewed the international agreements related to women's rights that countries have joined, constitutions, legal frameworks for national and local council elections, the women's quota system, when and how it was adopted, and the presence of women in various decision-making circles. With the exception of the fourth stage, a field study was conducted that relied on two questionnaires, one directed to women who held leadership positions (deputies, ministers, mayors, female municipal council members, party heads) and another directed to a group of male representatives, male and female political activists, male and female activists in civil society, and a group of Youth. The questionnaire aimed primarily to survey their opinions about the quota system, how it is implemented and its effectiveness, their opinions about the appointment method through which governments are formed, and whether they support the adoption of the quota system, the difficulties facing the work of female representatives and ministers and their evaluation of their work in public affairs. Thirteen female researchers participated in the study, assisted by 13 assistants.

The study reached a set of conclusions, most notably:

- The women's quota system has proven to have brought about a positive change in women's access to legislative and executive decision-making positions. However, the percentages approved for its implementation in the countries studied did not exceed a maximum of (25%), which does not allow women in representative councils to constitute a pressure force which reflects the quantitative increase in their number to a qualitative efficiency of performance. The percentage of women's quota must be increased to at least (30%) of the total seats in national and local representative councils, in addition to adopting a gender-based policy in all ministerial, judicial and administrative appointments.
- Adopting the quota system alone is not sufficient to enhance the presence of women in representative councils, and it must be coupled with choosing a women-friendly electoral system. Indicators have shown that the proportional system with the adoption of large constituencies and a closed list subject to a gender arrangement in favor of women is the most appropriate.

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- Political will, which translates into enacting women-friendly legislation and making decisions alone, is not sufficient if it is not coupled with medium- and long-term public policies in the educational, cultural and media fields, aimed at changing behaviors and mentalities that oppose women's participation in the public space. There is a big gap between legislation and reality on the ground.
- Studies have shown that political parties do not often play their required role in the process of mobilizing women and enhancing their presence within their internal structures, and their commitment to improving women's conditions has proven weak. They often exploit the quota system to increase their seats, not out of a belief in the necessity of enhancing women's political participation. Political parties must be urged, through laws, to enhance the presence of women in senior positions within their internal structures first and nomination lists second.
- Ambiguity of political will to improve women's conditions. Some political regimes have adopted the quota system to improve their image internationally or to comply with the provisions of the relevant international agreements to which they have joined.
- Approaching the issue of women's political participation numerically is not useful and must be changed to an approach that aims to bring in the most qualified. Hence, it became clear that there is a difference between the actual political empowerment of women and increasing their representation in official political positions.
- It is necessary to study the phenomenon of "electoral reluctance," especially among female voters and the youth, to determine its causes and address it.
- Internal armed conflicts must be resolved because of the negative effects they have on society in general and on women in particular in terms of aborting all development efforts, reversing the gains they have achieved and the grave violations they are exposed to.