

# Adopting Women Quota as a Necessity to Empower Women in the Arab World With Special Reference to the Social and Religious Factor

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## Abstract

This study aims at assessing the role of women quota in empowering women and enabling them to reach parliaments and decision-making positions as a step towards gaining their rights in Arab societies, with special reference to social and religious factors which play an effective role in the Arab World.

The study is based on the hypothesis that women do not have a chance to win seats or have representatives via traditional elections due to social reasons and popular interpretation of religion. Consequently, the presence of women and equality between sexes is impossible without quota application.

The study carries out a comparative analysis between results of elections held in different parts of the Arab world with and without quotas showing a clear difference in the level of women representation in both cases.

The study assures that there is a trend among political parties and religious authorities towards accepting the quota despite it being a sensitive issue.

**Keywords:** quota, elections, Arab world, religion, women empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

Women quota and the possibility of adopting it as a means for empowering women and gaining equal rights has been highly debated in the Arab societies during the previous decades. The lack of women representatives in legislative councils and decision-making positions has contributed to the absence of women life issues representation, and the adopting of legislations that assure women's rights. Few women representatives reach legislative councils via traditional elections due to a number of social reasons (Dhailmi, 2015), therefore, the call for applying the women quota has become a necessity to represent women and realize their active participation in decision making in the society. This is what led women groups and

supporters to call for the application of the quota in elections.

Enabling women and engaging them in decision-making has become the main concern of many social reformers in the Arab world. Yet, the women quota had not been present in the Arab World until the end of the 20th century; therefore, there is little research on it. To fill this gap, this study assesses the role of women quota in enabling women to reach parliaments and decision-making positions in the Arab World and its role in supporting women rights. In addition, it discusses the two opposing positions regarding the acceptance of women quota to understand the reasons for such stance. In particular, this study analyzes the claims of the opposing group who totally reject women quota

to rebut such claims and overcome fears regarding the adoption of women quota in the legislative council elections in the Arab societies. Some general claims are heard in different parts of the world considering the quota a contradiction to the principle of equality. Other claims are specific to the Arab World and its cultural structure including popular interpretation of religion and its teachings.

The majority of works discussing women quota, being it a new issue in the Arab World, are internet articles and reports. This demanded the researchers to track debates and news published on the internet within a period limited to the beginning of the third millennium, as it is the period that witnessed a growth in calls and debates regarding woman quota in the Arab World. Due to this, the study relays on logic along with objectivity in order to shed light on the true essence of women quota in Arab communities.

It need be noted that most Arab societies witnessed the outbreak of anti-government protests calling for democracy, rights and freedom known as the Arab Spring. The ruling regimes faced such protests with violence and force. Such events crippled the democratic life and elections for almost a decade. Such events affected this study negatively due to the absence of elections or elections being run in an unstable and insecure atmosphere. Moreover, the outbreak of the corona virus pandemic around the world led to the suspension of all aspects of life including elections and parliaments. Thus, the researchers were limited in their study samples to the pre-Arab Spring and pre-corona period.

### Women quota

Quota refers to the number of parliamentary or representative seats found for sectors of the society with no chance to be part of parliaments. Elected quota is a method adopted by governments to give the weak segments of a society and its ethnicities the chance to have their voices heard. If ordinary elections were to be held, the weak segments will continue to be left behind, affecting social harmony and stability. As such, women's presence in decision-making positions requires the application of procedures and measures to enhance their abilities and remove all possible

obstacles that prevent them from participating in the social, political and economic aspects of life. These efforts aim at changing the situation from "taking care of women" to enabling women. One example of such measures is the quota, which is considered a form of positive discrimination to assure that women are actively present in all arenas and at all levels (Lagrini, 2013).

These days, the quota is adopted by countries to give women the chance to be in parliaments and is known as "woman quota". This is based on the claim that women are considered a deprived group in many societies, and ordinary elections do not give them the appropriate representation in parliaments, or no representation at all. (The ACE Encyclopedia, 2012).

The women quota gives a particular portion for women in parliaments to assure their presence and representation. This means that women quota is a temporary system that aims at achieving equality and fairness between sexes and reproducing a smaller image of the society within parliaments. The quota aims at giving women a true representation, which is achieved by reaching the "critical minority" point in women representatives – preferably 20-30% of seats. However, some call for an equal share of seats with 50% women representation since they are half the society. This is achieved through a special form of elections designed especially for this purpose. Women quota can be applied in many ways. Some seats can be specified for women only; men cannot be nominated for them; or, political parties can be forced to nominate women within their candidates at a minimal number, along with adding the nominated women at the top of their lists to assure women representation (Dhailmi, 2015; "The Quota and its different forms", 2013).

In many countries, the absence of such a form does not allow effective women representation in parliaments, which deprives them from participating in the process of decision-making in their societies (Fahmi, 2007). This makes it clear that such an issue is a public responsibility that needs support not only from feminist groups, but also from all sectors of the society such as civil society organizations, political parties and religious institutions.

### Women's political rights

The right of all individuals including women to take part in ruling their country has legal foundations and has been protected throughout the body of international human rights law and instruments. For example, the first international document that recognized this right is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the 10th of December 1948, through article 21 (1). It called for the right of individuals to either be elected directly in the government of their country, or to freely elect their representatives in the government.

Following was the Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1952 article (3), which protects women's right to hold decision-making positions all on equal terms with men without any discrimination.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in articles (3, 25, 26) in 1976 is another example. It ensures equal political rights of men and women and prohibits discrimination.

Again in 1979, women's rights including their political rights were advanced through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a strife to force equality between women and men. The Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 asserted the equality and the civil and political rights of women. It called for raising women representation to 30% through a number of mechanisms that assure equality between the two sexes. This is considered a call for compulsory women quotas in general elections ("The Quota and its different forms", 2013).

Despite that, the average of women representation in parliaments around the world has not exceeded 20% according to the International Parliamentary Union reports in 2016. In fact, the case is not only in the Arab World; it is applicable almost to all human societies, including America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australia, as women do not get a suitable percentage of parliamentary representation which suits their size in the society. In France for example, women have not been able to reach half the percentages allotted to them through the gender parity quota in parliamentary elections, as it is not compulsory. Consequently, parties hesitate to give women the chance to reach the 50% allotted to them

leading to results that are not satisfactory (Le'pinard & Lieber, 2015). As for countries like America and Europe, they do not consider the women quota compulsory because their societies and parties do not have a problem in accepting women. In such countries, women have been able to achieve higher percentages of representation in political, parliamentary and even presidential positions than the Arab World without a compulsory quota.

The importance of adopting women quota and the justifications for its application

The presence of women in legislative and decision-making positions, in any country in general and in the Arab societies in particular, contributes to supporting women struggle for gaining their rights as no person can represent and defend their rights better than women themselves. Additionally, it enables women to participate in decision-making processes. This female presence reflects the degree of development in the society and a sign of development and respect for human rights. It is an indicative that the society is ready to accept women and their effective roles (Fahmi, 2007). A women quota enables women to be part of the discussions on general issues and women issues, as each sex has its own experiences and issues which they need to talk about for themselves. This comes under the call for "representation of interests", which is a right for both men and women. Furthermore, women quota opens the way for the utilization of undiscovered efforts and qualifications. It gives women the chance to work, develop and innovate with all the capacities they have to produce a society that makes use of all the abilities of its people whether males or females (Marhoon, 2004).

The women quota is not to be considered a form of discrimination against men; it is a means of compensation for the long term of discrimination against women. It is a temporary positive discrimination measure to give women their rights. It is a call for "equality of results" and not "equality of opportunities" which is useless in the light of the negative view some people hold for women in their societies. For this, conventions mentioned earlier in this research call for the acceptance of the quota as a temporary procedure that is to be stopped once it achieves its purpose (Lagrini, 2009; Tohamy, 2009).

Moreover, this participation enhances women's social eligibility and their leadership as well as the way the society looks to them. Thus, a women quota is considered as a "positive intervention" and a step towards achieving equality and justice for women (Abdulqader, 2006; Gullam, 2004). One very important issue is that women quota puts an end, or limits the rule of men in a patriarchal society. It forces political parties to include women among their candidates via the force of law. Thus, any list with no women candidates will be rejected by the force of law (Abdulqader, 2006).

However, there has been ongoing debate regarding the adoption of women quota in the Arab World, with some supporting and others rejecting. These opposing views are a result of various social reasons whether general or specific. The interpretation of certain aspects of religion is added to these reasons since it is a major aspect of Arab societies. Therefore, it is necessary to study the ideas and thoughts of Islamic scholars on women participation in parliaments and public affairs since women quota means allowing them to be part of the political arena along with the need to be elected and to undertake public offices. Tracing the various opinions of supporters of women quota leads us to the most important advantage, which is assuring women representation with an acceptable number of seats, especially in societies reluctant in giving women their votes. This is due to many reasons such as the societies' perception to women and untrusting their abilities. A review of the elections in the Arab world for over half a century shows that women hardly get any seats in the legislative councils without the quota being applied while the application of the quota in some of these countries gave women a 10% or a 25% representation, as will be clarified in the upcoming parts of this research. This assures the idea that without a quota there will be no parliamentary women (Shnawah, 2010). Women face so many obstacles when trying to reach parliaments including patriarchal societies, the growing voices that reject women participation in public affairs and the hesitation of parties in nominating women for fear that they will fail to win any votes. Applying women quota to overcome such obstacles is a step towards achieving the "equality principle" which assures women's right to be represented as they are half the society.

Rejecters of women quota consider it an act against democracy and see it as a form of discrimination and a practice of inequality, which contradicts with the right of free and democratic choice. For them, it is a contradiction to the principle of equality agreed on by all constitutions, conventions and declarations. Hence, the opponents of women quota see no need for women quota with the presence of such conventions. They argue that its application will have negative impacts on the efficiency and competence of the elected legislative councils since the woman candidates may not be well qualified for such a position and they will be elected based on their sex and not based on their qualifications, causing councils to fail to achieve their goals. Furthermore, they claim that women quota contradicts with their interpretation of religion that prohibits women participation in public affairs (Dhailmi, 2015; Abu Zaid, 2010; Salim, 2004).

Another claim is that having a women quota means forcing people to elect a person they may not wish to elect and imposing women as representatives in the councils in the same way dictators make their way to leadership. Additionally, they fear that societal complications along with religious and ethnic crises may arise due to the application of women quota. Different ethnicities and religious groups may call for having their own quotas claiming their rights, causing such groups to be isolated in their societies rather than being merged, thus, division and exclusion grow in the society instead of harmony, inclusion and unity (Amarat, 2012; Semina, 2012; Ghawanmeh & Althubetat, 2001).

We argue that the claims of the quota opponents are too exaggerated. Allowing women to be represented in parliaments and other councils and having the right to represent themselves, at least partially, does not contradict with the principle of equality as it promotes equity by giving women the chance to represent themselves. While constitutions assured the right of equality, woman quota strives to achieve it. Moreover, giving women a small share of parliamentary seats is not an anti-democratic and anti-freedom system because it allows half the society to be represented and those women representatives will be elected based on democracy and freedom of choice principles. On

the contrary, the absence of women, who form half the society, is discrimination.

Elections are a procedure for choosing representatives for the people, and women have the right to elect representatives from their own gender by adopting a strategy that promotes that since the regular election systems in some societies such as the case in the Arab World do not give the women a fair chance to reach the legislative councils. Furthermore, the claim that women quotas lead to weak councils and parliaments with insufficient qualifications is in itself a discrimination against women because this claim sees men more qualified than women. Also, it considers all the elections around the world to be based on qualifications and capacities. For example, in the Arab World, other considerations play an important role in choosing the representatives for the legislative council elections such as the clan and the political party. It needs to be made clear that the quota does not aim at women replacing men; it aims at women working side by side with men to utilize the capacities of both for the good of the society.

One issue that can be justified and must be taken into consideration is the fear that having a woman quota will become infectious and spread to other sectors of the society such as the youth, ethnic or religious groups. In this case, there is a need to give these groups their rights and allow them to be represented as well rather than ignoring them and neglecting their rights. To include youth in the public decision-making process, some countries allow younger ages to run for elections, thus giving them a chance to be present and their voices to be heard. Ethnic minorities receive their rights through certain acts, while religious minorities are given religious privacy and freedom; some give them a seat for their region in the parliament, which may be considered a contradiction to the purpose of emerging them in the society. It is notable that no voices have been heard rejecting such practices, but when the issue is related to women and adopting women quota to promote their political participation, refusing voices arise. We argue that this rejection of the women quota stems from the negative stands against women and their participation in the public affairs rather than the quota itself.

### Religion as a critical factor

Religion is a main factor that influences almost all aspects of life in the Arab World. Women rights are a highly sensitive matter, which are affected by the opinions of religious scholars and authorities. These religious scholars do not all adopt the same ideas regarding women taking part in decision-making. While some scholars give the consent for women participation in decision making processes, there are others who either deny women right to take part in the decision making process or restrict it. Consequently, opinions on the acceptance of the woman quota vary. The rejection of women quotas in such a case is due to the rejection of women participation in the public sphere from the first place based on their interpretation and understanding of the sacred texts (Dhailmi, 2015 p.71).

Popular interpretations of religion that reject women participation in public matters are offensive to Islam and raise hatred among feminist movements and women supporters. Observers of the situation- in light of the Arab Spring in which religious parties were present-blame Islamic groups for the retreat in women representation and the loss of gain women had managed to achieve before the start of the Arab Spring (Dhailmi, 2015). Such accusations are far from the essence of Islam, which came to achieve justice and equality for all.

Recently, many contemporary political Islamic movements agree on having a quota for women; therefore, they are present in public elections with candidates from both sexes, and with systems that apply the quota. Surely, such Islamic movements would not have taken this step without the approval of their Islamic scholars and authorities that support women participation in elections with or without a quota as Yusuf Al-Qardawi, the Islamic theologian and ex-chairman of the International Union of Islamic Scholars (Qaradawi, 2016).

Additionally, none of the highest religious authorities have been heard to prohibit the quota in the Arab World. Even in Saudi Arabia, when the King took the decision to allow women to enter the Shura Council, he did that following discussions and the approval of the council of senior religious scholars (Waqdani, 2014). The only exceptional case was before one decade, when Fadilah scholars in Yemen

rejected the quota. And even this opinion was refuted by some members of the same party such as sheikh Hmood, a member of the constituent body of Fadilah party, who announced his support for women and their rights in elections (Taher, 2008; Mashhour, 2008). This was not the case in all the Arab countries. For example, in Tunisia, women were able to achieve a remarkable progress with the participation of Nahda Islamic Movement. The case was the same in the Moroccan elections in which women achieved great progress in the light of the Islam party (Semina, 2012).

It is notable that religious references and jurisprudential conventions do not reject the quota or prohibit woman participation in public decision making, but there are some individual religious scholars who rejected the quota. Thus, elections with a women quota have been held in Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Sudan, Iraq and Palestine with no religious authorities rejecting it. Moreover, religious political movements participated in these elections and had women representatives within their candidates (Al-Shaer, 2018).

Scholars who accept woman participation in public matters depend on a number of religious attestations, reasonable justifications, and societal necessities. One argument is that in Islamic understanding, public matters depend on "general welfare". So, if the welfare of the people requires the participation of women and the adaptation of a quota, so be it. Welfare here can be seen in a number of issues including the investment of female experiences and efforts. Another issue is that Islamic commands address both males and females. This assures that women can take part in public matters including electing and being elected. Thus, elections are a clear act of entrusting the elected to represent the voter and his/her interests and women are capable of being both-candidate and voter (Beltagy, 2000; Ezzat, 1995; Abu Shuqa, 1990; Bawazeer, 2009).

Opposing all these claims stand those who refuse to have woman participants in public matters. These defend their claims with a number of justifications. The first and most important justification is that women are housewives and mothers; their role in society is restricted to house chores only. To them, public matters and affairs are the responsibility of men, relying on their own interpretation of the

religious scripts, which put "kiwama" (guardianship) in the hands of men. (See: Quran, surat "Alahzab" verse 33 and surat "Alnisaa" verse 34). Moreover, they consider the presence of women in public issues and parliaments something forbidden. They claim that women are weak mentally and physically and are not capable of such responsibilities nor will they be able to lead societies and countries. Such justifications are rejected by the first group of scholars along with many contemporary Islamic movements (Abu Faris, 2000; Al-Zindani, 2000; Habib, 2010; Al-Qudah, 2011).

Women quota has become an international culture that is becoming more widespread. Today, more than a hundred countries have adopted the quota in their elections considering it a successful method for achieving equality. This may be one of the reasons why Islamic movements and parties have accepted the quota in a number of Arab and Islamic countries despite those rejecting voices. Such was clear in Jordan, with women candidates running the parliamentary elections for the Islamic movement, and with the Islamic political party in Palestine 'the Change and Reform Bloc' having women candidates in their lists for the legislative council elections. This spread more after the Arab Spring and was clear in Tunisia and Morocco (Daybis, 2013).

#### Adopting women quota in a patriarchal society

Other important factors that affect the application of the quota arise in Arab societies including traditions and norms, which have been controlling the area for a long period of time. Such issues are no longer an obstacle due to the technological revolution, which opened new roads between different cultures, changing the world into a small village. Once political and intellectual elites appear on television along with religious scholars who accept the quota, this will positively affect the quota and lead it to being accepted in the society.

All these points make it clear that the atmosphere in the Arab World is ready to accept the quota and its application once it comes by the law. Yet quotas are the only hope for women in reaching parliaments (Badarni, 2020).

## Women quota in the Arab World

In most of the Arab World, the presence of women in legislative councils is still considered very low. Moreover, the regimes in most of the Arab countries had not promoted women's political rights until the beginning of the third Millennium (Dhailmi, 2015; Lagrini, 2013).

With the start of the 21st century, a number of Arab countries did actually apply women quota in their parliamentary elections such as Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Sudan and Palestine. In these cases, it is notable that women have been able to achieve a significant degree of representation. Yet, a number of Arab countries still do not apply the quota in their elections, while others do not even have parliamentary elections at all (Dhailmi, 2015). They do not accept rotation of power or political plurality up to the date of this research.

Following is a sample of Arab countries, which hold elections. The aim is mainly to show how the application of the quota in these countries has actually enabled women to gain seats which eventually led to a change in the position of women in their countries ("The Quota and its different forms", 2013).

### Egypt

Egypt was a pioneer in allowing women to participate in the political life through being candidates and being elected since the middle of the last century, yet the practical application of it is still limited. Abu Shaaban (2011) mentioned that the Egyptian Constitution of 1956 gave women their right of nomination and election. Since then, the number of women elected ranged between three to eight women, which formed a 1-3% of the parliament's seats. In 1979 and following act 188, Egypt adopted a quota with no less than 30 seats for women; as a result, women were able to gain 35 seats, which forms a 9% of the total seats (Ismail, 2011). The case changed when, in 1986, the constitutional court considered the quota futile claiming that it discriminates between men and women (Maat, 2009). The effects of such a rule were clear in the following elections in which women representatives dropped to a 2-4%. In 1990 and 1995 elections, the number of women dropped to 10 and 9 seats respectively. In the 2000 elections, only 11 women reached the

parliament (2%), seven of them were elected and four of them were appointed based on the individual election system. Then in 2005, the percentage declined to 1%; only eight out of 454 seats were for women- three of them were elected and five were appointed.

Subsequently, in 2009 and following act number 149, the Egyptian Parliament decided to allot 64 seats for women with their right to race for the other general seats. The results of such a decision were clear in the 2010 elections with a 12% representation for women (Abu Shaaban, 2011). As for the elections that followed the revolution of 2011, the compulsory quota was cancelled thus women did not reach a 2% representation again. In these elections, it is also notable that no women were elected. Based on the previous figures, it is clear that women did not win any seat through the individual candidacy category. This is a strong indication that women chances to be elected without a quota are almost zero.

### Tunisia

In contrast to other Arab countries, Tunisia is a pioneer in giving women their right to participate in the political life and parliaments. The ruling party adopted the quota with a 20% representation for women. The effects of such a decision were clear in 2004 with 43 women reaching the parliament, forming a 23% out of the total 189 seats. The case was the same in the 2009 elections; 59 women won, with a percentage of 28%. After the Arab Spring and the fall of Bin Ali, women reached a 25% representation in the elections of 2011. In 2014, there were 68 Tunisian women out of 217 members with a percentage of 30% when Ennahdha Islamic Party won more than 40% of the votes (89 seats out of 217). Women got 42 seats out of the 49 women seats of the National Constituent Assembly. As a result, Tunisia broke the record in the number of women representatives in the Arab countries via quota (Saminah, 2012).

### Morocco

The Moroccan women ran a number of elections since 1976 without winning any seats. In 1993 and 1997 women won two seats with a

percentage less than 1%. This led decision makers to decide on procedures to assure that women get their rights. Therefore, the woman quota was adopted and parties agreed on giving women 30 seats (Tohamy, 2009). Consequently, the representation of women in the parliament jumped to 11% resulting in 35 women members out of the 325 members. Later on, in the 2007 elections, women won 34 seats out of 325. In the elections of 2011, the quota allotted 60 seats for women and 30 for the youth less than the age of 40 out of the 395 seats of the parliament giving women and youth one fourth of the seats. The Islamic party of Justice and Development managed to win 107 seats out of which 16 were for women and 8 for the youth (Lagrini, 2007, 2009, 2013; Saminah, 2012). Then in the 2016 elections, woman representation rose to 18 seats out of 395 (20%) with the application of the quota. Again, this shows that the quota plays a crucial role in increasing woman representation in legislative councils and parliaments ("Women Quota in Moroccan Elections", 2021).

#### Jordan

Women were granted the right to be candidates in 1974 for the parliament. In the year 1989, 12 women ran for the elections for the first time but none won (Ismail, 2011). In 1993, only one woman managed to reach the parliament for the seat of the Circassians. Also, in 1997, no woman won the elections, as a result, it was decided to allot six seats for women out of 110 parliamentary seats in 2003. Next in 2007, only one woman won the elections via free vote. The share of women raised to 12 seats in 2010, giving women an 11% representation of all parliamentary seats ("The Quota and its different forms", 2013). Once again, the seats for women raised to 15 seats. Then, in the 2013 elections, women won 15 seats via women quota and three others via free elections, reaching a 12% representation, and the Islamic Action Front nominated women in their electoral list for Zarqa (Nassar, 2015).

In January 2016, the Jordanian parliament approved the new elections system passed on by the government. It calls for less than 12% representation for women, which was not welcomed by feminist activists who call for 20-30% representation for women in the

parliament ("Women participation in Jordanian parliaments", 2016).

In the 2020 parliament elections, women won 15 seats via the quota and received no other seats via competition unlike the 2016 elections where women managed to get 5 additional seats besides the ones they won through the quota ("Women Quota in Jordan", 2020).

#### Palestine

The first legislative elections were held in Palestine in 1996. Less than 6% of the parliamentarians were women, with 5 women out of 88 members. Despite the fact that the number of woman voters exceeded male voters reaching 85% (Central Elections Commission-Palestine, 2006). This was with no woman quota; it included only a quota based on religion with a specific number of seats for Christians and Samaritans. The following legislative elections were in 2006. National powers and the Islamic Change and Reform Bloc were present in these elections (Saleh, 2007). 17 women managed to reach the council out of the 132 members- almost 13% ("The Quota and its different forms," 2013). This was due to the new election system of the year 2005 and act (9), which considers woman quota obligatory in all proportional representation lists. It enforced a 20% representation for women in these lists, other than the electoral districts (Al-Ghoul, 2015). But the feminist movement activists in Palestine did not agree with this percentage demanding no less than 30%. In these elections, parties were obliged to include women candidates in their lists following certain rules. Women representatives became present in the successive Palestinian Governments including the government formed by the Islamic movement after winning the 2006 elections.

In the local body elections held in the West Bank in 2021 and 2022, women gained a 22% representation in the first stage while men got 78%. Women gained 19% while men got 81% in the second stage. This percentage was achieved due to the quota being compulsory in elections. (Central Elections Commission, 2022).

## Sudan

Sudanese women became aware that they cannot reach parliaments via traditional elections (Badri & El-Naggar 2013). Only one woman managed to win during the 1965 elections and this continued for years. Consequently, it was out of question that the only way for women to reach the parliament was through the quota. 35 seats were allotted for women in the legislative council following the article (28) of year 1999.

Badri & El-Naggar (2013) asserted that the quota does not contradict with the constitution nor the law in Sudan. They believe that the financial funding of parties should depend on the degree of their application of the quota, and this should be no less than 30%. Badri & El-Naggar (2013) assured that Sudan has been applying the quota in many forms for half a century, and the Sudanese society, including its political, intellectual and religious sectors, accept the quota. Thus, the quota needs to be a compulsory part of the law.

## Algeria

In 2012, a women quota was approved in Algeria, obliging parties to have women representatives in their lists with a 20-40%, and 30% for municipality councils. Not applying these percentages considers the lists incompatible and rejected. During the 2012 elections, 106 women reached the parliament out of the 462 members (Semina, 2012).

## Iraq

In 2005, the Iraqi constitution and law stated that the quota need be adopted by the parliament and the Iraqi National Assembly with no less than 25% from the members. Without this representation the council is considered invalid (Aljabir, 2011).

In the 2005 elections, women managed to win 87 seats (almost a third) which is higher than the percentage allotted for them through the quota. Then in 2021, women won 91 seats which is also more than the 83 seats allotted for them through the quota. Such results assert the necessity of quota application in having woman representatives in parliaments and other

decision making positions ("In a precedent: Iraqi women exceed women quota", 2021).

## Yemen

Two women managed to win seats in the 1993 elections ("Yemen busy with women quota", 2013). Then, in 2003, only one woman won, and this was the situation in the 2007 elections with less than a 1% representation.

Calls for adopting the woman quota in Yemen have been rejected from that time under the pretext of it being against Islamic teachings, especially that the Islamic Fadila scholars considered the quota forbidden in Islam ("Fadila Scholars Forbid Women Quota", 2015). In December 2015, the Yemeni prime minister urged the political parties to specify women quotas within their electoral lists with no less than 15%.

## Gulf Countries and Saudi Arabia

These areas were late behind other countries in the Arab World in holding elections and adopting quotas. For the sake of this study, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia will be briefly mentioned. As for Kuwait, since 1962, laws gave the right to elect only to males; women were prohibited. The year 2005 witnessed the first time women got their right to elect and run elections but without winning any parliamentary seats as no quota was applied. In 1999, Sheikh Jaber Al-Sabah, the prince of Kuwait, introduced an initiative to give women their right to participate in the 2003 elections. This initiative was hampered by the parliament (Eydat, 2014; Ashraf, & Kilani, 2012). As for Saudi Arabia, general elections are not held till now. However, on the 25th of September 2011, the King announced that women will be present in the Shura Council in its upcoming session and they will be allowed to participate in the upcoming municipality elections (Waqdani, 2014).

## Conclusions

The study discussed women quota in the Arab World and its necessity with special reference to the religious and social factor. It

concluded that women quota is a form of positive discrimination to empower women in their societies and to represent their interests and needs. In addition, it assured that the quota is a procedure that will allow societies to benefit from the qualifications and potentials of both men and women for the welfare of the society.

It was clear that women were not able to reach any active representation in parliaments without the quota. This led many countries to apply woman quotas in their elections. Women empowerment cannot be achieved with women being absent from parliaments. This is the justification for those who call for positive discrimination, if temporary, to assure the presence of women.

The varying opinions of Islamic scholars and religious authorities on woman participation in public affairs and leadership have been discussed in the study. Scholars who accept the participation of women in public affairs and general issues accept the quota while those who reject the participation of women in the general issue reject the quota. The study clarified that religious authorities have not been heard to reject the application of the quota in Arab countries, opening the way for the application of the quota.

The cases presented in the study from elections held in a number of Arab countries assure that women cannot reach parliaments and represent themselves in societies without the application of the quota. This gives preference to the voices supporting the quota and those who consider it a way for women empowerment.

Finally, despite customs and traditions, Arab societies continue to be tolerant of women rights due to the many religious scripts and teachings which assert such rights. This makes the Arab societies ready to accept any legal acts aiming at achieving equality and maintaining women rights which do not contradict with the teaching of Islam.

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