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Electoral Processes in Selected Countries of the Middle East
A Case Study

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ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

A CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND

The challenges of the Middle East peace process between the Arab world and Israel undoubtedly form the main backdrop to various political, economic and social issues in the Arab world. Even for Arab countries that have not been directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the issue still looms as a major factor not only in determining policies of countries of the region, but also in the daily lives of their citizens.

The four wars that took place in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973; in addition to the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in 1978 and of Beirut in 1982, and later the first Intifada of 1987 and the second Intifada of 2000 have all had their toll on the Arab world, with variations in impact on each country depending on various factors such as proximity to the region of conflict, the number of Palestinian refugees residing in each country as well as other factors.

While the Arab-Israeli conflict dates back to the first half of the twentieth century, its ramifications are still as grave, if not more so, today. The gravity of the situation has been exacerbated by the three consecutive conflicts that took place in the east of the Arab world, namely: the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the war that ensued, and most recently, the war launched by the coalition forces on Iraq and its subsequent occupation.

Before looking at conflict situations in individual countries and the electoral processes that followed them, it should be noted here that the role of Arab women in the public sphere is generally regarded to be minimal, if not at times non-existent, in comparison to other regions of the world. Of course, this minimal public role is best illustrated in Arab women's representation, or lack of, in their respective parliaments; as well as a more or less passive role in electoral processes. While many Arab states have granted women the right to vote and run for office, there are few in which they are still denied that right, such as in Kuwait, where despite a decree issued by the Emir granting women full political rights in 1999, parliament rejected the decree as unconstitutional.

The issue of Arab women's minimal political participation has been a high priority among Arab women activists and entities concerned with the advancement of women in various Arab countries for sometime now, but it was brought up forcefully on the international scene more recently in UNDP's Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) 2002. While the Report shows that Arab countries made certain advances in more than one area of human development, there remain three deeply-rooted shortcomings that pose as major obstacles to building human development that are embodied in the deficits related to freedom, empowerment of women and knowledge.

To complicate the issue of the deficit in women's empowerment, the AHDR also notes that political participation in the Arab world is less advanced than in other

developing regions. Even in countries where political participation is explicitly stated in the constitution, this is sometimes constrained by declarations of states of emergency. “Practical constraints of these kinds have had adverse effects on people’s perceptions and actions, reflected in low turnout rates during national and local elections and in an aversion to participating in the activities of political parties.” (UNDP 2002: 109)

Since the number of countries in the region makes it impossible to look at each country’s electoral process individually, this paper looks at the electoral processes in only three countries of the region, namely: Yemen, Lebanon and Jordan, although there are other interesting experiences as well in the region. However, the specificity of the nature of Arab women’s political participation dictates that not only the immediate elections that took place after the conflict be reviewed, but also the following ones to be able to establish certain trends and get a better understanding of the situation in each country. Due to limitations of time in preparing this paper as well as limitations on its size, it was not possible to conduct in-depth research on the electoral process in each country. Hence, this paper will attempt to give a brief analysis and assessment of how the electoral process in each of these countries was supportive, or not, of women’s participation in conformity with the outline presented in the Aide Memoire of this meeting, and then identify commonalities and differences which might help in drawing conclusions and recommendations on how to better support women’s full participation in elections not only in the three countries under study but the Arab region as a whole, and possibly other post-conflict countries.

THE YEMENI CASE STUDY

In addition to the regional conflicts mentioned above and their varying impacts on each Arab state, many Arab states have had their own conflicts which have ultimately shaped the political, economic and social scenes in these countries, including electoral processes. In Yemen, the unification of northern and southern Yemen (YAR and PDRY) in 1990 brought along with it its own set of opportunities and apprehensions. The unification made Yemen the most populous country in the sparsely populated Arabian Peninsula and it also brought about a commitment to democratization in a region of the Arab world that at the time had not yet started considering any such process.

However, the union between the tribal north and the Marxist south also had its problems which became apparent in the second half of 1993 when tensions ran high between the president (from the north) and vice-president (from the south). Despite a Document of Pledge and Agreement which called for a thorough review of the Constitution and the country’s economic policies (the Document was initiated by the major political parties of Yemen and signed by the two leaders in early 1994), a full-scale civil war erupted in May, the south seceded from the union but it was ultimately defeated in July by northern forces. The conflict caused damage to much of the infrastructure in the southern Aden region, but more seriously, it posed the government with the task not only of rebuilding the economy but also the fabric of internal unity. This prompted the country to introduce reforms to the 1991 unification Constitution and to introduce economic austerity measures.

In addition to this internal conflict, Yemen has had a long-standing dispute with Saudi Arabia over their shared borders. At certain points, the situation threatened to become potentially explosive with border skirmishes taking place. However, an

agreement in 1995 to negotiate a settlement defused the situation and the agreement was finally reached in 2000. To the south, Yemen has also had another conflict situation with Eritrea on sovereignty over the Greater Hanish Island. This conflict was resolved by an arbitration tribunal in 1998 which ruled in favour of Yemen.

Against this background of regional, internal and border conflicts, Yemen has held three national legislative elections since 1993. Following the unification, a multi-party system was established and in 1993 a semi-independent electoral commission was formed, which is entrusted by the electoral law with the responsibility of administering, preparing, supervising and monitoring the general elections (al-Assbahi 2003). It has been observed that, in general, the Yemeni government has continued to demonstrate its commitment to democracy. While this paper focuses on parliamentary elections, it is worth mentioning here that the first post-unification local council elections took place in 2001, and 36 women were elected out of 147 women who ran for these elections.

In the first parliamentary elections which took place in April 1993, the number of female candidates reached 42 with a little less than half of them being partisan candidates while the rest ran as independents. Two of the women won seats in a 301-seat parliament. In the second elections, which took place in April 1997, the number of female candidates went down to 19, forming 1.3% of the total number of candidates, as was the case in the previous elections (the number of male candidates also decreased in the 1997 elections). Out of the women candidates, two won forming 0.7% of the total number of Yemeni parliamentarians. It is worth noting at this point that the women who won in 1993 and in 1997 were from southern constituencies (i.e. the former PDRY), where the formal discourse on promoting gender equity was much stronger than in the north. The decreasing trend in the number of female candidates was even more noticeable in the 2003 elections, when only eleven women ran for office, forming only 0.6% of the total number of candidates. Out of these only one won a seat, so women now constitute only 0.3% of the Yemeni parliament.

This decrease in the number of candidates is explained by Mashhour (2003) as being due to the stipulation introduced in the General Election Law No. 13 for 2001 which states that an independent candidate has to be given an attestation by at least three hundred people from his/her constituency. This was a difficult condition for all candidates to fulfill, but was probably more so for women who traditionally have more restrictions on their mobility and are less known within their communities.

On the brighter side, women voter registration has steadily increased over the three elections. Whereas in 1993 only 18% of all the registered voters were women, in 1997 the proportion went up to 27% and in 2003 it further increased to 42%.

With regard to legislation governing the electoral process, the Yemeni Constitution guarantees women the right to vote and to run for elections. Since the illiteracy rate in Yemen is still high, the election law requires each candidate to choose a distinct logo for use on the ballot. This requirement is definitely in favour of women voters, among whom the illiteracy rate is as high as 67.5% as compared to 22.7% among men (Colburn 2002: 151). The law also encourages female participation by establishing women's committees in each electoral district. These committees are entrusted with the registration of female voters and are responsible for polling on election day (Mashhour 2003, Colburn 2002).

While women voter registration has witnessed significant increases over the three elections and in view of the decrease in the number of women candidates, one cannot but assume that male candidates are becoming increasingly aware of the potential of Yemeni women voters and are therefore making use of this potential to their advantage. Hence, despite not having any legal hindrances to their participation, it is legitimate to question whether women voters are making free choices or that their votes are being dictated by their male relatives. Actually, it is admitted by Yemeni women themselves that the negative trend in women's success in elections has been a result of "tribalism, its value system and its view of women. Even political parties, which should have affected change since they represent modernizing influences within the state, were themselves an extension of the tribe and of the tribal attitude that resists any advancement in the status of women." (Mashhour 2003: 4)

Within such a traditional context, the establishment of the Yemeni National Commission for Women can be definitely considered a special measure to improve Yemeni women's electoral participation. Actually, the National Strategy for Women launched last year dedicates a whole domain to the political participation of women. While some of the special measures included in the electoral law mentioned above can be encouraging to women's participation in the electoral process as voters, no special measures have been introduced to facilitate women's role as candidates. The Yemeni Commission as well as women activists are demanding affirmative action measures in this regard, encouraged by the experiences of Morocco and Jordan (YNCW 2001, Mashhour 2003). It should also be mentioned that in the electoral commission, only one woman was a member in the commission formed for the 1993 elections. In the following two commissions, there were no women members.

While political parties seem to have thrived in post-unification Yemen, women formed only 2% of their membership at establishment. However, the major political parties do have token representation of one or two women in their higher echelons (out of an average twenty at this level). The only exception is the Socialist Party which has four out of 29 members in their political bureau. Analysis of reasons for this vary between women themselves refraining from party work, or their feeling that "they are not given serious tasks except during elections to mobilize women to vote." (Mashhour 2003: 33)

A serious setback took place in the 2003 elections as women candidates bitterly complained that they were not given any kind of financial or moral support for their campaigns. While traditional forces openly resisted women's participation, the resistance of political parties was not as straightforward, yet indirectly they pressured women not to run. The ruling party fielded only one woman candidate, whereas the Socialist Party (which was previously the ruling party in the PDRY and was then noted for its pro-women policies) fielded only two. Furthermore, the election platforms of these parties in 2003 did not express any specific commitments to support women in getting elected. "Rather, what appeared in these platforms were general expressions which do not reflect any real political commitments by the parties." (ibid.: 34)

Voter education has been limited to raising public awareness on the importance of elections and the significance of women's political participation at the parliamentary level. The training of potential candidates and their campaign managers seems to have been stronger in the local council elections than in parliamentary elections. Women's

branches of political parties were trained to strengthen their organizing and outreach capacity in the lead-up to the 2003 elections. Obviously, this training was more to the advantage of men rather than women candidates, since very few women were fielded by political parties in the first place.

Election monitoring took place during the past three elections. While the electoral commission is the official entity created by law to serve this purpose, local and foreign observers could also participate. During the 2003 elections, it is reported that some 90-100 international observers and 30000 Yemenis were involved, monitoring 5620 polling stations nationwide. (Election Monitoring Report 2003). No gender-segregated data is available on these observers and for purposes of writing this paper, no reference was found that specifically mentioned the mandate of these observers regarding women voters and candidates.

Despite the general atmosphere of democratization in Yemen, the media still plays a rather marginal role in politics. With respect to enhancing women's political participation and dealing with the issue at the official media level things become even worse. Observers argue that this can partly be explained by the lack of a clear policy on how best to address women's issues and change wrong beliefs and outdated traditions among people responsible for running the official media in the country, be they men or women. There are still some erroneous generalizations about women being presented and it is also noticed that very little time is allocated to women's programmes in the national media.

However, the age of global information, the huge expansion of satellite TVs and the Internet necessarily mean that one cannot look at the issue of women and elections from the angle of the role of the national media alone. In fact, a significant number of programmes are being run on Arab-owned satellite stations that deal with certain sensitive women-related issues, such as legislation, violence and discrimination practiced against them, as well as their participation in the public sphere. In the Arab world, this is generally believed to have a great influence on women's awareness of their rights and assist their advancement in society. Given the poverty indicators of Yemen, it remains open to question how many Yemeni households do such programmes reach and impact.

THE LEBANESE CASE STUDY

In Lebanon the conflict lasted much longer than Yemen. Lebanon has had one of the longest histories of democratic practice in the Arab world, the civil war of 1975-1990 negatively impacted it, while of course, the unstable regional situation has aggravated the difficulties that Lebanon face. Although mistrust between various religious communities has always played its role in Lebanese politics, the civil war actually erupted after an attack by Christian militants on a busload of Palestinians. While the protracted civil war revealed a multiplicity of strange alliances and caused severe damage to the country's service-oriented economy and already-fragile social fabric, the complexities are too many to be discussed in this paper. However, it should be mentioned here that Israel's invasion and occupation of most of the area south of the Litani River three years after the civil war broke out added to this complicated conflict. Later, most of that area was turned over to Israel's ally, the South Lebanon Army, under the pretence of protecting northern Israel from cross-border attacks.

The Ta'if Agreement of 1989, in which major political figures participated, marked the beginning of reconciliation in Lebanon. Some of the political reforms envisioned in this meeting were adopted in constitutional amendments in 1990 through which the number of parliamentary seats was increased and divided equally between Christians and Muslims. This led up to the 1992 parliamentary elections, the first to take place in the country in twenty years.

Political and social instability, coupled with economic hardships and a severe collapse of the Lebanese currency have posed the major challenges for postwar reconstruction efforts which started in 1992. While fourteen years later the physical damages caused by the war have been repaired, Lebanon still lags behind in basic infrastructure and public services after such a long hiatus in upgrading them. Yet for many observers, more seriously than this is the fact that “the social and political divisions that gave rise to and sustained (the) conflict remain largely unresolved.” (abacci)

Despite a legislative amendment in the 1950s that gave women full suffrage, their participation in political life is still low. Currently, the Lebanese parliament has only 2.3% female representation, which is rather low even when compared to other Arab countries that have given women full suffrage (CRTD 2003). Lebanese women parliamentarians have been branded as the women “dressed in black,” (ibid.) because the first two women to enter parliament, in 1963 and much later in 1992, actually “inherited” their seats, the first one from her father and the second from her assassinated husband, so when they went into parliament they were wearing black in mourning. The current situation is not any better, since the women parliamentarians have not had political careers as such, but their socio-political status is derived from a male politician, either deceased or alive (iula-int.org).

Since the civil war ended, parliamentary elections took place in Lebanon in 1992, 1996 and 2000. In 1996, only ten women ran for office, while in 2000, eleven ran and three of them were elected. It is difficult to find reliable data on women as voters, “for neither accurate statistics are provided, nor is the available data classified according to sex,” although it is estimated that male and female voting rates are equal (Helou 1998: 264-5).

Prior to the civil war, women's participation in political parties seems to have been quite active. Even during the war, certain parties sought women's participation in particular. Currently, the situation seems to have regressed as it has been observed that “women's sections in these parties in some instance have been reformulated into NGOs. “Some civil society actors feel that women's sections of political parties have in effect been marginalized and ‘pushed aside’ into these NGOs, and thus it is more an indication of the lack of incorporation of women into party politics than genuine attention to women's issues” (CRTD 2003).

Of course men still dominate the leadership of political parties, and among six major parties, women's participation at the highest levels ranges from zero to 10% at best (ibid.). According to a few personal testimonies, women face some difficulties within political parties, they question the internal democracy of parties and say that there is an obvious division of labour based on sex within the parties' general activities (Bizri 1998: 342).

Women's NGOs in Lebanon have held a number of training activities with women candidates and they also worked on mobilizing women's turnout at the polls (macmag-glip). Yet again, their work seems to have suffered because of the civil strife since, historically, they have been known to be much more active than what is currently being published on their work. However, one must not forget that there are some Lebanese factions that boycotted the previous elections, and some of the active women's NGOs may have been amongst them.

Observing elections is not yet an integral component of most electoral processes in the Arab world. In the case under study, a specialized NGO ruefully comments that "Election monitoring in Lebanon is something easier said than done!" (ladeleb.org). This NGO and others suggested forming a national elections committee to be made up of judges, governmental representatives as well as representatives of different political forces to supervise the previous elections, the government turned down the suggestion. However, there are some NGOs that did get foreign technical support in developing voter education programmes and in how to monitor elections. (ndi.org)

Press freedoms in Lebanon were the most advanced in the Arab world before the civil war. Despite certain state restrictions since then, the Lebanese media still retains a special position. This has prompted some of Lebanon's post-war political elites to operate their own television stations and to own considerable shares in the print media. These privately-owned television stations have promoted the policies and electoral lists favoured by their owners (meib.org). Hence the role of the Lebanese media, though quite active, had tended to focus on what their owners dictated.

Unfortunately, the materials available on women in the Lebanese elections for the purposes of writing this paper were not as detailed or numerous as what was available for the two other case studies. Additionally, and given the strenuous political atmosphere that still engulfs the country, one cannot vouch that all of the materials do not have certain hidden political agendas behind them, which due to time constraints in preparing the paper could not be verified thoroughly. However, from the rather sketchy information gathered here, one can safely assume that much work needs to be done in the area of promoting women's participation in the electoral process in Lebanon.

THE JORDANIAN CASE STUDY

While Jordan has not witnessed any major internal conflicts since 1970, understanding the complexity of the situation in the country necessitates analyzing the broad contexts that profoundly affect it, namely: the country's limited internal resources which have made it dependent on external aid and the political instability of the Middle East region as a whole. Jordan's strategic location between the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel to the west, and Iraq to the east has made it very vulnerable and prone to experiencing major impacts whenever there is tension on either side.

Parliamentary elections could not be held in Jordan following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, since both the East and West Banks had equal representation in the Jordanian parliament and elections could not take place in the occupied West Bank. However, Jordan's decision in 1988 to sever all legal and administrative ties with the West Bank in addition to riots and demonstrations which broke out in different places of the country in 1989 protesting the subsidy cuts agreed to

with the IMF, paved the way for a return to democratic life in the country. Months later, Jordan held its first general parliamentary elections. The Muslim Brotherhood movement, which had escaped a ban imposed on all political parties in 1957 on grounds it operated under charity rules, won a lion's share, 22 of the 80 seats. Together with other independent Islamists, they became the single largest bloc in parliament, and began to challenge the country's generally moderate policies. Such demands contrasted with Jordan's general image in the west as being a more modern society than others in the region with a rather well educated population. "It is not thought of as an overtly religious state or prey to the forces of Islamic radicalism... there is a strong tendency to take Jordan for granted as an example of moderation and reform in the region." (Hollis 2004: 1)

Since these first elections that took place immediately after the country embarked on a political liberalization process, Jordan has witnessed three parliamentary elections with each having its distinct features, since each one somewhat reflected the impact of regional developments on Jordan's internal politics at that particular juncture. To pre-empt the rising power of Islamists at a time when Jordan was preparing to sign a peace treaty with Israel, which the Islamists oppose on ideological grounds, authorities changed the election law to a one-person/one-vote formula, instead of allowing voters to chose up to six candidates in one go. As a result, the Islamists won only 17 seats in a largely apolitical parliament in 1993, as most Jordanians voted along tribal lines in constituencies that were redrawn. A year later, the House endorsed the peace treaty with Israel -- despite the Islamists' rejection.

Reacting to what they perceived as government policies targeting them, whether through the one-person/one-vote formula or other legislation such as those limiting press freedoms, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Brotherhood established after the return to democratic life and the passing of a new party law, as well as other opposition parties, decided to boycott the 1997 elections, although some of their members did run for elections as independent candidates. The IAF decision totally marginalized them as a force in shaping public policies, a major reason for their decision to run in the 2003 elections, the first under King Abdullah's rule. In this round they clinched 17 seats, but in a parliament whose seats have been increased to 110 from 80 in the past.

In its approach to promote democracy that includes good governance based on equal rights and responsible citizenship and that is also gender sensitive, Jordan has progressively been implementing sustainable efforts to enhance women's political participation. In fact, within the context of the four elections that the country has witnessed in the last fifteen years, it can be said that women did move towards more active participation in politics since gaining the right to vote and to run for office in 1974.

Table 1 shows that women's participation as candidates in parliamentary elections has witnessed shifts and developments in terms of quality and quantity. Indeed, while in the 1984 by-elections women's participation was rather passive, in 1989 twelve women ran for office. Yet, having not won any seats in these elections discouraged many women from running in the 1993 elections, when only three women ran. Having one woman amongst them win a seat did, however, encourage 17 women to run for the 1997 elections; unfortunately, none of them won.

Table 1. Women's participation in national elections as candidates

| Election year | Number of women candidates | Percentage of women to total candidates | Percentage of votes given to women | Number of successful women candidates* | Percentage of women in Lower House |
|---------------|----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1989 | 12 | 1.86 | 1.01 | 0 | 0 |
| 1993 | 3 | 0.18 | 0.48 | 1 | 1.25 |
| 1997 | 17 | 3.24 | 1.60 | 0 | 0 |
| 2003 | 54 | 7.06 | 2.66 | 6 | 6.5 |

* The 1993 successful candidate won through the Circassian/Chechen quota, whereas the 2003 successful candidates won through the women's quota

Considering the fact that social attitudes towards women's political participation is the main reason behind women's failure to win seats in the Lower House, an affirmative action measure was therefore necessary. In this respect, the Jordanian government responded to national campaigns that took place in the aftermath of the 1997 elections, and presented the voice of many women activists through the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW is a semi-governmental organization established by the Cabinet in 1992 as a policy platform for women's issues in Jordan) demanding the introduction of a women's quota to the Lower House. Since then the issue was on the public agenda until the King finally gave his directives to the government to introduce the quota system to help empower women.

The quota system adopted in Jordan in early 2003 allows women to run in open competition for all the seats, even those reserved as quota seats for minorities such as Christians, Circassians/Chechens or *Bedu*. The women who do not make it in the open competition are then given a second opportunity to win one of the six seats reserved for women. The formula adopted for this is taking the highest six percentages of the votes a woman got to the total ballots cast in her electoral district. These six seats could be occupied by any woman regardless of her belonging to any group in the population such as those for whom a quota has already been reserved.

The system has come under criticism by various groups, even though without it the current Jordanian Lower House would not have had any women representation. Many women activists believe that the number of seats is not enough to form a "critical mass" that could affect change in the House. Another criticism targeted at the system is that the way it is formulated automatically favours women from smaller districts, i.e. rural areas. This criticism is often countered with the argument that women in rural areas are doubly hindered than women in urban areas --- whether because of stricter social attitudes or because of their lack of financial resources.

Both arguments actually have sound reasoning behind them and any new amendment to the system should try to strike a delicate balance between the two, which will not be an easy task. However, it should be noted that upon the announcement of the quota system, many women were encouraged to run. In some electoral districts,

especially urban ones, there were three or four women running. This scattered the votes among them, hence the percentages they got were very low, exacerbating the situation created by an already disadvantageous formula.

Tribalism is still a major force to be reckoned with in both Jordanian politics and society. What is interesting in this instance is that out of the six winners of the quota seats, five had the support of their tribes and were fielded as “tribal candidates,” while only one was a partisan candidate. Unlike Yemen where tribalism is seen as debilitating to the advancement of women, the quota system seems to have suited smaller tribes whose male candidates would not have stood a chance in open competition with candidates of larger tribes. Some simple calculations assured the smaller tribes of having much better opportunities through the quota system, hence they used it to their advantage.

Besides having the quota as a gender-sensitive measure introduced to the electoral law, the procedures enacted in the provisional Election Law No. 34 of 2001 facilitated measures of voter registration and balloting, which coincidentally facilitated the procedure for women voters, since they were not introduced specifically as gender-sensitive measures. For example, whereas in the past voters had to get special voting cards on the basis of their Family Booklet (a civil status registry issued to the household head which includes all members of his/her family), the voting cards were not required for the 2003 elections. Instead, voters were requested to present their national identity cards in lieu of the voting cards. Since all Jordanians above the age of 18 are required by law to have these cards, women voters did not have to rely on the heads of households (most often men) to get them their voting cards, making them less susceptible to pressures by those men on who to vote for.

The procedures adopted for the last elections also allowed people to vote in any polling centre within their electoral district, whereas in the past voter lists were issued for each polling centre individually and each voter had to go to the specific centre where his/her name was registered. This facilitated the task of women in voting, since their mobility is more restricted than men’s and in the past they had to depend on other people, usually men, to provide them with transportation to go to the polling centre, whereas through this measure a polling centre could easily be reached on foot.

In addition to these legal amendments that in general facilitated women’s participation in the electoral process, there were other special measures that targeted the same goal. For example, JNCW established a temporary Higher Committee for the Promotion of Women in Elections, the name explaining the major task of the Committee. The membership of the Committee included committed and experienced people such as ex-senators, ex-ministers, leading journalists and the heads of the major women’s NGOs. The Committee drew up a plan to achieve its purpose, assisted individual candidates in planning their campaigns and attempted to convince the candidates from districts that had more than two women candidates to try and reach an agreement amongst themselves on having only one of them run to give her better chances, however, this was a futile exercise.

As for voter registration, the electoral law stipulates that the Civil Status and Passport Department is responsible for preparing the list of eligible voters who are entitled by law to vote on the basis of their national identity cards and their national numbers. Eligible voters, 18 years old and above, who did not get their voting cards are

given a chance to have them issued by the Civil Status Office in their respective districts. Citizens who have reservations about people registered in those lists are entitled to appeal at the Court of First Instance in their area. Based on the court ruling, the final version of electoral lists are compiled and used during elections. Also according to the law, eligible voters whose names are unjustly excluded from the list or whose data are wrong are entitled to request a correction. In addition, citizens may object to the inclusion of a person who does not have the right to vote or the omission of names of those who are entitled to vote. Women registered as voters comprised 52% of the total registered. The reason behind this is the prohibition imposed by the law on army and general security forces, in which tens of thousands of men are enlisted, from voting.

Similar to the case of Yemen, voter education did not exceed awareness raising workshops that targeted both men and women on the importance of promoting women's election to parliament. Between JNCW and its women NGO partners, one hundred such workshops were conducted all over the Kingdom. However, in future elections such activities should be more diversified especially since there is a chronic misperception among Jordanians in general on the actual role of their parliamentary representatives. With the exception of few urban, more affluent electoral districts, most of the population relies on their representatives to be their "service providers," whether in getting them employment or solving certain issues they have pending with government departments on their behalf. Hence a comprehensive, well-planned voter education programme that uses various approaches and that incorporates all the different aspects of how constituents can make best use of their representatives is highly needed.

With the resumption of political liberalisation in 1989 and the passing of a new party law, Jordan now has 31 registered political parties. The presence of women in these parties does not exceed, at best, 8%, with very few in the higher echelons (the Islamic Action Front and the Islamic Centrist Party are two of the parties that do have women in their *shura* councils). During the 2003 elections, only the Islamic Action Front fielded a woman candidate who is currently in parliament on a quota seat. However, this does not mean that other political parties were successful in fielding men candidates at the expense of women. Out of the 31 parties, only five parties had parliamentary candidates. While the Islamic Action Front succeeded in getting 17 out of their 30 candidates into parliament, the other four parties combined fielded 38 candidates, out of whom only eight succeeded (QCPS 2003: 9).

Hence it can be said that being affiliated to a political party – with the exception of the Islamic Action Front – does not necessarily improve a person's chances of getting elected to the Jordanian parliament at present. This is due to major structural, financial and possibly ideological deficiencies that characterize most Jordanian political parties. While it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these deficiencies, suffice it to say here that the inability of political parties to play their full role on the Jordanian political scene has prompted the King to instruct the government formed towards the end of 2003 to put the political development of the country high on its agenda. So until major reforms take place within political parties, there is much doubt that they will be able to support the political participation of Jordanian women.

Training for women candidates became a major programme for JNCW and some women NGOs since the 1997 elections, and this was increased in 2003. Seminars, workshops and individual consultations were held for and with women candidates. Skills

training targeted both the candidates and their campaign managers and addressed such issues as time management, targeting voters, recruiting volunteers, fundraising and formulating and implementing a field strategy among many other topics. In retrospect, there was probably some duplication of efforts not only between organizations but also in the activities of the same organization. This was either because potential candidates who could not attend a previous programme requested having it repeated, or because these organizations accepted anything that was offered to them by foreign partners, even though they had implemented a similar activity already.

While in other countries it is quite legitimate to discuss the process of “candidate identification,” since such processes exist, in Jordan this level of sophistication has not been reached yet, probably with the exception of the Islamic Action Front and one or two other parties. Women NGOs, through the Higher Election Committee established under the auspices of JNCW, did discuss the issue and came up with a list of criteria that women candidates should possess. Yet it was impossible to use these criteria to tell women whether they were “good” potential candidates due to two reasons: first, social relations would be jeopardized; and second, and more importantly, the electoral law does not specify such criteria so using them would have been illegal. Had the women NGOs offered any kind of financial support to the candidates, they might have been able to apply these criteria illicitly, but then they do not have the resources for such support and the law governing the establishment and operation of NGOs forbids them to have any “political activities.” Anyway, to make use of these criteria which took a long time of deliberations to finalize, the list was distributed amongst the women candidates and they were asked to base their final decision on whether to run or not on how much they found these criteria applicable to them. There is enough reason to believe that this advice was not taken seriously.

Jordan has never officially made a statement on whether it accepts or refuses to have foreign observers at elections. However, international organizations specialized in election monitoring seem never to have applied officially to the government. Yet there have been certain such organizations present in Jordan at the time of elections and their work was not hindered in any way. Locally, there have been calls for the establishment of a national independent body to observe elections but this has not materialized so far. In light of the current focus on political development and increased transparency by the leadership of the country, establishing such a national body might only be a matter of time. Informally, the media coverage that took place over the past four elections could be considered as one sort of monitoring, especially because in addition to the local media, the four elections that took place did attract a lot of foreign media attention.

The media coverage of women candidates in both the 1997 and 2003 elections was quite impressive. It was obvious that the most influential columnists were committed to the promotion of the idea, while TV and radio ran several programmes to discuss the issue. During the 1997 elections, JNCW funded TV spots for the seventeen women candidates, while in the 2003 elections one of the women’s NGOs produced newspaper ads, T-shirts, posters and stickers with the slogan “When women win, the country wins” for the 2003 elections.

FACTORS AND ASPECTS IN PROMOTING AND SUPPORTING THE FULL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Factors that hinder the promotion of Arab women in the public domain are complicated and intertwined. On the other hand, the small windows of opportunity available vary between countries, therefore, there is no blueprint for the promotion of women that can be applied across the Arab world, given the different contexts and experiences of each country. However, the previous case studies do raise certain common obstacles that women face and to a lesser extent some recommendations that could be implemented to overcome these obstacles.

The weak political participation of women at all levels is one striking commonality. Although there have been certain advances in appointed positions, specifically in Jordan, the near-absence of women or their token representation in appointed positions seems to impact their advancement in elected positions. Until the psychological barrier amongst the populations of these countries against women's political participation is weakened, women in Arab countries will continue to face this major obstacle to their full participation. It is quite paradoxical that in Lebanon, which is the most open and modernized society under study, not a single woman minister has been appointed yet. As for the women who succeeded in parliamentary elections, their relationship – whether, through kinship or political affiliation – to a male politician has been the decisive factor in their success.

Even though social attitudes are critical in hindering women's political advancement, there are also other factors that create further obstacles. The illiteracy rate among women could be such a factor, as in the case of Yemen. Illiteracy limits women's political awareness and is probably a factor that hinders women from registering as voters.

Electoral laws in the three countries do not discriminate against women but, indirectly, legal discrimination in other laws could hinder women from participating in public life. There is no available research on how such discrimination is actually affecting women's advancement in the political domain in particular, but undoubtedly family laws and labour laws, among others, are having their impact.

The impact of regional politics and the general political environment in addition to the state of the economy within each country also plays a role. In some instances, these circumstances are used as an excuse for a government not giving enough attention to women's issues. In other instances, reactionary values are played up while under different political circumstances more enlightened values are highlighted. This has definitely caused a setback in women's political advancement in both Jordan and Yemen.

Researchers have pointed out that the weak political participation of Arab women is also due to financial constraints, lack of organization among women's groups in addition to the fact that people, men and women, in the Arab world are still convinced that women cannot perform as well as men in such areas.

The forces of globalization, though opening up certain opportunities for women, have also caused a backlash on women's advancement. While in many areas, especially

the economy, impositions of globalization could not be resisted by decision-makers, their last “bastion of power” becomes upholding their traditions and social norms. This was evident in the summer of 2003 when the Jordanian parliament rejected outright amendments to the Personal Status Law and the Penal Law.

The factors that facilitate women’s participation are less than those that hinder them. To start with, the levels and types of support given to female parliamentary candidates vary among the three countries. Yemeni women relied on strong political parties, Jordanian women received training from women organizations but got their votes primarily from their tribes (with the exception of the IAF candidate) and Lebanese women had the support of a male figure, although in one instance it was the death of this figure that brought his wife to the forefront.

Affirmative action policies have shown some effectiveness in the case of Jordan, despite varying views on the results. There are serious calls now in the two other countries to adopt such policies, and it should be interesting to observe how political and social forces within each country would deal with such policies.

The support of high political-level leadership is believed to have a significant impact on women’s political participation. In Jordan the support came from the King and other members of the royal family. In Yemen, the support came from the major political parties, while in Lebanon it was from leading male politicians.

The role of the media is quite significant in promoting women’s advancement and changing stereotypes. This was evident in the Jordanian case and, to a lesser extent, in Yemen. However, the politicization of the media in Lebanon forced a decision recently to ban them from campaigning for politicians, which would negatively impact their possible role in promoting women.

In conclusion, while women’s participation in electoral processes in the countries under study and the Arab world in general is still very limited, there are some lessons that can be drawn from these case studies as well some untapped sources of support that can be utilized in the future.

Affirmative action policies have shown a positive effect in Jordan. However, such policies need not only be restricted to electoral laws, but should also permeate into political parties. The example set up by Morocco in this regard should be seriously considered, even though in states where political parties are still weak, such as in Jordan, such measures will take some time to come to fruition.

The role of the media should be further enhanced, as it has already proved to be a reliable ally. Yet care should be taken in removing stereotyped images of women in the more popular programmes (soap operas, etc ...) which undermine what the more serious programmes are promoting.

Concurrently, and given the strong social attitudes that govern women’s political participation in the Arab world, school and university curricula could become a source for changing those attitudes, if properly amended.

There is an obvious lack of national gender-sensitive mechanisms to monitor and observe elections. Introducing such mechanisms could have a positive impact in the long run.

Voter education programmes need to be strengthened. While raising awareness on the importance of women's political participation is commendable, it is not enough. Comprehensive programmes on the whole electoral process are needed.

For the female candidates themselves, an evaluation of previous training programmes is needed to enable planning for better programmes in future elections.

The difficulties faced in finding good references for this paper, prompt me to also recommend that the participation of women in electoral processes in the Arab world be better analyzed and documented. Availability and accessibility to such documents should be made systematic and easy. While such difficulties are encountered in the Arab world in all social and political research fields, the importance of promoting women's political participation makes it imperative to embark on such a process.