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In this Special Issue on Women and Reform:

Insights and Analysis

The Gender of Democracy: The Link Between Women's Rights and Democratization in the Middle East *By Valentine M. Moghadam*

Avoiding the Women's Rights Trap *By Marina Ottaway*

Women and Strategies for Change: An Egyptian Model *By Diane Singerman*

Women's Political Status in the GCC States *By Ebtisam Al Kitbi*

Women in Islamist Parties: The Case of Jordan's Islamic Action Front *By Janine Clark*

The Politics of Women's Suffrage in Kuwait *By Haya Al Mughni*

News and Views

Statistics on Women in Politics in the Arab World

Saudi Dialogue on Women's Rights

Jordan Rejects Amendment of Personal Status Law

Revisions to Algeria's Family Law?

Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia

Political Party Reforms

Egypt: Shura Council Elections and a Cabinet Change

New Reports on Human Rights

Views from the Arab Press

Read On

A selection of recent writings on women and democratization in the Middle East.

Subscriber Information

Insights and Analysis

The Gender of Democracy: The Link Between Women's Rights and Democratization in the Middle East

By Valentine M. Moghadam

The empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality are crucial to democracy. Democracy is as much about citizenship rights, participation and inclusion as it is about political parties, elections, and checks and balances. The *quality* of democracy is determined not only by the form of institutions, but also by the extent that different social groups participate in these institutions. In this regard, the *gender* of democracy matters profoundly. The absence of women from political life results in democratization with a male face or in a "male democracy"—an incomplete and very biased form of democracy.

In the United States and in European countries such as Britain, democratic rights initially were enjoyed exclusively by property-owning white males, and only extended to women and to the rest of the male population much later. In other parts of the world, the expansion of women's rights has gone hand-in-hand with the establishment of democracy, and women have played a key role in the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The Latin American experience is a leading example, especially the cases of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. In Turkey in the 1980s, when civil society was under tight military control, the new Turkish feminist movement helped to usher in democratization through campaigns for women's rights, participation, and personal freedom.

And today, across the Arab world and in Iran, modernizing women are principal agents of democratization and cultural change. Democratization and women's rights movements have emerged more or less in tandem. These processes are closely intertwined and indeed mutually dependent: the fate of democratization is bound to the fate of women's rights and vice versa. Separating the two is conceptually muddled as well as politically dangerous. This is because women can pay a high price when a democratic process is launched without strong institutions and without firmly-established principles of equality and the rights of all citizens. In such situations, a party based on patriarchal norms can come to power through free elections and then move to relegate women to second-class citizenship.

In fact, this was the Algerian feminists' nightmare. It is the reason why many educated Algerian women who wanted democratic change opposed the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) after it burst on the scene in 1989 with its rhetoric of 'democracy' but with an agenda of rolling back women's rights. (The FIS's complicity in violence against women during the insurrection that occurred after the military nullified the 1991 elections cast further doubt on the FIS's dubious commitment to women's rights). To prevent "democracy without democrats," therefore, policies to protect women's rights and to increase women's participation in parties, in the judiciary, and in civil society are essential.

Many of the calls for reform emanating from Arab countries appear to be gender-blind and inattentive to issues of women's rights. These calls seem to be trapped in formalistic rhetoric

without being conscious of the importance of the quality and gender of democracy. The recent reform manifesto of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example, extols the laudable goals of forming political parties and establishing an independent judiciary, but it also calls for "conformity to Islamic Sharia," a goal that is incompatible with gender equality.

The U.S. government has made numerous and profound mistakes in its Middle East policy. U.S. efforts to promote women's rights and women's empowerment as part of a broader policy of democracy promotion, however, are not among them. More important, it behooves Middle Eastern intellectuals and activists working for political reform to understand the interconnections among women's rights, political rights, and democracy, and to acknowledge that a democratic system without women's human rights and gender equality is an inferior form of democracy. Women may need democracy in order to flourish, but the converse is also true: democracy needs women if it is to be an inclusive, representative, and enduring system of government.

Valentine M. Moghadam is currently the chief of the section for Gender Equality and Development in the sector of Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO in Paris. She is on leave from her position as director of women's studies and professor of sociology at Illinois State University. Dr. Moghadam is the author of Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003, 2nd ed.).

Avoiding the Women's Rights Trap

By Marina Ottaway

Women's rights in the Middle East remain severely restricted both by law and by social customs. Although some countries have made notable progress in broadening the formal rights of women, the application of the laws remains problematic everywhere. In the worst case, that of Saudi Arabia, both the law and social customs circumscribe women's life choices. The recognition of equal rights for women thus must be a central concern of any plan for reform in the Middle East. This is an idea that is well accepted within the Arab world. Arab reformers today take the issue of women's rights extremely seriously.

The promotion of women's rights also occupies an important place in U.S. and European efforts to promote democratic reform in the Middle East. Women's empowerment has become one of the pillars of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the program through which the Bush administration is pushing reform in the Arab world. Many of the programs devoted to MEPI's other goals—political reform, education, and economic development—also single out women for special attention. And the United States has organized a number of high profile conferences devoted to women's issues. European countries have also long been concerned about women's rights, although they are much less vocal on this as on all other issues concerning reform in the Arab world.

The potential positive repercussions of women's empowerment are considerable. Worldwide, for example, an improvement in the rights and conditions for women has proved to be the most effective means of curbing population growth—a problem that has reached explosive proportions

in the Middle East. And in many Arab countries women constitute a pool of badly-needed trained workers; contrary to stereotypes, women are becoming educated in large numbers, particularly in the Gulf countries where more women than men now receive university degrees.

The focus on women's rights, whether by domestic or by foreign reformers, becomes problematic only when it is seen as a means of promoting democracy. Under the prevailing conditions in the Arab world, promoting women's rights does not constitute promoting democratic reform. It is true that a country will never be fully democratic while it discriminates against half its population. It is equally true that the real obstacle to democracy in Arab countries today is not discrimination against women, but the fact that the entire population has only limited political rights. The unchecked power of Arab presidents, kings, sheiks, and emirs, and the absence or weakness of institutions that could limit that power, are the real problem. Parliaments tend to be docile, often dominated by the ruling party or by handpicked appointees. Judiciaries are rarely independent. Islamists dominate the best-organized opposition groups. Giving women the vote or training women to run for office does nothing to address these core issues. The problem is not to give women the same rights as men, but to reform political systems so that the entire population can enjoy fully the civil and political rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that most Arab countries have signed but do not respect.

Arab governments today generally favor improving the conditions of women, even as they resist political reforms that would curb their power. Virtually all governments have appointed some women to public office, and have announced their intention to appoint more. In almost all countries women have the right to vote and to stand for office, although social customs keep most from succeeding. Many countries, notably Morocco and Egypt, have amended family status laws in ways that greatly strengthen the position of women. These are positive steps. But they do not amount to the growth of democracy.

Arab countries will become more democratic only when rulers are confronted by well-organized opposition parties, strong parliaments, and independent judiciaries, not when women can vote like men for powerless parliaments, extricate themselves more easily from abusive marriages or when more girls attend school.

In most established democracies, the battle to put in place the essential elements of democracy was won long before the battle for women's rights. For decades or even centuries, parliaments representing only part of the population fought governments jealous of their privileges and slowly asserted their authority. Today, it is unthinkable that a country could democratize while excluding women. It is an illusion, however, that giving women the same limited rights enjoyed by men in autocratic countries brings a country closer to democracy. The battle for women's rights and the battle for democracy are both important and must both be fought, but they are not the same battle.

Marina Ottaway is a senior associate in the Democracy and Rule of Law Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Women and Strategies for Change: An Egyptian Model

By Diane Singerman

Quite apart from international efforts to "rescue" women in the Middle East, female activists in Arab countries have been toiling for decades for reforms that achieve concrete gains for women. Recently, certain efforts have borne fruit through the use of pragmatic, coalition-building strategies that take advantage of the expanded political space available in some countries.

Egypt offers a model of this approach. During the 1990s, a coalition of activists successfully lobbied parliament to enact important legislation reforming the personal status law. The 2000 Law on Reorganization of Certain Terms and Procedures of Litigation in Personal Status Matters grants women the right to divorce without the consent of their husbands if they give up some of their financial rights (this type of divorce, known as *khul'*, is legitimated in Islamic law). The law also creates a new family court system, establishes a fund to provide child support for impoverished families, authorizes the government to garnish the wages of fathers who renege on alimony and child support, and facilitates divorce and the resolution of paternity claims in increasingly popular *urfi* (unregistered) marriages.

For almost a century Egyptian women have been advocating for a unilateral right to divorce and for other changes in personal status legislation. An earlier generation of women won some reforms in 1979 with the support of First Lady Jihan Al Sadat. After President Hosni Mubarak came to power in 1981, the reforms were ruled unconstitutional because of procedural irregularities employed by President Anwar Al Sadat to enact the legislation in the face of stiff Islamist opposition. A watered-down version of the legislation was passed in 1985. Women activists then pursued a back-door approach of lobbying the Ministry of Justice to revise the state-issued marriage contract to give brides the option of asserting their right to education, work, travel without their husbands' permission, and pursue a *khul'* divorce. After facing opposition from conservative religious forces, and realizing that family and social pressures would dissuade most women from taking advantage of such a contract, by the mid-1990s activists focused instead on building a coalition to push parliament to revise the personal status law. (Their efforts did have an impact, as the Ministry of Justice issued a new marriage contract in June 2000 with these options).

The coalition included female lawyers, civil society leaders, women's rights activists, academics, and lawmakers. They were determined to avoid the tactical mistakes of past initiatives. Most significantly, they muted the liberal rights discourse favored by many women's rights activists and instead emphasized religion as an asset. As a key member of the coalition explained, if the revised law were founded on religious principles, it would be difficult for opponents to reject it as anti-Islam. To this end, academics belonging to a new generation of post-colonial scholars built a case that patriarchal traditions and decades of secular, customary, Western, and Ottoman influences had distorted the existing law, and that reforms were needed to restore the rights that Islam truly affords to women. Their strategy derived from a transnational movement of Muslim women who use sacred texts to reinterpret Islam and women's rightful place in society. The coalition also actively solicited the support of religious authorities.

In addition, rather than viewing the government as an antagonist, the coalition forged alliances with officials in the Ministry of Justice and other parts of the executive branch. It gained the support of elements within Egypt's business community, who backed the reforms in the hope they would help to reduce the backlog of personal status cases clogging the courts. Aided by the quiet but unmistakable support of First Lady Suzanne Mubarak and President Mubarak, experienced female parliamentarians negotiated the draft law through parliament in the face of vociferous attacks by conservative parliamentarians and religious figures. To counter these voices Sheikh Mohammed Sayed Al Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, the most revered center of learning in Sunni Islam, attended the opening discussion. He reminded legislators that the Academy for Islamic Research, a deliberative body of Al Azhar's foremost scholars and jurists, had vetted and approved the reforms.

The coalition's success was not without controversy. Some activists contended that the reforms benefited elite women at the expense of the poor and that using religiously-based arguments risked diluting liberal and feminist ideals and undermining constitutional guarantees of equality. Islamist voices warned that feminists and secularists had distorted the Islamic tradition and had co-opted religious authorities who were too close to the government, thereby contributing to the demise of the Egyptian family.

Though clearly a temporary convergence of interests dependent on executive branch support, the coalition nevertheless represented a valuable learning experience for the Egyptian women's movement. It has already produced positive side effects. Shortly after the law was enacted, a prominent member of the coalition, lawyer Tehani Al Jibali, was appointed as Egypt's first female judge. Also, coalition members played a critical role in parliament's recent enactment of a law granting citizenship rights to children born to Egyptian women and foreign husbands.

The lesson of the Egyptian personal status law reform coalition is that pragmatic, tenacious, and creative activists can achieve results under certain circumstances, and strengthen parliamentary politics, civil society advocacy, legal activism, and the rule of law in the process.

Diane Singerman is an associate professor in the Department of Government, School of Public Affairs, at American University. Her publications include Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). For further details on the case described in this article, see "Rewriting Divorce in Egypt: Reclaiming Islam, Legal Activism, and Coalition Politics," in Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, and Democratization (Robert Hefner (ed.), Princeton University Press, forthcoming 2004).

Women's Political Status in the GCC States

By Ebtisam Al Kitbi

A survey of women's political status in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states shows that in some countries women have recently made considerable progress toward formal equality of political rights, but in others they have not. The governing elite in the GCC countries generally

supports women's political rights, but strong social sentiment against women's participation in politics persists, as does economic and social discrimination.

Oman

In 1994, Oman became the first GCC state to grant women voting rights, although these rights were extended only to a small number of citizens selected by Sultan Qaboos. Women first ran for national office in the 2000 elections for the Consultative Council, the elected chamber of Oman's bicameral representative body, the majlis; two women won. In 2003, Oman established universal suffrage. In the elections held in October of that year, the two women already serving in the majlis were reelected.

The number of women in appointed positions increased in 2003. Seven women now serve in the State Council, the appointed chamber of the majlis. Two women are ministers, one serves as an ambassador, and four are undersecretaries.

Qatar

A 1998 decree establishing the Central Municipal Council, a national advisory council dealing with municipal affairs, gave male and female Qataris the right to vote and to stand for election for the council. Six of the 248 candidates in the first council elections, held in 1999, were women, but none won. One woman won a seat in the April 2003 council elections, marking the first time a woman was elected by universal suffrage in a GCC country.

Qatar's Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, last year appointed women to the positions of minister of education, public prosecutor, director of the University of Qatar, and deputy director and dean of the faculty of Islamic Law and Islamic Studies. These appointments did not result from social pressure but rather from the will of the Qatari leadership—and the special commitment of the First Lady, Sheikha Moza Al Misned—to increase the number of women in leadership roles.

Qatar's permanent constitution, approved in an April 2003 referendum, gives women the right to vote and stand for parliamentary elections. The country's first parliamentary elections are to be held by June 2005.

Bahrain

Bahraini women first held national office in 2000, when King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa appointed four women to the 40-member Consultative Council. A year later, a royal decree enfranchised women in municipal council elections. In the May 2002 elections, 31 women stood along with 275 men, but women did not win a single seat. The February 2002 constitution gives women right to vote and to stand for election for parliament. In the October 2002 parliamentary elections, eight female candidates competed in a field of 190. None was elected, although two women advanced to the second round of voting. King Hamad later appointed six women to the Consultative Council, the upper house of parliament.

Kuwait

While Kuwaiti women enjoy more social liberties than their counterparts in other GCC states and

Kuwait's constitution guarantees gender equality, according to the 1962 electoral law only male citizens age 21 and older have the right to vote and to stand for election.

A 1999 attempt by Emir Jaber Al Sabah to amend the election law by decree was struck down by the parliament, as was a subsequent draft law. In October 2003, the cabinet approved a plan to give women in Kuwait City the right to vote and stand for municipal elections, and in May 2004, the government introduced a bill to give women the same rights for parliamentary elections. Parliament remains divided on the issue of women's suffrage, however, and has taken no action on either bill.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The constitution recognizes equal rights for men and women. But since the UAE has no elected institutions, women are entirely dependent on decision-makers' willingness to appoint them to governmental positions.

No women currently hold ministerial positions in the federal government, although some female deputy and assistant ministers were appointed in the past three years. A few women also serve in the diplomatic corps.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi women remain the least fortunate of the GCC countries in terms of political rights (as well as in terms of economic and social rights). Only one woman, an assistant undersecretary for education appointed in 2000, occupies public office. A Saudi woman was also chosen by the United Nations Secretary-General as the executive director of its Population Fund.

In 2003, Saudi women became more politically active. Ten women participated with 50 men in a meeting of intellectuals that was part of Crown Prince Abdullah's Saudi National Dialogue program. Fifty-five women were among the 306 signatories of a reform petition presented to the Crown Prince, and 300 women signed a subsequent petition asking for the recognition of Saudi women as full citizens enjoying equal rights.

The prospects for women's political emancipation in the GCC countries remain slim. Social customs make it particularly difficult for women to be elected. Thus, quotas and appointments seem the best way, provisionally, to overcome social impediments to women's active political roles.

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Women in Islamist Parties: The Case of Jordan's Islamic Action Front

By Janine Clark

The role of women in Jordan's Islamic Action Front (IAF) party challenges the stereotype of the Arab world's Islamist parties as inherently "anti-women," but also reveals the party's ambivalence toward women's political participation.

Relative to many other parties in Jordan, the IAF boasts a large female membership and a substantial number of women in leadership positions. The IAF has some 300 female members, which, according to the party leadership, constitutes approximately ten percent of the total membership. A women's sector, headed by a committee of ten women, represents women within the party and recruits new female members. To this end, it hosts educational programs on women's rights in Islam and organizes activities on political issues of concern to women. In January 2004, for instance, the sector organized a demonstration against the French law banning headscarves in public schools and in conjunction with other women's groups gathered more than 30,000 signatures for a petition protesting the law. Women also hold six seats on the IAF's 120-member Shura (consultative) Council.

Several factors, however, continue to limit women's participation in the party. One is Jordanian women's general aversion to political parties. Many women join the IAF only because their fathers and husbands recruit them; the women's sector prefers to hold events away from the party headquarters because so few women turn up for activities there. A second factor is the presence of a vocal, hard-line minority that opposes women in leadership positions and advocates gender segregation within the party.

A third factor is the party's ambivalent policy positions on women. The IAF platform endorses women's rights to participate in public life, including the right to vote. IAF founding Secretary-General Ishaq Al Farhan argued in his inaugural speech that women should participate in the Shura Council. The IAF encourages women to vote in national elections, and large numbers of Islamist women headed to the polls for the 1989, 1993, and 2003 contests. Notably, however, no women serve in the party's highest policy-making body, the 14-member Executive Bureau. And while the IAF has never formally forbidden women to run for office, in practice it actively has discouraged them from doing so.

Last year, however, the IAF leadership broke with tradition by nominating Hayat Musimi, a Shura Council member since 1994, as one of its 30 candidates in the June 2003 parliamentary elections. The decision was not the result of a policy shift in favor of women candidates. In fact, the Executive Bureau took a strong stance against Jordan's new electoral quota system for women, arguing that quotas violate the principle of equality articulated by Islam and by the Jordanian constitution. (The quota, enacted in advance of the 2003 elections, reserves six out of 110 parliamentary seats for the top vote-getters among female candidates). Rather, the IAF nominated Musimi for purely strategic reasons, over the objections of party members who declared her candidacy *haram* (prohibited by Islam). Because Jordan's electoral system is biased toward candidates from tribal and rural districts—the backbone of the Hashemite monarchy—at the expense of urban constituencies, where the IAF draws its support, the party needs to be extremely shrewd about selecting its candidates. Due to its boycott of the 1997 elections to protest the electoral law, the IAF felt special pressure for a strong showing. Musimi's strong grassroots support in the city of Zarqa, an IAF stronghold, made her a good bet to win a seat. As

it happened, Musimi did not win outright, but she did earn the highest number of votes of the 54 female candidates nationwide, and joined parliament as one of 17 IAF members elected. Her candidacy enjoyed strong support among IAF women, who viewed the quota as a necessary short-term mechanism for women to attain effective parliamentary representation.

While Musimi's candidacy was a landmark for IAF women, it does not ensure an expanded role for women in the party in the future. So long as ideological contention over women's roles continues to exist within the IAF, the party's leaders will avoid creating a firm policy that could provoke further divisions among the rank-and-file. Instead, the leadership will continue to balance ideology with pragmatism, evaluating women's participation on a case-by-case basis and advancing women when strategically useful.

Janine Clark is an associate professor at the University of Guelph in Canada and author of Islam, Charity and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan and Yemen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

The Politics of Women's Suffrage in Kuwait

By Haya Abdulrahman Al Mughni

In May 2004, the Kuwaiti cabinet submitted to parliament a bill amending the 1962 electoral law to give women the right to vote and run for office. In November 1999, amidst the stormiest public debate in Kuwait's history, parliament narrowly rejected a decree promulgated by Emir Jaber Al Sabah that conferred full political rights on women. Parliament again voted down a similar bill a few months later. As the current legislation has provoked relatively little public opposition so far, its prospects appear more favorable. The bill's passage, however, will not necessarily have the profound impact on women's status that some expect.

Some observers have suggested that the Kuwaiti leadership expected the Islamist-dominated parliament to reject the bill, but still hoped to gain favorable international publicity by simply introducing the legislation. The government was surprised, therefore, when the Islamic Constitutional Movement—Kuwait's leading Sunni Islamist group—reversed its traditional opposition to women's suffrage and announced its support for the bill in June. This move increases the possibility that Islamist parliamentarians will back the legislation when parliament takes up the matter in October, following its summer recess. Liberal and Shiite parliamentarians are also likely to support the suffrage bill.

The fate of the bill is tied to that of controversial electoral redistricting legislation also pending in parliament. Backed by liberal and Shiite members, the redistricting bill would reduce Kuwait's current 25 electoral districts, which range in size from 1,000 to 10,000 voters, to ten districts of equal size. The existing districts generally favor pro-government candidates. For this reason the cabinet has sought to block the redistricting bill. If it passes, the government is likely to push hard for women's suffrage because it views enfranchising women as a means to mitigate the destabilizing effects that redistricting would have on Kuwait's complex political scene. The government seems to anticipate that on the whole, women will constitute a moderate, pro-

government force in national politics. A similar motivation was behind the government's 1981 naturalization and enfranchisement of large numbers of Bedouins whom it anticipated would be loyal pro-government voters.

What impact would enacting the proposed suffrage legislation have on women's lives? Kuwait's Islamist and liberal women's groups have divergent expectations. Islamist women's rights activists see the vote as a means to empower themselves to create a moral and orderly society in which women and men have different, but not equal, responsibilities. They share with their male counterparts the goal of achieving an Islamic society ruled by religious idioms and norms, in which women, veiled and modest, worship God and fulfill their familial and social duties. In contrast, liberal women see the vote as a tool for achieving "gender equality." They have long claimed that suffrage will allow women to gain the social and civil rights they are currently denied, such as equal welfare benefits and employment rights and formal equality in most aspects of marriage.

The gender equality sought by liberal women, however, does not challenge the deeper notion of women as different from men and in need of protection that permeates Kuwait's laws. Such laws require women to gain the consent of their fathers to marry and deny Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men the right to transfer residency to their foreign husbands and children. Enfranchised liberal and Islamist women are unlikely to confront the government on these basic human rights issues. Instead, most women voters are likely to demonstrate loyalty to the state and to reproduce traditional practices that maintain social order at the expense of women's interests.

Haya Abdulrahman Al Mughni is a Kuwaiti sociologist and author of Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender (London, UK: Sagi Books, 2000).

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News and Views

Statistics on Women in Politics in the Arab World

Click here for detailed charts showing the number of women in parliament and in ministerial positions across the Arab world, and the dates when Arab countries gave women the right to vote.

Saudi Dialogue on Women's Rights

The King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue in Saudi Arabia held a June 12-15 conference to discuss women's "legitimate rights and duties" in society. Attended by seventy participants including female academics, writers, and journalists, the meeting was the third in a series of conferences intended "to build and enhance a culture of dialogue in Saudi society." The conference recommendations stated that reforms should adhere to the Quran and the Sunna and called for a "national manifesto" detailing the rights and obligations of women according to Islamic law. Other recommendations included establishing domestic courts of law and a national organization to coordinate between the government and civil institutions on family and women's

issues; providing women with work opportunities to "ensure a respectful life for the family"; expanding women's participation in public endeavors; establishing cultural and social centers for the development of women's potential; emphasizing the rules of Islamic law that prohibit violence against women; and encouraging the media to focus on women's issues.

Jordan Rejects Amendment of Personal Status Law

Jordan's lower house of parliament in June again rejected amendments to the personal status law introduced by former Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb. The main disagreements among legislators centered on whether to allow women the right to divorce, to require the judiciary to inform women of their husbands' decision to remarry, and to raise the age of marriage to 18. Islamist, conservative, and tribal members of parliament first rejected the amendments in August 2003 claiming that they "encourage moral disintegration, tear down family values, and are against Islamic law." The Senate, which must approve lower house decisions, overturned the rejection and returned the bill to the lower house for consideration. In the recent vote, several legislators who had previously supported the amendments voted against them to protest the Senate's action. Should the Senate uphold its decision, a joint vote between the two houses will be held and the law will pass if a two-thirds majority endorses it.

Revisions to Algeria's Family Law?

In Algeria, a national commission tasked with reviewing the 1984 family law has presented a reform proposal to the Minister of Justice that is expected to provoke heated parliamentary debate. The commission of lawyers, academics, and activists recommended the revision of provisions in the law that allow men to divorce their wives without a reason, absolve them from obligation toward their former wives, and require women to obtain the permission of a male family member to marry. The proposed reforms would require the husband to provide a house for his wife if she is pregnant and to obtain permission from a judge to marry a second wife, and allow women to marry without permission. Responding to an outcry from Islamist groups, the commission's president, Mohammed Zaghoul Botarn, insisted that the proposed reforms do not target Islamic law but rather social customs that have become codified. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika has announced that reform of the family law is one of his top priorities.

Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia

On July 12, Saudi authorities announced that elections for municipal councils will take place in February 2005, following the *hajj* (pilgrimage) season. According to Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs Prince Mutib Bin Abdul Aziz, voter registration will begin in September. Prince Mutib also stated that councils will have between four and 14 members, depending on the city's size, and that half the members will be elected and half appointed. According to the Saudi newspaper *Al Watan*, only Saudi males age 21 and older will be eligible to vote and to stand as candidates.

Political Party Reforms

Developments related to the status of political parties have occurred recently in several Arab countries. In Bahrain, a proposal to legalize political parties was rejected by the parliament's legislative and legal affairs committee. Committee members argued that it was "premature" to legalize full-fledged parties since doing so could endanger the "newly launched democratic

experiment in Bahrain, which favors a gradual practice of politics." (Bahrain's political "societies" currently function as *de facto* parties). In a statement last year, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa did not directly reject the idea of legalizing political parties, but said that the decision was up to parliament. In Kuwait, Minister of Energy Sheikh Fahd Al Ahmed Al Sabah said last month that "various political groupings will one day be allowed to become full-fledged political parties by amending the constitution." The Kuwaiti constitution bans political parties but political groups field their own candidates in elections. The government has so far rejected repeated calls by opposition groups to legalize political parties.

In Jordan, Prime Minister Faisal Al Fayezi declared that the core of political reform will be new election and political party laws. At a conference titled "Political Parties in the Arab World: Current Situations and Perspectives" held in Amman on June 12-13, Al Fayezi stressed that political modernization cannot occur without effective political parties. He called for merging parties with similar agendas into three strong parties on the right, left, and center of the political spectrum.

A draft law on political parties is the focus of extensive debate among political parties and non-governmental organizations in Morocco. The draft law, which the government has not yet submitted to parliament, tightens controls on party registration and specifies that parties cannot have a religious, linguistic, ethnic, or regional basis.

At least one new political party may obtain recognition in Egypt. The liberal-oriented Al Ghad ('Tomorrow') Party, founded by former Wafd party member Ayman Nour, has applied to the Political Party Affairs Committee (PPAC) for official recognition. The six-member PPAC, which is affiliated to the upper house of parliament, has rejected Al Ghad's requests on several previous occasions. A recent administrative court ruling in support of the party may bolster its current attempt to gain legal status. The Al Wasat ('Center') Party, which claims to represent a moderate stream of political Islam, has also applied to the PPAC again after being rejected in 1996 and 1998. Al Wasat, led by former Muslim Brotherhood member Abul Ela Madi, has presented "a secular platform based on citizenship not religion." The PPAC has four months to respond to the applications. The PPAC also rejected the application for liberal-oriented party Masr Al Omm ('Mother Egypt') on June 23.

Egypt: Shura Council Elections and a Cabinet Change

Last month's elections for Egypt's Shura Council, the upper house of parliament, confirmed the overwhelming dominance of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP won 70 of the 88 contested seats with 17 of the remaining seats going to so-called NDP independents (NDP members who decided to run independently after the party did not nominate them). Only one seat was won by an opposition party candidate, from the leftist Tagammu Party. Most opposition parties boycotted the elections because, according to a member of parliament from the Muslim Brotherhood, "it became clear after the People's Assembly elections in 2000 that the government would never allow our candidates to win." President Hosni Mubarak also appointed 44 members to the Council, including eight Copts and 12 women. NDP Secretary-General and longtime Minister of Information Safwat Al Sharif was nominated to replace Mustafa Kamal Helmi (who had held the post for 15 years) as Shura Council Chairman.

Mubarak also announced a new cabinet on July 12, which includes 14 new ministers, adding a younger and technocratic element to his government. Several of the new ministers have worked closely with Gamal Mubarak in the NDP and other organizations. New Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif, age 52, was credited as the previous cabinet's most successful manager; as Minister of Information Technology he partnered with Gamal's Future Foundation for Youth. Also new are Mahmoud Mohieldin, a young economist and advisor to Gamal Mubarak, who has a newly created "Investment Development" portfolio, and businessman Rashid Mohammed Rashid as Minister of Industry and Trade. Two symbols of the NDP old guard, Minister of Information Safwat Al Sharif and Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali, lost their positions. Former Ambassador to the United Nations Ahmed Aboul Ghaith replaced Ahmed Maher (reportedly in ill health) as Minister of Foreign Affairs, and elderly Minister of Justice Farouq Seif Al Nasr (who had been in office during Mubarak's entire tenure) was relieved of his post. Many stalwarts of previous cabinets remain, including Minister of Defense Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, Minister of Interior Habib Al Adli, Minister of State for the People's Assembly Kamal Al Shazli, and Minister of Finance Youssef Boutros Ghali.

New Reports on Human Rights

New reports describe deteriorating human rights conditions in Arab countries. Torture in Egypt has reached "alarming proportions," according to a report by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR). A report by the Moroccan Center for Human Rights (CMDH) credits the Moroccan government for recent human rights achievements, including revising the family code to expand women's rights, but criticizes its banning of several peaceful protests, and expresses concern that recent amendments to the anti-terror law fail to guarantee fair trials in conformity with international standards.

The human rights situation in Syria has worsened in the past year, according to the London-based Syrian Human Rights Committee. Its annual report cites an increase in arbitrary arrests, systematic torture and repression against Syria's Kurdish population, and a regression in media freedom. A report by Amnesty International argues that human rights violations in Gulf countries are on the rise as a result of the "war on terrorism."

In another human rights-related development, the Muslim Brotherhood has established a human rights committee. Headed by lawyer Abdul Monem Abdul Maqsoud, the committee has thirty members, two of whom are members of the Brotherhood. The committee will monitor violations against prisoners and detainees, student rights, and acts of discrimination, and will focus initially on human rights violations in Egypt. To avoid the legal hurdles involved with establishing non-governmental organizations in Egypt, the committee was registered as a civil company on June 16.

Views from the Arab Press

Saudi writer Jafar Al Shayeb criticizes the recent National Dialogue conference on women held in Riyadh. In a June 28 op-ed article posted on *Al Jazeera's* website, Al Shayeb argues that the conference reflected an overwhelmingly conservative perspective. He calls for more government

action, including the establishment of women's rights organizations and research centers devoted to the study of women's roles in Saudi society.

In a July 15 op-ed article in Jordan's *Al Rai*, Zayd Hamza laments the Jordanian parliament's rejection of personal status law revisions that would have made it easier for women to obtain a divorce. The proposed reforms, Hamza maintains, represented a step forward for Jordanian women and society as a whole, and citizens should question the parliamentarians who opposed the law.

Arab intellectuals should stop blaming their problems on external factors, Egyptian analyst Amr Hamzawy writes in a July 5 article in pan-Arab *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat*. Intellectuals must also stop viewing the state as the sole protector of its citizens' well-being and recognize that all social forces share a responsibility to encourage development and political change. Hamzawy also observes that the Middle East lacks the optimism about the possibility for positive change that accompanied democratic openings in central Europe and Latin America.

In an optimistic assessment of the recent hand-over of sovereignty to the Iraqi interim government, Ali Ibrahim writes in a June 28 article in *Ash-Sharq Al Awsat* that the move proved the U.S. commitment to transfer power. Although Iraq lacks full sovereignty, the presence of foreign troops is necessary to prevent complete chaos. Islamist commentator Fahmi Huwaidi takes the opposite perspective in a June 29 piece in the same newspaper. Howaidi argues that the transfer of power was merely an attempt by President George W. Bush to bolster his presidential campaign. No real transfer of power has occurred in Iraq; the U.S. government will continue to control all matters through its embassy, its consultants in the ministries, and the laws it enacted during the occupation.

Commenting on the recent change of cabinet in Egypt, Motaz Salama writes in a July 14 op-ed article in United Arab Emirates-based *Al Khaleej* that the new government reflects President Hosni Mubarak's commitment to ambitious change. Salama argues that the new young ministers will inspire younger government officials, undermine the entrenched bureaucracy, and create a sense of hope. Mursi Atallah takes a more skeptical approach in a July 15 opinion piece in Egypt's *Al Ahram*. To attain genuine comprehensive change, the appointment of new ministers must be accompanied by a greater commitment to the rule of law, a free-market economy, and a free political environment. Talal Salmam, in a July 14 op-ed article in Lebanon's *Al Safir*, claims that the cabinet change is meaningless. No matter how qualified, the new ministers will not be able to alter the situation in Egypt, where, as in most Arab countries, power still resides solely in the hands of the ruler.

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Read On

A selection of recent writings on women and democratization in the Middle East.

The expansion of women's roles in the region fosters democratization, argues Nikki R. Keddie in "A Woman's Place: Democratization in the Middle East" (*Current History*, vol. 103, no. 669, January 2004, 25-30). Although establishing democracy will demand other difficult changes, further progress for women will create both an impetus and a precondition for democracy.

Larbi Sadiki's new book *The Search for Arab Democracy: Discourses and Counter-Discourses* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004) includes a chapter titled "Arab Women and Democracy: Breaking Out," which examines how Arab women, especially "Islamist feminists," conceptualize democracy. Sadiki contends that women are creating political and discursive space within Islamist movements, thus helping to harmonize the goals of Islamization, feminization, and democratization.

Two new reports by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) assess the situation of women in the Arab world. "The Progress of Arab Women 2004" finds that women remain severely under-represented in political life and calls on Arab governments to enact legislative reforms to empower women. "The Status of Jordanian Women: Demography, Economic Participation, Political Participation and Violence" examines how these factors create a gender gap in Jordan.

The state of women's rights in Arab countries and the struggles of a new generation of women's rights activists are the focus of Janet Afary's article "The Human Rights of Middle Eastern and Muslim Women: A Project for the 21st Century" (*Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 1, February 2004, 106-25). Afary explains how these activists are building new institutions at great personal and political risk.

Valentine M. Moghadam's *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003) analyzes the gender dynamics of the major social changes in the region. Moghadam argues that by challenging legal codes and demanding greater access to the public sphere, "modernizing women" are broadening the political agenda and redefining citizenship in the region. In the absence of other progressive social movements, women's movements provide the main impetus for expanding citizenship rights, building civil society, and implementing progressive reforms. In her article "Engendering Citizenship, Feminizing Civil Society: The Case of the Middle East and North Africa" (*Women & Politics*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, 2003, 63-87), Moghadam highlights the role of women's organizations in the regional push for democratization, civil society, and citizenship rights.

As young Egyptian women gain practical experience and come to understand the mechanisms of local power, they begin to lobby for greater rights and privileges, Rania Salem, Barbara Ibrahim, and Martha Brady argue in "Negotiating Leadership Roles: Young Women's Experience in Rural Egypt," in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3/4, Fall 2003, 174-91). Thus, creating opportunities for young female development workers to engage in broader national and regional initiatives will advance the broader goal of promoting democracy.

In "New Liberties for Moroccan Women" (*The Humanist*, vol. 64, no. 4, July/August 2004, 35-36) Abderrahim Sabir writes that while the recent revisions to Morocco's family code marked a

symbolic victory for women's rights, the implementation of the code is not assured. Past experiences in the Arab world suggest that reform initiated from the top often stalls without widespread public support. Thus, Morocco needs a strong campaign led by civil society and the media to support the implementation of the new code.

Sherifa Zuhur's "Women and Empowerment in the Arab World" (*Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 4, Fall 2003, 17-38) examines progress toward equal legal rights, access to public space, and political influence for women. Zuhur finds that the process of women's empowerment is extremely complex and occurring at so many levels that it is difficult to quantify its results.

Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy, and Society (Eleanor Abdella Doumato and Marsha Pripstein Posusney, (eds.), Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003) includes case studies on women and political liberalization in Jordan, the role of women in reform in Tunisia, and women's education in Saudi Arabia. The central message of the volume is that globalization is having a profound effect on gender dynamics in the Arab world, and at the same time women's responses to globalization are shaping its effects.

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