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Women’s representation in the Middle East:

Evaluating positive action strategies

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1. Synopsis:

Recent decades have witnessed growing demands in many countries for the inclusion and empowerment of more women in both elected and appointed office. Policies designed to achieve this objective have been implemented in a wide range of countries around the world -- including in Morocco, Jordan, Pakistan, Bahrain, India, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Tanzania -- and new initiatives are currently being undertaken in Afghanistan and Iraq.

These developments highlight the need to consider issues of women's representation in the design of new constitutions and electoral systems, and the most appropriate institutional arrangements that could achieve the inclusion of more women in both elected and appointed office. These reforms are particularly urgent in the Middle East, where women continue to lag far behind men in political leadership positions, and successful initiatives can contribute greatly towards greater democratization and good governance in these societies¹.

But what practical reforms would work? The prime aim of this research project is provide systematic evidence to analyze the impact of positive action strategies designed to include more women in elected and appointed office -- particularly the statutory use of reserved seats -- to inform debates about electoral reform, women's rights, and democracy in Kuwait and the Middle East.

To explore these issues, the research design would start by comparing positive action strategies used worldwide in elections, particularly the use of reserved seats. Reserved seats are defined here as those constituencies for elected office that can be contested only by women candidates, distributed either by appointment (by another body), or by direct election (by popular vote). The study would then focus in detail upon six case-studies of how reserved seats work, comparing Jordan, Bangladesh, Morocco and Pakistan, as well as monitoring women's representation as the result of elections held in Afghanistan and Iraq. The conclusion would assess the effectiveness of different forms of reserved seat and positive action strategies, and summarize what we know about their consequences.

The work would build on related publications by the author analyzing the consequences of electoral engineering, as well as public opinion towards issues of gender equality and democratization in many Muslim nations².

The project would be conducted during fall 2004 and the proposed budget would be \$24,530. The planned output would be shorter policy briefing papers that would be posted online and distributed to women's groups, NGOs, the news media, and parties in the region, and to the international community, to stimulate debate about these issues. The work would also generate at least two conference papers that would form the basis of articles suitable for academic journals (one analytic paper designed for an outlet such as the *BJPoLS*, one a more policy-oriented case-study paper designed for the *Journal of Democracy*).

2. Theoretical framework:

Many Arab states are considering reforms to include more women in elected and appointed office. This issue is important since any exclusion of women leaders may have significant consequences for the articulation of their interests on the public policy agenda, as well as for the democratic legitimacy of legislative bodies and executive agencies. Initiatives expanding democratic elections in Middle East states provide a critical opportunity to strengthen human rights in general, and to improve women's rights in particular.

Many countries around the globe have used positive action strategies designed to bring more women into elected leadership positions. By electoral law, about a dozen countries worldwide have reserved a certain number of parliamentary seats for women in the lower house of the national parliament (see Table 1). This strategy has been used for the lower house of the national parliament in Morocco, Jordan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Botswana, Taiwan, Lesotho, and Tanzania. Reserved seats have also been adopted for the new Afghanistan constitution and positive action strategies are being considered in Iraq. At the local level, as well, in India 33 percent of seats on local municipal councils are reserved for women, bringing thousands of women into local office. This strategy likely to be particularly important in political systems where gender quotas cannot be implemented through party organizations and party rules.

The effective implementation of reserved seats depends upon multiple detailed factors, including:

- How the statutory mechanisms are put into practice,

- The proportion or number of reserved seats for women specified by law,
- Whether the reserved seats are filled by appointment or election,
- If appointed, who selects nominees;
- How the use of reserved seats interacts with the electoral system.

Most importantly, reserved seats may work either *through appointment* (for example by the monarch, president, prime minister, the party leader, or parliament) or by *direct election*. In theory, reserved seats implemented through direct elections appear to have many potential advantages. Elections provide the fairest and most democratic process for determining membership of any parliament. This process also insures that women members entering parliament through reserved seats should have as much legitimacy and popular support as other members elected through general seats. Direct election should also strengthen the independence of women representatives and make them accountable to the electorate for their performance in office. Moreover, leaders may also use the powers of patronage for partisan advantage in legislative bodies. One major criticism of reserved seats through appointment is that these place ‘token’ women in visible leadership positions and yet undermine their power of independence. Nevertheless, based on past research, it remains unclear whether the type of recruitment to reserved seat has these potential consequences. Moreover, as Table 1 shows, the number of reserved seats varies widely, and it is important that more than a mere ‘token’ number of seats are reserved for women. The use of reserved seats also depends upon the basic type of electoral system and districting.

A growing body of work has compared the effectiveness and impact of gender quotas implemented through party rules in Western Europe, Latin America and elsewhere³. Far less is known, however, about the two issues at the heart of this research project:

(i) *How are reserved seats for women implemented, using both direct elections and indirect appointment, in the selected case-studies under comparison? And also;*

(ii) *What is the broader impact of this process upon women’s leadership and legislative roles in these societies?*

We need to understand more about these issues given the contemporary debate about the use of reserved seats as one potential strategy for the inclusion of more women in the Muslim world, especially in states with weak or non-existent party channels of recruitment.

3. Research design and selected cases:

To understand these issues this study will focus upon six selected case-studies examining how reserved seats work in practice -- in Jordan, Bangladesh, Morocco and Pakistan -- as well as monitoring new developments for women’s representation when elections are held in Afghanistan and Iraq. These cases were selected because they illuminate important variations in how reserved seats are implemented, as follows.

3.1 Jordan – appointment by the monarch

In *Jordan*, a change in the election law in 2001 reserved 6 out of 110 seats in the lower house of the National Assembly for women. Jordanian legislative elections use the Single Non-Transferable Vote system where each elector has one vote cast for an individual candidate in multimember districts. Those candidates with the highest vote total in each district are elected.

In the June 2003 elections, when no women succeeded in being directly elected under this system, the king appointed the six female candidates who won the highest proportion of votes in their constituencies. Appointed women members currently comprise 5 percent of the members of the Jordanian parliament.

3.2 Bangladesh – appointment by other MPs

For many years a system of reserved seats for women was used in Bangladesh. Under this system, 300 members were directly elected to parliament (the *Jatiyo Sangsad*) from single-member districts. These constituency MPs then chose the women members of parliament selected for the 30 reserved seats.

There have been a number of important criticisms concerning the implementation of this policy in Bangladesh.⁴ The process of indirect elections, in particular, meant that the women who entered parliament via the reserved seat were drawn from the majority party, reinforcing the power of the government. Women

recruited through reserved seats may have lacked the legitimacy conferred by winning democratic elections. The indirect election may have given them visibility but may also have undermined their status and influence, if others regarded them as 'second-class' representatives. In addition, the provision of reserved seats can function as a 'glass-ceiling,' if party leaders rely only on this route and become reluctant to nominate women candidates to run in the directly-elected constituencies. So far, the proportion of women who have been directly elected to parliament in Bangladesh has never risen over 2.5 percent.

This quota system was first introduced into Bangladesh by the 1972 Constitution and then expanded in 1978. The constitutional provision lapsed in 1987, but it was re-incorporated into the constitution in 1990. In the 1996 election, seven women won seats in direct elections (including the leaders of the two main political parties), in addition to the thirty women who entered through reserved seats. This provision also lapsed in April 2001, so that the parliament elected in October 2001 did not use any reserved seats for women. The issue of the most appropriate reforms that could strengthen women's representation in Bangladesh continues to be debated by parties, activists, and the women's movement.

For these reasons, it may be preferable to implement reserved seats through *direct elections*. This process can be illustrated through recent developments in Morocco and Pakistan.⁵

3.3 Morocco – *direct elections*

In *Morocco*, of 325 seats elected by a first-past-the post system, 295 seats are filled from single-member constituencies and 30 seats directly elected from a women-only national constituency. The women candidates with the highest share of the popular vote in the national constituency are elected to parliament.

In the 2002 election, five women won from single-member constituencies in addition to the 30 reserved seats, making a total of 35 women out of 325 MPs, or 10.8 percent of seats occupied by women. This is the highest proportion among Arab states and the comparable figure for the proportion of women in the previous parliament was 0.6 percent.

3.4 Pakistan – *appointment by parties*

In *Pakistan*, under the Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002, seats are reserved for women in both the lower house of the parliament (60 of 342 seats, or 17 percent) and in the provincial assemblies (also 17 percent). Thirty three percent of the seats in lower-level councils (union, Tehsil, municipality, and district) are also reserved for women, leading to the inclusion of over 40,000 women in elected office.⁶ The use of reserved seats for women and for minority communities has a long history in Pakistan, dating back to the 1956 electoral law. The use of reserved seats at local level has been found to lead to the inclusion of more women from poorer backgrounds and younger women, compared with the background of those who usually enter elected office.⁷

In the 2002 general elections for the National Assembly, Pakistani citizens voted for a legislative candidate in each of the 272 single-member districts by the first-past-the-post system. The total share of the vote won by each party was calculated for each province. Then the sixty reserved seats for women in the National Assembly were divided among the parties according to their total share of the vote won in each province. The parties nominate which women candidates enter the National Assembly through reserved seats, which critics suggest may undermine the independence and legitimacy of these women members.

In the general elections of 2002, 12 women won seats in the national parliament from generally contested seats, in addition to the 60 reserved seats, making for a total representation of 72 women out of 342 seats, or 21.1 percent.

Positions can be filled through two routes. Reserved seats may work through direct election (for example in Pakistan there are now 60 seats in the National Assembly and 17 in the Senate where only women can run as candidates), or through appointment by the monarch, president, prime minister, party leader or parliament.

3.5 *Afghanistan and Iraq*

In addition, the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq will be monitored when elections are held, although this does introduce an element of uncertainty concerning the planned final ending date of the research project.

The new Afghanistan constitution specifies that the *Wolesi Jirga* (lower house) shall include 64 women members (with election guaranteed through reserved seats) and up to 186 members of either sex (elected to general seats), given the current 32 provinces. It should be noted that the number of seats reserved for women, and hence the number of general seats, may change if provinces are created or merged. The upper house will also include a proportion of women appointed by the President. It remains to be seen how these provisions will be implemented in the new electoral law under development⁸.

In Iraq the new constitution also specifies that women should constitute 25% women of the members of the new legislature, although again the way that this target will be implemented is under debate. The study would monitor developments to study this process, depending upon the exact timing of any elections⁹.

4. Job description and timeline:

Graduate research assistants:

Six graduate research assistants will be employed for four months, each responsible for one case, with one graduate assistant project manager coordinating the work. The research assistants will be employed to conduct a comprehensive literature review; to collect primary materials and to write up materials for each election; and to arrange and conduct 30-minute semi-structured telephone interviews with selected regional experts and scholars, journalists, political leaders, women politicians and NGO representatives drawn from each country. Graduate students from Harvard will be selected for this position based on their background experience, language, research, and interviewing skills, and their familiarity with the region.

Est. 7 research assistants employed for 4 months PT work x 20 hours per week (1st October 2004 to 1st February 2005)

5. Brief bio:

Pippa Norris is the McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Her research compares elections and public opinion, political communications, and gender politics. She has published almost three dozen books, including most recently for Cambridge University Press *Rising Tide: Gender Equality & Cultural Change around the World*. (with Ronald Inglehart, 2003), *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior* (spring 2004), and *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (with Ronald Inglehart, forthcoming fall 2004).

She has served as an expert consultant for many international bodies including the UN, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, International IDEA, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Project, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the UK Electoral Commission. Her work has been published in more than a dozen languages. She teaches *STM 103: Good Governance and Democratization* (MPA/ID) at the Kennedy School and *Gov 20: Introduction to Comparative Politics* in the Government Department. All details (including related publications, teaching, and datasets) can be found at www.pippanorris.com and she can be contacted at Pippa.Norris@Harvard.edu.

Table 1: Reserved seats for women used in the lower house of parliaments worldwide

	Election	Selection method	Total number of MPs in the lower house	Number of seats reserved for women	% Of seats reserved for women
APPOINTED BY ANOTHER BODY					
Tanzania	2000	Appointed	295	48	16.2
Zimbabwe	2000	Appointed	274	37	13.5
Botswana	1999	Appointed	44	2	4.5
Jordan	2003	Appointed	120	6	5.5
Lesotho	1998	Appointed	80	3	3.8
Bangladesh	2001	Appointed	300	30	10.0
Uganda	2001	Appointed	292	56	19.1
DIRECT ELECTION					
Pakistan	2002	FPTP (i)	357	60	16.8
Sudan	2000	FPTP (i)	360	35	9.7
Morocco	2002	FPTP (i)	325	30	9.2
Taiwan	1996	Combined-independent (SNTV and closed PR list) (iii)	334	Varies	Varies
Djibouti	2003	Party Block (ii)	65	7	10.7

Notes: *Reserved seats* in the lower house of the national parliament are defined as those seats that by law can only be filled by women, either by appointment, indirect election, or direct election. (i) FPTP First-past-the-post (with single-member districts and plurality election). (ii) The Party Block electoral system uses plurality elections in multi-member districts. (iii) The combined-independent electoral system uses both Single Non-Transferable Vote and PR party list in parallel.

Sources: The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) www.eisa.org.za; *Elections Around the World*. www.electionworld.org; International IDEA www.IDEA.int; Pippa Norris. 2004. *Electoral Engineering: Voting rules and political behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Endnotes: Note all papers and chapters are available for downloading at www.pippanorris.com.

¹ The Inter-Parliamentary Union estimates that about 6000 women sit in parliament worldwide in March 2003, representing 15.3% of all members. As is well-known, women parliamentarians do best in the Nordic nations, constituting 39% of MPs in the lower house. The greatest gender inequality remains in Arab states, where women are 6% of elected representatives, and women continue to be barred by law from standing for parliament in Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. There have been some moves towards reforms in the region, for example in Bahrain legal revisions allowed women to stand in elections for the first time in the May 2002 local elections, but none were successful in elections to the national parliament held five months later. See Inter-parliamentary Union. 2003. *Women in National Parliaments*. www.ipu.org.

² Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. 2001. 'Cultural Obstacles to Equal Representation.' With Ronald Inglehart. *Journal of Democracy*. 12(3): 126-140; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality & Cultural Change around the World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp.226; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. 'The True Clash of Civilizations?' *Foreign Policy*. March/April: 63-70; 2004 *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. New York: Cambridge University Press (Spring 2004) Pp.360.

³ For example see Pippa Norris. 2004. *Electoral Engineering*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 8.

⁴ See Najma Chowdhury. 2002. 'The Implementation of Quotas: Bangladesh Experience — Dependence and Marginality in Politics.' International IDEA Regional Workshop on the Implementation of Quotas. http://www.idea.int/quota/CS/CS_Bangladesh.pdf

⁵ A useful series of case studies in different regions is being developed by International IDEA in conjunction with the University of Stockholm. For details see. www.quotaproject.org.

⁶ See Socorro L. Reyes. 2002. 'Quotas in Pakistan: A Case Study.' International IDEA Regional Workshop on the Implementation of Quotas. http://www.idea.int/quota/CS/CS_Pakistan.pdf

⁷ Op cit.

⁸ Pippa Norris. 2003. 'Increasing women's representation in government: What options would work best for Afghanistan?' Prepared for the *Afghanistan Reconstruction Project* Center on International Cooperation, New York University; Pippa Norris. 2004. 'Implementing Women's Representation in Afghanistan Electoral Law: Options for reserved seats.' Prepared for the *Afghanistan Reconstruction Project* Center on International Cooperation, New York University.

⁹ Pippa Norris. 2004. 'Women's representation in Iraq: Strategies and options.' Report for National Endowment for Democracy *International Forum for Democratic Development*.