

The Participation of Jordanian Women in Political Parties

After the return of democratic life to Jordan in 1989 the participation of women in political parties was insignificant. However, laws that work to regulate political party activity took some steps to encourage the participation of women in parties. As stated in the 2012 political parties' law, 10% of the founding members of a political party must be women yet the 2015 law did not include that stipulation.

1. Introduction:

Political parties are considered to be one of the cornerstones of the democratic process in any country whereby the role of political parties is to participate in elections to gain a majority seat in the legislative council to be able to exert control on the executive. Political parties can be defined as a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. They agree on some policies and programs for the society with a view to promote the collective good or to further their supporters' interests allowing for citizen participation in the governing process.

The inception of political parties in Jordan dates back to the period prior to the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan where parties such as Young Arab Society (Al-Fatat), Arab Istiqlal (Independence) Party, Syrian National Vow Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party emerged. The main interest of these parties was to liberate Syria and declare its independence. The parties maintained their strength even after the establishment of the Emirate. At the time there was no law that regulated political parties whereby between 1921 and 1949, 20 political parties emerged and were registered under the "Ottoman Associations" regulation.

After the Nakba in 1948, Jordan witnessed political reforms. The most notable being the ratification of the 1952 constitution and the first political parties law in 1955 that allowed for the flourishing of political parties and religious ideology as well as leftist and nationalistic movements. Although most nationalistic and leftist political parties emerged after the 1955 law was enacted, a lot of them remained unlicensed despite them being very popular and wielding significant impact on policies. The 50's witnessed a flourishing of political life especially considering the regional challenges such as the occupation of Palestine and the emergence of the communist movements. This led to a vibrant political party scene that was joined by the middle class, laborers, and tribal members and resulted in a parliamentary majority in the 1956 election. The leader of the largest political party was requested to form the government although he did not win the election personally. However, this government was soon after dissolved which subsequently led to the dissolution of political parties and banning their activities driving them under ground. That period witnessed the participation of women within political parties where they gave speeches and gave out flyers and organized

demonstrations. The first instance for women's participation was in 1951, where the first political party to include women members was the communist party – such members included; Salwa Shihadeh, Salwa Zayadeen, Rifka Ghoussein and Emily Naffa'. After the communist party, the Ba'th party was established in Jordan that included women such as; Lama'a Al Razzaz, Isa'f Shuqair and Suhaila al Rimawi.

The 1967 War resulted in the continued suspension of political parties especially with the announcement of the state of emergency. This resulted in the movement of party activities to trade unions that acted as a safe space for them to call for their aims. Political Parties were reintroduced after the return of parliamentary life in 1989 and in 1992 a law that regulates political party activities was enacted; subsequent laws were issued in 2007 and 2012 with the latest law being law number 39 of 2015.

2. The role of the political parties law in activating women's political participation

The participation of women in political parties that were formed after the 1992 law was weak, whereby their participation did not exceed 7%. This was mainly due to parties being unable to lobby for support probably due to their absence for such a long time.

In an attempt to expand popular support for parties, the 2007 stipulated a minimum number of 500 members to be able to form a party, this compelled parties to expand their support base and convince women to join. This resulted in increasing women's participation to 30% in 2010 according to the Jordanian National Commission for Women. Nevertheless, despite this percentage, few women occupied leading positions in those parties, as according to a press release, published in March 2015 based on the records of the Ministry of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs, only three Jordanian women hold senior positions in three political parties out of the 34 registered political parties in Jordan and they are: Abla Abu Elbeh, the Secretary General of the Jordanian Democratic People's Party «Hashd», Rula Al-Hroub, the Secretary General of "Jordan stronger" party, and Mona Abu Baker, the Secretary General of the Jordanian National Party.

For the purpose of maintaining a representation of women in political parties, the 2012 political party law stated that the minimum number of founding members required to register a political party should be at least 500 members from seven different governorates, with no less than 10% representation of women and 5% from each governorate. The goal behind this stipulation is to increase the participation of women and ensure their representation in political parties. However, the current Political Parties Law number 39 for the year 2015 reduced the number of founding members of the party from 500 to 150 members without requiring representation of neither governorates nor women. Thus, this law is the only one that did not pledge women's representation in political parties when compared to the decentralization law, municipality law and the election law.

What is also surprising is that human rights and women organizations did not pay attention to the importance of this law and to the representation of women in political parties, as this law was adopted without any objection or claim for quota for women unlike the decentralization law, which had initially no quota, but was then included during the discussion with the lower House of Parliament in response to the demands of the civil society organizations