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Women in Politics and Diplomacy in the MENA Region: Governance Systems Pulling the Strings

By

Jana Imad Al Hassanieh

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Student Name: Jana Al Hassanieh   I.D. #: 201601155

Thesis Title: Women in Politics and Diplomacy in the MENA Region: Governance Systems Pulling the S

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Department: Social Sciences

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The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

MA _____ in the major of International Affairs

Thesis Advisor's Name: Dr. Lina Haddad Kreidie

Signature: ███████████   Date: 09 / 05 / 2023
                                       Day   Month   Year

Committee Member's Name: Dr. Latifa Reda

Signature: ███████████   Date: 09 / 05 / 2023
                                       Day   Month   Year

Committee Member's Name: Dr. Sami Baroudi

Signature: ███████████   Date: 09 / 05 / 2023
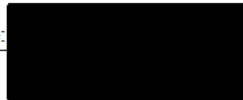   Day   Month   Year

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PLAGIARISM POLICY COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

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DEDICATION

To all female politicians and diplomats striving to prove themselves in a discriminatory world and a patriarchal MENA region

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Women in Politics and Diplomacy in the MENA Region: Governance Systems Pulling the Strings

Jana Imad Al Hassanieh

ABSTRACT

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to countries with distinct governance structures, resulting in a widely variable impact on women's political empowerment. Despite a history of patriarchal societal norms and marginalization of women, there have been recent efforts to promote women's inclusive participation in domestic politics and foreign policy. Using qualitative comparative case study analysis, this research draws on an in-depth literature review and thematic analysis of semi-structured key informant interviews to explore the impact of different governance systems in the MENA region on women's representation, inclusion, and empowerment in the political and diplomatic corps. The thesis focuses on Lebanon's confessional-based political system, Tunisia's democratic turned authoritarian system, and Saudi Arabia's monarchic system as case studies, strategically chosen given their characteristic governance and public gender regime profiles in the MENA region. The study findings indicate that distinct governance structures have varying impacts on the representation of women in politics and diplomacy, highlighting the need for context-specific feminist policies to promote positive reform toward sustainable peace and development in the region. The study concludes with implications for policymakers and directions for future research on governance, gender, and diplomacy in the MENA region.

Keywords*: Governance, Diplomacy, Politics, Gender, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Monarchy, Confessional, Authoritarian, Democracy, Culture

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW   Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CSOs   Civil Society Organizations

FFP   Feminist Foreign Policy

GCC   Gulf Cooperation Council

IPU   Inter-parliamentary Union

IDEA   Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

MENA   Middle East and North Africa

NAP   National Action Plan

NCLW   National Commission for Lebanese Women

SDG   Sustainable Development Goal

OECD   Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OHCHR   Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

UNDP   United Nations Development Program

UNFPA   United Nations Fund for Population

UNSCR   UN Security Council Resolution

UN Women   UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WEF   World Economic Forum

WHO   World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Leguey-Feilleux (2009) reveals how diplomacy has expanded and shifted from the traditional sense of "established foreign policy" and of "carrying out orders and implementing policy" to engaging in public relations and resorting to multilateral diplomacy amidst a changing global environment and an "expanding realm of international relations" (Leguey-Feilleux, 2009). He also mentions the diversity in diplomatic professions, encompassing foreign service professionals (such as career officers and political appointees), non-foreign service personnel (such as those involved in justice, defense, transportation, etc.), International Organization secretariat personnel, and transnational agents (i.e., diplomats at non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations). This expanded definition reflects how active diplomacy is critical in promoting sustainable peace and stability amidst the wide range of professions that manage dialogues, mediate conflicts, and develop new norms of state operations for sustainable development and human rights advocacy.

Whether it's politics or modern diplomacy, women's representation in international relations has long been impacted by several factors that interrupt, devalue, slow down, or halt this representation. First is the epistemic discrimination faced by women; i.e., the "prejudice, bias, and discriminatory action" faced in their positions, amidst underestimating their knowledge and expertise because of their characteristic identity (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018); i.e., in this case, females' knowledge acquisition and provision would be underestimated through "unconscious gender bias" (International

Labour Organization, 2017). Another factor is the perception that women are in diplomacy only as inherited or given identities; as daughters of diplomats or diplomatic wives (Leguey-Feilleux, 2009; Standfield, 2020). An additional factor could be attributed to females entering late into the field of diplomacy and the potential resistance to change when it comes to gender hierarchies and power dynamics (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). In addition, socialization and gender roles have also been recognized as determinants influencing women's engagement in politics and diplomacy, as women are often socialized to prioritize domestic and maternal responsibilities and are expected to conform to traditional gender norms (Dharsani & Ericsson, 2013). Furthermore, there is a dearth of mentorship, role models, and networking opportunities for women in politics and diplomacy, which further limits their access to leadership positions (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021; Washington, 2007). These factors along with several others create a rabbit hole that could stall or even hinder women from attaining their full potential in the arenas of politics and diplomacy (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

Gender is a socially constructed concept denoting the set of characteristics, behaviours, and societal expectations associated with male or female identity (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In role-playing, gender is often assigned to characters based on societal norms and expectations, but it can also be fluid and explored in rather non-traditional ways, allowing individuals to experiment with different gender expressions and identities (Fenstermaker & West, 2013; Carter, 2014). The concept of gender encompasses a broad spectrum of social, cultural, psychological, and biological dimensions, making it an interdisciplinary topic with a complex definition, in which it is shaped and constructed by societal norms, cultural beliefs, and individual experiences (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). For the sake of research and given

cultural and societal concepts narrowing its definition, this thesis will focus on women as females born with female reproductive systems and assigned females at birth (AFAB).

Gender biases, stereotypes, imbalances, and discrimination affect women's access to political and diplomatic roles and eventual career advancement. Gender discrimination can take several forms, including normative discrimination, which enforces cultural norms and expectations about gender roles and behaviors; cultural discrimination, which involves unequal treatment based on cultural beliefs about gender; social discrimination, driven by social and institutional factors; and epistemic discrimination, rooted in misunderstandings and biases about gender (Canadian International Development Agency, 2001; Kessler, 2000; OHCHR, 2014; Pal, 2021; Wikström, 2014). Throughout this thesis, the constraints for women's access to and representation in politics were extended to their access to and representation in diplomacy, especially since diplomacy is a key instrument of foreign policy and is intricately connected to the political objectives and strategies of a nation.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has long-standing patriarchal traditions that have marginalized women in all aspects of society, including public service and diplomacy. Despite this reality, in recent times, there have been several efforts made by various countries in the region to promote females' representation in diplomacy and politics, intending to promote sustainable peace and development.

In specific, the MENA region exhibits a notable gender gap, ranking second in terms of magnitude and third lowest in political empowerment subindex scores (WEF, 2022). Moreover, it has the lowest percentage of women in national parliaments among all global regions, with only 16.3% of seats occupied by females as of April 1st, 2023 (Inter-parliamentary Union [IPU], 2023a). As well, as per the 2023 *Women in Diplomacy Index*, the MENA region lags behind the world average in women's representation in ambassadorial and permanent representative ranks. The MENA region ranked lowest in

the percentage of share of women ambassadors by region in 2023, compared to Europe, the Americas, Oceania, Africa, and Asia (Chehab, 2023). The MENA region's dominant patriarchal and misogynistic structures have resisted pro-gender equality norms. Patriarchy has long been prevalent in the MENA region, not simply due to repressive regimes, but also due to repressive societal (familial relations and societal traditions), economic, and political governance structures (Al-Rasheed, 2013; Benstead, 2021; Rayan & Rizzo, 2020).

Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia are three countries in the MENA region with distinctive political systems and diplomatic operations, but they all face challenges in promoting gender equality in politics and diplomacy. Lebanon, located in the West Asian sub-region of the Levant 'Mashreq', is a parliamentary democratic republic with a corrupt confessional political system that divides political power among the country's religious groups (UNDP, UNFPA & UN Women, 2018; UN Women, 2020). Saudi Arabia, located in the Arabian Peninsula sub-region of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is an absolute monarchy with a theocratic political system based on Islamic law (Freedom House, 2022b). Tunisia, situated in the North African sub-region of Maghreb, has a mixed political system that combines elements of presidential and parliamentary systems in a parliamentary republic (Redissi, 2022; Freedom House, 2022a).

On one hand, Lebanon has a confessional political system, which has led to sectarian divisions and power-sharing arrangements that have hindered the promotion of gender equality. However, Saudi Arabia, with its conservative societal norms and strict interpretation of Islam, has long been known for its restrictive policies toward females' rights and participation in public life. In contrast, Tunisia is considered to be a relatively progressive country when it comes to women's rights.

Overall, while these countries have witnessed notable advancements toward promoting females' political and diplomatic representation, the extant patriarchal and misogynistic structures persist in the MENA region, underscoring the need for further steps to create more equitable and inclusive opportunities.

1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

1.2.1 Research Questions

The major research question employed to serve this study's purpose is "*How is the representation of women in politics and diplomacy linked to reform in a state's governance structure in the MENA region, with a particular focus on Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia?*"

Sub-research-question 1: *What are the governance factors in each case study that facilitate or hinder women's inclusion in politics and diplomacy?*

Sub-research-question 2: *How would the inclusion of women in MENA politics and diplomacy set the foundation for a contextualized domestic and foreign policy in each country's governance structure?*

1.2.2 Research Hypothesis

Accordingly, the proposed hypothesis is: *The representation of women in politics and diplomacy requires contextualized gender-affirmative policies to promote positive reform towards sustainable peace and development in the MENA region, specifically in the different governance structures of Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia.*

1.3 Research Methodology

This thesis employs a qualitative comparative case study methodology, incorporating primary data collection through semi-structured key informant interviews and secondary data from extensive desk research. The study outlines recommended guidelines and implications for rigorous analysis, aligning with the framework outlined in A. George and A. Bennett's seminal work, "*Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*."

Generic purposive sampling has been conducted as the selected countries were strategically chosen given their characteristic governance and public gender regime profiles in relation to a broader range of cases within the MENA region (Curini, 2020). When it comes to the sampled time and documents, the case studies were analyzed until early 2023's time period, meaning the latest context in each of the case studies. The comparative case study methodology hopes to control for cofounders and enables stronger external validity (Ruffa, 2020). Based on Mill's "method of difference," the chosen case study examples have similar features on the most confounding variables, disregarding the independent or dependent variables of interest (Mill, 1882). Contextualizing that with the purpose of this thesis, the case studies have similar cultures, languages, an Arab identity background, Middle Eastern and North African geographic locations, etc., while having different independent variables, which are the governance systems and the public gender regimes in these countries.

In brief, this study adopts 1) a qualitative comparative case study research design targeting the main governmental systems in the MENA region, namely the confessional, democratic turned authoritarian, and monarchic systems; 2) a deductive approach that adds to the ecological validity of this research method (Bryman, 2016); 3) a thematic analysis of emerging trends from semi-structured key informant interviews, and 4) an unstructured

contextual understanding of natural settings and meanings through rich and deep data analysis.

1.3.1 Secondary Data Literature Review

This case study comparative research analyzes data extracted from secondary sources. Specifically, the research draws on a range of secondary data, including online data and archives from official state documents, official national, regional, and international organization reports, and mass media outputs that were consulted, used, and analyzed during this research, as long as they are authentic, credible (as in free from error and distortion), representative of the case studies, and meaningful (as in clear and comprehensible) (Bryman, 2016). The main secondary sources that have been used are literature reviews in academic books and journal articles, laws and policies, litigations, cases, reports, and data reviews of relevant monthly and annual data indices and reports.

The literature review addresses the academic, theoretical, and policy debates surrounding gender equality, status, and policy dilemma of women's political/diplomatic representation within the broader public gender regime. By banking on established literature, this thesis links three theoretical frameworks, namely the gender regime theory, the Feminist Foreign Policy theory, and the constructivist theory, to analyze the role of women's participation in political and diplomatic bodies in promoting gender-sensitive policy reforms and facilitating democratic transitions. These theoretical frameworks eventually inform, analyze, and link the three case studies.

1.3.2 Semi-Structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

The incorporation of KIIs with female professionals in the field is crucial to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the differential impact of governance systems on

women's representation in politics and diplomacy across the MENA region. Ranging between diplomats and senior research and policy fellows to legal gender advisors for key intergovernmental organizations such as UN Women, the female professionals selected for this study bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise focused on identifying the challenges that hinder women's involvement in political and diplomatic processes in the MENA, as well as examining successful initiatives that have advanced such representation. The interviewed females, whose age ranges between The interviews were conducted virtually, lasted from 35 to 50 minutes each, and focused on investigating the participants' insights and perceptions of women's representation in diplomacy in distinct governance systems (such as political will, legal frameworks, and institutional mechanisms) in the MENA region to further understand the role such governance factors play in hindering or facilitating women's inclusion in political and diplomatic corps.

Through conducting semi-structured interviews with the key informants, the research delved into the intricate governance systems and policies that impact women's representation in diplomacy differently in each country, thereby providing deeper insights into the complex cultural and political contexts and factors that influence women's inclusion in diplomatic processes. As such, conducting key informant interviews with these female diplomats was deemed necessary to generate a robust and nuanced analysis of females' representation in politics and diplomacy in the MENA region and to identify the key strategies for advancing their meaningful inclusion in these corps.

1.3.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative thematic analysis and discourse analysis were employed to interpret the selected documents and the KIIs and to derive trends and patterns of the topic at hand. Accordingly, this research looked at emerging themes and examined the discourse used

within the selected texts and documents respectively. To preclude any potential for subjectivity or prejudgment and to ensure that the case studies represent each of their realities and not anomalies, the research methodology emphasizes cross-referencing and validation of the acquired information, which is undertaken through comparisons among various references and informants. Through these rigorous protocols, the study culminates in a well-structured thesis that caters to the precise needs of the research question.

Upon the verbatim transcription of the key informant interviews (KIIs), an interpretative analysis was undertaken to identify the salient patterns and major themes that emerged from the data. Initially, common patterns and subthemes were discerned from the three KIIs, which were then organized into a priori themes to simplify the analysis. Notably, four novel themes were identified, which were subsequently incorporated into the analytical framework. Through this iterative process, dominant ideas and recurring patterns emerged, which were corroborated by the responses of the participants from the three KIIs. To illustrate these findings, selected prominent quotes were extracted from the dataset, not for individual analysis, but rather to establish analytical connections between this study's main research questions and the KIIs' responses.

The four emerging themes and subthemes derived from the key informant interviews are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 - Emerging Themes & Subthemes from the KIIs' Thematic Analysis

Main Themes	Sub-themes
Influence of governance systems on women's representation in politics and diplomacy	• Government structure either easing or hindering the policymaking and implementation process. • Ministry of Foreign Affairs' role in policymaking and decision-making for promoting women's representation. • Barriers to gender equity contained in constitutional law and civil rights legal provision.

	• Marriage ban impeding women's representation. • Need for policies to retain women in diplomacy. • Gender quotas and gender-affirmative programs to advance women's representation.
Hurdles and complexities challenging women's entry and progression in the political and diplomatic field within the MENA region	• Women entry to the field not an issue but promotions and postings abroad being issues. • Formal and informal forces hindering women's diplomatic career advancement. • Patriarchal and feudal confessional family-based system. • Culture and family expectations impacting women's ability to travel and live alone. • Slow pace of change in the diplomatic field. • Gender quotas and gender-affirmative programs promoting women's empowerment and agency.
Cultural and Social determinants impacting women's representation in politics and diplomacy	• Perception of diplomacy as a "man's world" (male-dominated field). • Culture of the family more critical than status or class. • Prevailing cultural norms and traditions that restrict women's rights, freedoms, and empowerment. • Gender stereotypes.
Recommended effective policies and programs	• Gender quotas. • Incentives such as opportunities for growth and career advancement. • Women caucuses in parliaments. • Gender-affirmative election lists formation through horizontal and vertical parity. • Gender mainstreaming through nation-wide and/or a sector-wide policy changes (example: diversity, equity, and inclusion departments in ministries). • Mentorship and career advising programs through senior women diplomat coaches and mentees mentoring junior women diplomats. • Government-wide capacity building on the effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies, programs, and initiatives.

As per the abovementioned derived themes, there emerged some additional considerations from the discussions and insights of the key informants, many of which are incorporated throughout the case study analysis and discussion chapters.

1.4 Ethical Considerations

This research has ensured the protection of human subjects and that there is no harm to participants and no invasion of their privacy. First, the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval for this study was confirmed to ensure compliance with LAU's approved human research protocols. Second, the three interviewees received an IRB-approved introductory letter with the research rationale through email and an informed consent form. Third, the principal investigator (interviewer) ensured that the research participants were not subjected to any sort of judgment. Having a relaxed environment while running the semi-structured interviews surely aided in smoother knowledge, perspective, and experience-sharing, without any infringements. Fourth, the ownership of all data was acknowledged and properly referenced to avoid plagiarism. Fifth, soft copies of the research study were encrypted on the graduate student's laptop and stored in the cloud to avoid any loss of data in case any issues with the student's laptop occur. Sixth, the researcher abstained from any subjective biases while analyzing the case studies. The research was designed, reviewed, and executed with full integrity and quality. Last but certainly not least, this research study is fully dependent and is not funded by nor affiliated with any external organization, hence it is solely written for the graduate student's graduation requirement and is not linked to any political agenda nor any outside party's vested interests.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this thesis presented a concise yet comprehensive introduction to the research problem, including its significance, research questions, objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations. The research problem centers on the underrepresentation of women in politics and diplomacy and its consequential effects on

peace and development, particularly in the MENA region. This chapter presents a literature review covering the role of women in politics and diplomacy, the impact of governance systems on their participation, the relationship between gender equality and sustainable peace and development, and the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis. By providing a comprehensive background, this chapter sets the foundation for the subsequent chapters that delve deeper into the three chosen case studies: Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. Next, chapter 3 addresses the case of Lebanon's confessional-based system, failing democracy, and sects' impact on women's representation in diplomacy within their country. Afterward, chapter 4 addresses the case of Saudi Arabia's monarchic impact on women's representation in diplomacy amidst a hegemonic Islamic law. Then, chapter 5 addresses the case of Tunisia's semi-presidential system's impact on women's representation in diplomacy with a reflection on how 2021's constitutional referendum has shifted the political landscape. Chapter 6 subsequently analyzes and compares the case studies' governance systems toward grasping contextualized gender regime reforms, adopting a transformative Feminist Foreign Policy for better inclusion of women in politics and diplomacy, and reaching sustainable equality, peace, and stability. It also analyzes the emerging themes and subthemes from the conducted key informant interviews. The final chapter offers a conclusory section on the limitations, key findings, and significant contributions as well as recommendations on the way forward. And finally, a bibliography with all cited references is demonstrated and followed by the appendices and glossary of terms sections.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Background Information

The issue of female representation in diplomacy has garnered attention and scrutiny for years, and the MENA region is no exception. Against this backdrop, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the historical and present-day status of females' participation and inclusion in MENA's diplomatic landscape, as well as how governance structures are closely tied to such representation. Additionally, the chapter delves into the influence of this representation on peace and sustainable development. Finally, the chapter outlines the three theoretical frameworks that will be utilized throughout this thesis and concludes by identifying the literature gaps that remain.

2.1.1 Overview of Women in Politics and Diplomacy: Historical Overview and Current Status in the MENA Region

Since the late 1800s, women have been engaged in political and diplomatic affairs, taking part in international conferences, negotiations, and political processes. However, one cannot deny that their participation was limited and merely symbolic as it was primarily restricted to serving as wives, daughters, mothers, or companions of male diplomats, performing ceremonial and social functions with limited or even absent formal diplomatic negotiations or representation (Lenine & Sanca, 2022). Over time, the trend of more women joining the political and diplomatic corps has led to the establishment of

women's foreign services, female ambassadors, quotas for gender representation, and gender mainstreaming strategies aimed at advancing gender equality.

The United Nations' (UN) establishment in the aftermath of World War II marked a turning point in the history of women's rights (UN Women, 2019a), whereby the UN established various bodies and organs which aimed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment (United Nations Library & Archives Geneva, 2019), as well as hosting and adopting several key events, conferences, security council resolutions, agendas, and platforms, including but not limited decades for women and conventions on eliminating discrimination against women (UN Women, 2019a).

However, despite the concerted efforts made by the UN agencies and other international organizations, females' representation in politics and diplomacy remains staggeringly low worldwide. In many countries, women are grossly underrepresented in diplomatic services, with few women serving as ambassadors or in senior leadership positions. This persistent underrepresentation is attributable to numerous factors, including gender biases, discrimination, and a dearth of opportunities for women to enter and advance in the field. Cultural norms and traditions that impose traditional roles of women as caregivers and homemakers, inadequate access to educational and vocational training, as well as political and economic circumstances that restrict women's prospects for growth are also contributory factors. Additionally, the absence of supportive policies and programs for promoting females' political empowerment has contributed to a persistent gender gap in leadership positions globally, including in the MENA region.

Notwithstanding a long history of gender inequality and women facing interconnected challenges in their pursuit of political and diplomatic representation in their countries (Danon & Collins, 2019), the inclusion and representation of women in political and diplomatic forums in the MENA region have begun to increase, progress toward

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gender equality and indiscrimination remain heterogeneous and lopsided (UN Women Arab States, 2023). Several factors contribute to women's underrepresentation in politics and diplomacy in the region; including cultural and societal beliefs viewing women as inferior and unfit for running and working for public offices, inadequate political and economic female empowerment, structural discriminatory laws and policies against females' political and economic involvement, and absent legal and institutional mechanisms for advancing females' diplomatic and political careers.

Despite such a grim reality, a gradual albeit progressive recognition of the crucial role of women's representation in diplomacy has surfaced within the MENA region. Some of the notable female ambassadors from the region include Mervat Tallawy, who served as the Arab League's Secretary-General, and Feryal Gharib, the first female ambassador from the United Arab Emirates (UN Press, 2000; UAE Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority, 2023). In specific, the United Arab Emirates has significantly progressed in promoting women's political and diplomatic work; the main initiative of which is its 2015-established Gender Balance Council (UAE Gender Balance Council, 2020). Another promising update is Libya's feminist movements gaining momentum in recent years, highlighted by the recent appointment of Libya's first female Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation bringing to the fore the country's commitment to adopting a feminist foreign policy in 2021. As well, the emergence of feminist movements and initiatives such as the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and the claim of commitment to an FFP are positive signs of change paving the way for significant advancements in women's entitlements and empowerment in Libya despite the country's political instability and ongoing conflict (Thompson et al., 2021).

Henceforth, the MENA's history of women in politics and diplomacy has seen significant progress, but much remains to be done in a reflection of broader gender inequalities in society and challenges that need to be addressed.

2.1.2 Role of Governance in Women's Inclusion in Politics and Diplomacy

Governance refers to the processes, mechanisms, and institutions "through which power is exercised" by "public officials and institutions" (World Bank, 2007; Kaufmann & Kraay, (2008). It involves decision-making processes and resource allocation and encompasses an assortment of stakeholders, comprising the state, civil society, and private sector (World Bank, 2007). Thereby, governance factors shape women's inclusion and representation in diplomacy and the eventual goal of gender equality and female empowerment. And so, adopting policies and practices that facilitate females' representation in domestic politics, diplomatic missions, multilateral organizations, and other global institutions is a key milestone in promoting gender inclusivity (OECD, 2014). Consequently, the relationship between governance and females' inclusion in politics and diplomacy is interdependent.

Countries with supportive governance structures, including affirmative action policies, gender-sensitive policies, and gender mainstreaming, are more likely to present a higher representation of females in politics and diplomacy (OECD, 2023a). Good governance includes participatory, transparent, equitable, and accountable political systems that adhere to the rule of law (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, 2009, pp. 2-3). In contrast, weak or poor governance contributes to social and political exclusion, corruption, and human rights abuses as it creates obstacles to women's inclusion by perpetuating discriminatory practices and policies. In the context of females' inclusion in politics and diplomacy, good governance can create a conducive

environment for females' involvement in domestic and foreign policy by creating an enabling environment that promotes gender equality and removes institutional impediments to women's participation in political and diplomatic activities. Accordingly, good governance would provide women-empowering legal frameworks, such as gender equality laws and antidiscrimination legislation, that create the foundation for promoting women's inclusion in diplomacy. As well, it would have women-empowering policies and guidelines, such as quotas for women's representation in diplomacy and gender mainstreaming strategies, to provide practical tools for implementing gender equality objectives. Additionally, there would exist an institutional culture that fosters a supportive environment for women and promotes gender sensitivity in the workplace, hence encouraging women's participation in diplomacy. Besides, good governance would promote women's leadership by appointing females to senior positions in diplomacy and promoting female role models, thereby inspiring and empowering women to pursue diplomatic careers.

The MENA region is home to a diverse assortment of countries, each with its unique form of government. As government systems are diverse in the MENA region so do the governance structures differ. The heterogeneity of governance structures across the MENA region engenders a divergent impact of governance factors on the political and diplomatic representation of women, including absolute monarchies exemplified by Saudi Arabia, constitutional monarchies such as Bahrain, presidential republics typified by Egypt, semi-presidential republics akin to Djibouti, federal parliamentary systems like Iraq, and parliamentary democratic systems such as Lebanon.

While these different government systems vary widely in their political structures and processes, they reflect the unique histories, cultures, and political systems of each country in the region. Notably, some countries have taken significant strides toward

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promoting gender equality in diplomacy. For instance, Tunisia has made significant progress in this regard, with women occupying important diplomatic positions and affirmative action policies facilitating their representation in politics and diplomacy.

Patriarchy, or the social and cultural norms that support males' power dominance and women's subordination, continues to influence females' representation in politics and diplomacy in the MENA region. This system of male domination has resulted in women facing significant barriers to entering the politico-diplomatic field and advancing to senior positions. Addressing patriarchal attitudes and norms is essential for fostering gender equality as well as ensuring females' representation in diplomatic and political fields.

On the other hand, gender mainstreaming ensures that the governance structures in place are supportive of females' inclusion in these fields as well. Gender mainstreaming is the process of incorporating a gender perspective in all phases of governance, policymaking, planning, and implementation processes (UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women [OSAGI], 2002). It involves ensuring that the "needs and perspectives" of men and women are understood and integrated into policies, programs, and initiatives (UN OSAGI, 2002).

Gender mainstreaming should not be regarded as an end goal but rather a continuous process of development that requires time and sustained commitment from policymakers and civil society actors alike. By mainstreaming gender into diplomacy, policymakers can work to create more inclusive and equitable governance structures that advance females' meaningful inclusion and participation in decision-making processes.

2.1.3 Females' Representation in Politics and Diplomacy and its Impact on Peace and Development

In today's world, marred by crises, females' participation and representation in diplomacy play a crucial part in upholding sustainable peace and development. Women's

unique perspectives and experiences bring diversity and inclusivity to diplomatic discussions, leading to better outcomes in decision-making and problem-solving (Lenine & Sanca, 2022; Loken & Matfess, 2022). Furthermore, studies have found that women diplomats bring unique perspectives, experiences, and skills to the table, including a focus on issues related to human rights, social cohesion, justice, conflict resolution, community rebuilding, and positive peace (UN Women, 2021a).

Despite mounting evidence of the benefits of gender diversity, women remain underrepresented in diplomatic positions globally. In fact, a study by the *Women in Diplomacy Index* 2022 reveals that women make up only 21% of the ambassadors in the world (Chehab, 2022). These statistics highlight the continued need for action to address the impediments faced by females. Overall, their active participation in peace negotiation and reconciliation programs has been associated with a higher likelihood of successful outcomes along sustainable peace agreements, highlighting the significance of females' involvement in peacebuilding (Krause et al., 2018; Paffenholz et al., 2016).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 16 are central to this topic as they promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, as well as peaceful and inclusive societies. SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, is intrinsically connected to the participation of women in diplomacy and politics (UN Women, 2022). Such participation can have a profound impact on breaking down gender stereotypes and promoting women's empowerment (Standfield, 2020). Moreover, women diplomats can serve as role models for young women and girls, inspiring them to pursue careers in diplomatic fields and other traditionally male-dominated professions. As well, the impact of the representation of women in politics and diplomacy on SDG 5 can be seen in countries such as Tunisia, where the appointment of a gender-balanced cabinet in 2016 has led to progress in inspiring women's rights and

gender equality in politics (UN Women, 2016). Similarly, in the United Arab Emirates, women's inclusion in the consultative parliamentary body, the *Federal National Council*, has increased from 22.5% in 2006 to 50% in 2023, indicating progress toward achieving gender equality in political representation as well as toward better "inclusion, justice, and security" (Embassy of the United Arab Emirates, 2023).

SDG 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, is also linked to the representation of women in politics and diplomacy (United Nations, 2015). Research has shown that women tend to place a higher priority on peace and conflict resolution in their diplomatic efforts, which can contribute to building more stable and sustainable societies (UN Women, 2022). In the MENA region, women's contribution to peace negotiations has been essential in ensuring the inclusion of women's perspectives and needs in the peace process. In Yemen, for example, women have played a crucial role in promoting peace and conflict resolution (Crisis Management Initiative, 2015). Women's organizations have tirelessly worked to ensure that the voices and perspectives of women are heard during peace negotiations, resulting in more comprehensive and equitable peace agreements (Awadh & Shuja'adeen, 2019). Similarly, in Libya, women's involvement in peacebuilding initiatives and civic engagement avenues has been supported by UN Women as it is essential in promoting social cohesion, reconciliation, and sustainable peace (UN Women Arab States. 2020).

Furthermore, the representation of women in politics and diplomacy has the potential to bolster the growth and advancement of resilient, inclusive institutions (O'Reilly, 2015). Their participation can help break down institutional barriers that restrict female-led decision-making positions, ultimately fostering more diverse and pluralistic institutional cultures. Women's participation in peace negotiations is also associated with

a higher likelihood of success, resulting in more sustainable peace agreements and cohesive communities.

Despite the existing research on women's representation in diplomacy, there still exist several gaps in the literature surrounding this topic and especially within the MENA region. Henceforth, further studies are needed to investigate the impact of specific policies and programs aimed at safeguarding and promoting females' participation and representation in politics and diplomacy and to explore the experiences of women who have achieved high-level diplomatic positions in the MENA region.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

This research deploys three theories to frame the findings and contribute to the literature: constructivism, feminist foreign policy, and gender regime theory.

2.2.1 Gender Regime Theory

Walby (2020) introduces variable types of gender regimes from public to domestic gender regimes, and within public regimes, between neoliberal and social democratic forms of regimes. Shire and Walby (2020) reveal how the variable scales of analysis of gender regimes are needed to contextualize gender regimes amidst subnational and intraregional dynamics. Valentine M Moghadam (2020) expands upon Walby's model of gender regimes and provides a specific classification of public gender regimes in the MENA region. Moghadam's classification of public gender regimes in the MENA region is a useful tool for understanding the complex interplay between state policies, cultural values, and gender relations. She distinguishes between neopatriarchal and conservative-corporatist regimes, primarily highlighting the differences in family law and female economic participation. In particular, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria are classified as

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having a conservative-corporatist gender regime with reformed family laws and strong feminist movements, while Saudi Arabia is categorized as neopatriarchal with conservative family law and limited female economic participation. Lebanon is classified as a hybrid regime, reflecting the complex intersections of family and cultural influences on females' participation and representation in politics and diplomacy.

Mougadam's empirical analysis resonates with this paper's proposition amidst family and cultural influences on women's active representation and participation in diplomacy in the MENA region. For instance, the notion of neopatriarchy, evident in Saudi Arabia, underscores the entrenched cultural norms that often limit women's access to civil rights and political power. In contrast, conservative-corporatist regimes, like Tunisia, have witnessed a significant transformation in gender relations, with feminist movements pushing for greater rights and representation for women in various spheres of society, including politics and diplomacy.

Overall, the gender regime theory provides a useful lens for understanding the complexities of gender relations within different social structures and practices. It provides a robust framework for examining the compounded and multidimensional factors that shape women's political and diplomatic representation and participation in the MENA region. By analyzing the different types of gender regimes and their institutional, cultural, and social dynamics, policymakers and practitioners can better understand the fundamental determinants that give rise to gender disparities in diplomacy and develop targeted interventions to promote women's rights and representation.

2.2.2 Feminist Foreign Policy

The Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), as defined by the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy (2021), is a visionary political framework that places the welfare of the

marginalized at the core of foreign policy. The FFP represents a strategic cosmopolitan process toward democratic foreign policy taking into consideration marginalized individuals, including women, towards "quality, justice, solidarity, and peace" (CFFP, 2021). FFP, also known as "feminist diplomacy", calls for the abolition of patriarchy, demilitarization, "mediation over sanctions," and "cooperation over domination," (Zilla, C., 2022). Additionally, Marxist feminism calls for the abolition of capitalism, which has historically exploited and oppressed women (Armstrong, 2020). Such feminist diplomacy or FFP is as such significant to transform the MENA region's toxically masculine and patriarchal repressive power structures; through promoting women's rights, representation, resource allocations, and the reality in which FFP is operating (Government Offices of Sweden – MoFA, 2019).

While the Feminist Foreign Policy is a relatively new concept that has gained momentum in recent years, primarily in Western countries, it can be contextualized and implemented in countries within the MENA region to promote gender inclusivity. How a state governs itself can impact the extent to which it can adopt a feminist foreign policy, as deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms can either facilitate or challenge the implementation of an FFP. Eventually, the implementation of a contextualized FFP in the MENA region requires an understanding of the unique challenges faced by women in the region.

Accordingly, FFP is a multilateral approach premised on the notion that promoting gender equality and empowering women is a moral obligation and a crucial component in constructing peaceful, just, and prosperous societies. Embracing such policy in the MENA region can have profound effects on the region's democratic practices and state reform; whereby prioritizing the inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision-making processes can foster a more comprehensive and heterogenous political milieu that better reflects the

needs of all its constituents. This, in turn, ultimately contributes to building more inclusive, just, and democratic societies. The applicability of the FFP in context will be further examined in the analysis of this thesis paper.

2.2.3 Constructivist Theory

Constructivists believe that the state's actions are shaped by its interests, which are informed by the identity that the state gives itself (Reus-Smit, 1999, p.39). In specific, when it comes to systemic constructivism, Wendt (1999) emphasizes that the interplay of structural contexts, systemic processes, and strategic practices engenders various types of state identity, both in their creation and perpetuation. Hence, ideas, beliefs, and social norms interpret the actor's behavior, while the structure sets some constraints (Wendt, 1999).

The processes that happen within the structure are more important than the structure itself and the structures don't determine the behaviors of the states without their identities. If we were to reflect systemic constructivism on this thesis' topic, the political governance structures can change and be reformed towards more democratic characteristics that open up space for female politicians and diplomats in the MENA region. For example, if a state identifies itself as committed to gender equality, this may lead it to prioritize females' participation in diplomacy and other areas of public life. Conversely, if a state identifies itself as patriarchal or resistant to change, it may be less likely to promote women's rights and representation.

Constructivism also offers insight into how the global context can influence political structures and governance systems, an example that can build on this is the recent liberal openness of Saudi Arabia. The country has undergone significant reforms in recent years, including allowing women to drive, attend sports events, and participate in politics.

These changes were driven in part by a desire to fit Saudi norms to the West, and to continue receiving Western support for the country's regional stands in various conflicts (American Foreign Service Association, 2018). In other words, the state's identity was reshaped by global interaction and reconstruction to fit its interests.

Overall, constructivist theory highlights the importance of political structures, norms, and identities in shaping state behavior, and offers a useful framework for understanding how political structures and governance systems can be reformed to be more democratic and gender inclusive in the MENA region.

2.3 Gaps in Literature

There exists several gaps in the literature on females' representation in politics and diplomacy in the MENA region, from causal factors (social, economic, historical, and legal factors) to actual policy work toward lobbying and advocating for such representation through governance systems (Lenine & Sanca, 2022). Amidst bias and underestimations of women's political leadership roles in the MENA region (Benstead et al., 2015; Rayan & Rizzo, 2020), cultural, religious, familial, and social structural systems are diverse and intersectional; yet understudied. Amidst coercive diplomacy and Western military intervention in the MENA region, sustainable peace and security are far from the equation (Reychler & Langer, 2020). Yet, despite the limited to almost absent literature on the subject, moving to a more adaptive and intersectional diplomatic approach with divergent feminist foreign policy goals is critical (Aggestam & Towns, 2018).

This lacuna in the literature on hierarchically gendered diplomacy in the MENA region calls for the need for this research to analyze the agency of women in politics and diplomacy toward promoting equality, social justice, stability, and sustainable peace. It is thus critical to analyze the gender imbalance around diplomacy in the MENA region,

including how constitutions are different from practices in this region differences between males and females in the field of diplomacy. Hence, further research on the form and prospects of needed contextualized reform in each of the case studies is vital, to derive the modes of diplomacy that ought to be promoted, maneuvering inclusive domestic and national governance systems in the region.

Thus, the correlation between deeply entrenched patriarchal hyper-masculine constitutions, women's underrepresentation in diplomacy, and the negative and/or absent peace in the MENA region remain majorly unexplored. Therefore, contextualized reforms and policies should be explored against the backdrop of domestic and regional gender inequality to reach peaceful and stable governance systems.

2.4 Conclusion

In short, this literature review has first demonstrated a short historical overview of women in politics and diplomacy in the MENA region and moved to a review of the key findings and perspectives from existing studies on the role of governance on women's inclusion in diplomacy and the impact of such inclusion of positive peace and development. Second, it has provided insights into the theoretical approaches to females' representation in politics and diplomacy. Third, it has addressed the topic's research limitations and needed research. Next, the chapters addressing each case study will be demonstrated before comparing and analyzing the findings.

CHAPTER THREE

LEBANON'S CONFESSIONAL FAILING DEMOCRACY: SECTS PULLING THE STRINGS

3.1 Introduction

Lebanon has been known for its diverse cultural, religious, and political landscape. Despite the country's rich history and cultural heritage, women have been marginalized in various political and economic domains, including diplomacy. Recently, Lebanon has made some strides toward gender equality and inclusivity, resulting in policy and law reforms concerning females' representation in domestic politics and foreign policy.

Lebanon's governance system stands out in the MENA region, with its Consociational system and power-sharing arrangement that divides political power amongst the country's religious and ethnic communities. While this system was designed to ensure political representation for all religious groups in the country, it has resulted in the marginalization of certain groups, including women, and the creation of a sense of exclusion of minorities; thereby undermining the country's so-called democratic principles and eroding public trust in the government.

This chapter emphasizes the role that sectarianism and a confessional governance system play in perpetuating a feeble governance structure in Lebanon, riddled with corruption and failure to uphold the fundamental principles of gender justice and equality. It seeks to analyze the domestic and international policies and laws pertaining to females' representation in politics and diplomacy in Lebanon and assess their effects on gender equality and inclusivity in the nation.

3.2 Lebanon's Governance System: Sects Running the Show

Lebanon's political history dates back to the conclusion of World War I, during which the country was granted independence from France. The country's first constitution was established in 1926, providing for a "democratic parliamentary republic" system of government. However, Lebanon's governance system underwent significant changes in 1943 with the adoption of the National Pact and then in 1989 with the National Reconciliation Accord (aka Taif Agreement) in 1989 (Lebanese Parliament, 1926; Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon, 1989, 2004).

More specifically, Lebanon's governance system is based on a unique confessional model and an unbalanced power-sharing arrangement among 18 officially recognized religious and ethnic. This model was established at the country's independence in 1943 as a means of maintaining a balance of power among different communities and avoiding sectarian conflicts. However, political elites have since exploited this system, using sectarianism to maintain power rather than promote democracy and equality. The National Pact was a power-sharing agreement between the country's various religious groups that established a confessional system of governance, which continues to this day. This National Pact mandates that the President must be a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister a Muslim Sunni, and the Speaker of the Parliament a Muslim Shiite (The Institute on Religion and Public Policy, 2010). Other government positions are also allocated to different religious groups, creating a complex web of power-sharing arrangements. Consequently, Lebanon's confessional system has failed to deliver on its promises as a democracy, and it has become a source of corruption, inequality, and instability; undermining the democratic process and hindering the country's developmental progress.

Based on the 1989 national reconciliation and while 1926's Lebanese Constitution: 1. Declares within its preamble (H) to abolish political confessionalism as a national goal,

and 2. Calls in Article 95 to cancel the principle of confessional representation in the public sector, still 43 years later, this is far to be reached (Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon, 1995). Due to sectarianism, individuals often identify first and foremost with their religious group, rather than with the country as a whole; challenging how to build a cohesive national identity and hindering efforts to promote democracy and equal representation. Additionally, the sectarian divide in the country often results in a narrow focus on the interests of specific religious groups, with little regard for the needs and perspectives of women. This has resulted in a toxic political and diplomatic culture that is often exclusionary towards women and that perpetuates gender inequalities.

Lebanon's feminist history dates back to before its independence in 1943, but it was the post-independence era that saw the emergence of feminist movements that gained momentum and brought forth subsequent waves of feminism. The incident in 1934, where Deputy Sheikh Yussef Al Khazin proposed a bill granting women the right to vote in Lebanon, is a reminder of the historical struggle for gender parity and women's empowerment within the realm of political representation. The paucity of support garnered by the proposal in question, which culminated in its eventual defeat by a narrow margin of merely three votes, stands as a glaring testament to the tenacious impediments and oppositions that women have had to surmount in their endeavors to secure unmitigated access to the political arena (Shehadeh, 1999).

The Lebanese system was originally intended to protect minority rights and prevent sectarian conflict; however, it has been co-opted by political elites who use sectarianism to maintain power. Political parties and factions are often organized around sectarian lines, with leaders using religious rhetoric to appeal to their base; mobilizing their supporters and delegitimizing their opponents. This has led to a system of patronage, where political leaders distribute resources and services based on religious affiliation,

rather than need or merit. Such prioritization of the interests of the political leaders'

respective religious groups, in turn, means that women who do not belong to the dominant

religious group within a political party face additional barriers to entry and advancement

in diplomacy. Not only do women face major hurdles in breaking into the traditionally

male-dominated field of diplomacy, but they also often confront gender-based

discrimination and stereotyping based on their gender and are often not taken seriously in

political and diplomatic circles.

Lebanon passed a law granting women the right to vote and participate in political

candidacy in 1953, but it wasn't until a decade later, in 1963, that the first candidate was

elected to the country's parliament (IPU, 2023b). This was a significant milestone in

Lebanese history, as women's suffrage was an important step toward greater gender

equality and political participation. Although Lebanese women have gained the right to

vote, it is important to acknowledge that their representation in the country's political

arena has remained restricted, as women are frequently confronted with obstacles that

impede their engagement and progression in politics.

Furthermore, corruption and political paralysis have plagued Lebanon's governance

system, with sectarian interests often taking precedence over the needs and interests of the

population as a whole (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). In 2022, *Transparency*

International ranked Lebanon 150th out of 180 countries in its annual *Corruption*

Perceptions Index (CPI). This underscores the severe level of corruption that persists

within Lebanon's governmental and institutional frameworks, with little progress made

over the years to address the issue. The fact that the country has fallen six points in the

CPI since 2012 indicates that corruption has not only persisted but has worsened. The

consequences of this corruption are far-reaching, with citizens suffering from limited

access to basic services, widespread poverty, and economic inequality; contributing to

widespread dissatisfaction and unrest as demonstrated by the mass protests that erupted in 2019 and 2020. Yet, despite it all, Lebanon still stands out as a leading nation in gender parity for ministerial positions among its peers in the MENA region, with women holding 32% of all ministerial seats (WEF, 2022).

Interestingly, Lebanon has not had a First Speaker of the new legislature who is female (IPU, 2023b). In fact, Lebanon has never had a female First Speaker of Parliament as it has been exclusively held by male occupants since the establishment of the Lebanese parliament in 1922. The current First Speaker of Parliament is Nabih Berri, who has held the position since 1992.

As for the first female to be elected to the Lebanese parliament, it was Myrna Bustani who was elected in 1963 to fill the seat of her father Emile Bustani, who died in a plane crash (né à Beyrouth Films, 2019). This, in fact, unfortunately, reinforces Lebanon's political reality that hinders females' ability to break into the political field without political connections or family ties to secure party nominations and gain access to positions of power. Another example of a female inheriting political capital through familial connection is Nayla Mouawad, the widow of the past President of Lebanon René Mouwad who held office for 17 days before being assassinated in 1989. However, rather than establishing her own political power base, Nayla served as a placeholder for her son Michel, who eventually succeeded his father as a prominent Lebanese politician (United Nations, 2017). This phenomenon underscores Lebanon's political reality that often favors individuals with political connections or family ties, hence obstructing women's capacity to break into the political field and obtain party nominations or access to positions of power. This perpetuates the existing gender disparity in Lebanese politics, as women face an uphill battle to gain political representation based on their own merit and achievements.

In conclusion, Lebanon's governance system has resulted in a confessional democracy that shares power among different religious groups. The link between Lebanon's governance system and females' representation in politics and diplomacy is a critical matter for consideration, as it brings diverse perspectives to the negotiating table, challenges gender stereotypes, and promotes gender equality. Nevertheless, the realization of full gender equity in Lebanon's governance and political/diplomacy systems remains an elusive goal, indicating the need for sustained efforts to effect transformative change.

3.3 Achievements in Females' Political and Diplomatic Inclusion in Lebanon

Lebanon has a relatively progressive stance on females' rights compared to other countries in the region. Despite only a handful of females serving in key positions in the domestic and foreign service, the state has taken steps to increase females' inclusion in the political and diplomatic corps.

3.3.1 Examining Lebanese Women's Political and Diplomatic Success: International Policies, Laws, and Accomplishments

Lebanon has made some progress in increasing females' representation in diplomacy and politics by ratifying several international agreements and conventions that aim to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

1. The UDHR, a non-binding document adopted by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 1948, introduces the basic principles of human rights that should be respected and protected worldwide. While Lebanon has expressed support for and is a signatory to this document (UN GA, 1998), it has violated this agreement several

times and faced criticism for its poor record on protecting human rights (Alef - act for human rights, 2016; Kelly & Breslin, 2010).

2. Albeit with current reservations to certain paragraphs of articles 9, 16, and 29, Lebanon endorsed the CEDAW in 1997 (OHCHR, 2023a; United Nations General Assembly, 1979). However, due to weak compliance with ratified human rights and gender equality treaties, coupled with reservations to these treaties, discrimination against women persists in various areas, impeding progress and development in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2020). This stands in sharp contrast to the Republic of Lebanon's overall position towards its citizens and their rights and obligations - indeed, as the State strives to uphold principles of justice and human rights.

3. Lebanon ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR) in 1972, a binding treaty that aims to protect civil and political rights (OHCHR, 2023b). However, the country has been criticized for not fully respecting these rights, particularly during periods of political unrest and conflict. The Lebanese government has also been criticized for not investigating cases of torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2021; Amnesty International, 2023).

4. Lebanon ratified the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) in 1972, which is a binding treaty aimed to safeguard economic, social, and cultural rights (OHCHR, 2023b). Despite its ratification, the Republic of Lebanon has encountered formidable obstacles in facilitating universal access to fundamental services, namely healthcare, and education. Additionally, the nation grapples with acute economic challenges, characterized by pervasive

impoverishment and unemployment, which have had weighty bearings on the attainment of its economic and social entitlements.

5. Lebanon is a *Beijing Platform for Action* signatory, which is a global roadmap that prioritizes women's empowerment and gender equality (OHCHR, 2023b). The platform calls for creating domestic mechanisms to advance the status of women across all sectors and providing suitable personnel resources within and among ministries to enable them to perform their duties effectively.

6. While Lebanon has expressed support for both *UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) 1325 and 1820 resolutions on women, peace, and security* (NCLW & UN Women, 2019), it has faced challenges in fully implementing them, chiefly in light of the persisting socio-economic conflicts and political crises. Women in Lebanon continue to make up insignificant percentages of political participation in parliaments and ministerial positions, shares of senior positions in United Nations peacekeeping and political missions such as the *United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon* (UNIFIL), percentages in governance bodies of national human rights bodies, etc. (United Nations Press, 2023). As well, a notable example of Lebanese women taking up space in international courts is Micheline Braidi, a trial chamber judge at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (Special Tribunal for Lebanon, 2023).

A noteworthy point is that Lebanon is the top performer within the MENA region in terms of % share of women ambassadors, reaching a total of 24% share compared to the MENA region's 10% share of women ambassadors (Chehab, 2023). Overall, while Lebanon has signed and ratified many international agreements aimed at protecting human rights and promoting sustainable development, there is still much work to be done. Despite the narrow representation, there are some domestic government initiatives and laws in place that aim to promote women's inclusion in the field in Lebanon.

3.3.2 Women's Involvement and Influence in Lebanon's Politics and Diplomacy: Domestic Measures, Legal Context, and Accomplishments

Lebanon's pursuit of gender equality is driven by a network of national mechanisms, laws, and policies, each playing a unique role in promoting and advancing women's rights. For example, the Lebanese Penal Code includes provisions that protect women from discrimination and violence, and the Lebanese Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women. The promulgation and implementation of laws promoting women's representation in politics and diplomacy play a crucial role in mitigating gender-based barriers and gender inequality in the country.

The *National Commission for Lebanese Women* (NCLW), a key player in this national network, was established in 1998 to promote women's rights and gender mainstreaming in Lebanon, yet, it has limited resources and faces resistance from conservative elements in society (NCLW, 2023). The *NCLW* works to promote the implementation of CEDAW and other pertinent global accords concerning women's rights by advocating for women's active involvement in public and political domains.

Other than the NCLW, there are three other national schemes in place to ensure the progression of women's rights; which are the Minister of State's Office for the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth, the Women and Children Parliamentary Committee, and the Ministry of Social Affairs' Women's Department (UN Women, 2019b). Established by the Government of Lebanon in 2019, the aforementioned Office was created to address women's issues and enhance their potential and capacity development, as well as promote their economic empowerment. The Parliamentary Committee on Women and Children, formed in 2000, cooperates with the NCLW to study suggestions and draft laws regarding women and children and submit them to the plenary of the

Council for final consideration. Finally, the Ministry of Social Affairs' Women's Department works towards responding to women's needs and proposing budgets to monitor the necessary funds for implementation (UN Women, 2019b).

After the 1996 Women Affairs National Strategy, the NCLW in collaboration with the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA) formulated a comprehensive strategy between 2011 and 2021, aimed at alleviating gender disparities across various domains, including women's political engagement, educational and employment opportunities, legal and regulatory frameworks, and the prevention of GBV (NCLW, 2017). This innovative strategy comprises a range of interventions and initiatives, and it highlights twelve strategic objectives derived from international accords, the Lebanese Constitution and its amendments, and the Taif Accord of 1989. The strategic objectives endorse the creation of a more gender-sensitive legal system in Lebanon, including the amendment of laws and policies that discriminate against women.

Another significant work to be noted by the NCLW is the Lebanon National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 (2019-2022), which was developed in collaboration with UN Women and was endorsed by the Lebanese Government (NCLW & UN Women, 2019). The NAP is a comprehensive plan that seeks to promote gender equality in the country and address the barriers faced by women in various areas, including politics and diplomacy. The plan emphasizes five strategic priorities revolving around fostering women's participation in decision-making across all hierarchal levels, forestalling the emergence of conflict, safeguarding women and girls against gender-based violence, facilitating relief and recovery efforts, and fostering normative frameworks. Each of these priorities has a set of interventions and initiatives that promote women's participation in politics and foreign policy, including capacity-building programs, awareness-raising campaigns, and the development of affirmative action policies and gender-sensitive

systems (NCLW & UN Women, 2019). Despite the good intentions of the *NAP*, its implementation has been limited, and females' representation in politics and diplomacy remains muffled in the country.

A significant advancement towards enhancing females' political participation in Lebanon was realized by reviewing *Article 25 of Law No. 665*, dated 29/12/1997, which was subsequently amended by *Legislative Decree No. 118* dated 30/6/77, known as the *Municipalities Law*. This amendment allows married women who have relocated their personal status records to another municipality to run for a municipal council in the area where their name appears on the electoral list before their marriage. This is particularly important given that in Lebanon women are typically registered under their fathers' or husbands' names, preventing them from continuing their membership on municipal councils once they get married outside the municipality in which they were elected; hence preventing women from running for a municipal council in their place of birth or where their records were relocated after their marriage due to social barriers that regarded them as outsiders who were unfamiliar with the local community's affairs (UN Women, 2019b).

While the new legislations and policies present greater opportunities for women's political involvement, their impact on changing societal attitudes towards women's candidacy in politics and diplomacy remains unclear.

3.4 Challenges and Barriers to Female Politicians and Diplomats in Lebanon

Despite constitutional provisions and limited efforts by the Lebanese Government and civil society organizations (CSOs) to foster females' meaningful representation in politics and diplomacy, Lebanese women face a wide array of challenges and hurdles that

restrict their participation in this field within their home country. According to research by the WEF (2022), Lebanon fares poorly in terms of gender equality, as evidenced by its ranking of 119th out of 146 countries in the *Global Gender Gap Index*, and its ranking of 110th out of 146 countries in the political empowerment gender parity subindex. These rankings reflect significant disparities between genders in various spheres of life, encompassing education, vocational, and civic domains. This significant disparity is evident in the fact that only 8 out of 128 Members of Parliament (MPs) are female, accounting for a mere 6.25% of MPs (IPU, 2023b). The origins of this gender disparity are multifaceted and deeply entrenched in cultural and societal norms that perpetuate the notion of female inferiority. Political polarization also plays a role, as the absence of political will to promote women's inclusion in politics exacerbates the problem. Moreover, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions within the government and diplomatic corps and the paucity of legal and institutional frameworks that promote gender parity have further compounded the issue.

3.4.1 Political Polarization, Confessionalism, and Lack of Political Will

The Lebanese political system is characterized by deep-seated polarization, where rival political factions tend to prioritize their own interests at the expense of marginalized groups, including women. The political system is also plagued by clientelism and nepotism, limiting women's access to political power and representation. The dominance of men in political parties further exacerbates the challenge of women securing party nominations and gaining access to positions of power.

According to Ms. Cynthia Chidiac (personal communication, 25 April 2023), a Lebanese diplomat (served in Sierra Leone, South Africa, Germany, and at the mission of the UN in New York) and expert Legal Advisor with UN-Women, "Democratic traditions

or lack thereof are contributing to women being affected in terms of diplomatic representation." Ms. Chidiac (personal communication, 25 April 2023) also highlights how the diplomatic field generally operates on a merit-based system of representation. However, she highlights that issues arise in the areas of promotion and political appointments, where some ambassadors are appointed by politicians without even undergoing the national exam process as well as promotions being based on religious vacancies. Ms. Chidiac argues that this practice is problematic as it undermines the merit-based approach.

The country's struggle to form a functioning government in recent years, as well as the confessional system, has hindered efforts to pass meaningful reforms and address societal issues, leading to political paralysis and social unrest. Moreover, political instability and ongoing conflicts have contributed to the underrepresentation of women in politics and diplomacy (United Nations Lebanon, 2021). These ongoing political crises have impeded the government's ability to implement policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and females' representation in politics, as issues of regional interference, safety, and security take precedence over topics of gender equality. Overall, the absence of a stable government limits the enforcement of laws and policies designed to support and advance women's rights.

3.4.2 Familial, Cultural and Social Barriers

Cultural norms and gender stereotypes are significant barriers to females' representation in politics in Lebanon. These deeply ingrained norms and stereotypes often reinforce normative gender roles that restrict women's opportunities to participate in the public sphere. Lebanon's entrenched patriarchal and conservative norms not only impede women's engagement in public life but also intersect with the educational system and a

dearth of legal safeguards to deter workplace discrimination, thereby perpetuating gender biases and reinforcing patriarchal values.

Despite various initiatives, women's inclusion and representation in diplomacy in Lebanon remain narrow. The recent *IPU* study, which revealed that women in Lebanon comprise a mere 6.25% of the parliamentary body, all of whom are exclusively in the lower chamber and none in the upper chamber, represents a notably low percentage compared to other countries in the region (IPU, 2023b). This can be ascribed to cultural attitudes towards gender roles, a dearth of support and resources available for women in the political and diplomatic corps, and inadequate political will to enact policies and programs aimed at promoting women's representation in diplomacy. Lebanese political culture requires a "shift from a power-sharing culture into a responsibility-sharing one" argues Ms. Karma Ekmekji (personal communication, 20 April 2023), an Associate Fellow at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs and Lead Advisor on the WPS program. Here lies the need to shift from an individualistic mindset into a communal one. Ms. Chidiac (personal communication, 25 April 2023) also underscored the profound influence of alliances, familial ties, religious backgrounds, and political affiliations on women's affiliation in Lebanese politics. She astutely observed that political parties, in their overwhelming patriarchal nature, are predominantly led by men and primarily cater to men's interests and needs.

The political system in Lebanon is dominated by men while women are often viewed as secondary citizens and are not encouraged to pursue careers in politics and diplomacy. While quotas are a proven tool to escalate women's inclusion in political decision-making positions (OECD, 2015), Lebanon does not have a quota system for their representation in diplomatic affairs. As well, the absence of a quota system for women in politics and diplomacy and the lack of positive discrimination measures further hinder

women's entry into the political and diplomatic corps. Ultimately, the preponderance of patriarchal norms and values inherent in Lebanese society, alongside the predominance of male leadership in political spheres continue to limit women's political and diplomatic participation. This persisting gendered disparity, therefore, accentuates the need to actively foster gender-equality-oriented policies and initiatives aimed at dismantling the structural impediments and discriminatory practices that have historically hindered the access of women to leadership positions (OHCHR, 2022).

3.4.3 Either Absent or Discriminatory Legal and Institutional Frameworks

While the Lebanese Constitution provides some provisions that support gender equality and women's participation in political and public life, such provisions are not always upheld in practice. For instance, *Article 7 of the Constitution* states that all citizens are entitled to equal protection before the law, and *Article 8* guarantees personal freedom and dignity.

Although these provisions are meant to promote equal rights, they are not comprehensive enough to ensure the ideal political inclusion of women. Despite the constitutional guarantees, women still face discrimination and marginalization in different aspects of life, as several discriminatory laws and policies exist ranging between nationality, marital rights, divorce proceedings, parental authority, and child custody (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). In the *World Bank's recent 2023 Women, Business and the Law (WBL) report*, Lebanon has scored 58.8 out of 100 in the *2023 WBL Index*, amidst absent mandatory pension scheme for private sector workers, as well as gender gaps in assets, wages, and parenthood indicator levels (World Bank, 2023). This is partly due to the traditional patriarchal norms which are deeply rooted in Lebanese society and which the

Lebanese constitution upholds, posing significant obstacles for women who seek positions of power and influence.

While in 2006 there was a draft electoral law proposed by the National Commission for electoral law, the final law that was adopted dismissed the quota system with the excuse that it would be an "insult to women" (UN Women, 2021a; Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, 2017). To the date of writing this thesis, the gender quota law, which was developed by CSOs in cooperation with the UNDP, has not been yet adopted (UNDP, 2022). This lack of political will reflects the Lebanese government's limited commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the country.

Another issue lies in the regulatory framework governing the diplomatic corps of the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants which imposes restrictive measures on female candidates aspiring to take the entrance examination. Several interviewees touched upon the practice of marriage bans, or restrictions on married women serving in diplomatic positions. They shared that as per the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants' bylaws and rules of procedure, unmarried women are eligible to sit for the examination, whereas married women are precluded from doing so. Miss C. Chidiac (personal communication, 25 April 2023) agrees that marriage bans are often implemented under the assumption that married women would not be able to fulfill the demanding responsibilities of diplomatic positions, or that their marital status would undermine their credibility as representatives of their countries.

3.5 Conclusion

In summary, the complex interplay of sectarianism, confessionalism, and corruption has contributed to the persistence of a weak and ineffective governance

structure in Lebanon. Despite constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens and some efforts made by the government and CSOs, females' representation in politics and diplomacy remains limited due to several impediments. Addressing these issues and barriers requires a deep commitment to reforming the political system and promoting inclusive and equitable governance, devoid of any sectarian influences, and grounded in principles of meritocracy, transparency, and accountability.

CHAPTER FOUR

SAUDI ARABIA'S MONARCHY: ISLAMIC LAW PULLING THE STRINGS

4.1 Introduction

In the heart of the Arabian Peninsula lies the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) where towering skyscrapers coexist with ancient Bedouin traditions. Yet beneath the glittering facade of this wealthy nation, there lies a stark reality that belies the country's reputation as a progressive and prosperous kingdom, particularly when it comes to women's rights and empowerment. In the realm of gender equality, Saudi Arabia has struggled to keep pace with the rest of the world, as it has been the subject of intense scrutiny by the international community due to its limitations on women's rights and political activism. At the root of the issue lies the country's governance system, which is an absolute monarchy ruled by the Al Saud family. While the government has made efforts to introduce some reforms, religious leaders have been vocal opponents of these changes, arguing that such reforms would undermine traditional Islamic values and customs that form the foundation of the Kingdom's society. The reality for many women in the country is one of limited access to justice and opportunities, compounded by a guardianship system, restrictive policies, and societal norms.

Through examining how the Sharia law and absolute monarchy intersect with women's rights in Saudi Arabia, this chapter highlights the systemic barriers that prevent women from participating fully in diplomatic representation. By investigating the various policies and laws related to gender equality in the kingdom's diplomatic arena, this chapter aims to assess the effectiveness of such measures in promoting women's empowerment

and achieving gender equality. Furthermore, it will explore how international pressure and advocacy can help to push for progress in this area, and the potential for meaningful change in Saudi Arabia's political landscape.

4.2 Saudi Arabia's Governance System: Sharia Law Holding the Reins

Saudi Arabia has a unique political structure that is based on the principles of Islamic '*Sharia*' law and tribal traditions. The strict interpretation of Sharia law has resulted in gender-specific restrictions and limitations, including women's exclusion from political and diplomatic positions. The governance system in Saudi Arabia is characterized by a highly centralized and authoritarian political structure, with little to no political opposition allowed. The country has no political parties, and political dissent is met with severe repression (Freedom House, 2022b). Power is predominantly vested in the hands of the royal family, who wield an overarching authority that is largely grounded in a system of traditional tribal governance. Despite some political and economic changes in the country since the late 20th century, this governance structure has remained relatively unchanged. The prevalence of tribal identity is a testament to its enduring importance as a pillar of social control in Saudi Arabia. Despite the presence of a modern state bureaucracy, political sway is frequently contingent upon tribal affiliations. Consequently, tribal sheikhs wield significant clout within their respective tribes and exert a substantial level of influence over both local and national affairs (Britannica, n.a.).

Saudi Arabia's Basic Law derives its authority from Islamic law and the Quran, which is interpreted by the religious establishment in the kingdom that shapes the country's legal system and governance (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). The strict interpretation of Sharia law has resulted in gender-specific restrictions and limitations that permeate all aspects of the country's social, political, and economic life. The religious establishment's

strict adherence to conservative interpretations of Islamic law has been used to justify

discriminatory practices against women and limit their rights and freedoms. In turn, the

religious establishment's influence in shaping the country's legal system and governance

has also perpetuated gender inequality (Kuncic & Andrés, 2021).

The interests of Saudi Arabia in progressing along the lines of modernization and

development have shifted its conservative religious policies to become more moderate

with respect to women's rights; thereby embarking on a series of legal and social reforms

aimed at promoting social and cultural openness. The 2004 royal decree, which affirmed

gender equality in all matters related to Saudi nationality, represented a landmark

achievement in the ongoing struggle for women's rights in the country (UN CEDAW,

2007). The decree sought to rectify the deeply ingrained gender biases that had long

prevented women from enjoying the same rights and privileges as their male counterparts.

However, while the decree was an important step towards achieving greater gender

equality, it did not immediately translate into substantive improvements in the status of

women in Saudi Arabia.

Efforts to promote women's participation in the labor force and increase gender

diversity in non-traditional employment have involved relaxing religious restrictions and

improving working conditions for women (UNDP, 2019). The recent transformation of

social restrictions in Saudi Arabia, particularly concerning women's rights, has been

striking. The lifting of the driving ban for women was a major milestone and represented a

significant step towards greater gender equality in the country. Additionally, the relaxation

of rules surrounding the wearing of the abayas and the mixing of genders in public spaces

are also indications of a shifting social landscape. These changes have not come without

opposition as some seek to maintain the status quo. The religious police, who once

wielded considerable authority in enforcing strict social codes fueled by extreme

ideologies, have watched with displeasure as their authority has been eroded. While the strict enforcement of religious and moral codes was considered a means of safeguarding the country's Islamic values, it also contributed to the marginalization and oppression of certain groups, particularly women (Arab News, 2019; France 24, 2022).

Despite these efforts, females' representation in domestic politics and foreign policy remains limited, as they are still largely absent from high-level political positions and diplomatic roles, which continue to be dominated by men. This situation reflects the deep-seated cultural and societal barriers that women face in Saudi Arabia, where traditional gender roles and cultural norms continue to shape social and political dynamics. Achieving genuine gender equality in the labor force in Saudi Arabia remains a distant prospect, as the strict interpretation of Sharia law, which undergirds the patriarchal social order, along with deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms, poses formidable impediments to women's political empowerment in Saudi Arabia.

4.3 From Margins to Center: Advancements in Women's Inclusion in Saudi Arabia's Politics and Diplomacy

Over the past few years, Saudi Arabia has undertaken several significant measures aimed at increasing females' representation in diplomacy and political leadership positions. These steps mark a departure from women's historical exclusion from public and political life in the country, which has long been rooted in the country's conservative interpretation of Islamic law and deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms. While progress has been slow and there are still significant barriers to overcome, the adoption of more inclusive policies and laws, coupled with the successful appointment of women to key leadership positions, has provided hope that meaningful change is possible in the

realm of gender equality in Saudi Arabia; yielding positive results, with an increasing number of women now occupying positions in Saudi Arabia's domestic and foreign service.

4.3.1 Examining Advancements and Obstacles of Women's Political and Diplomatic Representation in Saudi Arabia: International Policies, Laws, and Accomplishments

The Saudi government has recently enacted different policies and laws to improve women's political participation. One of the most significant is the CEDAW, which KSA endorsed and ratified in 2000 albeit with reservations to certain paragraphs of *Articles 9 and 29*, including articles related to marriage and family law (OHCHR, 2023c; United Nations General Assembly, 1979). Such ratification was a significant moment for women's rights in the country, as it signaled the government's commitment to improving women's status and promoting gender equality.

Overall, while there is still much work to be done to improve women's representation in politics in Saudi Arabia, the country's involvement in discussions with the CEDAW Committee is a positive sign of its commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. By continuing to engage in these discussions and implementing the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee, Saudi Arabia can further advance females' rights in the country and contribute to a more inclusive and diverse political system (OHCHR, 2018).

The *World Bank's 2023 WBL report* praised Saudi Arabia's economy for its strides toward progress amidst its "historically larger legal gender gaps." The Kingdom's codification of its first-ever personal status law in 2022, grounded in Islamic Sharia Law, represents a significant milestone in this regard. However, while the government has eased some restrictions on women's freedom of choice since 2019, the legislative landscape

remains limited in the areas of women's rights in marriage and mobility. Particularly, Saudi Arabia has scored 71.3 out of 100 in the *2023 WBL Index*, a substantial increase from previous years, demonstrating that the country is moving in the right direction in its efforts to promote gender equality (World Bank, 2023).

A noteworthy example of Saudi women's representation in international organizations is the appointment of one as Director of the UNFPA (United Nations, 2017). More recently, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud's appointment as the Saudi ambassador to the United States in February 2019 was a momentous development, marking the first female envoy in Saudi Arabia's history. This milestone is indicative of the country's increasing recognition of women's capabilities and the creation of avenues for them to excel professionally. As of 2023, five female diplomats, Princess Reema, Haifa al-Jadea, Inas al-Shahwan, Nisreen al-Shibel, and Amal Yahya al-Moallimi, are serving as Saudi ambassadors, further reinforcing this notion (Alarabiya News, 2023).

Accordingly, despite limited involvement, the Kingdom's participation in international forums and treaties demonstrates its commitment to advancing women's rights and gender equality, which has positively influenced its domestic policies and laws on women's political and diplomatic involvement.

4.3.2 Women's Involvement and Influence in Saudi Arabia's Politics and Diplomacy: Domestic Measures, Legal Context, and Accomplishments

Saudi Arabia's national women's machinery, the Ministry of Social Affairs, has implemented several policies and laws aimed at advancing females' representation in domestic politics and foreign policy, majorly influenced by international policies, ratifications, and agendas.

For instance, the Saudi government has established a quota system that requires a minimum representation of women in municipal councils, as well as the Shura Council, which is the country's advisory council (HRW, 2011). This measure was introduced through a Royal Order which amended the previously all-male Consultative Council's composition, expanding its membership to include and grant women the right to participate in municipal elections and run for office by 2015. This announcement was followed by Royal Decree 44, which amended Article 3 of the Statute of the Shura Council providing for a minimum level of female representation in the council (United Nations, 2016). The amendment reserved 20% of the Council's seats exclusively for female members, marking a progressive step towards greater gender equality in the country's traditionally male-dominated political spaces (IPU, 2023c). While this electoral quota has increased the number of women in the Council, it remains a small step in addressing the gender disparities in Saudi Arabian politics. However, this measure has provided an opportunity for women to participate in decision-making processes, break down gender barriers, and challenge the gender norms that have historically hindered their political participation.

Launched in 2016, Vision 2030 is a testament to the government's strong political will which emphasizes the importance of empowering women, increasing their economic participation, and capitalizing on their abilities and knowledge. This comprehensive blueprint, in turn, aims to contribute to the overall development of Saudi society toward building a more prosperous and inclusive future for all. Vision 2030's pillars are embracing transparency, accountability, sustainability, and effectiveness (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016).

Through the amendments introduced by 2019's Royal Decree No. 684 of 27/11/1440 H, and reinforced in Articles 2, 3, and 34, Saudi Arabia has been taking steps

toward promoting gender equality and combatting the pervasive issue of the gender pay gap by ensuring the right to equal pay and wages (UNDP, 2019). This step towards wage parity ensures that women are not discriminated against in the workplace and are paid fairly for their work, which can help to increase their economic independence, financial stability, and overall empowerment. According to a statement made by Ahmed al-Rajhi, the Kingdom's Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, female labor participation in Saudi Arabia reached an all-time high in 2022, peaking at an impressive 37% (Al Arabiya Network, 2023). This milestone underscores the Kingdom's ongoing endeavors to advance gender diversity and equity in the workforce and is a testament to the resilience and determination of Saudi women in the face of historical barriers to employment.

This influx of women in the workforce is attributed to the Kingdom's reforms and decrees, to promote inclusivity and diversity in the labor market, as well as the introduction of numerous incentives to enrich women's positive image in the workplace (Arab News, 2022). While most Saudi women were found to be employed in the education, retail, and wholesale sectors, the year 2016 marked the appointment of the first female judge in KSA, although to a lower-level court (Arab News, 2016).

The Saudi Human Rights Commission's establishment of a specialized branch within the Commission, dedicated to addressing women's rights, signifies a concerted effort by the Saudi government to enhance gender equality and combat gender discrimination. This laudable initiative has resulted in the appointment of female members to various State councils, and their participation in religious jurisprudence, as well as decision-making processes. Furthermore, women have been entrusted with the task of initiating interactive dialogues aimed at devising strategies for improving their social status in Saudi society (OHCHR, 2018). Another noteworthy Vision 2030 initiative is the

Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education's 2011 establishment of the Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) Center for Promising Research in Social Research and Women's Studies, which provides research and education programs on social issues, women's rights, and empowerment (PNU, 2023). Moreover, the Ministry of Human Resource and Social Development established the Women's Empowerment Agency in 2019 tasked with the creation of initiatives and projects that facilitate the empowerment of women and individuals with disabilities; with the primary objective of promoting gender equality in the Saudi labor market. The Qiyadat platform has been established with the aim of empowering women and promoting their advancement as leaders within the workforce. It seeks to create a supportive and enabling work environment for women to thrive and realize their full potential in the workplace (Saudi Arabian Government, 2023).

In recent years, the KSA's progress toward gender equality has been reflected in the appointment of women to various key positions in government committees and chambers of commerce. The 2010 governmental announcement allowing female lawyers to represent women in family cases and the subsequent appointment of the first female trainee lawyer, Arwa al-Hujaili, in 2013 are laudable steps towards bridging the gender gap in this area (Arab News, 2013). As well, in 2012, Muneera Al Osaimi was assigned as Assistant Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Health's medical services affairs department (Alarabiya News, 2012), and in 2014, six women were appointed as Shura Committee deputy chairpersons, namely for the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Administration and Human Resources Committee, the Education and Scientific Research Committee, the Culture, Media, Tourism and Antiquities Committee, the Human Rights and Monitoring Authorities, the Health Affairs and Environment Committee (Alarabiya News, 2014). Furthermore, recent breakthroughs in 2022 have witnessed a significant acceleration in the country's efforts toward gender equality. The appointment of the first woman Deputy

Secretary-General of the Saudi Cabinet and the first woman to head the Saudi Human Rights Commission are significant markers of this progressive trajectory (Saudi Gazette, 2022; The National News, 2022). An important figure to mention is the significant increase in the number of women ambassadors representing Saudi Arabia, rising from 0% to 5% between 2018 and 2023 (Chehab, 2023). If this trend continues, Saudi Arabia will likely catch up and become on par with other countries in terms of female empowerment in politics and diplomacy within the next 5 to 10 years, one of the interviewees specialized in women and diplomacy indicates (personal communication, 18 April 2023).

The lifting of restrictions on women's rights, while still limited in many respects, epitomizes a momentous transformation in perceptions pertaining to gender parity within the Kingdom, threatening the Saudi monarchic regime's legitimacy and traditional socio-cultural authority. After all, it is up to the government and society as a whole to continue to build on these changes and work towards a more equitable future for all its citizens.

4.4 Challenges and Barriers to Female Politicians and Diplomats in Saudi Arabia

Given forbidden political parties and criminalized political dissent, the political system in the KSA is plagued with undue obstacles challenging political pluralism and participation. The monarchic system largely precludes the general public from participating in free and fair elections amidst heavy influence from tribal and religious leaders as well as largely opaque governmental functions (Freedom House, 2022b). Additionally, while the KSA is one of 2022's most improved countries in closing their gender gap; having the highest increased parity in workforce participation, it has the lowest level of parity for ministerial positions ranking at a staggering 0% (WEF, 2022).

The *WEF's Global Gender Gap Report of 2022* paints a disheartening picture of gender equality in Saudi Arabia, with the country ranking poorly in comparison to its regional and global peers. Specifically, the report places Saudi Arabia at 127th out of 146 countries in its *Global Gender Gap Index*, highlighting the extensive gender-based disparities that still exist in the country (WEF, 2022). Furthermore, *WEF's 2022* political empowerment gender parity subindex ranks Saudi Arabia at a meager 132nd out of 146, underscoring the urgent need for the Saudi government to prioritize gender equality initiatives and work towards eliminating the persistent gender disparities in the country.

4.4.1 Legal and Institutional Restrictions

At the international level, Saudi Arabia has not yet ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* nor the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (OHCHR, 2023c). Under the Saudi legal system, women are considered to be legal minors and are subject to a male relative's guardianship (Freedom House, 2022b). This arrangement renders women incapable of making decisions that affect their lives without first obtaining their male guardian's consent. According to UNDP (2019), the current legal framework fails to ensure gender parity, resulting in limited protection from gender-based violence (GBV) in various domains such as criminal laws pertaining to marital rape, personal status laws governing inheritance, and labor laws imposing legal constraints on women's participation in the workforce. While the passage of Saudi Arabia's first codified personal status law in 2022 is an important development in the country's legal system, the law fails to achieve its intended purpose of being comprehensive and progressive. Instead, it codified male guardianship and reinforces gender discrimination against women in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody of children (HRW, 2023a; OHCHR, 2018).

For example, the requirement for women to obtain male guardian approval for important decisions such as marriage and travel, and the lack of legal protections for women in areas such as marriage, divorce, and child custody. Women also face inadequate access to justice, with the legislative system often failing to hold perpetrators of violence and discrimination against women accountable (HRW, 2022a).

The guarantee of the principle of "justice, shura (consultation) and equality" in general, as stated in *Article 8 of the Basic Law of Governance* (Saudi Embassy, 1992), has been interpreted in a gender-neutral way, which means that it does not specifically address the issue of gender equality or gender-based discrimination. This has limited the legal basis for challenging discriminatory practices against women and has made it more difficult to hold institutions and individuals accountable for gender-based discrimination. The absence of provisions that safeguard gender parity and prevent discrimination based on sex or gender in the *Basic Law of Governance* is reflective of the Saudi Kingdom's profoundly conservative interpretation of Islamic law, which has historically prioritized the rights and roles of men over women. The significant disparity in Saudi Arabia's official parliament, the Shura Council "*Majlis Ash-Shura*," is evident with only 30 out of 151 Members of Parliament (MPs) being female, accounting for a mere 19.87 % of MPs (IPU, 2023c).

As well, accessing courts in Saudi Arabia is an obstacle in and of itself for women, as they must rely on male relatives or lawyers to represent them. To make matters worse, Saudi Arabia operates without a written penal code. This leaves individuals at the mercy of individual judges' interpretation of Sharia law (Kelly & Breslin, 2010).

Despite recent efforts to loosen restrictions on women's employment, the country still has one of the lowest female employment rates globally. As such, it remains uncertain

whether Saudi society will fully embrace the changes, given the deeply entrenched cultural and societal norms that hinder women's empowerment.

4.4.2 Cultural, Religious, and Social Conservative Values

For many years, women in Saudi Arabia have faced strict gender segregation laws and mobility constraints, education, and employment opportunities consistently confronted with limited access to education, employment, and other fundamental aspects of societal participation; stifling their capacity for broader social and economic contributions. These restrictions are often justified on religious and cultural grounds, with proponents arguing that they are necessary to maintain social order and protect the sanctity of the family. Despite the absence of legal impediments to women's involvement in public office and electoral processes, the existence of deep-rooted societal and cultural factors may still limit women's access to these opportunities. Furthermore, there remain persistent concerns surrounding the treatment of women's rights advocates and the curtailment of freedom of expression and assembly (OHCHR, 2018).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has long relied on a conservative interpretation of Islam to justify its restrictions on women's rights and traditionally relied on conservative religious scholars to legitimize its authority (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). Therefore, any challenge to this status quo, such as feminist activism, can be seen as a threat to the legitimacy of the regime's religious and cultural authority, challenging this conservative dominance by demanding greater political rights and representation for women. Additionally, feminist activism in Saudi Arabia has been compared to radical networks and seen as a threat to the family unit and traditional religious discourse; being considered a mere tool used by foreign agendas to Westernize Saudi society (Alhusein & Al-Sudairi, 2019).

The *Article 47 of the Basic Law* guarantees the right to litigation on an equal basis for Saudi Arabia's citizens and residents alike (UNDP, 2019). However, in practice, women face significant obstacles to accessing justice, particularly in cases involving gender-based discrimination. Women may face social stigma and retaliation for reporting discrimination, and the state-supported interpretation of Islamic law has been used to justify discriminatory practices and attitudes toward women.

Additionally, the freedom to choose a profession for Saudi women is still challenged by social norms, whereby the vast majority of working women are employed in the public sector, out of which 84% work in education (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). This leaves limited opportunities for women to break into male-dominated industries.

The women's movement in many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, has been characterized by fragmentation, and this is particularly true in the case of the movement for increased political rights and representation (UN Women Arab States, 2015). In KSA, for example, there have been multiple women's groups and activists working toward women's rights, but they have not always been able to work together effectively. This fragmentation can stem from a variety of factors, including differing political ideologies, religious views, and strategic approaches. One factor contributing to fragmentation is the lack of a clear agenda for women's political empowerment. While many women's groups may share a broad goal of political representation, they may have differing views on what this entails and how best to achieve it. Some may focus on advocating for legal reforms, while others may focus on building grassroots support or engaging in direct action. In addition, religious and cultural differences can also contribute to fragmentation within the women's movement. For example, in Saudi Arabia, some women who support more traditional interpretations of Islam while others advocate for more progressive

interpretations. These differences can lead to disagreements over issues such as the role of women in society and the appropriate methods for achieving political representation.

4.5 Conclusion

To sum up, Saudi Arabia's governance system is a unique blend of Islamic Sharia law and tribal traditions, with the ruling Al Saud family holding significant political power. The strict interpretation of Sharia law has resulted in gender-specific restrictions and limitations that continue to shape the political and social framework of the country. However, the monarchic government has also launched a series of ambitious economic and social reforms aimed at promoting progress and prosperity.

CHAPTER FIVE

TUNISIA'S CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM: FEMINIST LEGACY IN JEOPARDY

5.1 Introduction

The aftermath of President Kais Saied's ascension to power has been marked by an unanticipated and deeply troubling shift in Tunisia's political climate. Specifically, the suspension of parliament by the President, a move widely regarded as an auto-coup, has enabled the consolidation of power in his hands, and the implementation of an almost autocratic system of governance. The transformation of the political landscape towards authoritarianism has alarmed both the populace of Tunisia and the international community, who fear for the future of the country's democratic progress. Although the 2022 constitution provides a legal framework for democratic governance, the concentration of power in the hands of the president, coupled with the steady erosion of democratic norms and institutions, poses a severe threat to Tunisia's democratic trajectory. Consequently, the stability and inclusivity of the Tunisian democracy, which has long been a beacon of hope in the region, are presently in peril.

As for women's empowerment in the country, Tunisia is considered a pioneer in promoting women's rights and gender equality in the MENA region; recognized as one of the most progressive countries in the Arab world when it comes to women's rights and a top performer in the *Global Gender Gap report* year after year (WEF, 2022). In light of these developments, President Saied needs to take concrete steps toward the meaningful realization of women's rights and ensure that Tunisia's feminist heritage is not threatened.

This chapter delves into Tunisia's governance system, particularly in relation to women's inclusion in politics and diplomacy. The chapter will start with an overview of Tunisia's governance system, highlighting the current turmoil and uncertainty in the country. This will provide context for the subsequent discussion of women's representation in politics and diplomacy in Tunisia. It will explore the positive policies, laws, and achievements related to women's representation in politics and diplomacy, both internationally and domestically. However, it will also address the challenges and barriers faced by women diplomats in Tunisia. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Tunisia's political governance system as it pertains to women's representation in politics and diplomacy, examining both the successes and challenges the country faces in this regard.

5.2 Tunisia's Governance System: Regression, Turmoil, and Uncertainty

Tunisia has undergone a tumultuous political journey since the Arab uprisings in 2010, the overthrow of its longtime autocrat in 2011, the adoption of a new Constitution in 2014, and the adoption of another constitution in 2022. The 2011 revolution represented a momentous opportunity for the country to break free from the oppressive authoritarianism of the past and build a more democratic and prosperous future. Despite initial hopes and progress after the 2011 revolution, Tunisia's democratic transition has been fragile and vulnerable to setbacks, as demonstrated by the recent presidential measures to suspend the parliament and dismiss the government.

The country's transition to democracy has seen the implementation of political and civil liberties for its citizens, but it has been marred by endemic corruption, economic instability, security threats, and difficulties in achieving transitional justice. The political landscape in Tunisia took a dramatic turn in 2021, with the country's status declining from

Free to Partly Free (Freedom House, 2022a). Saied's rise to power was fueled by a backlash against the failures of consensus politics, which had resulted in gridlock and stagnation. However, his consolidation of power and crackdown on journalists, activists, and opposition figures have revealed the dangers of unchecked power. His suppression of dissent is deeply concerning as it undermines the democratic gains that Tunisia has made since the overthrow of autocrat Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's regime.

Tunisia's current political governance system is outlined in the 2022 constitution, which establishes the country as a presidential republic with a bicameral parliament. However, it is widely acknowledged that most of the power is consolidated in masse with the presidency (U.S. Department of State, 2023b), leading to concerns over democratic backsliding, especially in the wake of President Kais Saied's decision to suspend the parliament in 2021.

By changing the constitution to serve his own interests and putting it to a referendum vote, and by trying opposition figures in military courts, President Saied has shown a willingness to undermine democratic institutions and processes. In July 2021, the Republic of Tunisia witnessed an unprecedented move by its President, Kais Saied, in unilaterally dismissing the democratically elected government, suspending parliamentary activity, and implementing severe curbs on civil liberties as a means of quashing any dissent against his actions; invoking *Article 80* of the constitution, that grants the president the authority to undertake "necessary measures" in response to "imminent" dangers that could undermine the stability and sovereignty of the state. (HRW, 2022b) However, such an action was not in compliance with the constitution amidst an absent mechanism for an independent review of Saied's actions. In response to President Saied's actions, public frustration increased, and street protests by both supporters and opponents of different factions escalated (Freedom House, 2022a). Despite that, Saied imposed additional

emergency measures in August 2021, announcing a new prime minister and government deprived of parliamentary approval (HRW, 2023b). Since then, in 2022 and 2023, Tunisia continued to experience serious human rights violations that have threatened the fundamental freedoms of its citizenry. These violations have taken many forms, including, but not limited to, unwarranted constraints on free expression, the repression of CSOs and media outlets, the perpetration of GBV against women, and the imposition of arbitrary limitations under the auspices of the state of emergency.

One of the main issues with the December 2022 parliamentary elections was the low turnout, which was estimated at around 11 percent. In addition, an electoral law introduced in September of that year eliminated quotas for women and youth, which resulted in lower women's representation in the parliament (Yerkes & Al-Mailam, 2022). These factors led to concerns about the legitimacy of the election results and the overall health of Tunisia's democracy (U.S. Department of State, 2023b). The turn towards authoritarianism is a cause for concern as the country's democracy appears to be eroding and its future remains uncertain.

Tunisia's political landscape is characterized by diverse ideologies and interests represented by numerous political parties. Despite the relatively free formation and operation of parties in the post-2011 era, recent events have cast a shadow on political freedom in Tunisia. While opposition parties have been able to participate competitively in political processes, their ability to influence government formation and policymaking has been curtailed by recent developments. President Saied's suspension of parliament and subsequent centralization of power in 2021 have contributed to a lack of transparency in the country's political processes and future policy direction. In contrast, Tunisia's constitution enshrines fundamental human rights, including "freedom of thought, opinion, expression, information, and publication", albeit with certain limitations. While private

discussions largely reflect an "open and free" atmosphere, there exists a sense of apprehension regarding the consequences of voicing opinions on sensitive subjects, such as "criticism of the military" and "sexual orientation" (Freedom House, 2022a). According to the latest 2022 report released by *Transparency International*, Tunisia's position in the *Corruption Perceptions Index* has deteriorated significantly; dropping from 70th place in the previous year's ranking to 85th place among 180 countries evaluated. This downward trend is a cause for concern especially given the political instability and changes in governance in Tunisia under President Saied's administration which may affect the country's overall corruption perception.

The situation of women's rights in Tunisia is another cause for concern, with President Saied's inaction exacerbating the issue. Despite the landmark achievement of appointing a female prime minister, Najla Bouden, Saied has given her little autonomy, limiting her capacity to advance the cause of women's rights. The continued discrimination against women in inheritance rights is also troubling, epitomized by the fact that the proposed bill by former President Beji Caid Essebsi in 2018 aimed at establishing parity in inheritance rights was never ratified. This regrettable state of affairs has been exacerbated by President Kais Saied's avowed resistance to any initiative aimed at remedying the gender-based disparities in inheritance. Moreover, the recent dissolution of parliament by President Saied has precluded any meaningful legislative action on matters about women's rights, including the expansion and consolidation of inheritance rights. Although the new 2022 constitution proclaims that women and men are to be regarded as "equal in rights and duties" and "equal before the law without any discrimination" and pledges to eradicate GBV, an area of apprehension arises from the assertion that Tunisia is an integral "part of the Islamic Umma", and from the concomitant assumption that it is incumbent upon the state to carry out the aims of Islam. This latter provision may provide a basis for the

imposition of restrictions on civil liberties, particularly those pertaining to the rights of women, on the grounds of religious interpretations (HRW, 2023b).

The WEF's research conducted in 2022 reveals that Tunisia's performance on gender equality is suboptimal, with a ranking of 120th out of 146 countries in its *Global Gender Gap Index*. It is worth noting that Tunisia witnessed a negative trend in the gender gap scores for the economic participation and opportunity subindex as the country continues to struggle in achieving labor force participation parity, occupying the 140th rank out of 146 countries in this subindex. Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges, Tunisia has made notable progress in terms of political empowerment parity, ranking 68th out of 146 countries. According to the MENA region classification adopted in this thesis, Tunisia stands as the leading country in the region in the political empowerment parity subindex (WEF, 2022).

In conclusion, while Tunisia boasts a diverse range of political parties that espouse varying ideologies and champion disparate interests, recent events have raised concerns about political liberty within the nation. It remains to be seen how the constitutional revision process and the recent January 2023 parliamentary elections will play out and whether they will help to restore stability and democracy to the country or to regress into political turmoil and state fragility.

5.3 Leading the Way: Positive Policies, Laws, and Achievements in Females' Representation in Tunisian Politics and Diplomacy

The country's efforts towards gender equality have been lauded in the Arab world, owing to a combination of top-down and bottom-up measures. Specifically, Tunisia's past 2014 Constitution guarantees equal rights and duties for men and women, without

discrimination. This was followed by passing one of the most progressive gender parity

laws in the world, Basic Law No. 16 of 2014, which mandates political parties to alternate

the members of their candidate lists between men and women, with half of their lists being

headed by a woman.

5.3.1 Examining Advancements and Obstacles of the Political and Diplomatic Representation of Women in Tunisia: International Policies, Laws, and Accomplishments

Tunisia has made significant progress towards promoting women's representation

in politics and diplomacy, as evidenced by its adoption of various policies, laws, and

initiatives in past and recent years.

Notably, Tunisia ratified the CEDAW in 1985, with zero reservations (OHCHR,

2023d; United Nations General Assembly, 1979). Accordingly, this has prompted the

Tunisian government to take several measures to ensure the treaty's effective

implementation; such as the government's adoption of a national plan to combat violence

against women and the involvement of Tunisia with experts of the Committee on the

Elimination of Discrimination against Women through regular communication means to

monitor the implementation of CEDAW (OHCHR, 2023e).

Furthermore, Tunisia is a signatory to the UDHR from which the binding United

Nations covenants ICCPR and ICESCR have emerged. Tunisia's commitment to gender

equality is reflected in its ratification of the ICCPR and the ICESCR in 1969, which led to

the adoption of several measures to increase women's participation in political processes

and promote their economic and social rights. These measures encompass the adoption of

a quota system mandating females' representation in parliament, the establishment of a

fund to support women entrepreneurs, and the launching of measures to ensure equal pay

for equal work (Tunisian MFFES, 2016).

Besides, Tunisia was among the countries present at the *Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995*, where the global policy framework, known as the *Beijing Platform for Action*, was adopted. This framework provides a comprehensive set of measures that countries can employ to promote gender equality and empower women, and Tunisia's presence at the conference reflects its commitment to advancing women's rights on a global scale. Since then, Tunisia has taken several measures to implement this framework, including the adoption of laws to protect women's rights, the establishment of gender-sensitive policies, the adoption of the *National Plan of Action for Women*, and the promotion of women's participation in all areas of society; especially for women in marginalized rural areas (Tunisian MFFES, 2016).

Additionally, Tunisia has made significant progress in implementing *UNSCRs 1325 and 1820*, which focus on the *WPS* agenda. This progress is evident in Tunisia's adoption and implementation of its *NAP on WPS* and *UNSCR 1325* in 2018, with the support of UN Women and in collaboration with the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Seniors (MFFES) and additional executive entities, CSOs, elected officials, and youths (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2018; Tunisian MFFES, 2017a; UN Women, 2021b).

These efforts have contributed to Tunisia's progress in promoting gender equality and empowering women in various sectors, including political participation, economic opportunities, and social rights.

5.3.2 Women's Involvement and Influence in Tunisia's Politics and Diplomacy: Domestic Measures, Legal Context, and Accomplishments

Tunisia's progressive stance on women's rights and equality has garnered recognition across the Arab world. Its progress toward gender equality is largely attributed

to the efforts of female elected officials and a robust civil society, encompassing labor unions and nongovernmental organizations. Through advocacy for gender parity, these groups applied political pressure and utilized public outcry and protests to draw attention to the issue. The resultant external pressure on government officials compelled them to take action, leading to the enactment of electoral gender quotas and the passing of a landmark law prohibiting violence against women in 2017 (Yerkes & Mckeown, 2018).

In regard to its 2014 constitution, Tunisia has taken strides to foster gender parity in political participation by enacting electoral process legislation that embodies parity and alternation principles; a process which they call "*horizontal and vertical*" gender parity in *Article 49 of the electoral law* (UN Women, 2016). The constitutional provision for parity in elected assemblies mandates that men and women have equal representation in these bodies, thereby recognizing the prominence of women's equal representation and influence in political processes. In conjunction with parity, alternation practices, which involve the rotation of candidates from different genders on electoral lists, have also been enacted in Tunisia's electoral process legislation to encourage gender balance in the political sphere.

Tunisia has established a comprehensive set of national strategies to promote gender equality and empower women, which involves integrating a gender approach into public policies and programs at both local and national levels (Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Seniors, 2020). The country recognizes that women face multiple forms of violence and discrimination, and thus aims to address all manifestations of these issues. One of the key pillars of Tunisia's strategy is to support women's economic empowerment by providing women with access to education and training programs, as well as creating an enabling environment that fosters entrepreneurship and innovation. Another critical aspect of the strategy is to support women's and girls' social empowerment by addressing issues such as early school dropout rates, promoting literacy,

and providing services that cater to women's special needs. Tunisia aims to ensure that women are fully integrated into social and cultural activities and have equal access to public services and programs. Tunisia also recognizes the importance of women's political empowerment and seeks to increase their participation in public or political life and local government. That is particularly evident through its 2016-2020 "program to support women's participation in decision-making and public life"; especially through training, capacity-building, campaigning, lobbying, and advocacy activities. The country has made progress in this area, with more women assuming decision-making and leadership positions. Overall, Tunisia's N*ational Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* is in line with the UN SDGs and the *African Union's priorities for 2030* (Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Seniors, 2017a). The Tunisian MFFES also has developed and implemented several female empowerment strategies such as the National Strategy for 2017-2020 and its 2018-2022 NAP for gender mainstreaming (Tunisian MFFES, 2017b, 2020).

The Maputo Protocol's ratification by Tunisia, as outlined in Presidential Decree No. 61 of 2018, reflects that Tunisia has committed to promoting and protecting females' rights in political participation and decision-making (Tunisian MFFES, 2020). By ratifying this Protocol, Tunisia is committing to upholding and protecting the females' civil, political, and economic entitlements as well as eliminating gender-based discrimination in all domains of society, such as the workplace and education. This includes ensuring that women have unrestricted access to political participation and decision-making at all echelons of government, including the fields of diplomacy and foreign policy.

In 2018 as well, Tunisia appointed its first female Mayor, Souad Abderrahim, the first mayor-elect since the 2011 uprising (Deutsche Welle, 2018). In 2021, Tunisia

appointed its first female head of government, marking a significant milestone in the country's political history (WEF, 2022). This development positions Tunisia as the first economy within the MENA region, as classified in this thesis, to get a female head of state within the past 50 years. The appointment of a woman to this position not only reflects Tunisia's commitment to gender equality but also underscores its dedication to fostering inclusive and diverse political leadership. According to OECD's Women in Politics data, women comprise 19.9% of all parliamentarians (OECD, 2023a).

Moreover, the launching of the "*Toutes et tous Uni.e.s*" website, a centralized platform for information and resources on gender equality and GBV, in Tunisia signifies a commendable advancement in the government's unwavering drive to foster gender parity and combat the prevalent epidemic of violence against women. It is also noteworthy that Tunisia had been invited by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in April 2020 to accede to the Istanbul Convention, a key instrument aimed at promoting and safeguarding females' rights and curbing GBV (Council of Europe, 2021).

In light of all these positive domestic policies, laws, and action plans in Tunisia, the country's commitment to upholding gender equity and elevating women's rights is evident through its previous constitution's impact on governance. Ergo, by promoting gender equality and empowering women, Tunisia not only advances females' rights but also contributes to the country's overall development and progress. However, the new authoritarian governance system under President Saied raises concerns about the potential impact on Tunisia's female empowerment agenda amidst power concentration in the executive branch and increasing repressive political opposition.

5.4 Challenges and Barriers to Female Politicians and Diplomats in Tunisia

Amidst political turmoil and Saied's authoritarianism in Tunisia, women's empowerment in the country is at crossroads. On one hand, Tunisia has made significant progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality in the years following the 2011 revolution. As demonstrated in the above subsection, Tunisia has one of the most progressive laws on GBV in the region, and the country's 2014 constitution guaranteed gender equality and women's rights. However, recent developments in Tunisia could have negative implications for women's rights, empowerment, and political representation. The rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic institutions could threaten the gains made in advancing gender equality. The concentration of power in the hands of one person could lead to a weakening of women's rights, increased restrictions on their freedom, and further marginalization of Tunisian women's voices and concerns, amidst a political system that values centralized power over representation and dialogue.

5.4.1 Gender Equity Backsliding Amidst Constitutional Reform: A Test of Political Will

The recent electoral reforms introduced by Tunisian President Kais Saied have eliminated the principle of gender parity in elected assemblies, resulting in a significant drop in the figure of women lawmakers in the Tunisian parliament. This recent decline in females' inclusion in Tunisia's parliament is a concerning development that undermines the country's progress toward gender equality and democratic governance, especially given Tunisia's reputation as a leader in women's rights in the Arab world and its milestone introduction of a quota system for political party lists in 2014. Decree No. 55 of electoral law's abolishment of the quota system in 2022, which had been introduced in 2014's Basic

Law No. 16 to boost women's representation in the legislature, has had a negative impact on women's participation in the parliament. The requirement that at least 50% of political party lists feature women as lead candidates succeeded in augmenting women's political representation within the Tunisian parliament, which reached a whopping 31% in 2018. However, the recent electoral reforms introduced by President Saied have effectively dismantled this system, reducing women's representation to just 16% (Farouk, 2023; WEF, 2023; Yerkes & Al-Mailam, 2022).

Furthermore, the electoral reforms and new candidacy requirements, including the self-funding rule and the need to gather 400 signatures from supporters, have made it harder for women to run for office, especially for those who lack access to powerful local networks and financial resources or those financially dependent on their male family members. This reinforces patriarchal norms that have historically disadvantaged women in the public sphere, further undermining their political participation and representation (HRW, 2022c).

The decision to abolish gender parity and the quota system is particularly concerning, as it suggests a regression in the commitment to promoting females' political participation and representation. Henceforth, Tunisia's backsliding on gender parity is a cause for concern and could potentially limit the country's progress in other areas of gender equality.

Recently, a collaborative statement issued by various Tunisian non-governmental entities, including the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, and the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists, reflects a collective sense of apprehension regarding the retrogression of democratic and human rights that have been enshrined in the initial draft (HRW, 2022b).

Overall, the abolition of gender parity and the quota system, along with the new candidacy requirements, have disproportionately affected women aspirants and made it harder for them to participate in politics. The low turnout in the recent election run-off is a clear indication of public discontent with Saied's with Saied's actions and his electoral reforms. Thereby, the government must take steps to ensure that women are adequately represented in the political sphere and that their voices are heard.

5.4.2 Tunisia's Female Empowerment Agenda: Tokenism, Empty Promises, or Real Change

The situation in Tunisia, where women's rights have been a point of contention for decades, is a reflection of the broader struggle for gender equality in the Arab world. While Tunisia has historically been at the forefront of promoting women's rights in the region, recent events have raised concerns that progress may be reversing or concealing an ugly truth.

The appointment of Najla Bouden as Tunisia's prime minister has been criticized as mere tokenism. The appointment of women to political positions must come with real power and the ability to implement decisions that advanced gender equality. It is insufficient for women's inclusion in the governmental machinery of Tunisia to be a tokenistic and symbolic gesture bereft of meaningful sway on the rights of women. Some women's rights activists argue that President Saied is using female empowerment as a façade to bolster his power, while his government fails to address systemic issues that affect women's rights and his newly adopted constitution undermines the gains made by Tunisian women in their decades-long struggle for equality, representation, and more rights (Ibrahim, 2022).

Tunisia's women's rights movement has a long and celebrated history, from the implementation of the Code of Personal Status in 1956 to the more recent 2014 gender-parity law and the 2017 legislation on violence against women. However, it is also crucial to acknowledge that progress is not linear and that setbacks can occur. Women in Tunisia continue to face systemic violence and hate speech, as well as economic and social hardships. The dismantling of the 2014 constitution is a major setback for women's rights, as it lacked parity between men and women, which undermines the basic principles of citizenship and universal human rights. This significant disparity is evident in the fact that only 29 out of the 154 current MPs are female, accounting for a mere 16.23% of MPs (IPU, 2023c). As well, while Tunisia has made strides in implementing policies and measures to promote women's rights and participation in politics and diplomacy, the *WBL Index* reveals that there are still significant gender gaps given Tunisia's score of 64.4 out of 100 in the *World Bank's 2023 WBL Index*, with its greatest gender gaps present in pay, parenthood, and assets indicators (World Bank, 2023).

Henceforth, the struggle for women's rights in Tunisia and the Arab world remains ongoing. While progress has been made, recent events have raised concerns that hard-won gains may be reversed. The adoption of a new constitution that lacks parity between men and women and the failure of the government to address systemic issues affecting women's rights represent significant setbacks.

President Kais Saied's rhetoric on female empowerment should be viewed within the broader context of Tunisia's human rights record and its commitment to gender equality. While his statements may suggest a commitment to advancing women's rights, the reality on the ground is far from ideal. It is worth noting, however, that Tunisia's "female empowerment" is a façade that is not unique to President Saied's tenure. Previous Tunisian presidents have also faced criticism for their handling of women's rights issues.

For example, there were concerns about the government's commitment to women's rights under the regime of former Tunisian presidents (Rhaeim, 2014).

5.5 Conclusion

In sum, the situation in Tunisia is a complex one, with multiple factors contributing to the country's descent into authoritarianism. President Saied's recent consolidation of power, which included the dissolution of democratic institutions and ruling by presidential decree is worrisome. The recent political developments in Tunisia have cast a shadow over the country's progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality. While Tunisia has historically been recognized as a leader in promoting women's rights in the MENA region, recent electoral reforms and the resulting decrease in females' representation in the parliament are also a setback for the country's progress on gender equality.

CHAPTER SIX

OVERCOMING DESTRUCTIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS: A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

This chapter posits that addressing gender inequality in the political and diplomatic corps requires a multifaceted approach that takes into account the intersectional nature of discrimination and the need for systemic reforms in both domestic and international spheres. Moreover, the chapter incorporates a thematic analysis of the key informant interviews conducted with individuals closely involved in the political and diplomatic spheres in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. The inclusion of these perspectives affords a more comprehensive understanding of the pertinent issues at hand and offers valuable insights into potential solutions and avenues for progress to address women's rights and empowerment in these contexts. Ultimately, this chapter aims to contribute to a larger conversation about the intersection of law, governance, and gender in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia and to provide insights into potential solutions and avenues for progress in promoting women's rights and empowerment.

6.1 Analysis & Discussion of Key Findings: A Tapestry of Differences and Similarities between Governance Systems and Gender Regimes

6.1.1 Comparative Representation of Key Findings

Below, in Table 2, is a brief comparative matrix on the status of legal and institutional gender-related facts and procedures in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia.

Table 2 - Status of Legal and Institutional Gender-Related Facts and Procedures in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia

Status / Country	Lebanon	Saudi Arabia	Tunisia
Governmental Type	Confessional	Monarchy	Semi-presidential
Political Stability Index for the year 2021 ^ (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2022)	-1.49	-0.58	-0.7
Government Effectiveness Index for the year 2021 ^ (Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2022)	-1.29	0.5	-0.17 (2014 constitution)
Corruption Perceptions Index for the year 2021 (Transparency International, 2021)	154/180	52/180	70/180
Corruption Perceptions Index for the year 2022 (Transparency International, 2022)	150/180	51/180	85/180
Gender Regime (Moghadam, 2020)	Hybrid	Neopatriarchal	Conservative-corporatist
% seats held by women in the parliament (IPU, 2023; OECD, 2023a)	6.25%	19.9%	26.3%
Party Quotas on Gender (International IDEA, 2023; Yerkes & Al-Mailam, 2022)	No legislated or voluntary party quotas	20% quota for women	Candidacy applications based on parity between men and women in 2014's electoral law versus no gender quota in 2022's electoral law
Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2022)	119 of 146	127 of 146	120 of 146

WEF's Political Empowerment Gender Parity Index (WEF, 2022)	110 of 146	132 of 146	68 of 146
UNDP's Gender Inequality Index for the year 2021 (UNDP, 2022)	108 of 191	59 of 191	61 of 191
Level of Parity for Ministerial Positions (WEF, 2022; World Bank/IPU/Femmes et Leadership, 2023)	32%	0%	26% (projected to become 16% following 2023's elections)
World Bank's Women, Business and the Law Index (World Bank, 2023)	58.8%	71.3%	64.4%
CEDAW Convention Status (OHCHR, 2023a)	Ratified in 1997 *did not approve the acceptance of additional optional protocols [Articles 9(2),16(1c)(1d)(1f), 29(1)]	Ratified in 2000 *did not approve the acceptance of additional optional protocols [Articles 9(2), 29(1)]	Ratified in 1980 *no reservations
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (OHCHR, 2023b; OHCHR, 2023c; OHCHR, 2023d)	Ratified in 1972	Not Ratified	Ratified in 1969
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (OHCHR, 2023b; OHCHR, 2023c; OHCHR, 2023d)	Ratified in 1972	Not Ratified	Ratified in 1969
Year of Suffrage (United Nations, 2017)	1952	1959	2011 (exercised in 2015)
Percentage Share of Women Ambassadors for all UN Member States in 2023 (Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, 2023)	24%	5%	8%
Progress toward SDG 5 (Sachs et al., 2022)	Stagnating	Moderately Improving	Stagnating

Adoption of Feminist Foreign Policy (UN Women, 2023)	No	No	No

^ Estimate of governance ranging from around -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance

6.1.2 Navigating Lebanon's Political Paralysis: Women's Representation and Political Empowerment Amidst Political Corruption and Civil Society Mobilization

Lebanon's classification as a hybrid gender regime in the MENA region reflects the complex intersections of family and cultural influences on women's inclusion and representation in politics and diplomacy. Women's rights and political representation are impacted by this regime, as patriarchal norms and practices often undermine women's ability to participate fully in political and public life. Hybrid regimes "combine formal democratic structures with deficits regarding political and civic liberties or the rule of law" (Croissant, 2002), thereby often promoting traditional gender roles (Obuch et al., 2018). Lebanon's ranking on the political empowerment gender parity subindex indicates that women are significantly underrepresented in political decision-making processes. The limited representation and agency of women in the country's parliament and other political bodies indicate that women's voices and perspectives are not adequately represented, potentially resulting in policies and decisions that do not account for the needs and concerns of half of the population.

From a feminist foreign policy perspective, it is crucial to acknowledge the nuances of gender regimes and their intersectionality with other forms of oppression, such as sectarianism and corruption in the case of Lebanon. Lebanon's confessional-based power-sharing and welfare systems, coupled with bureaucratic inertia, have left the country vulnerable and in need of recovery. The persistent prevalence of clientelism and corruption in public administration, coupled with the weak and exclusionary nature of judicial service delivery, has contributed to the erosion of the country's institutional

capacity and undermined its ability to effectively govern and serve the needs of its citizens (World Bank, 2022). As evidenced by the 11 failed parliamentary sessions dedicated to electing a new president (as of the date of publishing this thesis), the continued deadlock in parliament is being prolonged by political bargaining and party disagreements. While the presidential vacuum is not a first in Lebanon, the condition is worse this time around, amidst a caretaking governmental status and ongoing economic meltdown. Given the rampant corruption in Lebanon, the international community's trust in the Lebanese government has also reached a new low, hanging on the election of the president and the Lebanese political elites' willingness to seal the deal with the International Monetary Fund and move forward with banking, fiscal, electricity, governance, and monetary stability reforms.

The impending triple vacuum of a missing president, unappointed functioning government, and expired term of the Lebanese General Security's Director General threaten to plunge the country into unprecedented chaos. This lack of functioning presidential, governmental, and general security officials signifies a failure of the Lebanese state to provide decisive leadership, governance, and security. The result could be an escalation in crime and violence, undermining public confidence in the state's ability to maintain order and stability. Women often bear the brunt of instability and political gridlock in conflict situations, and their voices are often silenced in political negotiations. As such, it is crucial to ensure that women are not only included in decision-making processes but are also protected from harm. This requires strong political empowerment and representation of women in all aspects of governance, including diplomacy.

Amidst political instability and governmental dysfunction, non-state actors, CSOs and women's rights movements play a critical role in advancing gender equality and promoting women's involvement in decision-making processes. Lebanon's civil society

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plays a crucial role in shaping policy outcomes and exerting influence, particularly in a context where the government has largely failed to deliver essential services and public goods to the citizens. This non-functioning government has made it difficult for traditional actors, exemplified by political parties and the state, to effectively manage the country's affairs, leading to a greater emphasis on the role of CSOs. From influencing policymaking through grassroots activism and mobilization to impacting policy outcomes through advocacy and lobbying efforts, civil society groups in Lebanon have emerged as key players in Lebanese politics and governance.

However, while civil society's role in policymaking is vital, it is not a substitute for effective and accountable government institutions. Ultimately, the success of any policy aimed at promoting women's rights and representation in politics and diplomacy in Lebanon will depend on the ability of the country's political elites to come together and address the fundamental underlying factors of the crisis, including corruption, political gridlock, and economic meltdown. The absence of specific laws or policies designed to propel women's representation in politics and diplomacy in Lebanon underscores the need for targeted interventions to address gender disparities in the country. Implementing gender quotas for diplomatic positions, for example, could help increase women's representation in this field. However, such interventions should be complemented by broader efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and catalyze women's rights and empowerment more broadly.

Only through inclusive and equitable governance can Lebanon emerge stronger and more resilient from this crisis. By understanding the multidimensional factors and the institutional, cultural, and social dynamics of the hybrid gender regime that shape women's representation and participation in Lebanon, policymakers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions to champion women's rights and representation.

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6.1.3 Navigating Saudi Arabia's Absolute Monarchic Governance System: Women's Representation and Political Empowerment Amidst Conservative Dominance

Saudi Arabia's neopatriarchal state classification is characterized by patriarchal family structures and conservative religious traditions that reinforce traditional gender roles and restrict women's rights and freedoms (Moghadam, 2020). Such a categorization is consistent with the kingdom's legal and social structures.

The current state of affairs in Saudi Arabia presents a complex and challenging context for the implementation of a context-specific feminist foreign policy. The legal and institutional restrictions that exist, along with cultural and religious conservatism, create significant barriers to gender equality and political participation for women in the country. Navigating these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving top-down policy changes and bottom-up societal shifts, assures Interviewee A (Anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2023).

In a country where the monarchic governance system and Sharia law play a significant role in perpetuating gender injustice and inequality, any meaningful change must come from the highest levels of government, highlights Interviewee A (Anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2023). This means that the government's leaders must be committed to implementing policies and laws that uphold females' empowerment and gender equality, both domestically and internationally.

One potential avenue for a context-specific domestic and foreign policy in Saudi Arabia would be to prioritize the elimination of legal and institutional restrictions that perpetuate gender discrimination and limit women's participation in politics. This could include advocating for the ratification of international human rights treaties, including those that specifically address women's rights, as well as the adoption of gender-sensitive

policies and legislation. Such ratifications and legislation would help strengthen the legal framework and provide a basis for fostering gender equality. Additionally, there must be a concerted effort to amend the Basic Law of Governance to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender and ensure equal representation of women in decision-making bodies similar to Royal Decree 44 (A) of 2013 which reserved 20% of the Shura Council's exclusively for female members. Working to eliminate the male guardianship system would also be critical to ensuring women's full participation in political and public life, as Interviewee A (Anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2023) explained. As well, Interviewee A highlighted how the sustainability of women is profoundly influenced by social and familial dynamics in the diplomatic corps. Promotions and assignments in foreign service hinge on the level of support provided by family members, particularly the spouse or father, as they play a pivotal role in shaping the household environment in empowering women to thrive in their careers (Anonymous, personal communication, 18 April 2023).

In regard to females' inclusion in all ministries, the Council of Ministers should ensure the women's full membership in the consultative council, having an equal say in the decision-making process on all issues that the council addresses.

The absence of political pluralism and participation in Saudi Arabia means that women's participation in politics is further limited. As a result, there is a need to establish initiatives that focus on strengthening democratic processes, promoting the participation of women in political parties and electoral processes, and increasing their representation in high-level political positions.

Addressing the cultural and religious conservatism that justifies gender segregation and mobility constraints and underpins gender inequality in Saudi Arabia presents a more complex challenge. However, there are still steps that could be taken to foster gender

equality and challenge discriminatory attitudes, especially through gender-sensitive education and public awareness campaigns. For example, working with religious leaders to spur a more inclusive interpretation of Islamic law that recognizes the rights of women and boosts gender equality could be a promising strategy, especially in helping to dispel myths and stereotypes about women's abilities and roles in society and cultivating a more inclusive and equitable understanding of gender roles.

The advancement of feminist activism in Saudi Arabia should also be supported and encouraged, as it plays a vital role in challenging the status quo and advocating for greater political rights and representation for women.

In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's *gender gap index* is still one of the lowest globally, and significant challenges remain in achieving gender equality. Yet through consistent efforts, Saudi Arabia can take meaningful steps towards achieving gender equality and improving the lives of its citizens.

6.1.4 Navigating Tunisia's Constitutional Referendum: Impacts of Political Challenges and Setbacks on Women's Representation in Political and Diplomatic Corps

Tunisia serves as a reminder of the importance of building robust and responsive democratic institutions, as well as the dangers of allowing extreme polarization and authoritarianism to take hold in a democracy. While Tunisia's commitment to elevating gender equality and women's empowerment is evident through its previous 2014 constitution, the new authoritarian governance system under President Saied raises concerns about the potential impact on Tunisia's feminist agenda.

The rise of authoritarianism and the erosion of democratic institutions in Tunisia could lead to a weakening of women's rights and increased restrictions on their freedom. Moreover, the lack of parity between men and women in the dismantled 2014 Tunisian

constitution undermines the basic principles of citizenship and universal human rights. It is crucial for Tunisia to recommit to supporting gender parity and females' political participation and representation, addressing the recent disparities. This requires not only the reinstatement of the quota system but also the introduction of additional affirmative action policies and measures to support women aspirants and eliminate barriers to their participation in politics and diplomacy. The country's progress towards democratic governance and gender equality must not be allowed to falter, as these are essential components of a stable and prosperous society.

The situation in Tunisia highlights the challenges of building and sustaining democratic institutions in the aftermath of a dictatorship.

The failure of political parties to effectively govern and address the concerns of the public led to widespread disillusionment with the democratic system and paved the way for a populist leader, who has little regard for democratic norms and institutions, to gain power. However, this leader has since consolidated power and undermined democratic institutions, highlighting the fragility of democracy when confronted with extreme polarization and authoritarianism.

The efficacy of policies and programs that boost gender equality and women's empowerment hinge upon the presence of good governance (OECD, 2017), and Tunisia's feminist movement must remain vigilant and continue to advocate for gender equity and females' empowerment even in the face of a progressively repressive and authoritarian governance system.

In light of the recent political turmoil and authoritarian behavior of the president in Tunisia, crafting gender-sensitive domestic and foreign policies tailored to the specific context of Tunisia presents a myriad of challenges in light of the current political landscape and the pronounced concentration of power within the presidency as it

necessitates a keen understanding of the local sociopolitical and economic realities, as well as a nuanced appreciation of cultural norms and attitudes.

The recent elimination of gender parity in elected assemblies and the introduction of new candidacy requirements by President Kais Saied will surely have negative implications for women's political representation and empowerment in Tunisia. Context-specific gender-sensitive domestic and foreign policies can work to address this by advocating for the reinstatement of gender parity in elected assemblies, the provision of financial and logistical support for women candidates, and the removal of barriers such as loosening the candidacy requirements that prevent women from running for office and participating in political decision-making processes. This could involve providing financial support to women candidates, building networks to increase their visibility, supporting women's political campaigns, training women to run for office, and advocating for the implementation of measures that support their political participation and representation.

By advancing and safeguarding women's rights, addressing the recent electoral reforms, and tackling the systemic issues that underlie gender inequality, contextualized gender-sensitive domestic and foreign policies can help ensure that Tunisian women have equal opportunities and rights as citizens and participants in the country's domestic and public service life and that Tunisia works toward building a more inclusive and democratic society that values the contributions of all its citizens, regardless of gender. Such an approach can foster social and economic development, catalyze peace and stability, and ultimately enhance Tunisia's position on the global stage. Ultimately, the path to stability and prosperity in Tunisia and the broader North African/Sahel region will be long and difficult, requiring not only the sustained commitment of the international community but

also a willingness on the part of regional leaders to work together to address shared challenges.

6.2 A Long Road Ahead

As shown in *WEF 2022's report*, the MENA region's ranking on gender equality indices highlights significant disparities between genders and the limited representation and involvement of women in political decision-making arenas. These disparities are rooted in social and cultural norms as well as patriarchal structures and structural barriers that limit women's agency, perpetuate gender-based discrimination, and hinder women's ability to attain and exercise political power, reinforcing gender disparities in society.

One has to acknowledge that individuals develop cognitive frameworks or "*schemas*" for understanding gender roles and behaviors based on societal norms and expectations; a concept known as gender schema theory. This schema can influence how individuals perceive and interpret information related to gender, such as the gender composition of certain professions or fields (Priess & Hyde, 2011).

Additionally, unconscious biases can shape how individuals perceive and evaluate others, with women often facing greater scrutiny and skepticism than their male counterparts. This can make it more difficult for women to gain recognition and promotions within the field, ultimately contributing to the glass ceiling that limits their upward mobility amidst unequal opportunities for career advancement or recognition (ILO, 2017; OECD, 2014). In the realm of diplomacy, Ms. Chidiac (personal communication, 25 April 2023) highlights the pervasive influence of biases. She underscores how gender often takes precedence over individual capacities and qualifications when it comes to assignments and postings for women, particularly evident in the disproportionate lack of female representation in challenging or hardship countries.

As the interviews revealed, women perceive diplomacy as an industry or profession that is "predominantly male-dominated". This perception may stem from various factors such as societal norms, gender stereotypes, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within diplomatic organizations, and biases that have historically hindered women's participation in politics and diplomacy. For women who are interested in pursuing a career in politics and/or diplomacy, the pervasive stereotype that "diplomacy is a man's world" can create a sense of dissonance, leading them to question their own fit within the field and potentially undermining their confidence, motivation, and career aspirations (Ekmekji, personal communication, 20 April 2023). Additionally, women who are the only or one of a few women in their workplace can face additional pressures to represent their gender and may feel as though they are being judged on their gender rather than their skills or abilities. This can create a sense of isolation and added scrutiny, potentially leading to feelings of impostor syndrome and limiting their ability to advance within the field.

One key factor that contributes to women's perceptions of diplomacy as a male-dominated field is the process of socialization. From a young age, girls and boys are often socialized to adopt different roles and behaviors, with boys encouraged to be assertive and competitive, while girls are taught to be more nurturing and accommodating. This gendered socialization can shape how individuals perceive their abilities and fit within certain professions, such as diplomacy, which are traditionally associated with masculine traits like aggression and dominance (Maluleke, 2012; Priess & Hyde, 2011). Politics is "socially associated" with power and its conservation which have traditionally been intertwined with men. This correlation has had a significant impact on women's representation in politics, rather than in diplomacy, as it reinforces the perception of

politics as a domain of power while diplomacy is often seen as a way to promote peace and collaboration (Chidiac, personal communication, 25 April 2023).

Additionally, diplomacy, as a field, is characterized by power asymmetries, where traditionally, men have occupied positions of power and influence, while women have been relegated to subordinate roles. This dynamic creates a self-perpetuating cycle, where women are discouraged from entering the profession, and those who do, face numerous challenges such as lack of promotion opportunities, pay disparities, and exclusion from decision-making processes; as reflected in discussion with an interviewee specialized in women and diplomacy (personal communication, 18 April 2023).

In the context of societal change, it is essential to acknowledge the established social norms that have been in place for decades and which are deeply ingrained in the fabric of society impacting the behaviors and attitudes of its members. These norms have been shaped by a multitude of factors, encompassing history, culture, and political systems, and they have a significant impact on how individuals, particularly women, navigate their roles in society. Every country, whether in the MENA region or the globe as a whole, undergoes a period of development, and any significant changes must be implemented gradually to ensure their success. Attempting to impose rapid changes without proper consideration of the existing social norms may lead to resistance and ultimately hinder progress toward the desired outcome. In terms of women's representation in political and diplomatic positions, it is vital to recognize that change may take time, and there may be future opportunities for women to gain seats in elections.

The interviews revealed that gender quotas, while temporary special technical measures, help introduce a gender-inclusive culture into the governmental system. As Ms. K. Ekmekji (personal communication, 20 April 2023) highlights that "While criticized, tokenism is a natural step toward genuine merit-based representation." Ms. Ekmekji attests

that tokenism can help to create a sense of momentum and awareness around the need for more diverse representation, which can then lead to more substantive efforts to promote equity and inclusion.

However, while the trend of feminization of diplomacy, which refers to increasing representation of women in the field of diplomacy, may lead to greater gender equality, it can also lead to tokenism, causing women to feel like they are only being included in this workforce as a way to check a diversity box, rather than being valued for their expertise and contributions. Women who are hired or promoted in diplomacy may feel that their success is due to tokenism rather than their own merit, which can be demoralizing and may reinforce the perception that they do not truly belong in the field.

As the constructivist theory highlights, political structures and governance systems are not fixed or immutable but are shaped by the ideas, beliefs, and social norms that actors hold. This means that there is potential for change and that states can be influenced by global norms and ideas. State identities are shaped by systemic processes, strategic practices, and structural contexts. In the case of the MENA region, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and gender disparities have been perpetuated by political structures that limit women's agency and exclude them from decision-making processes. However, by redefining their identities and committing to gender equality, states can prioritize women's participation in diplomacy and other areas of public life.

After all, gender relations in each country are not static as they have evolved, often in response to external and internal factors. For instance, women's participation in politics and diplomacy has majorly increased in recent years in Tunisia, driven by a growing feminist movement in the country amidst diverse national action plans, programs, and activities. However, this progress has recently been limited amidst 2021's constitutional reform by the new Tunisian president. On another note, women in Lebanon are not a

monolithic group, and their experiences are shaped by factors such as class, religion, ethnicity, and regional location. So, it is essential to recognize and challenge the intersectional barriers that women from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and religious affiliations face in the country.

Ultimately, empowering women and promoting their rights and representation is not only a matter of justice but also a prerequisite for building a more just and prosperous future for all citizens in the MENA region. While there is a long road ahead, progress toward a more contextualized foreign policy system that takes into consideration a feminist perspective is essential to achieving this goal. Even, Ms. Chidiac emphasizes how democratic practices influence the state of representation of women in the diplomatic and political corps (personal communication, 25 April 2023). Strategic planning and policy implementation using gender-sensitive policy instruments and governance practices followed by government-wide policy monitoring and evaluation with gender-inclusive key performance indicators help build a robust institutional governance framework (OECD, 2021).

The Feminist Foreign Policy is a quite recent notion in the field of international relations, intending to ensure gender equity and the rights of women in foreign policy decision-making. However, implementing such a policy in the MENA region presents considerable challenges that render it unfeasible at present. The MENA region faces complex sociopolitical realities characterized by patriarchal power structures and deeply entrenched gender norms. Thus, any attempt to promote gender equality and women's rights requires a profound transformation of the existing social order, necessitating a long-term, sustained, and multifaceted approach from all stakeholders, including policymakers, CSOs, and the general public.

In light of these challenges, an alternative option that could facilitate progress toward gender equity in the MENA region may involve adopting a gender-sensitive domestic and foreign policy approach. This approach would require policymakers to consider the gendered impacts of their decisions, including the potential for exacerbating gender inequality and discrimination. Such a gender-sensitive foreign policy would also prioritize supporting initiatives aimed at improving women's rights and representation, empowering women to participate in the political process, and enhancing access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women. By incorporating a gender-sensitive lens into foreign policy decision-making, policymakers could lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive feminist foreign policy in the future.

In this context, a governance structure and foreign policy system that take into account the specificities of each country's gender regime are essential to fostering women's rights and representation in diplomacy. Such a system would need to be grounded in a deep understanding of the complex social, economic, and political factors that shape gender relations in the country and the MENA region more broadly. This would require a nuanced approach that duly considers the multifaceted manifestations of gender regimes that exist and the institutional, cultural, and social dynamics that intricately mold them.

6.3 Conclusion

In the MENA region, the interdependence of good governance and gender equality is mutually beneficial, as reforms that support gender equality reinforce the principles of good governance. A key determinant of the effective implementation of gender reforms is the existence of sound planning, monitoring, and implementation processes for the public sector as a whole; given that good governance practices can support gender mainstreaming

in policy planning and implementation, while simultaneously advancing the

implementation of gender equality reforms.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Women's inclusion and representation in politics and diplomacy have become a central issue globally, and the MENA region is no exception; as an effective representation of women in government not only demonstrates the state's dedication to gender equality and females' empowerment but also plays a critical role in shaping foreign policy and fostering sustainable peace and development. The significance of this thesis lies in its contribution to the academic discourse on gender inequality in diplomacy in the MENA region. This study contributes to a growing body of literature that highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive policymaking and implementation processes that can advance women's agency and promote their inclusion in decision-making processes, particularly in diplomacy.

This chapter outlines the limitations associated with the present research study, the significance of this thesis despite such limitations, and some recommendations as well as considerations for future research.

7.1 Limitations

The present research study is not exempt from certain limitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the research employs generic purposive sampling, which may lead to the risk of "*cherry-picking*" data, thereby limiting the generalizability of findings. Secondly, there exists the risk accompanying the comparative case study approach in regard to the inability to account for all confounding variables and factors in the selected countries; such as geopolitics, state interests, and other contextual factors that could

influence the equation of research. Thirdly, the study is also vulnerable to the competing and counterfactual explanations and developments of the cases at hand, whereby during research or post-research, certain governance systems may shift and hence polarize the research findings and analysis. Additionally, the fact that the interviewed sample consisted solely of female participants adds a limitation as it precludes the incorporation of diverse male perspectives. Finally, the limited number of key informant interviews (sample size of three KIIs) is another limitation, as additional primary research data, particularly from female diplomats in the MENA region, could have further contributed to the argumentation and analysis of the prospects and challenges faced by female politicians and diplomats in the region and the selected three case study countries.

7.2 Thesis Significance

Despite the mentioned limitations and challenges, this thesis has several significant contributions to the academic discourse on gender inequality in diplomacy in the MENA region.

First, it explores the extent to which normative, cultural, social, and epistemic discrimination against women exists in politics and diplomacy in MENA countries; unpacking commonalities and differences between countries in the region and shedding light on the nature and scope of gender-based discrimination.

Second, it examines how females' lack of representation in politics and diplomacy reflects patriarchal societies, hegemonic masculinity, and male-power dominance; highlighting how females' exclusion from political and diplomatic positions is perpetuated by gender-based biases, norms, and stereotypes.

Third, the study specifically sheds light on the Lebanese, Tunisian, and Saudi Arabian different political governance systems and each of their consequent positive

and/or negative impacts on the MENA region's women representation in politics and diplomacy by highlighting promising initiatives, success stories, and challenges faced in promoting inclusivity and gender mainstreaming in international relations.

Fourth, it adds to the existing body of work on gender mainstreaming in governmental systems in the MENA region, emphasizing the need to adopt context-specific policies and legislation.

Fifth, it seeks to inform contextualized strategic planning, policymaking, and reform in the states' governance structure in the MENA region.

By identifying specific challenges and prospects for advancing females' representation in politics and diplomacy, the thesis provides a valuable resource for policymakers, scholars, and advocates working toward gender equality in the region.

7.3 Future Research and Recommendations

7.3.1 Policy Recommendations

In the MENA region, the importance of good governance practices and gender equality reforms cannot be overstated. As a result, this study offers valuable recommendations for advancing females' representation in political and diplomatic corps and promoting gender equality in the region. These recommendations include adopting gender mainstreaming policies, establishing quotas for women in diplomatic, electoral, and ministerial positions, addressing gender-based biases, stereotypes, and traditional norms in the public sector, and promoting inclusive governance structures. Such a policy must aim to engage a broad coalition of stakeholders, including CSOs, government officials, and community leaders, to effectively advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

7.3.2 Future Research

Future research could further explore these recommendations' execution through different contexts and the gender mainstreaming policies' sway on gender equality outcomes in international relations in the MENA region. Moreover, it is essential to examine the potential impact of the changing geopolitical landscape and its implications for females' representation in domestic and public service in the MENA region. Another important avenue for future research could be to examine how gender schemas, unconscious bias, and attribution bias may impact gender mainstreaming's implementation and effectiveness in the region. This could involve conducting qualitative research to identify common gender stereotypes and biases that exist within political and diplomatic institutions in the MENA region and exploring the extent to which these biases may undermine efforts to promote gender equality. As well, reflecting on the intersectionality of age and gender is essential in ensuring that gender mainstreaming policies are inclusive and effective for all women, including young women, in the MENA region. Overall, this thesis highlights the interdependence of gender equality and good governance, emphasizing the need for continued efforts toward promoting inclusivity, gender mainstreaming, and sound public governance in the MENA region. By continuing to investigate the areas outlined above, researchers can identify best practices and develop evidence-based policies and programs that bolster females' participation in diplomacy and public service while advancing gender equality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

- Anonymous (18 April 2023). Personal Communication.

- Ekmekji, K. (20 April 2023). Personal Communication.

- Chidiac, C. (25 April 2023). Personal Communication.

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

LAU
الجامعة اللبنانية الأميركية
Lebanese American University

NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL

To:	Ms. Jana Al Hassanieh Dr. Lina Kreidie Assistant Professor School of Arts and Sciences

APPROVAL ISSUED: 3 April 2023
EXPIRATION DATE: 3 April 2024
REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED – Initial

Date: April 3, 2023
RE: *IRB #: LAU.SAS.LK5.3/Apr/2023*
Protocol Title: Women in Diplomacy in the MENA Region: Governance Systems Pulling the Strings

The above referenced research project has been approved by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the Approved Research Protocol and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Enclosed with this letter are the stamped approved documents that must be used.**

APPROVAL CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU APPROVED HUMAN RESEARCH PROTOCOLS

LAU RESEARCH POLICIES & PROCEDURES: *All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies & Procedures. PARTICIPANTS must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB approval date or after the expiration date.*

PROTOCOL EXPIRATION: *The LAU IRB approval expiry date is listed above. The IRB Office will send an email at least 45 days prior to protocol approval expiry - Request for Continuing Review - in order to avoid any temporary hold on the initial protocol approval. It is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the research project. Failure to send Request for Continuation before the expiry date will result in suspension of the approval of this research project on the expiration date.*

MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS: *All protocol modifications must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.*

NOTIFICATION OF SITE SPECIFIC UNEXPECTED ADVERSE EVENTS OR SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS: *Immediate prompt reporting for any site specific unexpected/unanticipated and related AE or SAE occurring to any participant in an LAU IRB approved research project, and no later than 24 hours, as described in the LAU IRB Investigator Manual Policies and Procedures and related processes.*

NOTIFICATION OF PROJECT COMPLETION: *A notification of research project closure and a summary of findings must be sent to the IRB office upon completion. Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of notification of project completion.*

IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE IRB ADMINISTRATORS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB APPROVAL CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at irb@lau.edu.lb

The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

Dr. Joseph Stephan
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:

LAU IRB Initial Protocol Application	Received 17 March 2023
Research Proposal	Received 17 March 2023
Letters to UN women	Received 17 March 2023, amended 3 April 2023
email or phone message script	Received 17 March 2023
Informed Consent	Received 17 March 2023
Interview Questions	Received 17 March 2023
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CITI Training – Jana Al Hassanieh & CV	Cert.# 54958595 Dated (17 March 2023)

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Glossary of Terms

- Culture:

Culture is defined as a "*set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs*" (UNESCO, 2001).

- Gender Mainstreaming:

As per the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference, "*gender mainstreaming*" institutes the "*global strategy for promoting gender equality*" by including a gender perspective in *all processes, legislations, and policies* (UN Women, 2015). As per the OECD (2023b), it includes "*integrating a gender equality perspective across government action and policy decisions.*"

- Middle East and North Africa region:

Given political dynamics and conflicts of interest, there is no one consistent list of the *Middle East and North Africa region's countries. This thesis addresses the countries in the MENA as those classified by the World Bank: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen* (World Bank, 2022).

- Patriarchy:

Patriarchy is defined as a "*social system in which men hold the greatest power, leadership roles, privilege, moral authority and access to resources and land, including in the family. Most modern societies are patriarchies*" (UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2017).

- Quota:

Quota is a term that refers to the reservation of a percentage or a specific number of seats in elected bodies such as Parliaments and Municipal Councils, to "*ensure women's access to legislation and decision-making positions*" (European Commission & UNDP, 2018).