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Women's Participation in Education and Politics: Evidence from the Selected OIC Countries

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Abstract

In this twenty-first century, it is crystal clear that education is the most powerful instrument for a nation's progress and prosperity. Islam has also emphasized on educating both men and women since the beginning. So, Muslim countries should take initiatives to enhance participation of women in education. In reality, it is seen that women's positions in the field of education and politics are very nominal compared to their male counterparts within Muslim countries. Situation is even worse in under-developed and non-democratic countries where the position of women and their participation in both the education and political sectors alongside men are visibly low. In this context, the purpose of this study is to explore the level of Muslim women's participation in education and politics in some selected Muslim countries. Two South-Asian countries, Bangladesh and Pakistan, two south-east Asian countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries have been considered for this study. Thus, empowered women can take part in politics to resolve social issues. One of the findings of this study is that in democratic countries such as; Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, women's participation in both the educational and political sectors have been significantly improving over the years. Though economic conditions and social stigma, directly and indirectly, are still the barriers to enhance women's education level as well as their participation in politics. Finally, the study highlights the obstacles that hinder women's participation in both sectors and discusses the remedies to overcome the situation from an Islamic point of view.

Keywords: Women's Participation, Education, Politics, Islamic Perspective, Muslim World

1. Introduction

There is a widespread debate going on about the issue of 'women's rights and empowerment' across the globe. However, some scholars are clearly focused on women's empowerment and some have not been (Mosedale, 2014). Women's positions and their dignity in older societies was dreadful and a disputable issue in their society.

They were treated as the stuff of men's enjoyment (Ansiya et al., 2014). Even at the beginning of 20th century, Muslim women were barred from participation in politics, left out of social and community works, and were living in poverty, illiterate, and in the midst of collapsing and declining communal and moral states (AK, 2019). The situation of women and their position in their community still did not change as compared to their male counterparts in both the family and wider society. It is a common phenomenon that women are always suppressed in male dominant societies in every aspect of their lives (Zengenene & Susanti, 2019; Ali, Solihin & Haque, 2018; Odine, 2013), e.g. in education, politics, the labour force, entrepreneurship etc. Moreover, globally, women in the 21st century still cannot secure as strong of a position in the previously mentioned sectors as men have been able to achieve either in the family or in society, particularly in the Muslim world (Haque, Sarker, Rahman & Rakibuddin, 2020). It is very unfortunate that, in the Muslim world, often women are considered as subordinate to men and they are treated as second class citizen in family and society (Sudarso, Keban & Mas'udah, 2019; Kabir, 2007). Women in the family and in society are mistreated because of the ill practice of socio-cultural norms and the patriarchal social system (Haque, Sarker & Rahman, 2019). Even in developing Muslim countries, the poor families considered girls a burden for the family (Susanti, 2019). Thus, the parents often arrange early marriage for their daughters at the premature motherhood age.

Hence, it creates negative thoughts in Western minds. Outside of Muslim countries there are discussions or criticisms of Islam; that it does not provide equal rights to women along with men in terms of empowerment. Several Muslim leaders and scholars have observed and identified the internal challenges which are the causes, such as; misinterpretations of Islam, refusal to be modern, trendy and secular; and also, an underpinning of ideas of the disintegration of Muslim women in the modern world (AK, 2019). Astonishingly, some leaders and scholars have realised that internal intransigent and extremist forces are the cause of exposing political, cultural, and ideological challenges (AK, 2019). They have started to adopt western ideologies in alignment with Islamic principles and views to develop the area of politics, education, and economic theories (Monshipouri, 1998). These intellectual ideas have facilitated the objectives of fundamental Islam, for example; Islam is a modern religion which is compatible with modernisation, science and trends, benighted thought, theology, and philosophy that isn't scientific in nature (AK, 2019). In these circumstances, Muslim leaders and intellectuals have adopted western political and scientific theories to develop Islam through socio-economic empowerment for both men and women (Mawṣilili, 1999).

Islam secures a dignified and strong position for women in all aspects of their lives (Sha'rāwī, 1998; Haque, Solihin, Ahmad & Jani, 2020). There is no sacred text in the Qur'ān or Sunnah that obstructs women's empowerment in public and private affairs (Qarh Dāgī, 2011). In addition, Islam is very affirmative regarding women's participation in the above-discussed areas, maintaining their dignity and chastity after completing household tasks which are assigned by the Almighty Allah. If we observe Prophetic history, we find that the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) encouraged women to take part in all areas of life; i.e. social, political, economic, and religious fields (Jawad, 1998). Empowering women in the economic sector is one of the ways to ensure a good quality life to women in families and society (Subramaniam, et al., 2013). It is found in hadith that *Ansāri* women wanted to participate in all activities during the establishment of the first ever Islamic state of Madinah. They set the model role for other women to follow (Jawad, 1998). Women made a great contribution in the field of expedition (*Jihād*). It was narrated that 'Umm'Atiyyah al-Ansāriyyah said: "I have participated in seven expeditions (wars) with the Messenger of Allāh; I have stayed behind in the camp, making food for them, treating the wounded and looking after the sick" (Sahīh Muslim, 261H, vol.3, hadith, 142 (1812)). In this context, this study explores women's positions in the Muslim world in certain areas, specifically in education and politics, with a discussion of remedies to overcome this issue from the Islamic perspective.

2. Objective of The Study

Islam has secured women's status and a strong position in the family as well as in society in terms of receiving an education and their participation in politics for the betterment of society. In the 21st century, women's positions and statuses are gradually rising in education and politics in the Muslim world (Bangladesh, Pakistan,

Malaysia, Indonesia and MENA countries). However, the objective of this current study is to explore the current status of women's participation in the education and political sectors in the Muslim world. It also emphasises on the gathering of Islamic views on women's rights and positions of power in education and politics.

3. Data and Methodology

The present study has followed a qualitative approach, where it gathered the data relevant to women's participation in education and national parliaments from World Bank data sources. This study attained data of women's literacy above the age of 15 and women's participation in national parliaments, focusing on Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. According to Hackett et al. (2015), about 73% of Muslim populations live in Muslim majority countries such as in the Middle East and North Africa and southern Asian countries. The data is presented as a percentage in the table and graph. Besides this information, the current study also followed the analytical method in which all the pertinent texts related to women's empowerment in the area of education and politics were analysed within the Islamic scholars' viewpoints. Finally, data has been analysed and briefly explained in an argumentative approach from past findings in related studies.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Education

Islamic principles in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition have empowered women in all aspects of life, either in the family or in society, especially in the area of education where they are treated equally to men (Jawad, 1998; Vidyasagar & Rea, 2004). According to Maududi (1981), Islam strongly encourages women to obtain both religious education and social branches of knowledge, i.e. agriculture, technology, politics, economics, and they must also be well-trained culturally. These dimensions are important and integral elements of social development. In addition, in relation to gaining an education, there is no preference given to men over women, rather; both are equally encouraged to get education (Malik, 1979; Haque, 2020). In this consequence, it is acknowledged that acquiring and acquisition of knowledge is part of Islamic teachings. The Qur'an did not put any distinction of pursuing education for men and women which shows the equal duty for every Muslim.

It is very unfortunate that, because of misunderstandings of Islamic principles and poor practice of socio-cultural norms created a block for women to be associated with societal affairs on a par with men, particularly in the field of education in Muslim countries (Ta'īmah, 2005; AK, 2019). Even, in the Western world, intimate partner violence and a discriminatory mindset determine women's access in the family to education, nutrition, and healthcare. These behaviours impede women's participation in education, the workforce, and public service (O'Rourke, 2017). The common perception among people is that education is not necessary for women (T'īmah, 2005), whereas, education has been highly 778adith778zed in Islamic sacred texts, such as the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions. In fact, it is obligatory for every individual Muslim to be educated. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) urged every Muslim to seek knowledge: it was narrated by Anas Bin Mālik, Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: "Seeking knowledge is made compulsory upon every individual Muslim (male and female)" (Al-Khurāsānī, 2003, vol. 3, 778adith no 1545).

Education for girls has been recognised as a fundamental element in creating strong economic growth and sustainable social development across the globe (Hill & Elisabeth, 1993). Many Muslim scholars like Imām Ghazālī and Muhammad 'Abduh have emphasised girl's education. In fact, they have argued that without educating girls, it is impossible to empower them and change their status and position in the family as well as in society (Saiful Islam, 2016). Imām Ghazālī defines education as "a process which enables an individual to distinguish between the truth and the false, the good and bad, and the right conduct and the evil doing" (Saiful Islam, 2016). Moreover, if women get more opportunity to obtain higher education it gives them a boost and enables them to participate in the workforce and politics. Hence, female education is a key indicator which minimises gender discrimination as well as increasing female autonomy in family and society (Inglehart &

Norris, 2003; AK, 2019; Jensen, 1995). From the Islamic point of view, if women achieve religious and social education, it helps them to become a good wife and mother, as well as good housekeeper (Maududi, 1981). It is also proven from the Islamic history that Allāh (SWT) sent the first revelation through Angel Gabriel to the Prophet (SAW) to 'read' (*'Iqra'*) (Sūrah al- 'Alaq, 1).

4.2 Politics

Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions strongly emphasise women's participation in politics along with men (Surah al-Tawbah, 9:71). Traditional and contemporary Muslim scholars have agreed that women need to be associated with politics for the betterment of citizens' lives and a nation's development (Jawad, 1998; Abu Faris, 2000). Participation in politics is an obligatory action (*wājib*) for both men and women and it is based on the concept of vicegerent (*khalīfah*) and both are responsible to establish the commands of Allah (s.w.t) (Abu Faris, 2000), i.e. enjoying good deeds and forbidding evil, establishing salat (prayer), and paying zakat (charity) (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:30; Surah al-Tawbah, 9:71).

However, In Muslim societies, women's participation in the field of politics and leadership is still barely significant and it is often controlled by political parties and social norms as well as a lack of access to financial resources, information, and education (Rahman, 2014). For example, Turkey is one of the leading Muslim countries in today's world. But the position of women and their participation in education, economics, and politics is insignificant compared to the Western world. According to the World Economic Forum's gender gap index, Turkey ranked 131st among the 144 countries surveyed (Cinar & Kose, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2017).

In the traditions and cultures in south Asian societies like Bangladesh, Pakistan, etc, women's participation in politics is considered to be going against society (Rahman, 2017). According to Adeela Rehman, these Muslim societies believe that women are created to serve domestic roles and responsibilities (Sakuan, 2019). Hence, women must acknowledge that politics is a very tough task for them and that it is more appropriate for men. Women are considered less intelligent and weaker in policymaking for the country in comparison to their male counterparts (Rahman, 2017).

Women's minimal participation in the political arena is because of the influence of scholars who justify extremely limited social roles for women due to gender segregation (Moten, 2017). They "demand greater control over women's bodies, emphasising women's roles in procreation and call for women's submission to patriarchal values" (Afary, 2004). According to Keddie and Baron, these scholars always put pressure on the government to enforce public morality, ensure observance of religious rites, and tighten control over women (Moten, 2017).

On the other hand, Islam is very much affirmative towards women's participation in social development, especially in the field of politics. Islam accepts women's views in various aspects such as education, politics, social aspects, economics, and other areas (Abu Faris, 2000). Both men and women are entitled to ask the people to do good deeds for the betterment of everyone. They are also asked to raise their voice to stop evil practices within society. As Allāh (SWT) says in this regard:

> Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity (Sūrah Āli 'imrān: 104), (Al-Hilali, & Khan, 1990).
> Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind. Enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allāh (Sūrah Āli 'imrān: 110), (Al-Hilali, & Khan, 1990).

Allah (SWT) further says that women's participation in politics is obligatory as shown in Sūrah al-Tawbah verse 71.

> The believers, men and women, are *Auliyā'* (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another; they enjoin (on the people) *Al-Ma'rūf* (i.e. Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do), and forbid (people) from Al-Munkar (i.e. Polytheism and disbelief of all kinds, and that Islam has forbidden); they perform As-Salāt (Iqāmat as-Salāt), and give the Zakāt, and obey Allāh and His Messenger (p.b.u.h). Allāh will have His Mercy on them. Surely Allāh is All-Mighty, All-Wise (Al-Hilali, & Khan, 1990).

In addition, the Prophet (SWT) also said that both men and women are entitled to establish *'al-amr bil-ma'rūf* and *wa nahyu 'anil-munkar'* in the family, society and, nation. He said:

> The Messenger of Allāh (SWT) said: "Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand (by taking action); if he cannot, then with his tongue (by speaking out); and if he cannot, then with his heart (by hating it and feeling it is wrong), and that is the weakest of faith" (Al-Hajjāj, 2007, vol. 1, hadīth no: 78).

The above verses and the Prophetic traditions clearly indicate that men and women are both entitled to participate in social affairs for the betterment of the society and nation. In the exegesis of the first verse, al-Rāzī and al-Qurtubī say, the word '*minkum'* is not *li-al-tab'īd* (replacement); rather it is '*bayaniyyah'* or an imperative command for both men and women. Their responsibility in society is to conduct or carry out *'al-amr bi-al-ma'rūf* and *wa nahyu anil-munkar'* which is described in the following verse. In fact, it is an obligatory task for every *mukallaf* in the family as well as in society (Al-Qurtubī, 1964; Al-Rāzī, 1420H).

In the exegesis (*Tafsīr*) of the above verse, scholars have asserted that this verse is a clear message for every individual Muslim male and female that they must take part in politics for the betterment of their nation. According to Sayyid Qutub, the nature of the male believer *(Mu'minīn)* and the nature of female believer *(Mu'mināt)* are the same as the nature of unity and the nature of solidarity. He further asserts that if hypocritical men and hypocritical women come together to destroy the society and the commands of Allāh (SWT), then why don't believing men and believing women come together to do righteous deeds and abolish all forms of bad actions from the society (Qutub, 1412H, vol.3)? Moreover, Muhammad Shaltūt clarifies that the meaning of '*Al-'amru bil-ma'rūf* and *wa-yan hawna 'anil munkar'* shows the leading responsibilities for men and women as vicegerents of Allāh on this earth. In this regard, both believing men and women are equally responsible to implement these commands of Allāh (SWT) on this earth (Shaltūt, 2001; al-Qaradāwī, 1994).

During the era of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and the *Khulafā'*, women used to participate in every crucial sphere of the society, especially in politics. Women shared their views without any reservation and sometimes the view went against the leader. In fact, on certain occasions where the leader himself did not have a proper idea for a special issue, he used to accept the idea of women in resolving the problem. For example:

> When the writing of the peace treaty was concluded, Allāh's Messenger said to his companions, "Get up and slaughter your sacrifices and get your head shaved". By Allāh, none of them got up, and the Prophet (p.b.u.h) repeated his order thrice. When none of them got up, he left them and went to Umm Salama and told her of the people's attitudes towards him. Umm Salama said, "O the Prophet of Allāh! Do you want your order to be carried out? Go out and don't say a word to anybody until you have slaughtered your sacrifice and call your barber to shave your head". So, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) went out and did not talk to any one of them until he did that, i.e. slaughtered his sacrifice and called his barber who shaved his head. Seeing that, the companions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) got up, slaughtered their sacrifices and started shaving the heads of one another (Sahīh al-bukhārī, 1997, vol.3, hadīth 2731).

This *hadīth* discusses the political contract which was made by the Prophet (p.b.u.h) and Quraish in 628 A.D. In 6th year of *hijrah*. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) and 1400 companions went to Mecca to perform the Umrah, but they were obstructed by the Quraish and were prohibited from performing the Umrah. After that, both parties had a long discussion regarding a 'peace treaty or peaceful agreement' between Mecca and Madinah. One of the

conditions of the treaty of *Hudaybiyah* prohibited the Muslims from performing Umrah in that particular year. Consequently, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) requested His companions to stand up, do the slaughter and shave their heads. No one stood up and followed His command. The Prophet (p.b.u.h) was trying to resolve the situation so immediately he consulted with his wife Umm Salmah regarding the issue. She gave a wise idea which solved the problem and they went back to Madinah (Al-Dimashqī, 1976, vol. 3). This *hadīth* is clear evidence that a woman's opinion is valued and considered in solving social problems, particularly relating to political conflicts which is derived from the Prophet's (p.b.u.h) action in consulting his wife 'Umm Salamah (R.A) regarding the incident of *sulh hudaibiyah.* The view of 'Umm Salamah (R.A) solved the issue between the Prophet (SWT) and his companions and led the way for a successful solution (Haque & Osmani, 2017).

Moreover, during the era of *Khulafā'*, they also used to consult women about societal affairs. For instance, second Caliph of Islam 'Umar (R.A) did not take any decision regarding women's issues unless he consulted with women, especially on the matter of matrimonial life (Al-Zuhaylī, 2008). Another example of women's participation in politics is when 'Ā'isha (R.A) participated in the Battle of Camel (*gajwah Jamal*) against the fourth Caliph of Islam 'Ālī (R.A) on the issue of third Caliph of Islam Othman's uncertain death (Abu Faris, 2000).

Hence, there is a very clear message from this verse that both men and women are commanded by Allāh (SWT) to participate in politics after fulfilling their household responsibilities. Participation in politics is an obligatory task for men and women as vicegerents on this earth to establish a well-balanced nation in every aspect of life.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Women's Education

Figure 1 presents women's literacy rates in several Muslim countries in Asia and in MENA countries which are under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). According to the figure, it is cleared that Muslim women do receive education in all countries. More than 90% of women are educated in both Malaysia and Indonesia. Likewise, Bangladesh shows a sharp increase after 2010. These findings are consistent with Mcclendon et al. (2018), who stated that Muslim women had better level of educational achievements and enhancements in richer countries than poorer countries (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Although all countries are showing growth in women's education, MENA and Pakistan are showing a steady growth. The growth percentage in women's education in the highlighted countries can be found in Appendix A. the growth of women's education is also recorded and proven in past studies. For example, despite the strict dress code for women and lack of mobility in Gulf countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, young women's enrolment is sharply increasing in colleges (Gorney, 2016; Paschyn, 2014), Muslim women's education levels have increased on the whole in the Middle East and North Africa (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Furthermore, young women are more educated than men in the Gulf countries, yet they are not actively participating in the context of national politics (Mcclendon et al., 2018). This pattern was also noted among Arab women in the United States (Paschyn, 2014). Conversely, a few studies have found that women in Muslim majority countries have a lower level of participation in education, lower rates of employment, less participation in national politics, and wider gender gaps compared with other countries (Cherif, 2010; Rahman, 2012). Similarly, a few studies have also found low level of women's education compared to other non-Muslim countries (Feldmann, 2016; Østby, Urdal, & Rudolfsen, 2016). However, Islam has played a role in education inequalities, encouraging societies to reduce culture clashes between traditional Islamic values and gender equality (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Likewise, in the last few decades, it has been observed the progress and development of Muslim women around the world comprising intellect, education, political engagement, and many more indicators (AK, 2019).

There is a debate on religion's role in women's education in Muslim majority countries. Hence, economic development, not religious constraints or cultural attitudes, is the key factor of Muslim women's education levels in a country (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Likewise, economic and structural obstacles may restrain countries and

regions from achieving universal or conventional education or enhancement of enrolment in schools to western levels (Østby et al., 2016). Women's lower level of education in Muslim countries is caused by economic situations and structural constraints rather than religious or cultural impacts (Mcclendon, Hackett, Potančoková, Stonawski, & Skirbekk, 2018). These findings reflected the findings of this study; it clearly shows how economic development links to the growth in women's education in Malaysia, Indonesia, and recently Bangladesh. Economic development is a tool of improving the education sector through access of schooling, resources of education, and quality that relates to the flexibility and advancement of women's education (Østby et al., 2016).

Many African governments, following independence, have resisted distributing resources for universal education due to economic slumps, escalating foreign debts, and rapid growth of populations (Launay, 2016). Indeed, the majority of Muslims are focused in the Middle East, Africa, and southern Asia, areas which are comparably economically less developed and less democratic than other countries in the world (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Interestingly, education is the key indicator involved in all kinds of economic activities as well as socio-economic factors including political activities; in addition, mothers are the fundamental players in the education, socialisation and well-being of their children (Ross & Mirowsky, 2010). In reality, Islam does not restrict women in gathering knowledge or achieving an education, at least not globally. Even though Muslim countries have lower levels of growth in education compared to other religious group, they is still progress (Mcclendon et al., 2018). Thus, it is clearly proved that education levels are, directly or indirectly, linked to the economic condition of a country. Islam, or any other religion does not restrict women from participating in educational programs as long as they follow the designated criteria set out by their religious principles.
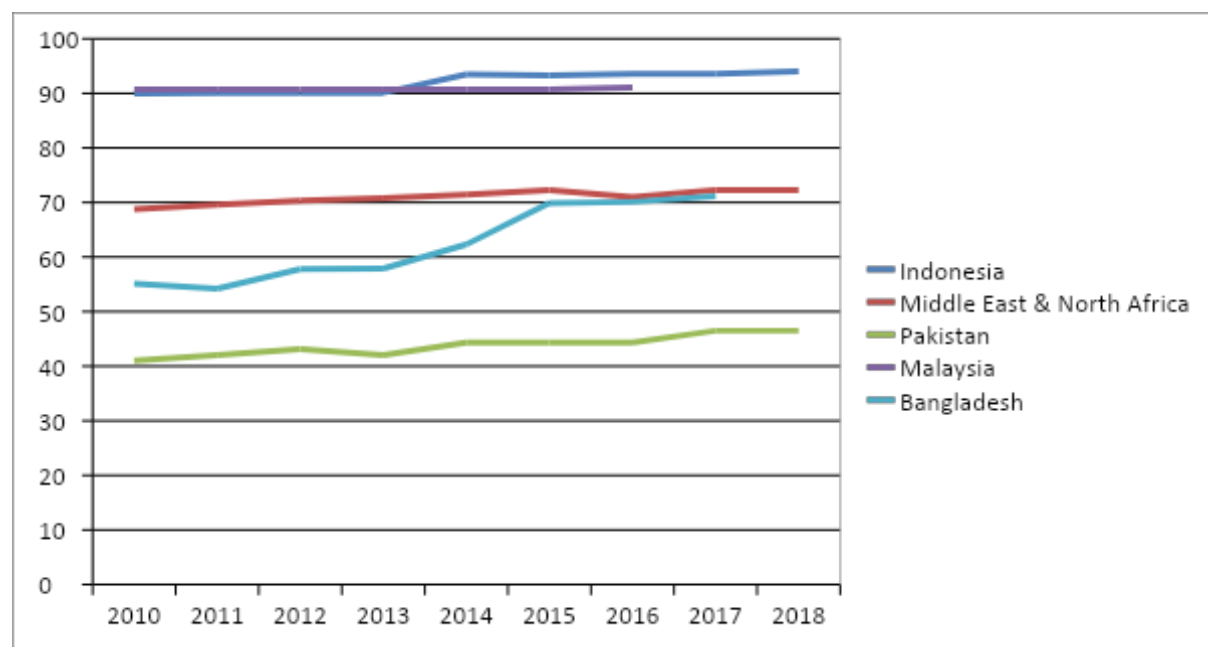

Figure 1: Women's literacy in Muslim countries; Source: World Bank Data (2010-2018)

5.2 Political Participation

There is a significant growth of Muslim women participants in political decision-making in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) (CMI, 2018). Similarly, Muslim majority countries in Asia especially Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia are showing an uptrend in women's participation in parliament, except Pakistan which has been decreasing recently (Figure 1, see the percentage rate in Appendix B). In line with the general trend, there is an increase of women participating in MENA countries (Figure 1). Figure 2 presents the percentage of women's participation in national parliaments in MENA countries. What is noteworthy is that Qatar and Yemen

have no women participating in their national parliaments. Saudi Arabia has recorded participation at 19.9%, followed by 30.5% in Sudan, 31.6% in Algeria, 31.3% Tunisia, and 17% Morocco. Furthermore, the overall percentage of women participating in politics in MENA countries is recorded at 18%, as compared to the global rate which is 22%. Surprisingly, Pakistan has shown a decreasing number of women in politics after 2011. It might be due to the political instability in the country, which may have discouraged women from engaging in politics.

The findings from both figures present the growth of women's participation in politics in Muslim countries. Although the growth is not even significant, compared to the global rate of women's participation, it is quite considerable that women are prone to participate in national parliaments if the constitutions allow it. It is still pegged to the domination of men in the constitution, instead of religious perspectives. Furthermore, the growth and active participation of women in several Muslim countries strongly represents that Islam does not prohibit or present an obstacle to the participation of women in politics. It is a system that has dominated in such countries, mainly due to social stigma, whereas men dominate the society and believe that women's participation in politics is against social norms (Rahman, 2017; Sakuan 2019). Additionally, democratic countries have supportive tendencies of gender equality and liberal sexual attitudes (Inglehart & Norris, 2009), for instance in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. The findings of this study support past studies where women participate at the highest level of political decision-making endeavours and holding institutional power (AK, 2019). Indeed, women's involvement in politics is commensurate with levels of education and mobility of employment outside the home (Allwood & Wadia, 2000). Therefore, it is clearly denoted that participation in politics by women somehow is disturbed by social stigma and a lack of education.

In fact, democracy plays an important role in nurturing unbiased gender education, middle-class politicians, and opportunities for women to mobilise and impact on policy making decisions in a country (Cooray & Potrafke, 2011; Østby et al., 2016). Also, democracy has played an important role in educating women widely through ensuring equal rights and fair distribution of resources. For example; women in government have promoted participation in politics and education through providing opportunities as well as by being an inspiring female leader, such as Bensir Bhutto in Pakistan, and Begum Khaleda Sia and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh. Similarly, highly educated women are pressing to reform policies to encourage gender equality and opportunities for women's education in several countries (Gorney, 2016; Power, 2015).
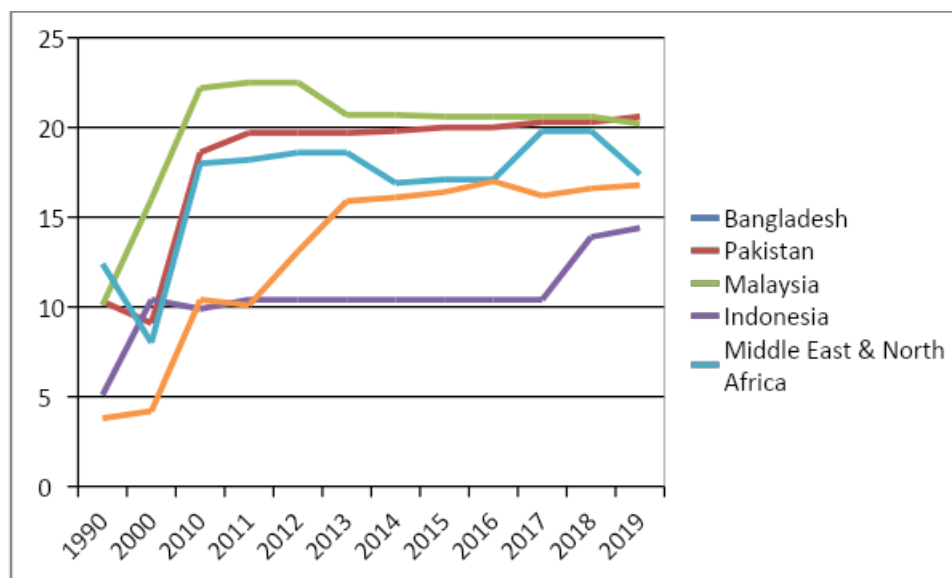

Figure 2: Women's participation in national parliament in Muslim countries; Source: World Development Indicators
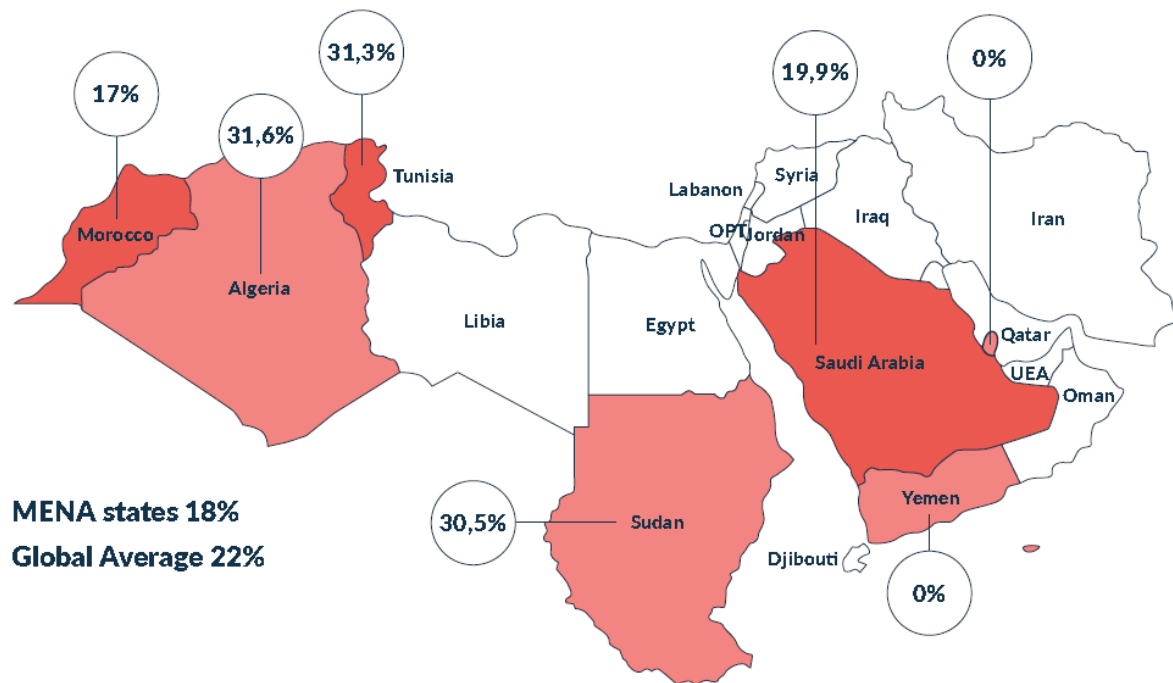
Figure 3: Women's political participation in MENA countries; Source: (CMI, 2018)

6.   Conclusion

This study has presented the level of women's education and participation in national parliaments in a few Muslim majority countries. From the findings, it is noticeable that, under-developed and non-democratic countries are still far behind in their levels of women's enrolment in the field of education and active participation in national politics as compared to their male counterparts. However, in democratic countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bangladesh, there are signs of significant improvement in both educational levels and participation in national parliaments of women. Surprisingly, although Pakistan is the second largest Muslim populated country among the Muslim world, women's positions are still left behind in both sectors. In addition, based on the exploration and discussion of this study, it is observed that Islam is very affirmative and gives much emphasis on women's extensive participation in both the educational and political sectors. Unfortunately, the overall facts and the situation of women's positions in Muslim majority countries shows that women are often deprived of active participation in the fields of education and politics. The lack of immersion of women in both sectors causes misinterpretations of the sacred text related to women's participation in social and familial tasks, cultural traditions, and the patriarchal social system.

Thus, women may develop their position in terms of education and empowerment in both politics and social aspects, observing and adopting best civilizations through focusing, following, and perceiving. Development can be acquired by individuals through following the first verse of Al-Qur'an, "Iqra" (Surah al-'Alaq: 1) which means not only to read, but also to understand and follow; it sharply denotes the importance of education and wisdom for all. Undoubtedly, the verse was not indicated only for men. Furthermore, Allah (SWT) clearly indicates women's active participation in the field of politics next to their male counterparts after fulfilling their household tasks according to their capabilities and skills (Surah al-Tawbah: 71). Muslim exegetists assert, regarding verse 71 of Surah al-tawbah, like al-Rāzī and al-Qurtubī say, the word '*minkum*' is not *li-al-tabʿīd* (replacement); rather it is '*bayaniyyah*' or an imperative command for both men and women. Their responsibility in society is to conduct or carry out *'al-amr bil-maʿrūf* (enjoining what is right) and *wa nahyu 'anil-munkar'* (forbidding what is wrong), which is described in the verse. In fact, it is an obligatory task for every *mukallaf* in the family as well as in society (Al-Qurtubī, 1964; Al-Rāzī, 1420H).

Finally, it can be concluded that men and women both are the creation of Allah and they both are entitled to take extensive participation in education and politics to fulfil their individual and societal development as vicegerents on this Earth. It is next to impossible for a nation to be developed in all demographic indicators and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 21st century without involving the full two halves of their population, women and men, in these two sectors. Moreover, the Muslim world should create a congenial environment whereby men and women can take active involvement in the fields of education and politics, which will endeavour to raise their quality of life in individual and societal affairs. Likewise, parents, society, and the country should create more opportunities for women to achieve education through enrolling girls in the primary to tertiary levels of education.

7. Implications and Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study have given several implications for both Muslim populations as well as policy makers for the Muslim world. Muslim populations may find these findings to be a lesson and find motivation to promote education and political participation regardless of gender, especially so that women may understand their equal rights and opportunities as adopted in the greatest Islamic knowledge. The findings may also benefit the Muslim world through providing concrete texts from Islamic literature that highly encourage both men and women to be educated and to actively participate in political endeavours in order to facilitate and contribute in the development of an economy. Policy makers may understand the extensive lessons of Islamic jurisprudence towards women's right to an education and to participate in politics and societal affairs. As a result, they can influence women to participate in both educational institutes and political endeavours through creating equal opportunities for both men and women. Finally, the findings of this study provide extensive literature from the Islamic point of view relating to women's participation in the fields of education and politics.

However, this study has several limitations which leaves scope for future studies. Firstly, this study is mainly based on secondary data that has been adapted from World Bank statistics, which may not include significant and in-depth analysis. As a result, future studies may adopt advanced methodology and extensive data for further analysis. Secondly, this study only includes a few countries instead of all Muslim majority countries in the world. Therefore, future studies may include more countries. Finally, future studies may adopt primary data with empirical studies to improve the findings.

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Appendix A: Women's literacy in Muslim countries

Year	1990	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Bangladesh	..	..	..	55.1	54.2	57.8	57.9	62.3	69.9	70.1	71.2
Indonesia	75.3	..	..	90.1	..	..	93.5	93.3	93.6	..	94.0
Malaysia	..	85.4	90.7	..	..	..	..	..	91.1	..	..
Pakistan	..	..	41.0	42.0	43.1	42.0	44.3	..	..	46.5	..
Middle East & North Africa	45.5	59.1	68.6	69.6	70.3	70.8	71.4	72.3	71.0	72.3	72.3

Appendix B: Women's participation in national parliament in Muslim countries

Year	1990	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Bangladesh	10.3	9.1	18.6	19.7	19.7	19.7	19.8	20.0	20.0	20.3	20.3	20.6
Indonesia	12.4	8.0	18.0	18.2	18.6	18.6	16.9	17.1	17.1	19.8	19.8	17.4
Malaysia	5.1	10.4	9.9	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	10.4	13.9	14.4
Pakistan	10.1	..	22.2	22.5	20.7	20.6	20.6	20.6	20.6	20.6	20.6	20.2
Middle East & North Africa	3.8	4.2	10.4	10.1	13.1	15.9	16.1	16.4	17.0	16.2	16.6	16.8