Islamic Women in Political Parties and their Electoral Participation in Seven Middle East Countries

Sophia Francesca DP. Lu
Ateneo de Manila University Law School (Student-Juris Doctor Program), and Bachelor of Arts Honors (Political Science) (Graduate), Department of Political Science, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman
sophia_fran@yahoo.com

Received 6 May, 2014; Accepted 3 June, 2014; Published 2 July, 2014
© 2014 Science and Engineering Publishing Company

Abstract

Women’s electoral participation in the Middle East has been widely contested both in practice and in the academe. This study investigates seven Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, which are—Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey. Quantitative analysis, particularly raw statistical data by Kaasem (2010), entitled Party Variation in Religiosity and Women’s Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective, 2008-2010, funded and published by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), was used. This study aims to establish a correlational relationship between women’s electoral participation and Islam, if any, and to what degree. The context of this investigation is the debate on the influence of Islam on women’s electoral participation. The scholar Moghadam excludes Islam and culture in general, as influential factors in the low social-political location of women, and focuses more on the interaction of world policy, regional economic order, social class and gender as explanatory variables of women’s position in the Middle East. On the other hand, another Islam scholar Roded proposes a different approach in understanding the low rate of women’s political participation. Roded (2008) states that Islam can be divided into three types based on the degree of fundamentalism: Islamic modernism, Islamic fundamentalism, and pluralizing Islam. The results of the quantitative analysis indicate that women’s electoral participation is affected by Islamism and religiosity.

Keywords
Women’s Electoral Participation; Middle East; Political Parties; Gender; Islam; Patriarchy

Introduction

There are various positions on the relations between women’s issues and the Islamic religion. Moghadam (1993) asserts that religion and women’s political participation do not cross paths. It is rather the societal institutions and formal structures that hammer women’s emancipation in society. While some scholars agree with Moghadam (1993), others concur with the scholar Roded (2008) who posits that Islam is averse to the accommodation of women’s political rights such as electoral and political participation. Roded (2008) states that Islam can be divided into three types based on the degree of fundamentalism: Islamic modernism, Islamic fundamentalism, and pluralizing Islam. The three types of Islam differ in their openness towards women’s involvement in the public sphere based on their fundamental teaching, thus, affecting the extent of equality and inequality between women and men.

Islamic modernism adopts modern rationalist methods and scientific discoveries as convenient and advantageous for the survival of the Islamic community or ummah. Roded (2008) cites Turkey as a primary example of an Islamic modernist state. In 1934, Turkey, having a more liberal and progressive view of women, gave seats to women in the Parliament. This practice was further institutionalized by the constitution. In 1965, census revealed Turkey having women in various professions including positions of judge and jurist. However, Islamic fundamentalists such as Khomeini and Qubt (in Roded 2008), the modernist approach advocated by Al Faghani will not create unification of the ummah, but will lead to its deterioration and subservience of Islam to Western power. Cultural and moral corruption masquerades as
modernity, particularly, western modernity (Roded 2008). Islamic fundamentalism rejects human sovereignty in any form (whether democratic, communist or liberal) in political rule, and all those that define legal rules apart from divine rules. Second, Islamic fundamentalism requires the establishment of Sharia Law as the sole and legitimate source of sovereignty. On the other hand, the third political thought is pluralizing Islamism, propounded by Rivat Hassan and Tahrir (in Roded 2008). Islamic discourse, according to these proponents, emphasizes the concepts of ijtihad (independent judgment or interpretation) and shura (consultation). Contrary to the claim that Islam is inhospitable to democracy, these thinkers argue that Islam is compatible with democracy in two areas—as a form of governance and as a political practice.

This research study looked into the effect of Islam on women’s political participation in Muslim-majority Middle East countries particularly Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey. This research study was mainly quantitative in nature. It was based on the dataset provided by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research based in the University of Michigan, USA. The research hypotheses were—1) the mean of women’s electoral participation is lesser in more radical Middle East countries than the mean in more moderate Middle East countries; and 2) there is a correlation between Muslim religiosity and women’s electoral participation.

Methodology

Political participation is investigated here to mean a range of activities including electoral participation, and political leadership in governance, allowing opportunities for political agendas of women to develop (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005).

The theoretical assertion in this study is the vital role of religion, particularly Islam, in affecting women’s electoral/political participation in selected Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East. This is hinged on the theories on Islam as a political ideology evident in Islamic states. The major hypothesis in the research is: “The more inclined a country is to Islamic ideologies, the lower the women’s political participation.” The specific hypotheses in the research are:

1) **Hypothesis 1**

Ho: \( u_1 \geq u_2 \); The mean of women’s electoral participation is equal or greater in more radical Middle East countries than the mean in more moderate Middle East countries.

Ha: \( u_1 < u_2 \); The mean of women’s electoral participation is less in radical Middle East countries than the mean in more moderate Middle East countries.

2) **Hypothesis 2**

Ho: \( p = 0 \); There is a correlation between Muslim religiosity and women’s electoral participation.

Ha: \( p \neq 0 \); There is no correlation between Muslim religiosity and women’s electoral participation.

Statistical Analysis of Dataset Published by ICPSR

The original dataset was culled from the research study of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research based in the University of Michigan, USA. The study was entitled *Party Variation in Religiosity and Women’s Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective, 2008-2010*. It looked beyond the national domestic level into individual party-level explanations for women’s political leadership focusing on 26 countries. The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of political party structure on gender inequality, particularly in parliament. It recorded the level of religiosity of political parties, which refers to religious components in the party’s political platforms or the extent to which religion penetrates a party’s political agenda. Data on women were gathered in 329 political parties in 13 Arab and 7 non-Arab Muslim-majority countries, 5 European countries plus Israel from 2008 to 2010. Structured interviews were done with party administrators and party officials. The inclusion criteria for respondents included political parties that occupied at least one seat in the latest parliaments. The inclusion of Arab Muslim majority countries is having a population of more than 50 percent Muslims. In fact, Muslim is the largest minority in Europe which is why some European countries were included in the list of non-Muslim majority countries.

Dataset Adopted for this Research Study

Since the research question set out for this study is “How does Islam affect the electoral participation of women in Middle East countries,” only pertinent variables were considered. The sample consisted of 98 political parties out of the original 329 parties from seven countries mainly in the Middle East out of the
The unit of analysis consisted of the political party, which has at least one seat in the latest parliament. This study narrowed the analysis to Muslim majority countries, having more than 50% Muslims in the population, and then compared to non-Muslim majority countries having less than 50% Muslims in their population. This shifted away from the categorizations of the original dataset focusing on 1) Arab, 2) non-Arab Muslim majority countries, and 3) European countries with Muslim population. An earlier publication by Lu (2013) dealt with 329 political parties in the Arab countries and non-Arab Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, totaling 26 countries. This present research study focuses however on Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East only to see whether the same findings are generated.

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Specifically, these were—1) Descriptive analysis was used for the frequency distribution, measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion of certain variables in the study; 2) Chi-square test of independence was used to look into the association between two nominal variables, which were religiosity and women in parliament, taken as a nominal variable. Chi-square in this study was used as a descriptive statistics, and not as a form of inferential statistics; 3) For the difference in women’s electoral participation between religiosity taken as a ratio variable and the percent of women in leadership positions, a bivariate correlation was used. To estimate how much change in the dependent variable is caused for every unit change in the independent variable, simple linear regression used. Inter-correlation analysis was also done to look into the interaction of variables with each other.

Results

Socio-Demographics of the Sample Population

The unit of analysis consisted of political parties in 7 countries covering Muslim majority countries in the Middle East. A survey was conducted in 7 countries, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Yemen, and Turkey. The sample size consisted of 98 political parties. From the 7 countries, Egypt had the most number of political parties that participated in the study (7.6%), followed by Bahrain (5.5%). The least number of samples was taken from Yemen (1.2%). The mean number of seats occupied by the parties in the current or last parliament was 7.84 (s.d. 14.09).

The year of founding of the political parties was from 1863 to 2010. The median for the founding year was 1997, and the mode was in 2007 accounting for 7.3% of all parties. This means that there were many political parties founded in 2007.

Results of Descriptive Statistics

The variable religiosity in this study was an interval level of measurement ranging from 1 to 5, a score of 1 being most Islamic, and 5 being the most secular/religious. For women’s electoral participation, the data showed the mean percentage for women in decision making bodies was 12.01 (s.d. 10.64) while the percentage share of female nominees on parties’ electoral lists for parliament was 2.59 (s.d. 5.91).

For the Islam indicator, the Muslim majority countries had lesser internal party quotas for women (16.2%) than non-Muslim majority countries (57.9%) (Figure 1). Likewise, for external quota for women, more non-Muslim majority countries had electoral quota for women (95.5%) compared to Muslim majority countries (63.2%). This is because the Muslim population even in non-Muslim majority countries adhere to the strict interpretation of Islam in regard women’s electoral participation (Figure 2). This shows that Islam being the main political factor in Muslim majority countries has an influence on women’s electoral participation.

For the association between religiosity and women’s electoral participation, a bivariate correlation was done. The values of Pearson’s r for the sample data are shown in Table 2. The calculated Pearson’s r share of women in decision-making in parliament (r=0.334), and female leadership with female membership (r=-0.195) exceeded the tabular statistic of 0.173. Therefore,
the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a correlation between religiosity and women's electoral participation. Table 3 shows the inter-correlation between variables. There is a significant relationship between percentage share of women in decision-making bodies with percent female membership, as well as percentage share of female nominees on parties' electoral lists for parliament with percentage share of women in decision-making bodies.

**TABLE 2. CORRELATION OF PERCENTAGE SHARE OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES (IN %), PERCENTAGE SHARE OF FEMALE MEMBERSHIP (IN %), RELIGIOSITY AND SECULARISM 5-POINT SCALE, AND PERCENTAGE SHARE OF FEMALE NOMINEES ON PARTIES’ ELECTORAL LISTS FOR PARLIAMENT (IN %)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Indicators</th>
<th>Pearson’s r (tabular statistic)</th>
<th>p-value (alpha 0.10, 2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of women in decision-making bodies (in %)</td>
<td>0.334 (moderate)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of female membership (in %)</td>
<td>0.195 (weak)</td>
<td>0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of female nominees on parties’ electoral lists for parliament (in %)</td>
<td>0.165 (no association)</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3. INTER-CORRELATION OF PERCENTAGE SHARE OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING BODIES (IN %), PERCENTAGE SHARE OF FEMALE MEMBERSHIP (IN %), AND PERCENTAGE SHARE OF FEMALE NOMINEES ON PARTIES’ ELECTORAL LISTS FOR PARLIAMENT (IN %)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electrical Indicators</th>
<th>Pearson’s r</th>
<th>p-value (alpha 0.10, 1-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of women in decision-making bodies with Percent female membership</td>
<td>0.460</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of female nominees on parties’ electoral lists for parliament with Percentage share of women in decision-making bodies</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4. CROSS-TABULATION OF INTERNAL PARTY QUOTAS AND RELIGIOSITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religiosity and secularism (5-point scale)</th>
<th>Internal voluntary party quotas Cross-tabulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious and secular (6-point scale)</td>
<td>Parties not employing quotas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremist Religiosity</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative but not extremist</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerant Religiosity</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confessional but Civil Secularism</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-religious and secular parties</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the cross tabulation of internal party quotas and religiosity, data show that the more a-religious and secular political parties, the higher percentages of quotas for women, while the extremely religious ones have the least quota allocation for women in their political parties (Table 4).

Since bivariate analysis is a symmetric test which cannot distinguish between dependent and independent variables, a simple linear regression was done to estimate the change in the dependent variable on every unit change in the independent variable as well as to estimate the variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable. The independent variable is the score on religiosity wherein a higher score points towards more secularism or lesser religiosity. The dependent variables taken separately were share of women in decision making bodies, percent of female nominees in party’s electoral lists, or female leadership x female membership. Results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5. REGRESSION OF RELIGIOSITY ON WOMEN’S ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Electoral Participation</th>
<th>Intercept (constant)</th>
<th>Slope (beta)</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>p-level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of women in decision-making bodies in parliament</td>
<td>0.304</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage share of female nominees on parties’ electoral lists for parliament</td>
<td>2.885</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent female membership</td>
<td>11.389</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Religiosity—lower score represented the most extremist religious orientation
(Source of raw and basic data: Kaasem, 2011, published by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research)

Based on the linear regression, for every unit increase in secularism (lower religiosity), there is a 4.1 increase of percentage share of female in decision-making bodies. Likewise, there is a 2.86 increase in percentage share of female nominees on parties’ electoral lists, as well as a 130 increase in percentage of female membership.

All the statistical analyses lead to the following statistical conclusions: 1) The mean of women’s electoral participation is less in radical Middle East countries than the mean in more moderate Middle East countries; 2) There is a correlation between Muslim religiosity and women’s electoral participation; and 3) There is an inverse relationship between religiosity and the following- the share of women in decision making bodies, the percent of female nominees in party’s electoral parties, and the interaction between female leadership and female membership.

**Analysis**

In the Middle East, the responses to the universalization of gender equality and inclusiveness have depended largely on several factors such as the relations of women within the family, the collectivity represented by the culture and religion, and the policies of the state. In Arabic-speaking countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq, there have been efforts and mechanisms for women’s empowerment. However, these were countered by conservatism in the community. Furthermore, although women in these countries have gained entry into the labor force, they have not been traditionally seen in politics. This is not due to lack of education of women since many Middle Eastern women are educated, but this stems from stereotyped and traditional structure of society. In Iran and Egypt, the constitution guarantees equal rights between gender in political participation. In practice, however, women are less likely to participate in politics (Paxton & Kunovich, 2003). In Syria and Lebanon, some women’s collectivities were organized but did not develop into an electoral force. Women’s political participation was limited to working in political parties, supporting male candidates, or being elected only if chosen by men within the parties (Sivan, 1989). In Turkey, women have more freedom. After the war of independence in this country in 1923 and onwards, women obtained full rights including education, equality in law, freedom to practice all professions and trades, and access to employment and political/public offices.

In Egypt, women’s political involvement began in the late nineteenth century. Historically, the Egyptian women were involved in nationalist movements, particularly the 1882 and 1919 revolutions. The women of Bint al-Nil rallied and engaged in hunger strike in 1951 to demand female representation in parliament. In 1956, the new Constitution finally granted women the right to vote and have full political rights (Sivan, 1989). In Jordan, feminist movements and women-centered reforms were state-led and state-initiated. Jordan’s King Abdullah I who continues the monarchical Hashemite rule for eighty years has implemented democratic reforms, but retains the absolute power to appoint the upper house of the
Parliament. Despite accommodation of women as members of political parties, the Muslim Brotherhood in 1989 objected to the candidacy of some women and publicly denounced women's involvement in higher politics (Clark & Schwedler, 2003). Meanwhile, Yemen's political democratization started in 1990 with the unification of the Northern Yemen Arab Republic and the Southern People’s Democratic Republic into today’s Republic of Yemen. Women’s political involvement in Yemen is embedded within political parties particularly the dominant Islamist Islah party. In Cyprus, although women are seen in business, and employment, they have not achieved the same representation in the political arena (Yirmibesoglu, 2008). Women are confined in the lower ranks of the political parties, serving mainly in women’s branches. In fact, it was only in 1952 that women were granted the right to vote and be elected in the general elections.

In the paper of Ungor (1968), he presents the cases of women in the Middle East and North African nations. According to the author, the responses to the universalization of gender equality and inclusiveness depend largely on several factors such as the relations of women within the family, the collectivity represented by the culture, and the state. In North Africa, post colonization, the emancipation movement opened the parliament and regional bodies to women legislators. Women became involved in public affairs, were elected to presidencies, gained memberships in assemblies and councils, and served in government and non-government administrations. In Arabic-speaking countries like Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and the North African countries, there were initiatives for women’s political involvement but they still encountered resistance from the family and the community. Turkey presents a different case, according to Ungor (1968), since modernization and secularization of society, including a more liberal and progressive view of women were initiated by the state and institutionalized through the constitution. The first election in Turkey in 1935 gave 35 seats to women in the Parliament, and way back in 1965, census revealed Turkey having 59,873 women practicing their professions including 1,504 judges and jurists. In Arab Africa, paid woman’s work was prevalent but this was viewed merely as an economic necessity. Nonetheless, modernization and agrarian reforms were still seen as positive factors in women’s economic empowerment. Within reformed states in Africa, the rural women did not fare better as they remained impenetrable to changes brought about by traditional culture and family structure.

Monshipour (2003) also shows the relations between women and globalization in Arab Middle East. He discusses that in Turkey, the imposition of the 8-year of schooling and intervention against intra-family violence advanced women’s status including abortion upon request. In Iran, international pressure resulted in the abolition of death of women by stoning. In Bangladesh, women’s local groups advocated inheritance rights and cessation of violence. The conclusion in the paper was—while the EU played a great role in Spain, Ireland, and other European countries’ discourse on women’s rights, there is a lack of regional influence of the Arab League in the Middle East and Arab nations. Monshipour (2003) also posits that economic globalization opened up spaces for employment and political activism of women in the Mideast and North African Muslim nations but due to lack of social safety net and wage discrimination, the women became victims of economic restructuring. As a consequence, the women resorted to Islam to regain their “rights and emancipation”. These women also resented attempts to accommodate western secular views on society and women.

In the research study of Paxton and Kunovich (2003), women’s political participation is cross-nationally low compared to men. In no country in the said survey are women found more than 50 percent in national politics, ranging from none at all in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and 43 percent in Sweden. The reasons provided include the effects of structural, political and ideological factors. Socio-structural factors include the pool of available women, and educational level; political forces pertain to openness of the political system and the presence of multi-party system; ideological explanations focus on religion, and attitude towards women. The analysis is further taken by the authors to fit the supply and demand for women politicians. Education supplies the availability of women for higher political office while the need to get support from voters and constituencies explains the demand side of having women candidates in political parties. Only these two factors—structural and political—are found in cross-national studies to correlate with women’s electoral participation, leaving out ideology. The authors contend that ideology can be a strong predictor when a robust measure of it is constructed. Based on the World Values Survey of 46 countries, they developed a measure of a national gender ideology that could predict women’s political representation, and their conclusions are—1) On the
whole, men make better political leaders than women do; 2) A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl; and 3) Do you think that a woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled? Using these measures, ideology became a strong predictor of political egalitarianism. Such findings provide a public policy challenge to affect reforms in the formal structures of politics and governance as well as to change societal attitudes towards women's political representation.

**Debate on which Factor—Patriarchy or Islam—Affects Women’s Political Participation**

The political landscape of feminism in the Middle East is a challenging terrain especially in light of its interpolation with religion. Some Muslim scholars like A’aolalu explicate that women’s inferior position in society is due to patriarchy, and not religion (Cosar 2007). He argues that Quran’s fundamental mooring is geared towards equality between men and women, and women's enhanced status. It is patriarchy that confined women to the domestic sphere, and turned her into a commodity of her husband. On the other hand, the scholar Safa insists that women should participate in the modernization project while retaining their natural constitution of femininity, and not fall into the trap of vulgar modern woman. For Sertel who is a leftist, he evinces the need for technological changes, modernization, equality of gender, and economic-material emancipation of a class society, which will effect women’s emancipation. However, the woman project for him, being a leftist, is under the rubric of class emancipation (Cosar, 2007).

On the other hand, Farhi (2001) starts with a daunting question as to how a Muslim intellectual begins to deal with a stereotyped conception of Islam traditionally associated with women’s inferiority and man’s superiority. Simply put, how can a Muslim man find a positive connection between women and their religious ideology vis-à-vis patriarchy? The new generation of religious intellectuals has acknowledged, albeit covertly, that there is definitely a ‘woman’s question’ in the case of Iran. Although they claim to be Muslim at heart, meaning they believe in the testament of Mohammad and the doctrines of Islam, they consider that there should be a more sensitive reinterpretation of essential religious truths in the form of new intellectual concepts and systems in consonance with the democratic values in society. However, they have yet to address the women’s question (masale-ye zan) in their version of religious modernism. According to Mir-Hosseini (1999), religious intellectuals are concerned with the dynamics of patriarchy/tradition against modernity as they perceive disharmony between traditional morality or law and modern conceptualizations of manhood and womanhood. In traditional societies, harmony was evident because women accepted the codes of conduct in regard their social and political location in society. Albeit in recent times, there has been a change in the perception of women’s identity for greater political participation, which was previously attributed only to men.

Monshipouri (2003), on the other hand, argues that there have been inroads for women’s rights even in conservative Islamic societies through processes of international relations, regional blocs, globalization, and structural adjustment programs. Also, the rise of Islamic feminism as against secular feminism in the Mideast is largely a reaction against western globalization. There is resistance among Muslims to be configured into a western model of modernity and femininity.

The paper of Yirmibesoglu (2008) provides a good exposition of how politics, culture, and ideology intersect to explain why there is low political participation of women in Northern Cyprus. The reasons for women’s low participation in politics in Cyprus can be summarized as—1) structural factors played out by the state and public institutions; 2) cultural moorings and patriarchy defining status of women in society and; 3) the willing subjugation of women to be inferior to men in the political arena. One issue stands out, which is the perception that the public sphere is the male’s domain while women are relegated to the home or the private sphere. This gendered division of labor evident in patriarchy has institutionalized male political power.

Patriarchal constructions of gender spheres are still palpable in the political landscape in the Middle East. There is a view of a passive woman who is sacrificial, tolerant, and unassertive. But seeing her deserving of pity and favors is no longer perceived a positive approach. The women’s question is identified as a complex social problem, and therefore cannot be rejected as a valid search for gender sameness or equality. Does religion alone, or patriarchy instead of religion, or the interaction between the two defines women’s status in the Middle East? This leads to another issue which is the relations of Islam with modernity.
The Growing Debate on the Relations between Islam and Modernity—Are they Antithetical or Complementary?

There is now a growing debate on the relations between Islam and modernity. Are the two contradictory, or can they be merged to advance women’s political rights? This debate is reviewed in the dynamics between Islam and modernity below.

There are several authors that show the dynamics between Islamist movements and modernization in the Middle East (Jamal, 2009; Blaydes & El Tarouty, 2009; Kia, 2000). Women in Pakistan, argued by Jamal (2009) adhere to Islamic traditions such as the wearing of veils or purdah while at the same time advocating modernity, but one that brings the benefits of modernization into conformity with Islam. The paper of Jamal (2009) shows that Islam is a facilitating factor for advancing modernity, not its interlocutor. There is evidence that the ‘modern’ and the ‘religious’ can intersect, and women of religion can reclaim their place in politics and society. The resurgence of a new Islamic feminism legitimizes Islamic values and at the same time contextualizes modernity. As is, the Pakistani women’s construction of their subjectivity and identity provides an inspiring alternative on how Islam can be reconstituted by the woman. She is not merely a gendered person, she also has race, ethnicity, and citizenship. She has multiple identities and is multiply positioned. She is a woman, a Muslim, a Shi’a or a Sunni, an Arab, and a citizen.

On the other hand, there are scholars who state that religion is antithetical to modernity. Cosar (2007) cited Hadaar (1994), Oman (1994), and Kolakowski (1993), among others, as some of the many scholars who point out that Islam and democracy are incompatible. As a case in point, Cosar (2007) refers to Turkish women in that while they are encouraged to actively participate in public affairs, ‘nation’s motherhood’ still remains largely as the signifier of the ideal woman. In the public sphere, women’s main responsibility consists of being nurturers and educators of national leaders. Cosar (2007) also argues that while Islam, in principle, advocates gender equality, in reality, however, patriarchy reinforces gender inequality. It is difficult to ignore the ideological dynamics between Islam and patriarchy, which compose the Muslim’s culture. The law espoused by the ‘village schoolmaster’ is the harbinger of secularism, while the ‘village preacher’ or imam is the vanguard of conservative values and tradition.

Conclusion

Women’s experiences and needs may be ignored in the policymaking processes due to their low political participation or low political representation. Based on the quantitative data in this study, there is statistical evidence to show that the seven Middle East countries have lesser mean for women’s electoral participation, and that Islamic religiosity is associated with lower women’s electoral participation.

The research study also showed the interpolation of Islam with other factors such as patriarchy, modernization, and state formations. Hence, the effect of Islam on the political participation of women should not disregard the influence of political opportunities such as modernization, nationalisms and uprisings, political structures such as states and political parties, and political actors such as the women themselves, that interact with Islam in constructing women’s subjectivity and women’s socio-political location.

With regard to the binary categorization between Islam and modernity, there are two opposing views. One is the ideological understanding that Political Islam is opposed to modernization and secularization, and that Islam and modernity are binary oppositions and contradict each other in practice. The other advocates that Islam is a facilitating factor to modernity, not its interlocutor. For instance, the Jama’at women of Pakistan have self-constructions of being both religious and agents of modernity thus intertwining the ‘religious’ with the ‘secular’. They advocate the portrayal of a woman whose main role is childbearing/rearing but at the same time actively participating in the economic and political affairs of society. They argue that while women seek equal opportunities in the public sphere, they should remain Islamic enough and be true to their domestic roles.

It is the hope of this research study to elucidate new essential understandings about Islam and women’s political participation in particular, and the issue of gender, religion, and politics in general. Gender is construed as a classification of being a woman or a man not merely by biological identification but one that is embedded within structures of power in families, communities, and states, which have gender in itself, as an organizing principle. Gender is likewise relational and positional which means that it could take both the personal and collective-political dimensions. Gender is also constitutive and
constituted, therefore, experiential.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This is to acknowledge the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, entitled “Party variation in religiosity and women's leadership: across-national perspective, 2008-2010,” by Fatima Sbaity Kaasem (Columbia University), ICPSR 30742, University of Michigan, USA. www.icpsr.umich.edu for the use of their raw survey dataset. This is also to acknowledge the following Professors of Political Science at the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman- Dr. Jean Encinas-Franco who was my thesis adviser, and Dr. Maria Ela L. Atienza and Dr. Ma. Lourdes Rebullida who were my research course professors. This article is based on my thesis and research course works.

REFERENCES


