



## Negotiating Women's Rights in Jordanian Electoral Law: Are They Fulfilled?

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Article	Abstract
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Governance; Pluralism; Women's Electoral Quotas; Women's Political Participation</p> <p><b>Article History</b> Received: Sep 29, 2025; Reviewed: Sep 30, 2025; Accepted: Dec 10, 2025; Published: Dec 12, 2025.</p>	<p><i>The research analyses legal guarantees for politically empowering women from a comparative perspective and the factors that limit their effectiveness. The research findings show that the sustainability of women's representation in Jordan's Parliament depends heavily on the force of law. Women's representation in Parliament is a temporary measure and is practically considered an alternative to competitive integration. Although those measures contributed to women's representation rising to 19.6% of the House of Representatives' seats and went beyond formal (token) representation, the percentage remained below the effective "critical mass" of 30%. From a pluralism governance perspective, the study uncovered a severe weakness in youth representation in Parliament at 4.3%, although they represent 60% of the population. The paper highlights the socio-political challenges surrounding the effectiveness of women's empowerment legal guarantees, which are tribal elections, discriminatory practices, and electoral violence against women in the digital space. To handle those gaps, the research recommends legislative reformations such as redividing political districts, reengineering the quota system, adopting a gender alternation system (zipper system), modifying the financial support for the party-based level, while linking it to the percentage of women's representation beyond the quota, and fostering transformation that supports women's political participation.</i></p>



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### INTRODUCTION

Democratic governance through pluralism is essential to democracy, as it is a primary standard for a fair electoral system and inclusive political participation to achieve political legitimacy and social justice. In the legal and political context of

Jordan, the election laws remain controversial, attracting constant criticism, and are being assessed to determine the extent to which they can apply the fair representation principle within the Legislative Authority, particularly for women.

Legally, the Election Law of Jordan No. 4 of 2022 is a turning point for Jordan's political life, as the Royal Committee recommended that Law to modernise the political system established by King Abdulla II in June 2021. The Law includes structural modernisations aimed at enhancing political participation. Among the top provisions brought by this law is the adoption of nomination at two levels: a local level in accordance with the open list system, and a national level dedicated to political parties in line with the closed list system. This reflects a tendency to deepen the democratic system based on partisan pluralism and programmatic organisation of a political state rather than tribal and regional affiliations (EU EOM, 2024). The Law also adopts a proportional representation system, which distributes seats more fairly than individual nomination systems that depend on the absolute majority or plurality rule (Farag & Abudalu, 2022; Norris, 2004; Welborne, 2011).

As for the Law's provisions on women's empowerment, 18 seats are reserved for women under the women's quota or dedication rule. The law requires each national party list to include at least one woman in the first three nominees and another among the next three. This measurement, along with the quota system, helped advance women's political participation within the legal framework.

Statistically, these legal reforms have raised women's representation in Parliament to 19.6%, exceeding the MENA region and North Africa's average of 17.9% (UN Women, 2024). Nevertheless, the (OECD, 2024) report indicates that women's representation does not reach the "critical mass" threshold of 30% necessary for an effective influence in the Parliament.

Despite the legislative developments and statistical indicators of women's representation progress, women's participation remains restricted by the force of legal provisions and empowerment measurement employment as an alternative for free competition due to cultural and structural challenges (Shalaby, 2025), as well as the broader political pluralism governance challenges, as the youth representation in the Parliament remained at 4.3%. However, this group represents 60% of the total population.

The research problem of this study is the extent to which Election Law effectiveness enables women to engage in and sustain effective political participation within the free competition framework, despite sociopolitical challenges that prevent the comprehensive achievement of this goal. The study also examines the extent to which the Jordan's Election Law conformity, from a pluralism governance perspective, aligns with the constitutional principles and international standards of human rights, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women (CEDAW) and the General Comment No. 25 (1996) of Human Rights Commission concerning the right to participation in public affairs.

The basis of the study is to handle the issue from a sociological perspective by focusing on women's rights to analyse the cultural incubators and institutional practices, as well as their impact on the legislation efficacy through the analysis of the cultural barriers that prevent women from reaching a free competition-based political participation stage, such as tribal discriminatory elections and hatred speech against women and their participation in public affairs.

A study by Norris shows that the proportional system, unlike the majority systems, provides a suitable environment to ensure that women are represented in Parliament through party lists (Norris, 2004). This should help reduce the financial cost of nominees and serve as a mediator between the electoral system's principles and rules and the nominees under this system. Furthermore, the design of the electoral system plays a partial role in overcoming cultural and social barriers to women's participation, especially when combined with enabling measures, such as quotas and the arrangement of nominees' names on election closed lists. The significance of this study is reflected in an essential context, as in (Htun, 2004), suggesting that women, as a societal group, do not form a homogeneous political group; therefore, the guarantee of representation of political identity of women in the society entails special measures, including the quota to ensure that women are represented as an influential group in decision-making.

Similar Studies warned against the superficial use of quotas as an illusory reform mechanism, highlighting their potential misuse to obstruct genuine equality demands or to empower only a limited elite of women rather than achieving inclusive empowerment of the intended groups (Gray, 2010; Yadav, 2024). (Bari, 2005) and (Nussbaum, 2000) further argued that sustainable empowerment requires addressing institutional and cultural frameworks simultaneously to dismantle gender stereotypes.

In another comparison, studies by Krook and Yadav demonstrate that the success of the quota system depends on the suitability of the cultural environment and the effectiveness of its contribution to changing stereotypes of women's position and role in society. The study warned that the quota symbolism could be used as a delusional means of reform and development, either to disable the claim of equality or to empower a limited group of women rather than all targeted groups. (Bari, 2005) and (Nussbaum, 2000) suggest that the enhancement of women's political participation relies on its ability to overcome the structural challenges of the cultural and social barriers, entailing a design of electoral principles that ensures a fair representation of women, provided that it is associated with a methodological cultural change aiming to alter the stereotypes and traditions that restrict women's roles in political affairs. It further suggests that the actual fairness involves opportunities to exercise rights, requiring the development of women's actual abilities to overcome their social barriers.

In the context of Jordanian studies, studies specialised in election laws are limited to women's political representation within the framework of numerical ratios, regardless of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of empowerment measurement within a pluralistic governance concept (Al-Zubi et al., 2024; Shahzadeh, 2020). A study by (Shalaby, 2025) demonstrates the quota's effectiveness in ensuring that women's representation is numerically represented in Jordan Parliament, associated with the limitation of the actual effect in the absence of institutional influence due to poor party organisation work in the Parliament, including the lack of women's representation in the advanced positions of parliamentary committees. The same outcomes were reported in a study by (Mari et al., 2007), which examined women's political participation solely from a numerical perspective. Furthermore, a study by (Awdat, 2024) analysed election laws during the period between 2013 and 2020 and their impact on actual political participation, outside the context of political pluralism governance concepts. (Khataybeh, 2024) examined the three modernisation tracks economic, social and cultural without assessing the impact of the Election Law of Jordan on women's political empowerment from a pluralistic governance perspective. Moreover, (Al-Zubi & Alrfoua, 2025) examine the legislative development of policies to politically and economically empower women and youth, without assessing the legislative effects or employing relevant data and statistics to address social and cultural barriers. Its recommendations are limited to the legislative framework. A study by (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010), emphasises the economic challenge posed by women's political participation as a barrier to the dedication or effectiveness of quota systems. Furthermore, (Moghadam, 2016) concludes in his study that women's participation after the Arab Spring failed to achieve fair representation, given the dominance of conservative powers. On the other hand, a study by (Kao, 2023), presents a deep analysis of the nature of the electoral system, social identities, and their motivation to be factionally enclosed or moving beyond it towards building societal interactions; however, this study did not sufficiently discuss the effect of electoral systems on women political participation and did not analytically discuss the new Election Law of 2022.

These findings reveal that there is a clear research gap in Jordan, as Jordanian legal studies remained restricted by the legal context without conducting a sufficient analysis of the sociological aspect by studying the social incubators' impact on the legislation effectiveness and the empirical aspect through a statistical analysis of the electoral data. This serves as a tool to assess the empowerment within the women's sustainable political participation framework.

Our study seeks to broadly and comprehensively deal with its specialized topic by adopting the legal approach of the Election Law provisions and the extent to which it aligns with the constitutional principles and international standards of equality, and the extent to which the sociological-legal method based on social and cultural

interactions aligns the Law, as well as their actual effect on the sustainable pluralism governance within the Parliament. The study also aims to employ relevant empirical data by comparing the electoral data from the 2016, 2020, and 2024 Parliament elections, and to assess the contribution of the Election Law of 2022, under which the Parliamentary elections of 2024 were held, within the fair representation and pluralism governance framework.

Through the aforementioned integrative approach, our study aims to provide a research model for standard legal analysis and a legal-sociological approach, which is concerned with studying the dynamics of the relationship between legislation and society within the pluralism governance framework from a democratic perspective, and contributes to the development of the sustainable fair representation track and motivates the scientific discussion of fair representation in Jordan. In light of the foregoing issue, the main research question of this study is “How much does the Election Law of Jordan No. 4 of 2022 contribute to the pluralism governance to ensure women's exercise of their political rights is empowered, and the societal behaviour towards women is influenced?”.

## METHODS

The nature of this study requires adopting a mixed legal methodology: the normative legal approach (Negara, 2023) and the socio-legal approach (Al-Fatih, 2023) to examine the effectiveness of legal provisions from a practical, social, and cultural perspective. Additionally, we conducted a comparative analysis of international best practices on the subject with the relevant provisions in the Indonesian General Election Law No. (7) of 2017, whenever necessary (Aljunidi et al., 2025). Furthermore, we analysed the Indonesian Constitutional Court's decision No. (62/PUU XXII/2024), which was published on 2 January 2025.

The normative legal approach was reflected in a comparative analysis of the provisions of the Jordanian Election Law No. (4) of 2022 and their compatibility with international human rights standards, particularly the normative jurisprudence on the concept of quotas or the rule of allocation, as well as the rights principles contained in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Jordan ratified these instruments and completed the necessary constitutional procedures for their entry into force within the national legal system in 2006, all within the framework of the principle of representational justice, which is regarded as one of the foundations of democratic governance.

The study also required adopting the socio-legal approach, which combines the analysis of specialised human rights reports with the examination of quantitative electoral data to assess the practical effectiveness of legal provisions within their social context. This approach included reviewing data from the Independent Election Commission (IEC) on voter turnout, women's representation by list type, and

candidate distribution by gender across the 2016, 2020, and 2024 parliamentary elections, as well as analysing reports from (UN Women, 2024), the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2024), and the National Centre for Human Rights. In parallel, the study examined the social and cultural challenges that constrain women's political empowerment, such as tribal electoral practices and gender-based hate speech online, which weaken the effectiveness of legal guarantees and require practical legislative and policy solutions. Collectively, these sources and analyses support the empirical evaluation of the legal framework's effectiveness in achieving representational justice and pluralistic governance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The 20th Parliament elections 2024-2027 were held on 10 September 2024 based on a new legal system in accordance with the outputs of the Royal Committee to modernise the political system formed by King Abdulla II in 2021. This reform aimed to establish a new stage, seeking to achieve the fair representation principle, especially the empowerment of women and youth, and to advance political work toward a programmatic, pluralistic partisan system to achieve a democratic goal: forming parliamentary governments.

According to official statistics, women constituted 47.1% of the total population in Jordan, with a voter participation rate of 48% in the 2024 parliamentary elections. However, women's representation in the Jordanian Parliament remained at 19.6%, while men made up 80.4%, despite the temporary measures and enabling procedures under the Election Law.

This research provides a comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of temporary measures and enabling procedures seeking women's sustainable political participation from a pluralistic governance perspective. The research is divided into three main parts: (1) the nature of the electoral system and women's quota policy; (2) the manifestations and practical obstacles to women's empowerment under the Jordanian Electoral Law; and (3) an analysis of the election results from the perspective of electoral justice.

### **The Nature of the Electoral System and Women's Quota Policy**

The electoral system is considered the foundation of the principle of fair representation on one hand, and a structural element in ensuring the balance between political stability and popular representation on the other. This, in turn, has a decisive impact on achieving political legitimacy and the democratic character of the state, influencing the level of political participation in elections and the formation of governments, particularly parliamentary governments (Al-Tarawneh, 2019).

The electoral system in Jordan has been based on fixed constitutional principles since the establishment of the Emirate of Transjordan. These principles stipulate that elections must be general, secret, and direct. The Jordanian Constitution delegated to

the law the authority to determine the nature of the electoral system and the number of parliamentary members, rendering it the legislative instrument for their regulation (The Jordanian Constitution, Article 67).

The parliamentary elections for the Twentieth Parliament were conducted under Electoral Law No. (4) of 2022, which redefined the electoral system by dividing constituencies into local and general districts. Under this arrangement, a total of 138 seats were allocated: 97 seats for local representation through open lists distributed across 18 electoral districts, and 41 seats for general representation through closed lists reserved for political parties and party alliances. These allocations operated alongside the women's quota system and additional procedures designed to ensure the representation and empowerment of religious and ethnic minorities.

Under the new law, candidacy in local or general districts was restricted to electoral lists, thereby eliminating the option of individual candidacy. One advantage of the list-based nomination system is that it encourages members of Parliament to focus on public issues, public interest, and principles, since competition is based on programmes rather than personal services. This contributes to the development of programmatic political work and party life, shifting political competition from family, tribal, or clan-based rivalries to programmatic party-based competition.

The law also adopted a proportional representation system, translating a political party's vote total into a corresponding number of parliamentary seats. With respect to this matter, the legislation codified the electoral thresholds by setting a 7% threshold for the local districts and 2.5% for the general district (Election Law for the House of Representatives, Articles 49 and 50).

Proportional representation fulfils one of the key constitutional principles: the principle of fair representation within mixed electoral systems. This system aims to enhance the opportunities of political parties through general lists, thereby compensating for potential shortcomings in local district results (Reynolds et al., 2008) and reducing the risk of vote fragmentation. This, in turn, has a positive impact on the stability of the state's political system and maximises the prospects for forming parliamentary governments.

More specifically, proportional representation provides a favourable environment to ensure women's representation in Parliament by reducing the financial cost of candidacy and partially overcoming the cultural and social barriers that often restrict women's political participation. These advantages become particularly essential when proportional representation comes with enabling measures, such as quotas and the arrangement of candidates' names within closed electoral lists (Norris, 2004; Sibarani, 2024).

The electoral district division is associated with the principles of fair representation and equality among citizens. It is connected to the Parliament's realisation of political legitimacy and is considered a basis for the core of truth. Among

other things, this constitutional principle requires the actual equality of electoral vote weight in representation within parliamentary commissions (HRC, 1996). Determining political districts adheres to multiple criteria, including population density, geographic distribution of representation inclusiveness, and seeking fair development (Amin, 2021).

Table 1 shows the local political district divisions in Jordan and the number of seats allocated to each district based on population size (DOS, 2025). Additionally, it provides the number of eligible voters in each political district, broken down by gender. The Table was prepared by researchers in reference to relevant official reports (IEC, 2024).

**Table 1. Local electoral districts, seats, and eligible voters by gender**

Governorate District	Population	Total Eligible Voters	Percentage of Women among Eligible Voters	Number of voters in the 2024 parliamentary elections	Allocated Seats	Seats Allocated for Women (Quota)
Amman	4,920,100	1,954,301	51.8%	381,895	20	1
Balqa	603,700	352,948	53.08%	143,839	8	1
Zarqa	1,675,700	727,569	51.44%	157,447	10	1
Madaba	232,300	126,381	53.34%	59,964	4	1
Irbid	2,173,200	894,295	53.7%	335,932	15	1
Ma'raq	675,200	110,932	54.5%	57,808	4	1
Jerash	291,000	129,236	55.13%	71,386	4	1
Ajloun	216,200	114,300	56.09%	61,948	4	1
Karak	388,700	189,268	55.09%	116,837	8	1
Tafilah	118,200	61,996	56.18%	33,945	4	1
Ma'an	194,500	57,414	52.28%	34,575	4	1
Aqaba	245,200	80,760	50.86%	30,745	3	1
Northern Badia District	-	119,184	58.97%	60,333	3	1
Central Badia District	-	76,322	59.28%	38,805	3	1

Southern Badia District	-	85,952	56.84%	52,897	3	1
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Source: Independent Election Commission (IEC, 2024); Department of Statistics (DOS, 2025).

The above Table shows essential information regarding the parliament seat distribution in terms of the total number of people eligible to vote at each local electoral district, the percentage out of the total number of eligible voters, and the number of seats allocated to each political district, demonstrating the following imbalances:

1. No fair distribution of parliament seats

Though we compared the population and the number of eligible voters in each governorate, we found that the electoral vote was unequally distributed. For example, in Ma'an Governorate, there were 15 voters per seat; while in Amman Governorate, each seat in the Parliament was equivalent to approximately 98 voters, making it more represented by sixfold. This violates the principles of fair representation and voter equality, which can be constitutionally framed as discrimination.

2. In consideration of the women's demographic weight when the quota or allocation rule is applied

By comparing the number of women to the total number of voters at each electoral district, their numerical superiority, and the disparity in their proportions across electoral districts, we found that the law, under the quota rule, dedicated one woman seat at each electoral district without taking into consideration the demographic weight at each electoral district. This raises an important question: is there an actual will for women's political representation in Parliament, or is adopting the quota system intended to keep women within the formal symbols of representation (Dahlerup, 1988).

Achieving the fair representation principle requires addressing these two issues. This involves a redivision of electoral districts by establishing a fair basis to consider the electoral vote weight at all local electoral districts and the demographic weight of women when determining the number of seats allocated under the quota system at each electoral district. This comes in addition to continuing to divide electoral districts within the same law, rather than granting this power to the executive authority, as was the case in Jordan under the previous Election Law of 2016.

Ensuring the fair representation principle requires effective constitutional oversight of electoral district division, taking into account the equality of electoral votes within local electoral districts, and a deeper understanding of the rights involved in this regard (Borman et al., 2024). Despite the possibility of challenging Election Law

provisions for unconstitutionality under the Constitutional Court's jurisdiction, we found, upon reviewing all Constitutional Court decisions, that they lacked application of or reference to this principle. This indicates an absence of the actual application of this constitutional guarantee, despite its importance in correcting legislative outputs when they deviate from jurisprudence (Al-Shibli et al., 2023).

Comparatively, the importance of the constitutional judiciary in maintaining pluralism and equality in the Election Law can be found in the judgment made by the Constitutional Court of Indonesia in the case numbered (62/PUU XXII/2024) dated 2 December 2025, under which it decided that Article 222 of the General Election Law No. 7 of 2017 is unconstitutional.

Article 222 of the General Election Law of Indonesia No. 7 of 2017 requires political parties or alliances that nominate candidates for the presidency or vice-presidency to have 20% of the parliamentary seats or to have received 25% of the nationwide vote in the previous elections. According to the Court with regard to the challenge made to claim that this provision is unconstitutional, it decided that the presidential threshold is unconstitutional, as that threshold is a restriction of the minor parties' right to nominate and gives the major parties an advantage, and the Court considers it a violation of the equality principle and the people's right to political participation, which conflicts with the core of the pluralistic democratic system.

With this decision, the Court established an electoral reform instrument and protections against laws that restrict representation or place barriers to the effectiveness of political participation (Hanan et al., 2025). This represents the actual results of the constitutional oversight that maintains public liberties in accordance with constitutional principles, as well as the extent to which the provisions align with those principles. The decision demonstrates the effectiveness of standard constitutional oversight, rather than a mere literal interpretation of the constitutional provisions.

### **Manifestations of Women's Empowerment under the Jordanian Electoral Law and Its Practical Obstacles**

Ratification or accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) imposes obligations on the parties thereto, as it is a convention on women's rights and empowerment. Such obligations include the realisation of equality between men and women in all fields (Aghbari et al., 2024). In the Jordanian case, Jordan is a party to CEDAW. This Convention was published in the official gazette of 2007 without being presented to the Parliament for approval under a special ratification law. Under CEDAW, Jordan has an obligation to adopt temporary empowerment measures for women pursuant to Article 4(1) thereof.

The philosophy of securing temporary empowerment measures for women should realise actual equality between men and women, particularly from a political and social perspective, as they do not represent a homogenous political group, and

those measures help them overcome societal challenges of their political participation (Htun, 2004; Mari et al., 2007).

The basis of women's empowerment and doubling their chances to be represented in the Parliament are associated with the positive discrimination rule, also known as “Quota,” which requires five criteria to be met to develop and democratise the electoral systems (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022), as stated in General Recommendation No. 25 issued by CEDAW (2004):

1. The existence of actual inequality;
2. The presence of discriminatory treatment accompanying this inequality;
3. The political will of the governing authority to adopt measures granting preferential treatment to groups of citizens who have historically suffered discrimination;
4. The corrective nature of the measure, which must go beyond formal equality to establish substantive equality; and
5. The temporary character of the measure, whereby legal differentiation is justified only until substantive equality is achieved, at which point the special measures are to be phased out.

The adoption of the Jordanian Electoral Law No. (4) of 2022 introduced a quota system for women, alongside a series of legislative measures designed to enhance their representation in the Parliament. Within this framework, 18 seats were reserved for women under the local list quota, representing approximately 13% of the House of Representatives total membership. As a practical application of the principle of “enabling measures”, the law requires that each candidate list at the general party-list level must include at least one woman among the first three candidates, and at least one woman among the subsequent three candidates. However, the law did not adopt the gender alternation mechanism, commonly referred to as the *Zipper System*, which, according to one study, can enable women’s parliamentary representation at rates of 40% to 60% (Monati et al., 2023).

By comparison, Article 245 of the General Election Law of Indonesia No. 7 of 2017 established a legal framework that guarantees women’s sustainable political participation in Parliament. It requires the lists of nominees for the House of Representatives, the Regional House of Representatives and the city/district House of Representatives to include 30% of female candidates, and the names to be arranged in an order that ensures women's presence in advanced places on these lists (Dahlia & Warjiati, 2024; Muhammad & Elmayanti, 2025).

The effectiveness of these enabling measures, represented by the application of the quota system at the district level and the general list level, has remained a subject of debate among academics and legal experts. A public opinion survey on “Women’s Political Participation and the Impact of New Legislation,” conducted after the 2024 parliamentary elections and including 1,812 Jordanians and 174 female political leaders,

revealed that 91.4% of the female leaders and 73.4% of Jordanians in the sample indicated that financial barriers related to the costs of election campaigns constituted a major obstacle to women's political participation. Meanwhile, family obligations were found to hinder their participation by 71.7%, societal rejection by 66.8%, and harassment from the public, including online, by 62.2% (UN Women, 2025).

On the other hand, a study shows that the success of the quota system depends on its alignment with the cultural environment or on the law's effectiveness in promoting cultural change regarding stereotypical perceptions of women's status and role in society. Without this change, women's presence remains within the framework of symbolic representation (Gray, 2010; Yadav, 2024). In addition to cultural factors, the economic challenge to women's political participation is an obstacle to the effectiveness of the allocation or quota system. The economic gap and insufficient funding for women's electoral campaigns constitute constraints on women's political participation (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010).

In examining the reality of the legal framework for women's empowerment in light of the constitutional and international standards of affirmative action, and analysing it within the political, social, and cultural context of Jordan, two societal challenges elaborated in the following emerged regarding women's representation in the Parliament, in addition to the economic challenge of candidacy and campaign costs.

### **Tribal Elections**

According to monitoring reports on the electoral process in Jordan, many regions of the Kingdom held tribal elections before the official registration of candidates for the Nineteenth and Twentieth Parliaments. These pre-elections were held to reach agreements on nominating individuals to run in the parliamentary elections, and such outcomes are considered tribal and regional consensuses on the names of those wishing to run (National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), 2024).

The report of the European Union Election Observation Mission on the parliamentary elections documented the exclusion of women from decision-making and internal nomination processes within tribes (EU EOM, 2024), which reveals structural legal issues requiring systemic reform to ensure the principle of equal opportunity mandated by full equality, as a necessary condition for achieving genuine empowerment.

Regarding the legality of these elections, they are considered discriminatory by excluding women and limiting participation to men. Furthermore, such elections do not align with the essence of the electoral system, which is based on candidacy through lists according to programmatic foundations and unified visions, rather than individual candidacy. This, in turn, naturally reflects on the formation of the Parliament in an individualistic manner, contradicting the concept of legal certainty that the legal norm is supposed to provide (Borman et al., 2024).

These societal contexts have limited the effectiveness of the principle of equality and undermined its essence, reducing the real opportunities for women to benefit from the temporary measures in the Election Law aimed at empowering them politically and ensuring their fair access to the public sphere (Nussbaum, 2000).

### **Electoral Violence Against Women in the Digital Space**

Jordan's parliamentary elections of 2024 are important because they mark the first step in Jordan's new political track as it marks its 100th anniversary. Despite this reformative legislative transformation, the tracing of election events revealed deep imbalances in the cultural structure regarding women's political participation. Although the legal system was solid regarding the prosecution of cybercrimes, especially under the Cybercrime Law of 2022, the latest elections saw hate speech against female nominees, mainly on social media, which formed a structural challenge for Jordan's democracy.

A report issued by the Centre for Strategic Studies in Jordan analysed 34,329 posts on the X platform from 1 August to 19 September 2024. It showed that 1,741 posts contained negative content targeting particular groups or female candidates, and 44 posts received many reactions and 618,256 views. A deep search needs to be made into such posts that influence the Jordanian public opinion, especially among youth and women themselves (Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), 2024). According to the report, some posts involved a repetitive pattern of gender-based discrimination against female candidates whose initiatives to participate in the elections were marginalised. Below are examples observed by the report to be studied and analysed:

1. Women are the cause of every disaster, ignorant and naïve.
2. Women sit crying, their tears flowing, and they scream; when their hormones are active, they curse everything around them.
3. Since when have women been useful in public life? Stay in your homes.

Furthermore, a public opinion survey on "Women's Political Participation and the Impact of New Legislation" analysed narratives surrounding women's candidacy in the 2024 parliamentary elections through content analysis of social media posts. The report found that female candidates were targeted based on gender and framed within stereotypical roles, rather than having their electoral platforms discussed (UN Women, 2025).

Through content analysis, the public opinion survey report revealed narratives of comments opposing women's candidacy in the 2024 parliamentary elections on Facebook the platform most widely used by Jordanians which the report summarised as follows (UN Women, 2025):

1. Participation as the usurpation of men's rights: portraying women's political participation as a "zero-sum game" and a "marginalization of men's role."
2. Depicting advocacy efforts for women's political participation as being driven by foreign agendas.

3. Questioning the competence of female leaders: labelling them as “incompetent” and their achievements as “unnecessary.”

These narratives contribute to undermining gender equality and reveal a societal culture rooted in male-centred citizenship, which frames women’s political participation as a threat, representing a domination of cultural values over legal rights. As part of national efforts to enhance women’s participation in parliamentary elections, the Independent Election Commission launched the *Reference Framework for Women’s Empowerment* (Strategy for Women’s Empowerment in Elections and Political Parties 2024 2026 on 23 July 2026).

In terms of practical measures to mitigate the societal barriers impeding women’s political participation, the Commission simultaneously announced the establishment of the “MONITOR” platform within the Commission to track digital media platforms concerning “electoral violence against women.” The Independent Election Commission also adopted a definition of electoral violence against women based on the legal frameworks of electoral crimes under Election Law No. (4) of 2022, defining it as:

“Any act or omission, whether material or moral, intended by its perpetrator to deprive or hinder women from exercising any right, function, or freedom stipulated in the Election Law, and carried out on the basis of a woman’s gender” (National Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), 2024). The Independent Election Commission recorded eight complaints related to electoral violence against women, categorised as follows (IEC, 2024):

1. Prevention of candidacy: three complaints, one referred to the Public Prosecutor, while two were withdrawn.
2. Family pressure on a candidate: one complaint concerning pressures exerted on a female candidate to dissuade her from opening an electoral headquarters.
3. Interference in the electoral campaign: two complaints, one regarding the undermining of a female candidate’s campaign and the dissemination of false information about her.
4. Offensive comments on social media platforms: one complaint referred to the Public Prosecutor based on the Commission’s monitoring, as the published material included insults directed at a female candidate, as well as hate speech and racist content.
5. Campaign sabotage and removal of posters: one complaint referred to the Public Prosecutor.

Through its dedicated “MONITOR” platform for tracking digital media regarding electoral violence against women, the Independent Election Commission documented 269 posts containing electoral violence. Of the 95% targeted women, the content of these posts was distributed as follows: about 41% involved defamation and

social isolation, 31.3% questioned competence, and 17.4% mocked appearance (IEC, 2024).

A societal culture that opposes the concept of equal rights generates profound social challenges that diminish democratic aspirations. Addressing these challenges requires the following:

1. Launching cultural awareness programmes in cooperation with civil society organisations to raise awareness of the importance of the state's modernisation project and to promote women's political participation.
2. Implementing educational campaigns on the democratic transition process to foster a culture of equal citizenship, coupled with confronting the phenomenon of electoral violence through an integrated legislative framework and community support.
3. Training media personnel to cover elections in a manner that respects diversity and reinforces the constitutional principles of justice and equality.

### **Analysing the Election Results from the Perspective of Electoral Justice**

The detailed report of the 2024 parliamentary elections for the Twentieth Parliament, issued by the Independent Election Commission, indicates that voter turnout reached 32.25% of the total eligible voters (5,080,858), with 1,638,356 exercising their right to vote 52% men and 48% women. Among this overall percentage, 45.18% were from the youth category (IEC, 2024). The same report shows that the total number of candidate lists reached 197, of which 172 were local lists and 25 were party lists. The total number of candidates amounted to 1,623, including 1,246 men and 377 women.

Regarding women's candidacy, women constituted 20.3% of the total candidates in local districts and 27.5% of the candidates on the general (party) list. This latter percentage underscores the need to adopt a gender-alternation system rather than relying solely on enabling measures that require the inclusion of one woman among the first three candidates and another among the following three, to guarantee women's representation in the elections (Rambe, 2024).

Out of 190 female candidates, 166 ran through the quota track rather than the open competitive track. According to the European Union Election Observation Mission's report, women candidates preferred the quota track to the competitive one because male candidates did not view them as rivals under the quota system. In addition, this path reduced financial costs and increased their chances of winning (EU EOM, 2024).

Notably, regarding candidacy on the general list, 30% of all female candidates were among the first six names, and 25% of all youth candidates were among the first five. This underscores the importance of the legal guarantees provided to empower both groups within the general list, as the law required their candidacy. Nevertheless, representation remained at the minimum level.

The Election Law represents a development in its legal structure, with a proportional representation system and efforts to ensure pluralism through quota systems and empowerment guarantees. To examine the realisation of the principle of representational justice in the 2024 parliamentary elections for the Twentieth Parliament, we will analyse the distribution of seats among different social groups, comparing them in terms of quantity (number) and percentage of total seats, as well as the extent to which they reflect demographic reality and representational justice (Official Gazette, Issue No. 5950, dated 14-9-2024).

**Table 2. Distribution of parliamentary seats in the Twentieth Parliament (2024) across categories.**

Category	Seats in the General List (out of 41)	Percentage of General District Seats	Seats in the Local List (out of 97)	Percentage of Local District Seats	Total (138 Seats)	Representational Percentage
Christians	2	4.90%	7	7.20%	9	6.50%
Circassians and Chechens	1	2.40%	2	2.10%	3	2.20%
Youth (<35 years)	3	7.30%	3	3.10%	6	4.30%
Women	9	22.00%	18	18.60%	27	19.60%
Muslim Men	26	63.40%	67	69.10%	93	67.40%

Source: Official Gazette of Jordan, Issue No. 5950, dated 14-9-2024; Independent Election Commission, 2024

Although participation in the parliamentary elections was nearly equal between men and women, comparing the indicators of candidacy and election results against the foundations of empowerment highlights a challenge to the principle of representational justice. In terms of women's candidacy, they constituted 20.3% of candidates in local districts and 27.5% on the general list, with the vast majority (166 out of 190) running through the quota track. The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM, 2024) notes that women resorted to the quota track for economic and social reasons, as it doubled their chances of success.

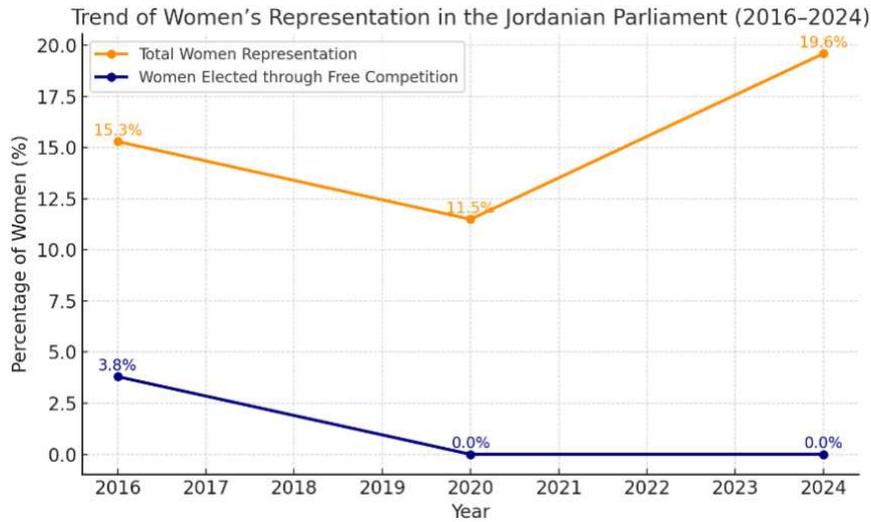
As for representation, the cultural and religious minorities reflected an official orientation toward guaranteeing a minimum level of political inclusion. Christians were represented at a rate higher than their demographic proportion, estimated at 2.1 3%, indicating a policy of positive, albeit relative, inclusion (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The Circassians and Chechens, despite their small population size and the

absence of official data documenting their proportion, also enjoyed enhanced representation that reflects cultural and historical considerations.

Regarding youth representation (<35 years), this group held only 6 of 138 seats (4.3%), whereas their demographic share exceeds 60% in Jordan, indicating severe underrepresentation and limited empowerment tools under the Election Law (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The significant disparity between youth representation and their demographic weight underscores a fundamental flaw in age-based representational justice. It also highlights gaps in the electoral system or political environment, such as limited candidacy opportunities, financial costs, and the dominance of traditional forces, necessitating reform interventions to improve youth political inclusion.

As for women's representation, women in Jordan constitute 49.147% of the total population, according to the Department of Statistics 2024 report (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Their participation rate in the last elections was 48% of voters; however, women won only 27 out of 138 seats (19.6%), of which 18 were allocated through the quota system and nine via general lists. The representation of women in the Twentieth House of Representatives accounted for only 19.6% of total seats, undermining the concepts of gender justice and substantive equality in political representation within the Parliament. From a normative analytical perspective, this reflects the following challenges:

The overall weakness of women's representation in the Parliament. Legal and political literature classifies the 19.6% representation rate as a "tilted critical mass," meaning it has surpassed the stage of purely "symbolic or token representation" but has not yet reached the 30% threshold considered the minimum level for achieving substantial influence in political participation (Dahlerup, 1988; EU EOM, 2024; NCHR, 2020). The temporal trend and the distinction between seats won through free competition and those won through enabling measures are illustrated in Figure 1 below.



Source: Independent Election Commission (IEC, 2024); National Center of Human Rights (NCHR, 2020).

By analysing the figure above, the highest representation percentage for women during the last three elections in Jordan (2016, 2020 and 2024) was in 2024 at 19.6%, compared to 11.5% in 2020 and 15.3% in 2016. Although this percentage exceeded the “Formal representation” concept, it still fails to reach the critical 30% threshold for effective participation in decision-making in parliaments (Dahlerup, 1988; EU EOM, 2024).

### **The limitation of women's representation to temporary and enabling measures**

The election results of 2024 show that 66.6% of women's seats were won through the quota system, and the remaining nine seats were won through enabling measures that allowed the formation of partisan lists at the general district level. This result of the enabling measures was inevitable, as introduced under the Election Law No. 4 of 2022 in the absence of women's representation through free competition compared to the 2016 elections, when five seats were won by women through free competition (Figure 1). This indicates that women's representation in the twentieth- and nineteenth-century parliaments occurred through the force of law rather than through free competition, which is the primary purpose of the enabling measures. This confirms that there are cultural and structural barriers hindering women's sustainable political empowerment, and that the enabling measures are alternative to actual competition. The law should serve as an effective means to continually address the evolving social and political dynamics (Hufon et al., 2025).

Through research findings and conclusions, we answer the research main question through the following:

1. The Election Law of Jordan No. 4 of 2022 includes a women's quota system. In parallel, it requires measures to empower women at the general district level. However, this statute fails to consider fair representation, which requires equal voting weights. The analysis of electoral district divisions reveals a significant contrast in electoral vote weights across Jordan's governorates. Furthermore, this statute did not consider women's demographic weight at the local districts, as it assigned each electoral district only one seat under the quota system, with no regard for women's percentages in those districts.
2. The analysis of the parliamentary election results shows that women's representation in the Jordanian Parliament since the 19th Parliament election has been by force of law rather than through free competition. This confirms the deviation of the measures from their primary purpose of enabling women to reach the free competition track, based on natural integration and women's right to political participation.
3. The cultural incubators and institutional challenges have been an actual barrier for women's political empowerment, particularly in tribal elections and hate speech on the internet.
4. Despite the legislative development of the Election Law of 2022, the political pluralism governance requires a review of electoral district divisions to ensure equal electoral vote weights in line with the fair representation principle. It also requires a zipper system to be applied to general lists and incentive modifications to financial contribution to party support to be made based on the women's nomination and representation percentage out of quota. Moreover, political pluralistic governance requires a cultural transformation that enhances women's political participation, given that such participation is a democratic necessity for transformation in Jordan.

Based on the above, we suggest that the Election Law of Jordan No. 4 of 2022 be subjected to a deep societal dialogue to achieve a partnership between legislation and society. In the context of the national invitation, we present the following suggestions: *First*, comprehensive legislative reform to restructure the electoral system based on proportional representation can be pursued by reconsidering temporary measures and enabling procedures for women. This reconsideration includes the following.

1. Restructuring the women's quota in a manner that aligns with its philosophy as a temporary enabling measure, intended to achieve substantive equality in representation and to reach the "critical mass" within the Parliament. Achieving this objective requires considering the demographic weight of women when determining the number of seats allocated to them in each electoral district, based on the number of eligible female voters, rather than

limiting the allocation to one seat per district regardless of women's proportion, as stipulated in the current Election Law.

2. Reconsideration of enabling measures for women in the formation of party lists at the general district level, by incorporating an explicit provision mandating full gender alternation (the Zipper System). This would require amending Article (8/c) of the Election Law No. (4) of 2022 and its amendments as follows "In the formation of party lists running at the level of the general district, the names of male and female candidates shall be arranged alternately by gender, such that no more than two consecutive names of the same gender are permitted in the list, and the first name on the list must be a woman."

Second, amending the Political Parties Financial Support System No. (15) of 2023 can be done by adding additional financial incentives linked to the rates of women's candidacy and representation. This includes the following:

1. Establishing a progressive bonus mechanism for parties to enable women to win parliamentary seats through open competition outside the quota framework.
2. Establishing an additional bonus mechanism for parties that include at least 30% women among the total number of candidates in their lists.
3. Establishing an additional bonus mechanism for parties in which women occupy leadership positions within their organisational structures.

Third, our suggestion also involves developing a cultural reform plan based on active citizenship, the rejection of discrimination and hateful speech, and modifications to educational curricula and general behaviours through an active partnership among official institutions, the media, religious institutions, and social organisations (unions, parties, and associations).

## CONCLUSION

This research uncovers practical imbalances of pluralistic governance in the Election Law of Jordan from a women's political empowerment perspective. The official data indicates that women's representation in Parliament (2020-2028) relied entirely on temporary measures (a quota system) and enabling procedures at the general district level. Although the percentage of women's participation in the last elections was 48%, women's representation was only 19.6% of the representatives' seats in the 2024 elections held under the Election Law under study. This means women remained below the critical mass of 30%. From a sociological perspective on law, the research paper analysed the dynamics of the relationship between enabling measures for women in the election law under study and the societal culture's influence on women's representation in the twentieth Parliament. Accordingly, this research aims to invite direct legal researchers in Jordan to a rights-based path to study and

analyse the law's interactions with society from a law-sociology perspective. This invitation is intended to realise the concept of citizenship and equality.

In this context, the research paper provided recommendations to achieve actual women's empowerment in Parliament. This requires an amendment to Article (8/A) of the Election Law of Jordan No. (4) of 2022 in a way that ensures the fair representation principle. This necessitates electoral vote weight equality and a review of the temporary measures and women's empowerment procedures, considering women's demographic weight in the allocation of seats in accordance with the quota system. Women's empowerment procedures will be further reviewed in the context of the nominated partisan lists at the general district level to ensure they include an explicit obligation to form election lists using the zipper system. This requires the amendment to Article (8/C) of the Election Law No. (4) of 2022. The research paper recommends an amendment to the Financial Contribution System to Support Political Parties (15) of 2023 by adding financial incentives associated with the percentage of women nominated and represented. It also recommends a broader reformation of societal culture by developing a cultural reformation plan based on active citizenship, rejection of both discrimination and hateful speech, and modification of educational curricula and general behaviours through an active partnership between the official institutions, the media, religious institutions, and social organisations (unions, parties, and associations).

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