

## A Study on Future Status of Seats in Parliament held by Iranian Women in Comparison with Middle East Countries in 2025

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### **Abstract**

Determining the status of a country requires assessment and calculation of the various scientific, economic, social, and political components and factors and comparing them with other countries. Calculating all of these factors can show the level of national power and the development of a country on regional and international levels.

One of the advancement factors is the development of gender indices of countries, and one of the indices of gender development is the status of seats in parliaments held by women. Gender indices in Middle East countries determine the place of women in each country in relation to others. The knowledge pertaining to this ratio shows the increase of democracy and the development of women in these countries.

This paper is the result of a research on measuring the condition of women in parliaments of Middle East countries. In this paper the aim is to present a method and model for measuring the condition of women in regard to their presence in parliaments in the Middle East region. The method used in this research is descriptive-analytic and using the method of multi-level sampling and by determining the current place of the countries in relation to one another, their place in 2025 is predicted based on indices of gender development and through techniques of analyzing time series models.

The result shows that Iran stands 15th among 22 Middle East countries in 2025 based on women's presence in the parliament. Of course the predicted difference of Iran's index with seven countries of the region was small and it is expected that with minor changes in the indices of Iran and the region, Iran's rank will rise to 8.

**Keywords:** Gender Development, Women in Parliament, Iran, Middle East.

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### **Introduction**

Human resources are effective factors in the national power of countries, because the presence of a human force which has passed stages of education and possesses different skills and expertise in all fields will increase productivity and efficiency. In fact this active and effective population should be considered without a gendered view because the experience of developed countries has shown that in cultural, social, economic, and political fields women have not been inferior to men, they have sometimes even left men behind.

Since 1990, the office of human development reports has published the factor of human development which, going beyond gross national production, looks at the more extensive definition of health and happiness. These factors are not a comprehensive criterion for human development because gender or income inequalities or respect for human rights or political freedoms are not addressed in them. (www.undp.ro, 2008)

According to the UN definition, women's level of capability shows whether women have an active role in economic and political life. This level shows women's share of legislative parliament seats, high officials, and their position among technical workers and women experts and demonstrates gender inequality in gaining income and economic independence in the country.

On March 8, 2006, Kofi Annan the former Secretary General of the UN, speaking for the International Women's Day, said that the international foundations and pillars of this year's Women's Day has been based on the participation of women in decision-making and presence in challenges and also in creating changes. (Press Release/ 2006)

The 25-year long-term plan began at a time that Iran was in various positions in relation to different factors of development in comparison to countries of the region.

One set of indices aimed for by Iran is factors of human development, including gender factors. According to United Nations documents, gender factors such as higher education for women, women's employment, and the political participation of women are used to determine the position of women. Comparison of women's condition based on the said factors in the Middle East region began in the 1990's and has been specified until the end of 2008, indicating the process of increase in each factor. Measuring the possibility of increase in each factor and predicting the degree of increase in gender factors of countries until 2025 employing the statistical model of

time series, can show the process of increase with the same pace and the ratio of increase in different countries with the same paces. But what is more remarkable than both these cases is planning to reach the desired condition: having the first place in gender development factors.

Since some of the factors such as responsibility of women for family and children, negative policy groups, conservative religions, educational trainings, social and economic conditions, nature of governments and financial obstacles can cause women have not a presence in legislative assemblies (Rule 1994a, 1994b, Liswood,1999; Harris,2001).

However, most of the researches about the gender inequality in relation with political agency indicate the educational, economic, social and political factors. But each of these factors, in different societies, are changeable and among the above factors, culture is the most effective factor which is known (Moor and Shackman, 1996; Paxton, 1997; Matland, 1998b; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999).

In 2003 a 25-year long-term development plan was introduced according to which in 2025 Iran should achieve high goals and in almost all fields gain the first rank among the countries of the region (Perspective Document, 11-14-2003).

The 25-year long-term plan of Iran contains the goals of advancement with acquiring advanced knowledge based on the greater share of human resources including women in reaching the first economic, scientific, and technological rank throughout southwest Asia (containing Central Asia, Caucasia, Middle East, and neighboring countries). One of the requirements of achieving this goal is women's participation in decision-making and creating change. Predicting the condition of the factor of the relative number of women's parliament seats to men in Iran in comparison to other countries of the Middle East in the 2009-2025 interval has been studied and analyzed in various modes.

**Mode 1:** Comparison of the relative index of Iran and predicting the constant index and lower than index of Iran (5 countries);

**Mode 2:** Comparison of the relative index of Iran with countries with predicted constant indices and higher than Iran's index (7 countries);

**Mode 3:** Comparison of Iran's relative index with countries with predicted rising indices and lower than Iran (6 countries);

**Mode 4:** Comparison of the relative index of Iran with countries with predicted rising indices and lower than Iran's index;

**Mode 5:** Comparison of the relative index of Iran with countries with a

falling predicted index (one country.)

Prediction of Palestine's relative indices in the 2009-2025 interval was not possible and thus it is not included in any of the above five modes. The present paper tries to determine the current status of Iranian women in the parliament and measuring it in relation to the status of women in parliaments of other countries of the region, as well as the future status of the women of Iran in 2025, according to factors of human development. In this research the aim is to first, determine the current condition and rank of women in parliament in the middle east and next, researching the future condition of women based on the past condition until the end of the application of Iran Perspective Document in 2025, so that it might be a effective criterion for comparing Iran with other countries of the region, based on which authorities will be able to employ the required mechanisms for reaching the first place in the region.

### **Research Methodology**

The method of this research is descriptive-analytic. Using the time series models and employing the spss software based on the index of women's share of parliament seats, this research is concerned with the current condition of women in the Middle East and goes on to predict this condition in 2025. In accordance with the nature and type of the subject under study, information has been gathered through library studies and from a combination of sources including country yearbooks, UN information and statistics, the Internet, etc.

In general assessing the condition of women and categorizing countries according to it is innovative. Designing a model for prediction measurement is another interesting aspect of this paper. On the other hand, using this model for the 22 countries of the Middle East region, namely, Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Armenia, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Israel, Palestine, Syria, Turkmenistan, Egypt, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan, is innovative in itself.

### **Question of the research**

What will be the status of the women of Iran in parliament in comparison to the women of other countries in the Middle East region in 2025?

### **Research hypothesis**

It seems that women in Iran's parliament will gain a higher status in comparison to women of other Middle East countries in 2025.

### **Women in parliament in 1990**

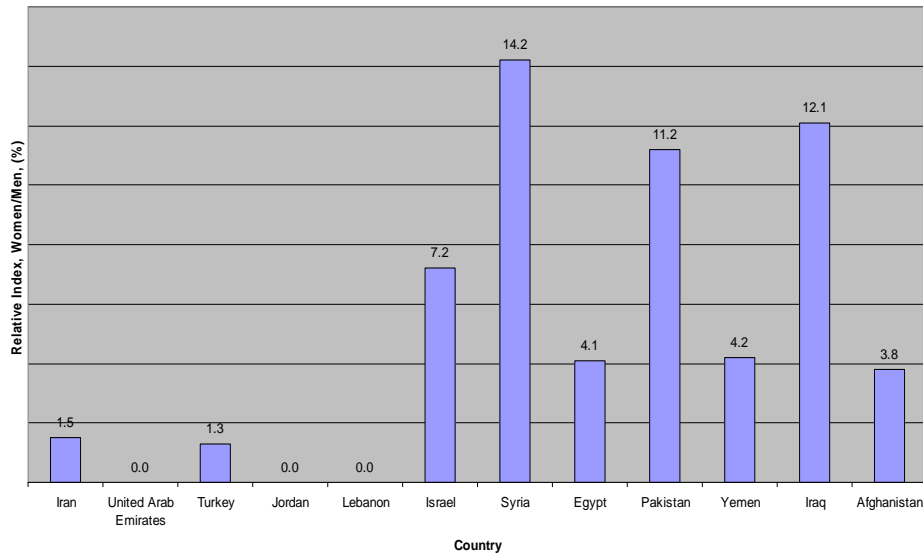
In figure 1, the condition of countries in the Middle East region is displayed according to the index of women's parliament seats in proportion to men's in the year 1990.

Out of the 22 Middle East countries women of Iran, turkey, Israel, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, and Afghanistan have had a presence in the parliament.

Women in United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Lebanon were not present in their parliaments and the relative index of women's parliament seats to men was zero for the mentioned countries. The condition of women's participation in legislative assemblies of Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Palestine, and Turkmenistan was not included in UN published statistics. Therefore in the year 1990 the abovementioned eleven countries have been excluded from study and comparison.

Among the eleven Middle East countries in which the relative parliament index of women to men was calculated, Syria has the highest relative index with 14.2% and Turkey the lowest with 1.3%. In other words in the legislative assembly of Syria, per 100 men, 14.2 women were present, and as same in Turkey's assembly were 1.3 women.

Fig. 1. Comparison of Middle East countries based on women's parliament seats index (1990)



Note: figure 1 has been prepared by author.

The index average of the eleven countries whose statistics have been recorded and their relative indices calculated is 5.4. The relative indices of Israel, Syria, Pakistan, and Iraq have been higher than the index average and the indices of the rest of the countries, including Iran, UAE, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and Afghanistan are lower than the index average. Among the Middle East countries, the percentage of Yemen's relative factor, 4.2, has had the lowest difference from the index average (5.4). Conversely the percentage of Syria's relative index (14.2) has had the most difference from the average.

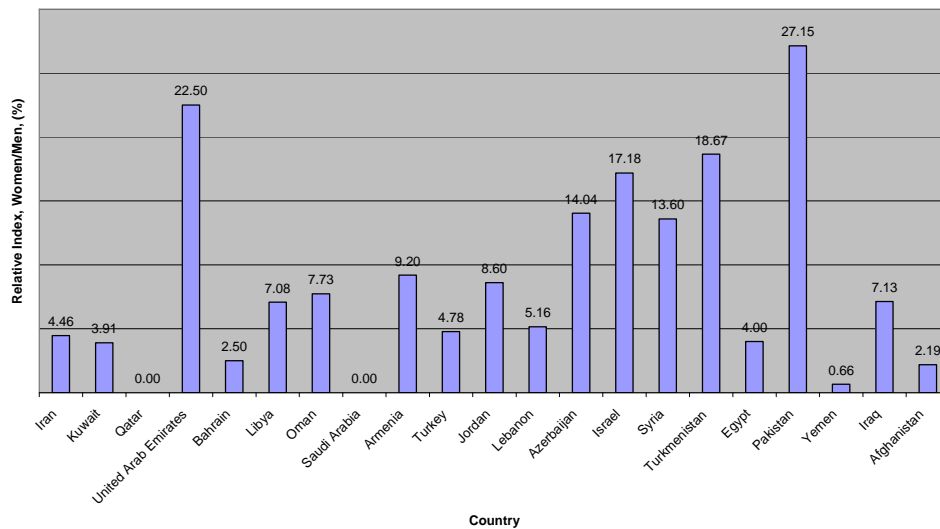
women's access to parliament has been frustratingly slow and very often disappointing. In 1975, women held 10.9 percent of all parliamentary seats worldwide. After more than 30 years of pledges, prescriptions and persuasion women occupy less than 18 percent of all parliamentary seats in 2008 (IPU, Reports and Documents n 54 page3).

### Women’s parliament seats in 2008

Anders Johnson, secretary general of the IPU, said that women are not only standing for election in greater numbers than before, they are getting elected, thanks in part to quota systems. In countries with gender quotas, women took 21.7 per cent of seats compared with 11.8 per cent in countries without. However Johnson said, the rate at which women have been making gains has slowed. The good news is that the number of seats held by women in parliament continues to go up and now has reached an all time high of nearly 17 per cent in 2006," He said the bad news is the increase in the number of women is slower than it was in the preceding year. If we are aiming for equality in parliament — in other words, roughly 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women — we will wait until the year 2077 to celebrate that event (www.cbc.ca).

In figure 2, the condition of Middle East countries has been displayed according to the relative index of women’s parliament seats to men in the year 2008.

Fig. 2. Comparison of Middle East countries based on women's parliament seats index (2009)



Note: figure2 has been prepared by author.

Among the countries of the region, the relative index of women’s parliament seats to men is at its highest in Pakistan with 25.6%. This means that in Pakistan’s legislative assembly, there are 25.6 women per 100 men.

The index average for 19 Middle East countries has been 8.9 in 2008. The indices of Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and Yemen, as well as Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been lower than the index average and the indices of UAE, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Israel, Syria, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan have been higher than the index average.

Among the countries with a relative index lower than the average, Jordan, with a relative index percentage of 8.6 had the lowest, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar with a zero index percentage had the most difference with the average. On the other hand among the countries with a relative index higher than the average, Armenia, with a relative index percentage of 9.2 had the least, and Pakistan with a relative index percentage of 25.6 had the most difference with the average.

Between the years 1990 to 2008, the average of the relative index of women's to men's parliament seats has gone from 5.4 to 8.9. It can be said that the relative index average has increased by 64.8% in 18 years. In other words the average of women's presence in the parliaments of countries in comparison to men has increased by 3.6% each year.

The required information for calculating the relative index of women's parliament seats to men is not available for many countries in 1990 and for some others in 2008. Fortunately, the required data from Iran, Turkey, Israel, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, and Yemen have been recorded for both 1990 and 2008. Therefore we will have a short survey of changes in the indices of these countries.

From among the above mentioned countries, the relative indices of Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Pakistan have increased while the relative index percentages of Syria, Egypt, and Yemen have decreased. In other words in the space of 18 years the presence of women in comparison to men in legislative assemblies of the four countries of the first group has increased, while it has decreased in the three countries of the second group.

The growth of the relative indices of Iran, Turkey, Israel, and Pakistan from 1990 to 2008 has been, respectively, 186.66%, 253.84%, 130.55%, and 128.57%. In a comparison with the average increase of the relative index (64.8%), it can be concluded that the above mentioned countries have had an approximate increase 2 to 4 times that of the average.

Ms Kitano, Head of the Inter-Parliamentary Union of Parliamentary Participation of Women, speaking at the annual conference on the condition of women in politics in 2009, said: When women are involved in politics, we note they bring a different perspective. They bring



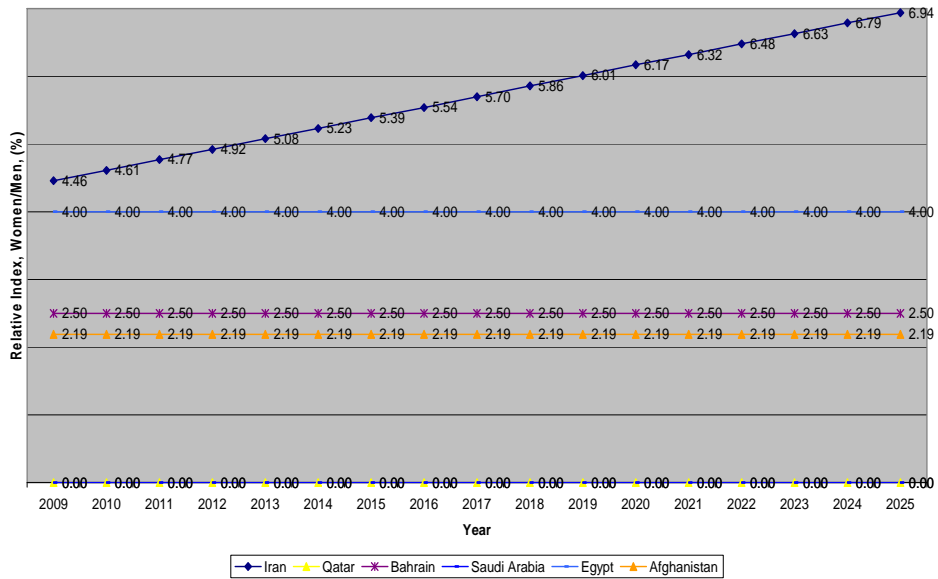
different talents, different views. So we feel that is fundamental to democracy that women's views are heard and that they are part of developmental agendas (www.un.org, 2009).

### **The future of women in parliaments of Middle East countries**

Figure 3 shows the prediction of the condition of the relative index trend of women's parliament seats to men, comparing Iran with Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Afghanistan. Iran's the relative index of women's parliament seats to men is predicted to be ascending and growing while the relative index of the other 5 countries will be constant and without change. From 2009 to 2025, the relative index of Iran will go from 4.46 to 6.94. In other words Iran's index will increase by 55.60%. On average, this increase is predicted to be 3.47% per year.

The relative index of women's parliament seats to men will be 4.00 for Egypt, 2.50 for Bahrain, 2.19 for Afghanistan, and zero for Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Therefore the common feature of these 5 Middle East countries will be the prediction of the constant of the participation and presence of women in legislative assemblies in the entire time span of the research. The parliament factor of the women of Qatar and Saudi Arabia is still predicted to be zero which means women will not have a presence in the parliaments of these two countries until 2025 (Naturally this is only a prediction based on time series models and according to past experience and in effect the presence of women in the legislative assemblies of Qatar and Saudi Arabia will be possible).

**Fig. 3. Forecasting of seats in parliament held by Iranian women's in comparison with Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt & Afghanistan**

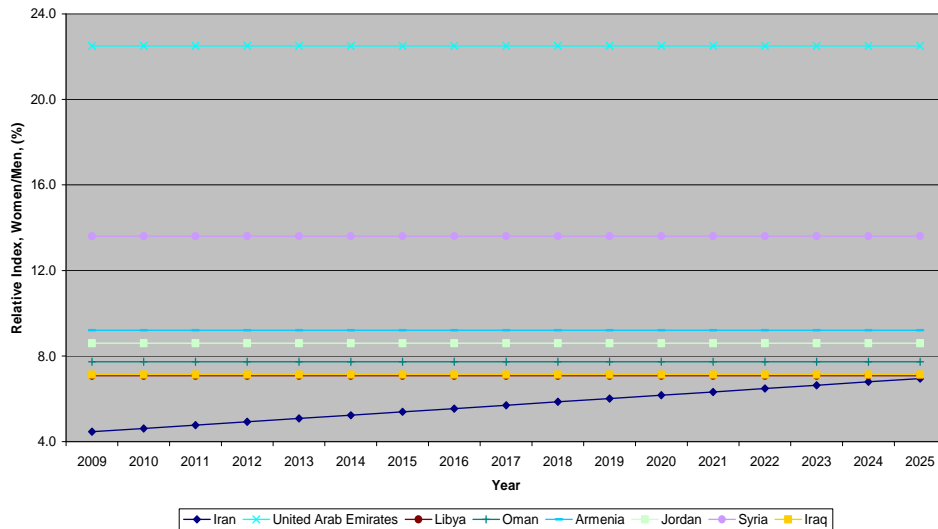


Note: figure 3 has been prepared by author.

Another feature of the relative indices of these 5 countries is that in 2009 (the beginning of the prediction period) the relative index of all five countries has been lower than that of Iran and according to the prediction of positive increase for Iran’s index and zero increase for the other five countries, naturally Iran’s index will be higher than those of the other countries in the parliament of 2025.

Figure 4 shows the prediction for the relative index of women’s parliament seats to men of Iran in comparison with United Arab Emirates, Libya, Oman, Armenia, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

Fig. 4. Forecasting seats in parliament held by Iranian women's in comparison with United Arab Emirates, Libya, Oman, Armenia, Jordan, Syria & Iraq

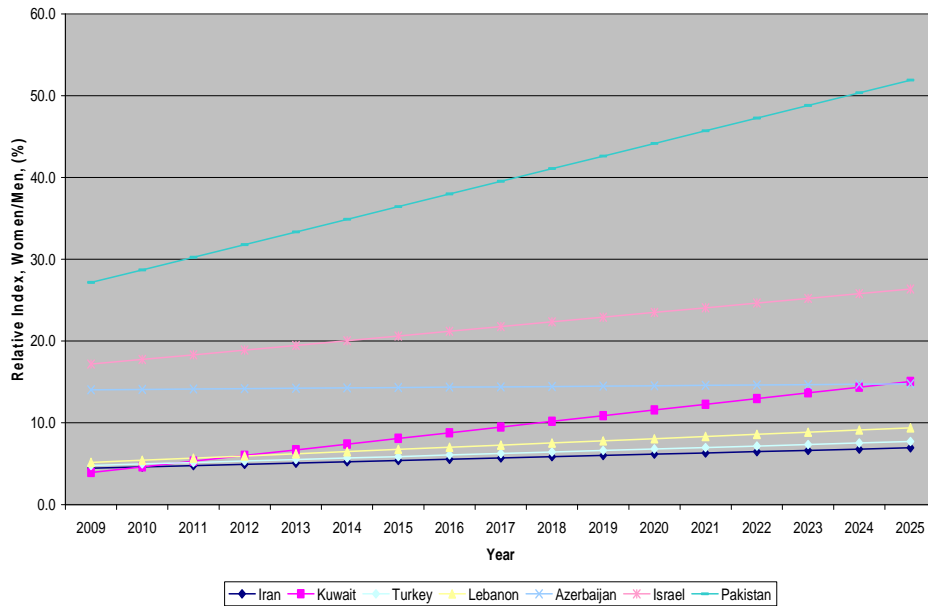


Note: figure 4 has been prepared by author.

As was mentioned in the previous figure, the prediction of Iran's relative index trend was ascending and growing. There is the possibility that Iran's factor will undergo a 55.60% growth from 2009 to 2025. This amount of growth will be equal 3.47% of annual rate index growth. The relative indices of the 7 above mentioned countries are predicted to be stable and unchanging. Thus the predicted index will be 22.50 for UAE, 13.60 for Syria, 9.20 for Armenia, 8.60 for Jordan, 7.73 for Oman, and 7.08 for Libya and 7.13 for Iraq. The common feature of these countries is the stability of the index of women to men in their legislative assemblies. Although Iran's index is predicted to be rising and their factors to be stable, at the end of the period Iran's relative index will still be lower than all of them at 6.94. Despite this the distance of the difference of Iran's index from these countries will be greatly reduced; it is not improbable for Iran's index to become higher than those of Jordan, Oman, Libya, and Iraq. Aside from results predicted through employing temporal series models, predicting the rise of Iran's relative index over those of the mentioned countries is a realistic and logical estimation.

In Figure 5 the prediction of the process of the relative index trend of women’s parliament seats to men of Iran in comparison to Kuwait, Turkey, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Israel, and Pakistan can be seen. The feature of Iran’s predicted index has in common with these countries is that all of them are ascending. Obviously the slope of the line of predicted indices are not the same for all countries. For example Pakistan’s relative index line has a steep slope, while it is expected for Iran’s relative index line to have a moderate slope from 2009 to 2025.

Fig. 5. Forecasting seats in parliament held by Iranian women's in comparison with Kuwait, Turkey, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Israel & Pakistan



Note: figure 5 has been prepared by author.

The prediction of the factor in 2009 and 2025, prediction of the percentage of the growth of the index from 2009 to 2025, and prediction of the annual average increase of the relative index are shown in the table below.

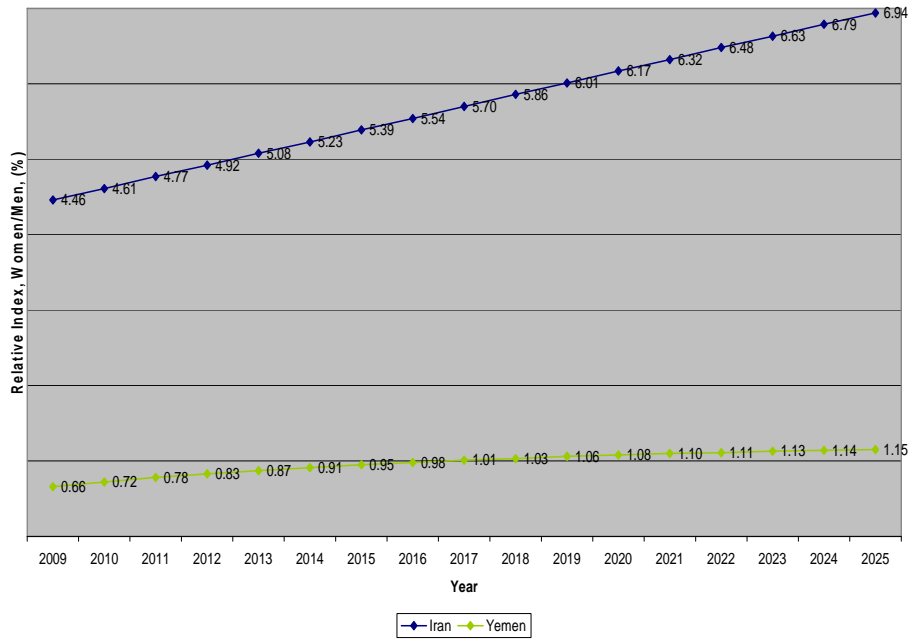
SEATS IN PARLIAMENTS OF MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES HELD BY WOMEN (% OF MEN)				
ANNUAL AVERAGE OF INCREASE OF SEATS (%)	INCREASE OF SEATS (%) 2009-2025	SEATS 2025 (% OF MEN)	SEATS 2009 (% OF MEN)	COUNTRY
5.69	91.16	51.90	27.15	PAKISTAN
3.34	53.49	26.37	17.18	ISRAEL
0.32	5.12	14.76	14.01	AZERBAIJAN
17.8	284.91	15.05	3.91	KUWAIT
5.11	81.78	9.38	5.16	LEBANON
3.84	61.50	7.72	4.78	TURKEY
3.47	55.60	6.94	4.46	IRAN

As can be seen in 2009 the highest predicted relative index belonged to Pakistan and the lowest to Kuwait. Also in 2025 Pakistan is expected to have the highest index and Iran to have the lowest.

Out of 22 Middle East countries, Kuwait will have the highest predicted increase of relative index with 284.91%. Out of the countries with an ascending index, Azerbaijan will have the least increase of index with 5.12%. In the same way the average annual increase of index is predicted to be 5.69% for Pakistan and 0.32% for Azerbaijan.

Figure 6 shows the prediction of the process of the relative index of women's parliament seats to men of Iran in comparison with Yemen. Like the previous figure, here the relative indices of the two countries are ascending, but the line of the predicted relative index of Yemen is lower than Iran's relative index line throughout the entire time span of 2009-2025. In other words out of countries with an ascending relative index lines, only Yemen's is placed lower than Iran's and according to Figure 5 other countries' lines of relative indices are placed higher than Iran's.

Fig. 6. Forecasting seats in parliament held by Iranian women's in comparison with Yemen

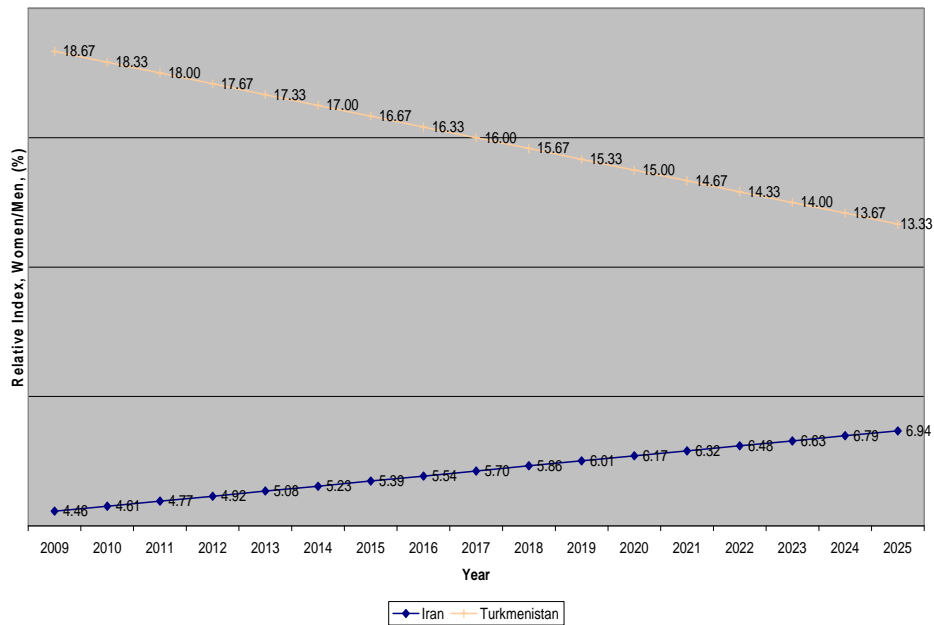


Note: figure 6 has been prepared by author.

As can be seen in the figure, in 2009 Iran’s index is 4.46 and Yemen’s 66%. In 2025 Iran’s index is predicted to be 6.94 and Yemen’s 1.15. The prediction of index increase is expected to be 55.6% for Iran and 74.2% for Yemen. In other words the average annual increase of index will be 3.47% for Iran and 4.64% for Yemen. Finally it is predicted that by 2025 for every 100 men there will be 6.94 women in Iran’s parliament and 1.15 women in Yemen’s parliament.

In Figure 7 the prediction of the process of the relative index of women’s parliament seats to men of Iran in comparison to Turkmenistan is displayed. Turkmenistan has been the only Middle East country whose line of relative index had a negative slope and for which a descending process is predicted. In other words it seems like women’s share of Turkmenistan’s parliament seats will decrease in the future.

Fig. 7. Forecasting seats in parliament held by Iranian women's in comparison with Turkmenistan

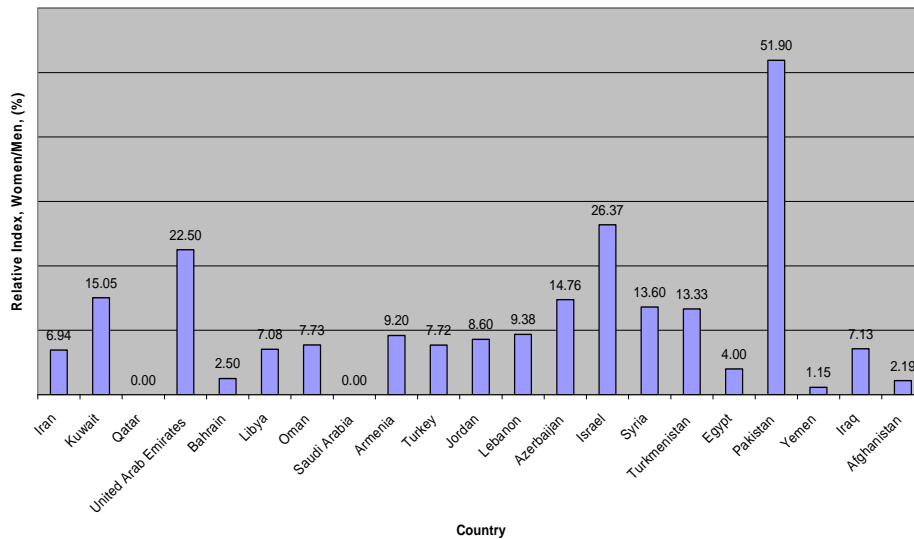


Note: figure7 has been prepared by author.

The relative index of Turkmenistan will go from 18.67 in 2009 to 13.33 in 2025. In other words the index of this country will experience 28.60% of negative growth in the 2009-2025 interval. This means the average decrease rate of women’s seats in the parliament of Turkmenistan is predicted to be 1.78%. Despite the increase in Iran’s index of women’s parliament seats, at the end of this period in 2025, there will be 13.37 women parliament members for every 100 men in the legislative assembly of Turkmenistan, while in Iran there will be 6.94 women members for every 100 men in the parliament. As a result the participation of Iran’s women in legislative assemblies will increase and conversely the participation of the women of Turkmenistan will decrease. If we compare the ratio of Turkmenistan’s index to that of Iran’s in the years 2009 and 2025, we will see that this ratio will go down from 4.18 to 1.92 which confirms the above conclusion.

In Figure 8 the ranking of countries according to the prediction of women’s parliament seats in 2025 is demonstrated. Iran has an increase index of 6.94 while Pakistan is predicted to have the highest index in the region with 51.90. It is also predicted that Qatar and Saudi Arabia will have a zero index and that the women of these countries will still not be able to hold seats in their parliaments by 2025. Additionally as a result of lack of date in past years there was no possibility of predicting this index for Palestine.

Fig. 8. Comparison of Middle East countries based on forecasting of seats in parliament held by women



Note: figure8 has been prepared by author.

**Test of the hypothesis**

The figures show that according to the relative index of women’s parliament seats to men, Iran will be ranked 15<sup>th</sup> among the 22 Middle East countries in 2025. If the activities of Iranian women in the society are extended and their share of political participation as half of Iran’s society is increased, then, because of the high potential of Iranian women, it can be expected that the index may be promoted to be the 8th among Middle East countries.

At first glance we can conclude that with regard to Iran’s fall of rank from 13 in 2008 to 15 in 2025, the hypothesis of this research is rejected. But since Iran’s relative index is predicted to have very little difference with



the 7 higher ranking Middle East countries (Libya, Oman, Armenia, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq) in 2025, so any change in the political and parliamentary participation of Middle East women will result in the substitution of Iran's place with the abovementioned countries. Therefore it can be analyzed that gaining the 8<sup>th</sup> place in the relative index of women's parliament seats to men will not be improbable for Iran, and thus the hypothesis is proven from the second perspective.

### **Conclusion**

Today the need for planning for achieving development in the country is an obvious fact, since development without a plan will result in the asymmetrical development of economic and ecological sectors and also worsen regional imbalance and therefore vulnerability, and weakening national unity. In fact planning is a tool with which all those active in the society including governments try to manage the process of development in a guided manner.

In more developed societies women can have a comprehensive, political life that also includes membership of parliament and it provides a process that increase political resources and it reduces the obstacles opposite, the development results in weakening the traditional values, reduction of fruitful rate, increasing the urban life, addition of human forces, literacy and share of women and also a change in view and comprehension. These will be of appropriate (necessity) role of women. ( Richard Matland 1998b; 114)

After studying the past and present condition of the women of Middle East in regard to their share of parliament seats according to reports, and predicting the condition of all countries, it became clear that only one third of them had an ascending process in that index and unfortunately some countries of the region will not have women members in the parliament even by 2025.

Iran, with an index of 6.94, will stand 15<sup>th</sup> among 22 Middle East countries in 2025. Of course the predicted difference with 7 countries of the region was small and it is probable that with small changes in the index of the women of Iran and the region, Iran's rank will be 8. Therefore, based on temporal series models, it can be stated that the predicted rank of the index of Iranian women will be at best 8 and at worst 15.

Policymakers and development planners in the Middle East, especially Iran, should create a condition for women's effective presence within the framework of islamic values, considering the vast experiences of advanced societies and the effective presence of women in all areas of life.

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- [www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/03/01/Women-politics.htm](http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2007/03/01/Women-politics.htm)/world,s women gain political ground.