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Political Empowerment of Women and the Mediating Role of Political Awareness: The Case of Oman

By Victoria Dauletova¹, Houchang Hassan² Yari, Zainab Hussain³

Abstract

Despite commitments by the Arabian Gulf countries to promote gender equality and policies of nondiscrimination against women, the underrepresentation of women in the political sphere remains unchanged. Using the case of the Sultanate of Oman, this paper endeavors to analyze the reasons behind the persistent political disempowerment of women in the Middle East and North African region through the lens of public opinion. The findings are based on 288 surveys conducted with two groups of participants – a group of undergraduate and postgraduate students majoring in political science, and a group of Omani citizens with no political education. These findings confirm the impact of both formal (government driven) and informal (socio-cultural) factors resulting in the low level of political empowerment of Omani women. By exploring public opinion formed towards women's political empowerment in the country, it was observed that respondents who majored in political science demonstrated a lower degree of gender bias compared to citizens with no education in political science. Socio-demographic variables such as the age and level of education of both groups did not show any significant impact on either reducing or increasing gender bias. However, a positive correlation between gender and citizens' opinions was observed. While politically educated respondents, regardless of their gender, maintained a positive attitude towards women and their participation in politics, male respondents from the general public group exhibited elevated levels of bias against the need for women's political empowerment. The study shows that gender bias is neutralized when mediated by the variable of political awareness. The findings also suggest that an increase in the level of political awareness among citizens might be considered as a positive intervention needed for changing public opinion in favour of the political empowerment of women.

Keywords: Political empowerment, Women, Oman, Socio-cultural factors, Institutional constraints, Survey, Political awareness, Gender bias

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Introduction

Despite earnest efforts by governments all over the globe to eliminate gender bias when it comes to women gaining political power, no groundbreaking improvements have been observed thus far. The situation is even less favourable for women in the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA region), where traditionally male-dominated political institutions and structures continue to demonstrate a lack of trust and support towards women candidates. The stigma of women's incompetence in decision-making at the national level as well as the belief that women are less electable compared to their male counterparts remains deep-seated in the Middle East (Shockley 2018). Al Subhi and Smith (2016) confirm that the long-awaited generational shift in favor of women has yet to occur.

The literature suggests a number of causes restricting women from active political engagement which are specific to the MENA countries. A significant cause put forward as being responsible for women's political disempowerment is Arab culture which is traditionally highly patriarchal. When such a highly patriarchal culture is combined with the religion of Islam, these contribute to lower levels of support for women in the political arena (Angrist 2012; Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). Charrad et al. (2001), Benstead et al. (2015), and Al Subhi and Smith (2016) name tribalism as another significant socio-cultural factor obstructing the growth of women's political empowerment.

A different perspective on gender bias and politics has been offered by supporters of the modernization theory who attribute the lack of women's political participation to the voters' level of education, degree of religiosity, and type of occupation. According to this theory, voters who are less educated, more religious, and do less prestigious jobs demonstrate a higher tendency to discriminate against women candidates (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Sharabi 1988).

The third line of research stresses the role of institutional factors promoting women's political underrepresentation. Al-Rasheed (2013) calls for a shift in focus from religion to other factors including institutional factors when explaining women's disempowerment. Chaturvedi and Montoya (2013) suggest that separating religion as an institution from the political sphere has a positive impact on promoting women's rights. Implementation of quota mechanisms can also assist with raising the number of women in politics (Bush and Gao 2013). Geha (2019) studied the value index of women's political empowerment programs launched by the government and identified a mismatch between the content of those programs and women's actual needs.

Research that explores gender equality in politics through the lens of role congruity theory offers a novel perspective on the unresolved issue of women being unable to exercise their political rights. Benstead, Jamal, and Lust (2015) demonstrated how incongruity between gender role stereotypes and qualities associated with effective leaders drive political bias and result in women's underrepresentation in the political sphere. Blackman and Jackson (2019) studied women candidates who emphasized issues congruent with stereotypes of political leadership such as security. As a result, they managed to increase voters' support.

Regarding Oman and the level of political empowerment of Omani women, previous studies are centered around socio-cultural factors and their role in obstructing gender equality and equal rights. Funsch (2018) pointed to the insufficient degree of women's integration and contribution to the national development of the country despite the introduction of women's political rights during the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. The author highlighted the role of culture and tradition in slowing women's political empowerment in Oman. Subhi and Smith (2016) confirmed the importance and influential power of tribes in sustaining a particular image of women with regard to politics and political participation. They offered their perspective on

tribalism labeled as “informal politics” and the exclusionary role it plays in women's representation in elected bodies. They also argued that voters with a high degree of religiosity and traditional views of women exhibit less support for women candidates.

Overall, the existing literature on women’s disempowerment in the MENA region suggests that underrepresentation of women in politics is caused by socio-cultural, structural, and institutional factors. Research on women and politics in the Omani context holds the local culture intertwined with religiosity and tribalism as being responsible for women being underestimated by the public.

The motivation for performing this investigation emanated from the conjecture that some important aspects relating to the current status of women in Oman had been overlooked. So, after running a series of informal, off the record interviews with a random sample of the Omani public, we identified a potential explanation for the lack of agreement between the researchers regarding the true state-of-affairs of women’s political engagement. It has been hypothesized that the level of political awareness of the public may be able to reconcile the existing intellectual tension.

The study pursues a three-fold purpose. First, there is a need to obtain an all-inclusive and updated perspective on the challenges that women experience when exercising their political rights. The last study of women’s political representation and obstacles encountered was conducted in Oman in 2015 (Subhi and Smith 2016). Since then, no comprehensive review has been attempted.

Secondly, available literature shows that such demographic variables as gender, age, and level of education would affect the responses in support of women’s political participation or otherwise (Dim and Asomah 2019; Nor et al. 2011). However, some differences have been observed in claims informed by different sets of data collected in the Arabian Gulf despite similar socio-cultural contexts shared by all the countries in the region. For example, the preference for male versus women candidates in Oman was attributed to the young age of the respondents (Al Subhi and Smith 2016). A study conducted in Qatar, on the contrary, suggests that advanced-level university undergraduate students are less likely to support women candidates (Shockley 2018).

Hence, the third purpose this paper pursues is to hypothesize that the inclusion of political awareness as a fourth variable would mediate public opinion in favor of women candidates regardless of socio-demographic variables. With this purpose in mind, we studied the status of women’s political empowerment as perceived by two groups taken from university-level students and from the general public by means of administering a survey. One group of respondents were undergraduate students from Sultan Qaboos University majoring in Political Science (POLS) together with postgraduate students and graduates of the International Relations and Security Studies (IRSS) program. The respondents in this group demonstrate a high level of political awareness. The other group was composed of members of the general public with no special education in political science and possibly low levels of political awareness.

By political awareness we understand an engagement with public affairs at an intellectual and cognitive level (Zaller 1992). Political awareness is a complex concept that has three components: political interest (degree of motivation to learn about politics), political knowledge (information related to political ideologies, systems, processes), and political understanding (ability to objectively analyze and critique political events) (Solhaug et al. 2018). Previous studies have yielded mixed results on the relationship between political awareness and political participation of women. For example, an Indian sample of women voters demonstrated limited impact of political awareness on women’s engagement in activities associated with politics (Amer 2009). In contrast, a study conducted by Ebrahimi (2016) in Iran reported a positive correlation

between political awareness and social participation of women suggesting the beneficial impact of political awareness on the increased rate of participation of women in civil affairs. However, insufficient and inconclusive data is available on the relationship between the general public's political awareness and public opinion regarding women's political participation. This study aims to investigate the effect political awareness has on shaping public opinion towards women's representation in politics and, in addition, to analyse the factors causing political disempowerment.

Women and Political Participation in Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries located in the Arabian Gulf with a population of 4.7 million (NCSI, 2019). It has a strategic location due to its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz. Oman is a monarchy with a bicameral parliament. Modern Oman was developed during the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said who ruled for almost 50 years and established all the major institutions of the country and introduced the Omani Basic Law in 1996. In 1970, Omani women gained their rights for education, employment, and property ownership without demanding them. The early governmental recognition of women's rights and their equal importance with their male counterparts led to the development of women's leadership within the political sector (Al-Nasseri 2017). As a result, Omani women were the second in the Arabian Gulf after Bahraini women to have representation in the Majlis Al-Shura (the lower house of the Omani Parliament), and the first among GCC countries to gain the right to vote. This approach of redistributing power by appointing women as ministers, ambassadors, and state-council members, together with the inclusion of women in the micro and macro levels of politics nationwide, was the initial step which empowered Omani women regionally, nationally, and internationally. The representation of women in diplomatic positions including at the United Nations was clear evidence of women's integration into the public arena by the government (Al-Lamki 2007). In addition, the country's constitution guarantees that women are protected by law without discrimination.

However, despite Oman's development in different areas, Omani society remains deeply conservative where culture and traditions continue to inhibit women's empowerment especially within the political sphere (Funsch 2018). The role of family, the stereotyped image of women's participation in the public sphere, traditions, tribal mentality, societal perceptions, public opinion, and the absence of collective action from women themselves have all contributed to women's political disempowerment (Hussain 2020). Historically, women in Oman were mainly assigned to specific careers such as teaching and nursing where the possibility to interact with males was low (Al-Mamaria 2018). Although this attitude towards women has been gradually changing, women working in the political sphere are yet to be accepted by society. The scarcity of women with political experience has caused a form of political vacuum and consequently a lack of trust in women candidates. Furthermore, the exclusion of women from public sessions and gatherings narrowed their societal circle, essential for winning elections in such a tribal county as Oman. Moreover, familial obligations at home have greatly burdened women and, in some cases, made achieving a balance between private and public responsibilities an impossible undertaking (Al-Lamki 2007; Varghese 2011).

Despite the fact that the percentage of women students in higher educational institutions has increased to 50% of the total of enrolled students, young women continue to experience gender bias. As a result, they have to constantly prove their worth by scoring higher grades especially when they elect to study such prestigious majors as POLS and IRSS (Al-Omairi and Amzat 2012).

It is well-known that the political system and electoral roles are strong factors that influence women's political participation. In Omani society, the common belief is that women's representation in the elected bodies is a merely symbolic role. The goal pursued by a politically engaged woman is not to achieve positive societal change but to seek higher social status for her own benefit (Hussain, 2020). Consequently, despite Oman's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2005, the percentage of women's representation in the upper house remains at just 1.2% (NCSI, 2019) with the percentage of women ministers at only 7% (The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 2018).

Women's participation in politics is also regulated by locality and place of residence (Hussain 2020). According to Al-Subhi (2016), people in rural areas are less likely to show interest in supporting women's engagement in politics. On the other hand, tribal ties seem to be less influential in the capital city, Muscat. Consequently, tribalism appears to have less impact on women's political empowerment.

Methodology

A survey was employed to gain access to public opinion regarding the on-going issue of women's participation in politics. This survey targeted both Omani public opinion as expressed by citizens without any formal education in politics and the opinion of individuals with formal political education (IRSS & POLS students and graduates) in an attempt to discover the factors affecting women's political empowerment.

Sample

The study surveyed a sample size of 288. The respondents for this study were divided into two groups with the purpose of establishing a potential link between the level of political awareness of the respondents and their attitude towards women's political participation. The first group included respondents who either hold Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Master of Arts (MA) degrees in Political Science or are still studying as undergraduate students either for a BA in Political Science or an MA in International Relations and Security Studies programs. Out of 93 participants from the first group, 27% were men and 73% were women. This gender distribution reflects the gender distribution found in the cohorts of these programs. The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 60 years old with 63% falling into the 20-30 years of age category and 27% of respondents belonging to the 30-40 years of age category. The remaining 10% were respondents above 40 years of age. All the respondents held or were studying university degrees (64% BA degree holders, 36% MA degree holders). The underrepresentation of the age group above 40 can be explained by the fact that the Department of Political Science was only launched in 2013.

The second group of respondents (195) came from the general Omani public. The group was randomly selected and represented diverse demographics in terms of gender, age, and level of education. Forty eight percent of respondents were women with 52% men. Sixty five percent of respondents were between 20 and 40 years of age while 35% were between 40-60 years of age. Sixty percent of the respondents had either a Bachelor's or Master's degree while 40% held a General Certificate of Education.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected using the Google Forms application. Twelve Likert-scale statements with five choices ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree were included in the survey. The research instrument included three variables—age, gender, and level of education—for IRSS & POLS respondents and four variables (level of political awareness in addition to the three mentioned above) for the general public group. The IRSS & POLS respondents have a high degree of political awareness due to the nature of their major specialization therefore the fourth variable for their group was omitted.

The survey content for IRSS & POLS group of respondents was written in English as all academic content for the programs is delivered in English while the questionnaire for the general public group was prepared in Arabic, the national language of Oman, due to low probability of making accurate predictions about the level of English language competence of the respondents. The received answers were translated into English by the Arabic speaking researcher.

The data were analyzed using PivotTables in Excel. This tool was used to categorize the collected data, filter them by socio-demographic variables, and calculate percentages.

Findings

Analysis of the respondents' answers resulted in the majority of findings confirming previous studies of Omani public opinion formed towards women and politics. Two categories of questions were included in the survey: 1) questions related to governmental or formal efforts (policies, initiatives) directed to support women's empowerment in the political arena; 2) questions aimed at exploring the cultural, religious, or informal impact on Omani women's political engagement. The first category of questions demonstrated a minimum level of discrepancy between the two groups of respondents.

When asked about their opinion regarding the proportion of seats held by Omani women in political positions (Q1: *"The percentage of seats held by Omani women in political offices is sufficient"*), a majority of the participants from both groups (IRSS & POLS students – 80%; general public – 70%) declared that the number of seats were insufficient. Women respondents from both groups expressed a stronger degree of disagreement (63%) compared to male respondents (38%). Similar results were recorded to the question related to Omani women and their rights recognized by law and government institutions (Q2: *The rights of Omani women are fully recognized by law and state institutions but not by society*"). 75% of IRSS & POLS students and 69% of the general public group acknowledged the provision of women with legislative rights and government support in contrast with limited support from society. Interestingly, women respondents from the general public group showed a higher degree of agreement with the statement (65%) compared to 40% of male respondents who supported the same.

A high percentage of the respondents from the IRSS & POLS group (63%) and a moderate percentage of general public group with 52% agreed and 21% remained neutral in support for implementing quotas for women in order to increase their presence in the political arena (Q3: *"Omani women need institutional quotas to increase their presence in the political arena"*). More support for increasing the number of quotas was voiced by women respondents (50%) compared to male ones (15%). Similarly, 66% of IRSS & POLS students and 53% of the general public group suggested the insufficient role of Omani Women's Associations in empowering women (Q7: *The current effectiveness of Omani women associations is sufficient*"). No disparities between the answers given by the two groups to Q11 (*"There is an inconsistency between the written laws related to women's political rights and their implementation"*) were identified either. Both IRSS & POLS students (42%) and the general public group (34%) confirmed the existence of disparities

between the written laws related to women's political rights and the way they have been implemented, with 37% of IRSS & POLS students and 31% of the general public group expressing a neutral opinion on the subject.

Contrary to the expected answers to the first category of questions concerning governmental and institutional practices and initiatives available for empowering women to be politically engaged, the second category of questions relating to socio-cultural factors resulted in several unforeseen findings. A significant discrepancy in the answers provided by IRSS & POLS students and by the general public group was observed (see Figure 2).

Consensus was noted only to Q5 (*"Omani traditions and culture encourage women's political empowerment"*). Fifty two percent of IRSS & POLS students and 47% of the general public group admitted the negative influence of traditions and culture on women's status in politics. Fifty five percent of women respondents from the general public group acknowledged that traditions and culture play a demotivating role in women's empowerment compared to only 30% of male respondents admitting the same.

The answers to the remaining questions associated with socio-cultural aspects show a significant divergence of opinions. Q4 (*"Low level of Omani women's political awareness is the main reason for their political disempowerment"*) was concerned with the level of women's political awareness and its effect on the political empowerment of women. According to IRSS & POLS students (48%), low levels of women's political awareness contributed to their weak position in the political sphere whereas only 24% of the general public group linked women's low political participation with low political awareness. However, when a gender filter was added, 75% of the respondents representing women in the general public group confirmed the link between women's low levels of political awareness and their high degree of political disempowerment with only 25% of male respondents sharing the same opinion.

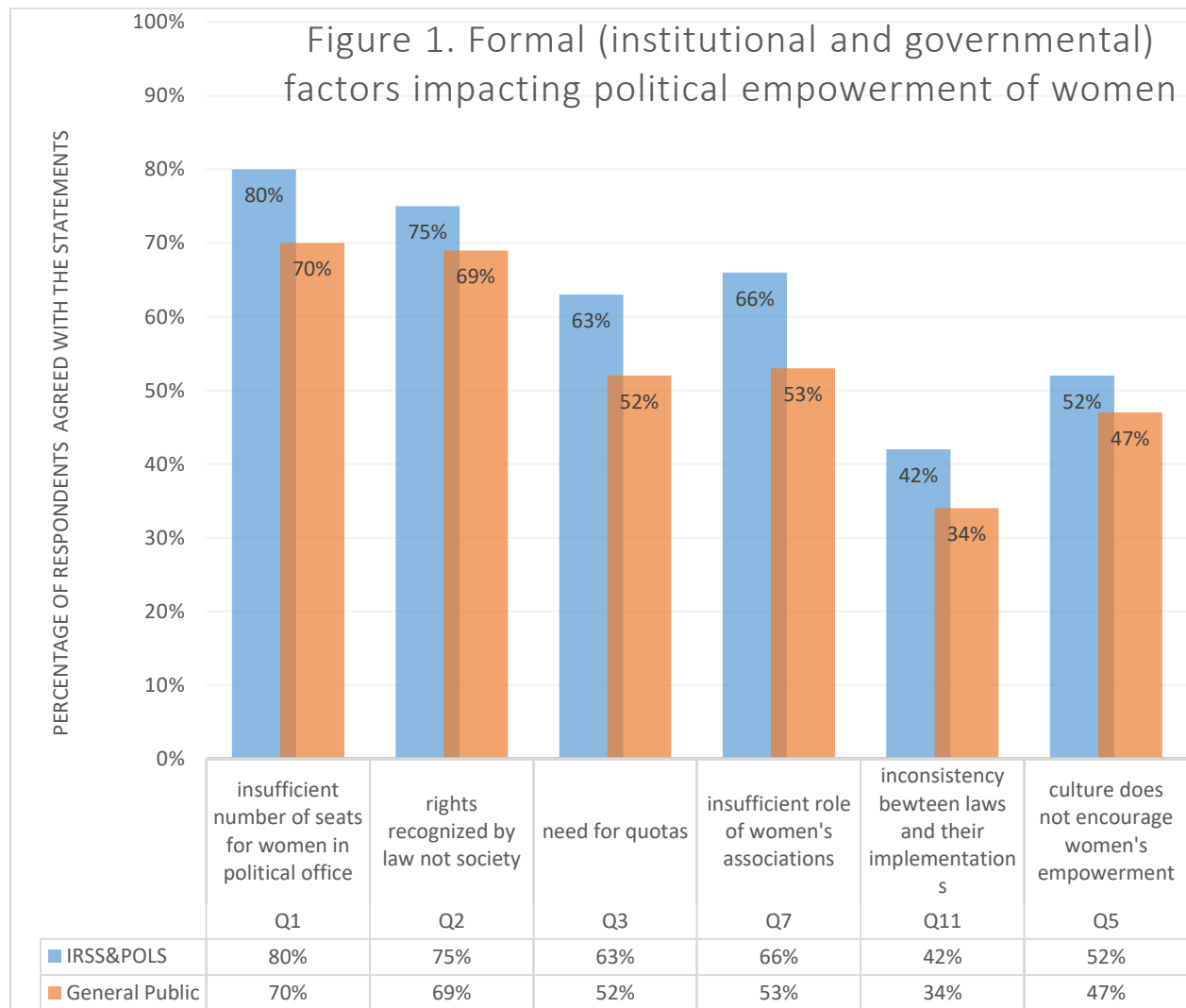
Another difference of opinion between the two groups of respondents was observed in the answers to Q6 (*"Omani women are capable of representing all national issues in local and parliamentary councils"*). IRSS & POLS students (90%) expressed trust in women and their potential to make a valuable contribution to the national development of the country while only 35% of the general public group supported the same view. In the general public group, 60% of respondents who expressed trust in women candidates were women and only 25% were men.

The relationship between culture and embedded tribalism, Islam, and political empowerment of women was explored by Q8 (*"Culture has prohibited certain practices for women that are not forbidden by Islam"*). The answers from the two groups of respondents demonstrate a high degree of disparity. Seventy eight percent of IRSS & POL students were convinced that it is the culture rooted in tribalism, not religious affiliation of the citizens, which impedes political empowerment of women in contrast with only 36% of respondents from the general public group who shared a similar opinion while 64% attributed disapproval of women's participation in political activities to the teachings of Islam. However, with the application of the gender variable there is evidence of women respondents citing culture as the main reason behind women's political disempowerment, 55%, compared to male respondents, 20%, stating the same.

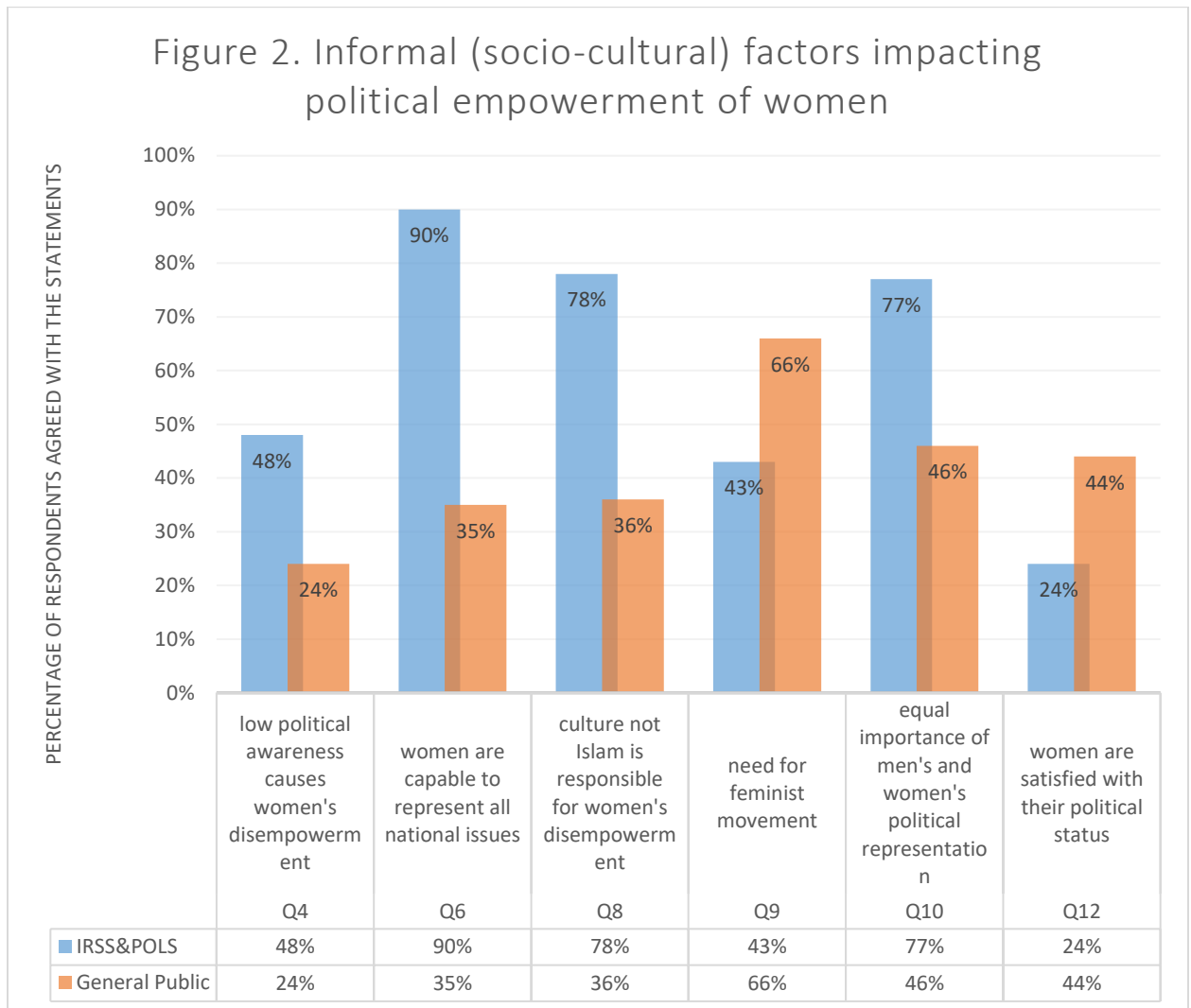
The idea of initiating a feminist movement compatible with Islamic principles was tested by Q9 (*"Omani society needs a feminist movement compatible with the cultural values and Islamic principles"*). Thirty percent of IRSS & POLS students chose a neutral stance while 43% supported the idea. However, the general public group demonstrated a higher degree of assertiveness in support of the feminist movement (66%) in Oman. The opposite result has been noticed with the responses to Q10 (*"Women's political representation is less important than men's political"*

representation”). When the respondents were asked their opinion about the value of political representation of women, 77% of the IRSS & POLS sample acknowledged equal importance of both genders while only 46% of the general public group agreed on the possibility of Omani politics and society benefiting from women politicians. The final discrepancy in responses offered by the two groups of respondents was observed in Q12 (“Omani women are satisfied with their current political status”) when only Omani women respondents were invited to share their responses. Only 24% of the IRSS & POLS group declared their satisfaction with their political participation with 48% stating their dissatisfaction. Conversely, 44% of the general public group expressed their satisfaction with their current political status with 20% of respondents remaining dissatisfied. For both groups, 28% of IRSS & POLS and 38% of the general public group left this question unanswered.

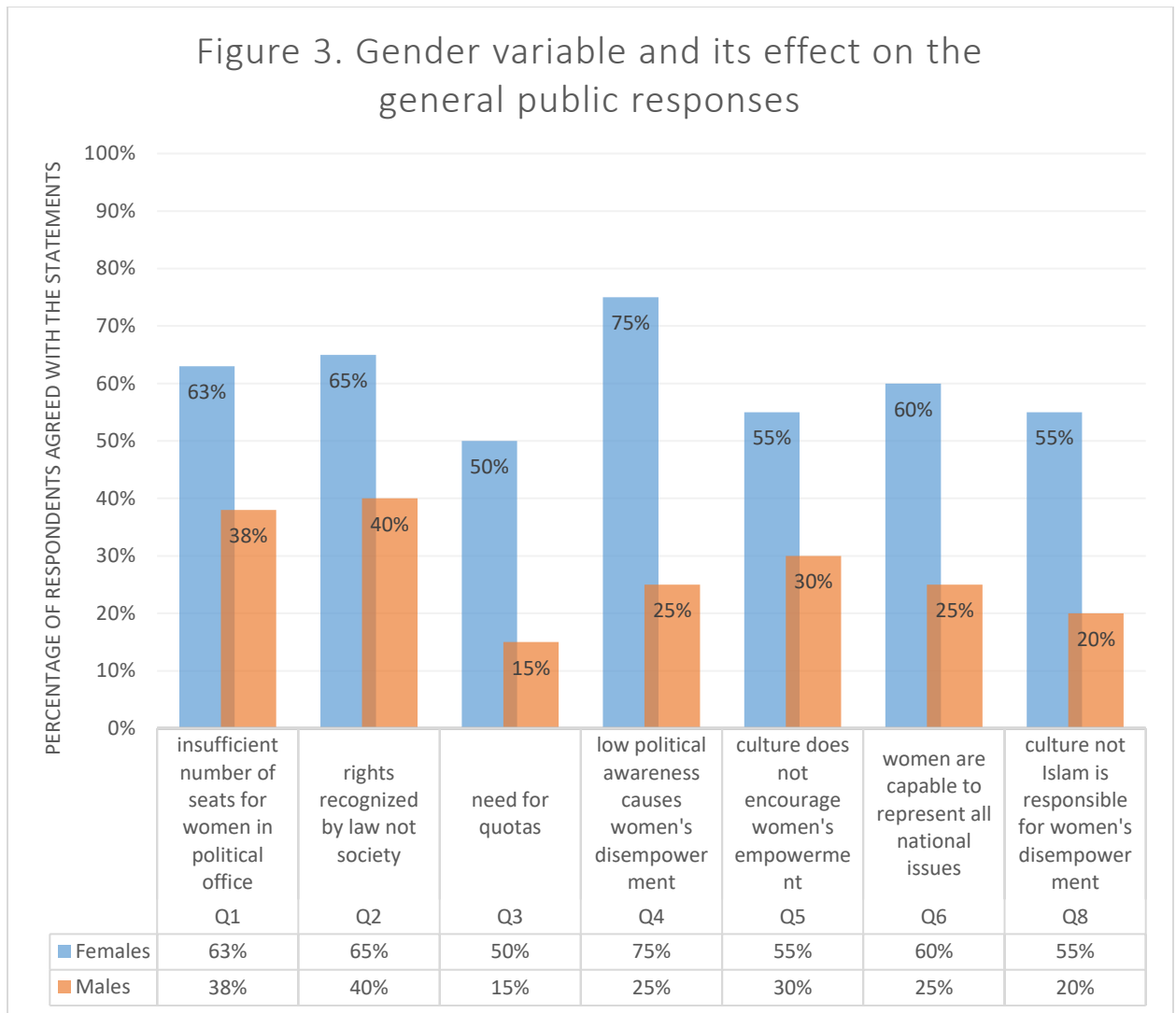
The first category of questions employed to study opinions of both groups associated with formal factors impacting women’s political empowerment showed no significant gap (see Figure 1).



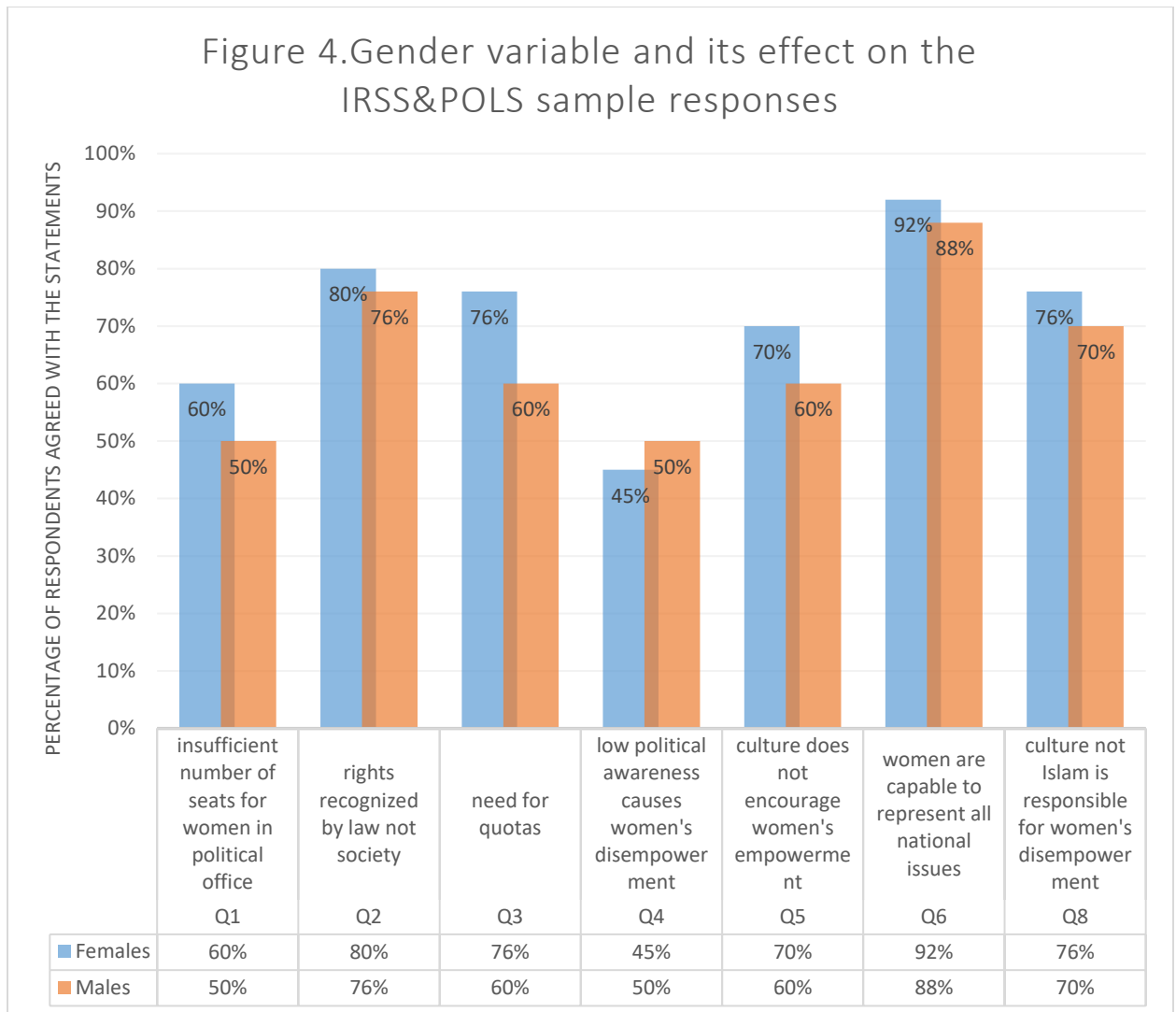
While the second category of questions related to socio-cultural factors and their impact on opinions from both groups, there was a discrepancy of opinion across the two samples of respondents (see Figure 2).



The socio-demographic variables applied to the study were not found to produce a significant impact with the exception of gender from the general public group (see Figure 3).



For the IRSS & POLS group gender did not seem to significantly impact their answers (see Figure 4).



Discussion

The data obtained from two groups of respondents (IRSS & POLS students versus members of the general public) offered the researchers an opportunity to identify similarities and differences in public opinion formed towards political empowerment of women in Oman by different strata of society. It became apparent that in terms of formal, government-related practices and initiatives directed towards women's political empowerment, both groups of respondents shared similar views.

Firstly, the respondents from both groups agreed that the efforts made by the government and safeguarded by law to sustain and promote women's rights as well as ensure women's access to legislative bodies are sufficient. However, when it comes to actual implementation of those rights and laws, significant deficiencies were acknowledged by both groups. Similar claims are supported in research done by Olimat (2009) pointing to the challenges of women politicians in Kuwait despite having been granted the right to vote and participate as a political candidate. Additionally, the effectiveness of Omani women's associations was questioned by the respondents from both groups, supporting Geha's (2019) findings on the lack of practical value offered by government initiatives to empower women in Lebanon to run for office. Both groups of

respondents supported the implementation of quotas as one of the mechanisms which could ensure women's empowerment in the legislature and change the perception of women in society and leadership positions. Although the extended body of research on quotas reports mixed results (Bush and Gao 2017; Dahlerup 2009), quotas seem to be a good fit for the Omani context according to the opinion of the general public group.

Regarding socio-cultural factors responsible for low representation of women in politics in Oman, the results of the study are consistent with previous research conducted in the country, stressing the powerful impact of culture, traditions, and tribal agendas on women's political empowerment (Almke 2014; Al-Subhi and Smith 2016). However, the two groups of respondents disagreed about the value of this impact. IRSS & POLS students see the negative effect that culture produces on public opinion formed towards women's participation in politics while the general public group tend to express more trust in the wisdom of the local cultural context with its values and traditions as well as its ancient system of tribes governing Arab communities. In other words, both groups acknowledge the effect of culture and social norms on women's empowerment, but only the IRSS & POLS group perceives it as an issue in need of resolution.

Another important inference made from the data and linked with the previous inference is concerned with the confusion between culture and religion. The high prevalence of mixing culture with religion was observed as a typical tendency manifested by the respondents representing the general public group. They tend to believe that Islam does not approve of women participating in public affairs hence it is not the right path for women to pursue. However, IRSS & POLS students are trained to see culture and Islam as intertwined but separate concepts. As a consequence, they are able to differentiate between the two concepts which gives them the ability to objectively hold local culture responsible for low levels of support for those women aspiring to a career in politics. This can be a starting point for exploring the role of religiosity in shaping voting preferences mediated by religiosity in Oman and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Studies of religiosity and voters' choice conducted in Tunisia and guided by role congruity theory suggest that religion has a stronger influence over the preferences of candidates among Tunisian voters compared to gender. Moreover, religious women candidates get more support from those voters who believe in the congruence of religiosity and leadership (Benstead, Lust, and Jamal, 2015). In the GCC countries where secular communities are a minority, it would be of value to see the impact of different levels and degrees of religiosity communicated by both voters and candidates on gender bias.

A significant difference of opinion was observed between the IRSS & POLS group and the general public group regarding the importance of women's representation in Omani politics as well as the degree of satisfaction with the current status of women. IRSS & POLS students voiced their concern regarding the low rate of women's participation in politics and the insufficient quality of women's political engagement. They attributed this tendency to culture-rooted customs and beliefs permeating contemporary Omani mentality. The general public group, on the other hand, demonstrated low levels of concern with the current state of affairs by accepting the current status quo as a natural social and cultural phenomenon.

Analysis of socio-cultural factors made apparent that the higher the level of political awareness of the respondents, the more they voice support for, and less prejudice towards, women and their rights in politics. Such variables as age and level of education of the respondents become largely irrelevant providing the respondents are politically aware. Being politically informed, having an interest in political matters, and being fully engaged in critical analysis of the political content of lectures and seminars, IRSS & POLS students possess higher levels of awareness

regarding gender bias in politics and its detrimental effect on the country's development compared to the general public group. Our study showed that low levels of political awareness might act as a predictor of gender stereotypes and might fortify the fossilized logic which questions the ability of women to bring valuable contributions to the political sphere of the country. Therefore, raising political awareness among the general public could lead to a less gender-biased choice from voters in the future. Currently, there are studies available exploring political knowledge and political interest as measures of political awareness. For example, Dolan and Hanse (2020), using a US sample of mixed-gender voters, established a positive correlation between women's low levels of political knowledge and their low interest in politics. However, no sufficient evidence pointing to the direct effect of political awareness on the reduction of the gender gap in politics has been offered so far.

Contrary to such variables as age and level of education which did not show a significant impact, the gender variable revealed considerable differences in opinions offered by male and women respondents among the general public group. Women respondents confirmed a stronger degree of dissatisfaction with the current state of both formal, government-related interventions and socio-cultural practices related to women's political empowerment while male respondents demonstrated a higher gender bias than women with regard to women's political empowerment. The IRSS & POLS group of respondents also showed signs of the gender gap impacting their opinions. However, the gap between the answers shared by male and women respondents was narrower compared to that of the general public group.

Hence, the results of our study suggest a direct positive relationship between political awareness and support for women in politics. They also suggest that gender has a significant impact on respondents' opinions regarding the political empowerment of women. However, when mediated by political awareness, gender exhibits a tendency to lose significance. Consequently, gender bias might be neutralized by the presence of high levels of political awareness among the general public regardless of their gender.

Conclusion

The concept of political awareness and its transformational effect deserves focused attention from the research community. It requires a larger data set preferably on a national level. There is also a need to study the predictors of political awareness such as level of religiosity and exposure to a social networking service (SNS) alongside other potential mediators associated with exercising high or low levels of political awareness with respect to public political engagement and participation. Finally, it would be of value to study further the political awareness of the general public and its effect on reducing gender bias in the political domain.

Formal constraints associated with the efforts of the government and supporting government bodies to integrate women citizens into the political fabric of the country are conditioned by informal, societal obstacles. If attitudes towards women in terms of bias, equality, and empowerment are to change to any meaningful extent, then it will require major changes in the way the Omani general public perceive women's place in society and in particular in respect of women's political empowerment.

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