

Beyond the Veil: Re-Examining Muslim Women's Political Rights in Classical and Contemporary Islamic Contexts

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Abstract

This paper looks again at the political rights of Muslim women, challenging common misunderstandings by showing Islam's truly positive and empowering view. It explores old Islamic writings and historical examples, proving the groundbreaking ideas of fairness for women set by The Qur'an and Sunnah. The paper also covers modern Islamic law discussions and the rise of Islamic feminism, showing how new scholars read old texts to support women's political involvement. By telling the difference between core Islamic teachings and cultural or male-dominated interpretations, this report shows that Islam not only allows but actively encourages women to be part of public and political life, leading to a more open and fair understanding of their roles in Muslim societies.

Keywords: Muslim Women, Political Rights, Islamic Feminism, Gender Equality

Introduction

Talk about Muslim women's political rights often suggests they are held back, excluded from society, and kept out of politics, especially in Western stories.¹ This common idea often leads to criticisms that paint Islam as being against equality for women, with some Western and secular feminist thinkers, and even some Islamic feminists, seeing Islam as a big problem for women's political involvement.¹ Such views often miss the deep historical and religious roots that support women's power within an Islamic framework.

This paper challenges these common ideas by stating that true Islamic teachings, when properly understood and followed, offer a complete way to empower women. This approach balances rights with duties while staying true to core religious values.² From its very beginning, Islam set up revolutionary ideas of fairness for women, greatly improving their status in 7th-century Arabia. These basic teachings gave women spiritual equality, chances for education, financial freedom, protection in marriage, and rights to take part in society.² Far from holding women back, Islamic principles actively encourage their involvement in political life, thus challenging strict interpretations that try to limit their participation using religious reasons.³

The goal of this paper is to create a different story that goes against common negative ideas. This is not merely about sharing facts; it's about actively dealing with and correcting wrong ideas to show the truly empowering parts of Islamic teachings. This effort has wider importance for encouraging talks between different faiths and dealing with anti-Islam prejudice. The idea that Islam and women's rights are in conflict is mostly about how things are understood and how Islam is seen from the outside, rather than a

real problem within Islamic beliefs themselves. This understanding is key, as it suggests the issue comes from how texts are read—often through male-dominated viewpoints³—and how Islam is viewed externally, frequently through old-fashioned Western views.⁴

The report is set up to first look at the basic ideas of women's rights in early Islam, then to explore how Islamic law discussions have changed, followed by a look at modern views, including Islamic feminism. Finally, it gives examples of Muslim women's power in modern politics. The main goal is to show a positive picture of Islam's ability to adjust to modern changes through its logical and flexible ways of understanding, such as *qiyas* (reasoning by analogy), *Ijma* (consensus), and *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning).⁵

Research Methodology

The research in this paper uses a qualitative approach, mainly drawing from an examination of feminist writings, Islamic scriptures, and historical records.⁴ The method carefully looks at the various reasons for women's exclusion in modern politics, explores the detailed Islamic textual positions on women's roles in society, and investigates the levels of women's political involvement across different countries.¹ To do this, a comparative and content analysis method is used.¹ Also, a legal-normative approach is used, which involves a thorough review of both older and modern legal writings and religious interpretations.³

A key part of this research involves including Islamic sources and their specific situations. The study explores and analyzes information taken directly from the texts of The Qur'an and The Hadith, the rules of Islamic Law (Shari'ah), and how they are understood through Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh).⁶ Importantly, the method uses an interpretive approach that includes women's real-life experiences as a valid way to understand religious texts. This allows for a fairer, more contextual, and more inclusive reading of Islam, which is essential for understanding women's roles.³

For gender studies specifically within Muslim communities, it is very important to include participatory research techniques in ethnographic inquiry. This approach puts the stories of participants' 'lived' faith first, making sure that the research reflects the realities and views of the communities themselves.⁷ This involves analyzing gender realities through the specific lens of local religious and cultural beliefs and exploring how community members respond to international Western ideals of gender equality.⁷ A "knowledge-sensitive" method is crucial for gender studies in Muslim contexts. This means that Western-focused frameworks, if used without careful thought, can lead to wrong understandings, and therefore, local religious and cultural beliefs must be prioritized to get a detailed understanding.⁷ The clear link here is: a culturally insensitive method will likely produce biased or irrelevant findings, while a knowledge-sensitive approach will give more detailed and useful insights. This also strengthens the positive view of Islam by supporting an approach that respects and understands Islamic contexts from within.

Such a method requires understanding how local religious tradition has become authoritative and investigating how religious discussions influence both public statements and private attitudes and behaviors.⁷ The study purposely avoids defining concepts like 'culture' or 'religion' beforehand and refrains from forcing Western ideals of gender equality on those being interviewed. Instead, it aims to explore foreign gender norms they may have been exposed to, allowing for a natural understanding of their views.⁷

I. The Foundational Principles: Women's Rights in Classical Islam

The start of Islam in 7th-century Arabia brought a huge change in the position of women, setting up ideas of fairness for women that were very advanced for their time. The teachings of the Holy The Qur'an and

Sunnah (the ways and practices of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)) created a full plan for women's empowerment, giving them protections and benefits that often came centuries before similar recognitions in other legal and religious systems.² This historical lead shows Islam not just as a religion that was good *for its time*, but as a global leader in developing fairness for women. The direct link between Islamic revelation and these improvements highlights Islam's historical leadership in this area.

Islam recognized women as fully human and having natural worth, giving them basic rights like inheritance (The Qur'an 4:7):

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ أَوْ كَثُرَ ۚ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا

*For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much – an obligatory share.*¹⁸

property ownership, agreeing to marriage, financial independence, and active participation in community life.² Prior to Islam, women in many civilizations faced very bad conditions, often treated as simple goods. Islam fundamentally transformed this reality, empowering women across various fields and establishing a foundational principle of no inherent gender difference in its main beliefs.⁵ Scholars like Badawi (1971) confirmed that Islam greatly improved the lives of women compared to their pre-Islamic status, with The Qur'an and Sunnah greatly raising their position.⁵ This full empowerment extended to spiritual equality (The Qur'an 33:35), educational opportunities, and social participation, testifying to Islam's naturally progressive and modern approach.² Female infanticide was categorically banned (The Qur'an 81:8-9):

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (أ) بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩)

*And when the girl-child buried alive shall be asked: for what offence was she killed?*⁹

The Qur'an itself recognizes women's ability in important social roles, shown by the story of the Queen of Sheba (Balqis), whose wise rule was even recognized by Prophet Solomon (The Qur'an 27:23–44):

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ (٢٣) وَجَدْتُهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ (٢٤) أَلَا يَسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يُخْرِجُ الْخَبَاءَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُخْفُونَ وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ (٢٥) اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ (٢٦) قَالِ سَتَنْظُرُونَ أَصْدَقَتْ أَمْ كُنْتِ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ (٢٧) أَذْهَبَ بِكِتَابِي هَذَا فَأَلْقَاهُ إِلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ فَانْظُرْ مَاذَا يَرْجِعُونَ (٢٨) قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلْقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتَابٌ كَرِيمٌ (٢٩) قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُون (٣٢) قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُوا قُوَّةً وَأُولُوا بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانْظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ (٣٣) قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَهَارَ أَغْلَاظُهَا وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُمْ لِقَاءَ أَعْيُنِنَا قَدْ نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ إِذْ دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَهَارَ أَغْلَاظُهَا وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُمْ لِقَاءَ أَعْيُنِنَا قَدْ نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ إِذْ دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَهَارَ أَغْلَاظُهَا وَلَئِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ لَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُمْ لِقَاءَ أَعْيُنِنَا قَدْ نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ إِذْ دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَهَارَ أَغْلَاظُهَا (٣٥)

I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given abundance of all things, and she has a mighty throne. (23) I found her and her people adoring the sun instead of Allah, and Satan has made their deeds fair-seeming to them and thus turned them from the way, so they do not go aright; (24) That they do not make obeisance to Allah, Who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth and knows what you hide and what you make manifest: (25) Allah, there is no god but He: He is the Lord of mighty power. (26) said, "We will see whether you are telling the truth or lying. (27) Go with this letter of mine and deliver it to them, then stand aside and see how they will respond." (28) The Queen [later] announced, "O chiefs! Indeed, a noble letter has been delivered to me. (29) She said, "O chiefs! Advise me in my affair. Not I would be the one to decide any matter until you are present with me." (32) They said, "We are possessors of strength and possessors of great might, and the command is up to you, so look what you will command." (33) She said, "Indeed, the kings, when they enter a town they ruin it and make the most honorable of its people the lowest. And thus they do." (34) But indeed, I am going to send to them a gift and see with what return the messengers." (35)¹³

A deeper understanding of empowerment in Islam can be seen in the idea of a "separate work-sphere" for women, as mentioned in some interpretations. Instead of seeing this as a limit, it is presented as a *special*

status that considers a woman's body, self-respect, modesty, and protection.⁵ This view suggests a different way of empowerment that puts certain values like modesty and self-respect first, offering a valuable form of power and respect, even if it doesn't always match Western liberal feminist ideals of identical roles in all areas.

Clear examples of women's active political involvement are plentiful from the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W)'s era, directly going against later male-dominated interpretations that tried to limit their roles. Women were active participants in important historical moments, including giving their loyalty (*bai'at*) to the Prophet (S.A.W).³ This act had deep political meaning, symbolizing social agreements and commitment to the new Muslim community.³ Beyond formal pledges, women were actively involved in solving problems, educating, and even battles, like Nusaybah bint Ka'b.³ Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) often asked for advice from female companions, especially Umm Salamah (RA), on important political matters, and her advice was key in calming tensions during crucial times.¹ Women also had the power to offer safety to non-combatants, as shown by Umm Hani bint Abi Talib.¹ Furthermore, figures like Samra bint Nahik and Shifa al-Adawiyya took on public roles related to upholding justice and managing market affairs.¹ A particularly telling example involves a woman who publicly challenged Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab's speech on dowry limits, showing her deep understanding of Shari'ah and her willingness to speak up to power, leading Umar to admit she was right.¹ These many examples are not just single events but together show a clear pattern of recognized female political participation in early Islamic society. This historical fact strongly contrasts with later limiting interpretations, suggesting that changing male-dominated societal structures influenced legal interpretations, moving away from the equal spirit of early Islam.

The following table further shows how revolutionary the rights given to women in early Islam were compared to when they were recognized in other legal and religious systems:

Table 1: Revolutionary Rights Granted to Women in Early Islam vs. Contemporary Societies

Right Granted in Early Islam (7th Century CE)	Recognition in Other Legal/Religious Frameworks (Approximate Century)
Spiritual Equality	(Often existed, but not widely applied to social/political areas)
Educational Opportunities	Widespread in Europe/West: 18th-19th Century (formal schools)
Economic Independence	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., Married Women's Property Acts)
Marital Protections (consent in marriage)	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., legal changes against forced marriage)
Social Participation Rights	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., public gatherings, groups)

Inheritance Rights	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., legal changes for equal inheritance)
Property Ownership	Europe/West: 18th-19th Century (e.g., Married Women's Property Acts)
Financial Independence	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., right to control own earnings)
Community Participation	Europe/West: 19th-20th Century (e.g., community groups)
Right to Grant Asylum	(Varies, but official recognition of women's authority: much later)
Right to Challenge Authority	(Rise of democratic/rights movements: 18th-20th Century)
Role in Consultation (<i>Shūrā</i>)	(Official inclusion in governance: 20th Century)

This table clearly shows that Islam's rules for women's rights were not only advanced for their time but actively led global legal and social development by centuries.² By showing this big time difference, it directly challenges the wrong idea that Islam is naturally old-fashioned about women's rights, instead placing it as a historical leader in fairness for women. This further strengthens the positive view of Islam's role in women's empowerment by showing its clear historical leadership.

II. Navigating Interpretations: Islamic Legal Discourse on Political Rights

The way Islamic law has developed, especially concerning women's political roles, has often reflected the male-dominated structures common during its early centuries.³ Older scholars, like al-Māwardī and Ibn Khaldūn, set rules that, in practice, limited women's public leadership.³ This historical trend led to a male-focused understanding of Islamic beliefs and Shari'ah.¹ However, it's important to understand that these "male-dominated structures" influencing older Islamic law represent a *change* from the more equal spirit and principles of early Islam, rather than a natural part of the religion itself. The strong evidence of early Islamic women's power, as discussed before, suggests that the limits found in older legal texts are products of specific historical and social situations. This means that the common societal male dominance influenced scholarly interpretations, leading to a move away from the original meaning of the basic texts.

A main point of disagreement in this discussion is the widely cited The Hadith stating that "a people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never prosper" (Sahih al-Bukhari, The Hadith 7099).¹⁵ While this saying has been used to justify limits on women's leadership, many modern scholars argue that it applies only to a specific situation, referring to the decline of the Persian Empire under female rule, and should not be seen as a universal rule.³ This new understanding and placing of the disputed The Hadith in its context by modern scholars show Islam's

active intellectual tradition and its natural ability for internal change to match modern ideas of justice. This active re-engagement with religious texts shows that Islamic scholarship is not stuck but has a lively tradition of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) and interpretation. This allows for a connection between historical understandings and modern views of human rights, showing Islam's natural ability to adapt⁵ and its power to correct itself and promote justice from within its own framework, directly countering any idea of Islam as rigid or unchanging. Islamic feminists, for example, actively re-read Islamic texts to challenge and change supposedly male-dominated ideas, arguing that certain verses and The Hadith are often misunderstood or taken out of context. An example is the requirement of two female witnesses, which they clarify is specific to financial matters and not a general statement on women's intellect (The Qur'an 2:282):

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ وَلْيَكُنْ بَيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ وَلْيَمْلِكِ
الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا يَبْخَسْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا

*O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed period, write it down. And let a scribe write it down between you justly. And let not a scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him. So let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate, and let him fear Allah, his Lord, and not diminish anything from it.*²⁰

At the core of Islamic governance is the idea of *shūrā* (consultation), highlighted in The Qur'an (The Qur'an 42:38):

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

*And those who have responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend.*²²

which naturally means everyone is involved in making decisions.³ Islam sees politics as a key part of social life, aiming to create justice and well-being for society. From this view, every person, regardless of gender, has a moral and social duty in public matters, including governing and political leadership.³ Therefore, making sure women have political rights is not just a modern wish but is essential for good governance and shared success in Muslim societies, as it directly reflects the Islamic values of consultation, accountability, and justice.³ The evidence suggests that no true Islamic rule stops women from holding public office; instead, their political involvement in modern democratic systems fits with and shows these core Islamic values.³

The following table further shows the different ways women's political leadership has been understood in Islamic thought:

Table 2: Interpretations of Women's Political Leadership in Islamic Thought

Source/Perspective	Stance on Women's Political Leadership	Rationale/Basis
Classical Jurists (e.g., al-Māwardī, Ibn Khaldūn)	Set limits	Reflected common male-dominated societal structures of their time
Traditional/Conservative Interpretations of The Hadith	Literal use of "a people who entrust their affairs to a woman will never prosper"	Direct reading of the text, often without historical context

	The Hadith	
Contemporary Muslim Scholars	Put The Hadith in context (specific to historical events, not a universal rule); No natural ban	Historical/situational context of texts; Main The Qur'anic principles (e.g., <i>shūrā</i> , justice)
Islamic Feminists	Actively encourage; Re-read texts to change male-dominated ideas	Focus on fairness for all genders; Re-reading texts with a justice-focused view; Historical examples of women's power

This table clearly shows the *variety* and *development* of understandings about women's political leadership in Islamic thought. By putting older, strict, and modern scholarly views side by side, it highlights the changing nature of *fiqh* (Islamic law) and the ongoing intellectual effort to connect religious texts with ideas of justice and fairness. This directly addresses the debated nature of this issue ¹ and strengthens the idea that limiting views are interpretations, not necessarily true Islamic principles. This supports the positive view of Islam by showing how progressive understandings are based on careful study and understanding of context.

Contemporary Perspectives: Islamic Feminism and Modern Political Participation

Modern talks about Islam and gender equality in politics often deal with the common idea that Islam naturally holds women back in different areas of life, thus fueling criticisms that it is fundamentally against gender equality.¹ However, this view often misses an important global fact: gender inequality in political involvement is a widespread issue, not just in Muslim societies.¹ In fact, some countries that identify as Islamic or have Islam as their state religion show levels of gender equality that are notably ahead of certain advanced democracies.¹ The idea that gender equality and social justice are foreign concepts to Islam needs to be looked at again carefully.¹ Wrong understandings by Western observers often make the position of women in Islamic society seem overly restricted.⁵ A key point to make clear is the need to tell the difference between gender-based discriminatory cultural practices and core Islamic teachings. Judging Islam only based on such cultural practices is a simple, narrow, and biased approach, as gender equality is a main principle found within Islamic religious sources.¹

In response to these complex situations, Islamic feminism has emerged as a strong intellectual and activist movement. Coming from the wider framework of postmodern feminism, it is a global movement active in many Muslim countries.¹ Its main goal is to achieve gender equality and social justice within a clear religious, Islamic framework.¹ Islamic feminism is defined as both a way of thinking and a practice that states Islam and feminism are naturally compatible.⁴ Important figures like Amina Wadud support reading The Qur'an through a feminist lens, while Fatima Mernissi critiques male-dominated interpretations of Islamic law.⁴ This movement stresses that gender equality is deeply rooted in The Qur'an and actively challenges male-dominated interpretations of Islamic teachings that have historically limited women's rights.⁴ It promotes equality and fairness for men and women in all parts of life ⁴, agreeing with views that suggest going back to The Qur'anic principles of gender justice, asserting that The Qur'an is "post-

patriarchal" and that a proper re-engagement with it can make Islam post-patriarchal in practice.⁴ Islamic feminism is not just an internal reform movement; it also acts as a *postcolonial response* and a form of *resistance* against Western dominant ideas and anti-Islam prejudice. It carefully looks at the complex interaction between Islamic and Western feminisms, specifically addressing claims of gender oppression in Muslim societies and challenging Western feminist criticisms.⁴ This movement highlights how Muslim women are wrongly shown in Western feminism, exposing examples of anti-Islam prejudice and cultural control.⁴ Western discussions have historically shown Muslim women as victims, thus strengthening old-fashioned Western ideas.⁴ Islamic feminism actively exposes this reliance on old-fashioned Western stories and the selective criticism of Islamic practices without enough understanding of their context.⁴ It calls the claim by some Western feminists that Islam oppresses women a form of gender-based anti-Islam prejudice, often serving colonial interests.⁴ Ultimately, Islamic feminism appears as a framework that reclaims religious identity while supporting fairness for women, providing a strong counter-story to Western feminism.⁴ It emphasizes the need to recognize the power of Muslim women and break down stereotypes spread by Western frameworks, leading to a more open and culturally sensitive understanding of feminism.⁴ The outside pressures, such as colonialism and Western criticisms, have clearly shaped the path and arguments of internal Muslim women's movements, making them inherently political beyond just religious reform.

It's important to recognize the different ways Muslim women's movements approach things. "Muslim feminism," as described by Halverson and Way (2011) and Mir-Hosseini (2011), is a global movement that confirms gender equality can be reconciled with Islam.¹⁷ In contrast, "Islamist feminism" often calls for a stricter following of religious rules about gender roles and doesn't necessarily challenge traditional male-dominated views.¹⁷ While Islamist feminist groups may stress that genders complete each other and, at times, stop women from decision-making roles based on interpretations of women's "unsuitable natures," they may also recognize women as valid sources of religious reinterpretation.¹⁷ Islamist feminism is also rooted in anti-colonial discussions.¹⁷ This difference shows a *range of approaches* within Muslim women's movements, challenging any single understanding of "Muslim women's rights advocacy." It highlights that there isn't one single "Islamic feminist" view; instead, different, sometimes conflicting, approaches exist, reflecting the rich and varied nature of the debate around women's rights in Islam, with internal disagreements on how to understand and apply things. The following table clearly shows the theoretical and practical framework of Islamic feminism:

Table 3: Core Tenets of Islamic Feminism and Responses to Western Critiques

Core Belief of Islamic Feminism	Response to Western Feminist Criticisms	Key Figures/Ideas
Gender equality based in The Qur'an	Challenges wrong portrayal of Muslim women	Amina Wadud (The Qur'anic interpretation)
Re-reading male-dominated Islamic teachings	Counters old-fashioned Western stories	Fatima Mernissi (criticism of male-dominated law)
Achieving social justice within Islamic framework	Deals with gender-based anti-Islam prejudice	<i>Ijtihad</i> (independent reasoning)

Reclaiming religious identity	Rejects idea of Islam as naturally male-dominated	Putting texts in context
Stating Islam and feminism are compatible	Highlights historical rights and power of Muslim women	The Qur'an as "post-patriarchal"
Promoting equality and fairness in all parts of life	Provides a strong counter-story to Western feminism	Power of Muslim women

This table clearly shows the theoretical and practical framework of Islamic feminism, directly addressing modern understandings and challenging wrong ideas. It clearly explains how Islamic feminism works within a religious system to achieve fairness for women while also engaging with and criticizing Western discussions. This strengthens the positive view of Islam by showing an active, internal intellectual movement that champions women's rights from an Islamic perspective, rather than an outside force. It also highlights the power of Muslim women in defining their own freedom.

Realizing Agency: Muslim Women in Modern Political Spheres

The current situation in Muslim-majority societies offers many strong examples of women holding important political positions, including leadership roles in countries like Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Turkey.¹ These examples show that the political power of Muslim women is not just an idea but a real fact in many parts of the world. Notably, some countries that have declared Islam as their state religion show levels of gender equality that are much more advanced than certain established democracies.¹ Many Muslim countries have impressive female representation in parliaments, with some even doing better than advanced democracies in this area.¹ Furthermore, Muslim women have successfully adapted to the demands of the 21st century while keeping Islamic norms and values, working in various fields—including those where they keep their religious identity, such as wearing the Hijab—showing that religious practice and modern professional and political roles can exist together.⁵ History itself continues to produce many women who are truly leaders in different ways.⁵

Despite these advances, differences between Islam's basic ideas of women's empowerment and the current reality of women's political involvement still exist in some situations. This gap is mostly due to *non-religious factors*, including social, economic, institutional, and cultural barriers, rather than true Islamic beliefs.¹ Obstacles to women's political involvement are many, including a lack of support from political parties, limiting existing political structures, and even, in some cases, a lack of trust among women themselves in their female counterparts as believable political figures.¹ It's important to understand that gender inequality in political involvement is a global issue, not just a problem for Muslim countries.¹ Therefore, judging Islam based on cultural practices that discriminate based on gender is a simple, narrow, and biased approach.¹ Moreover, the time when women gained the right to vote in many Muslim-majority countries was often tied to their freedom from colonial rule, rather than being solely a result of internal Islamic politics.¹ This understanding of the situation helps to shift the focus from blaming Islam itself for low participation to wider societal and political challenges, many of which are universal.

The blending of "Islamic norms and values"⁵ with modern political roles by Muslim women shows a *successful adjustment* of Islamic principles to current realities, highlighting Islam's natural flexibility.

Islamic scholars generally agree that nothing in true Islamic sources prevents women from seeking or holding political office, as long as they have the necessary skills and such involvement doesn't interfere with their main duties of nurturing and caring for their families.¹ This perspective suggests that political involvement is permissible as long as it doesn't undermine their crucial role as mothers.¹ While Islam supports a balanced social order and, in some understandings, maintains a "separate work-sphere" for women, considering their body, self-respect, modesty, and protection, thus offering a special status⁵, it is also recognized that women, including those who wear the Hijab, are actively working in various fields. Although the home is seen as a vital place for strengthening family bonds, this doesn't deny women's ability or right to contribute to public life.⁵ This shows a practical use of

ijtihad (independent reasoning) and *qiyas* (analogical reasoning), where Muslim women are actively showing how religious identity and modern professional and political roles can exist together peacefully. This directly goes against the idea of Islam as rigid or incompatible with modern times and strengthens the idea that Islam is a "logical religion" capable of dealing with "modern changes".⁵ And whoever does righteous good deeds — male or female — and is a true believer in the Oneness of Allah, such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a Naqira (speck on the back of a date-stone), will be done to them (The Qur'an 4:124):

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا

*And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.*²⁴

Conclusion

This new look at Muslim women's political rights shows a story much richer and more empowering than commonly thought. From its very beginning, Islam set up revolutionary ideas of gender justice, giving women rights related to spiritual equality, education, economic independence, and social and political involvement centuries before similar recognitions appeared in other legal systems.² This historical leadership challenges common wrong ideas and places Islam as a pioneer in supporting women's natural worth and power.

A central argument of this paper is that core Islamic teachings not only allow but actively encourage women's involvement in political life, thereby challenging conservative interpretations that have historically limited their roles.³ The way Islamic law has developed has, at times, mirrored male-dominated societal structures, leading to understandings that moved away from the more equal spirit of early Islam.³ However, the active intellectual tradition within Islamic scholarship, shown by modern scholars' re-reading and putting into context of disputed stories like the "never prosper" The Hadith, shows Islam's natural ability for internal change and adjustment to match modern ideas of justice and fairness.³ This ongoing process of

ijtihad (independent reasoning) and contextual re-interpretation highlights Islam's logic and its ability to deal with modern changes through its flexible ways of understanding.⁵

Furthermore, the rise of Islamic feminism provides a strong framework for achieving gender equality and social justice within a clear Islamic context.¹ This movement actively counters Western wrong portrayals of Muslim women and challenges male-dominated readings of Islamic texts, serving as both an internal reform effort and a vital postcolonial response against dominant ideas and anti-Islam prejudice.⁴ The variety within Muslim women's movements, including the differences between Islamic feminism and Islamist feminism, further shows the many-sided nature of advocacy and interpretation, moving beyond

any single understanding of Muslim women's rights.

Finally, the analysis shows that barriers to women's political involvement in modern Muslim-majority societies are often social, economic, institutional, or cultural, rather than being natural to Islamic belief itself.¹ The successful blending of Islamic norms and values with modern political roles by Muslim women across various nations shows a practical adjustment of Islamic principles to current realities, highlighting Islam's natural flexibility and its ability to foster power within its framework.⁵

In conclusion, women's political rights should be seen not as a threat to tradition but as a natural step toward a fair Islamic society, reflecting basic Islamic values of consultation, accountability, and justice.³ Encouraging true women's power within Muslim communities requires knowledge-sensitive approaches in research and practice, making sure that actions and understandings are based on and respectful of local religious and cultural beliefs.⁷ This full understanding allows for a more detailed and positive appreciation of Islam's enduring commitment to fairness for women and empowerment.

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