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# Women's representation in majlis al shura in Oman: how do gender ideology, Islam, and tribalism matter?

Ahlam Khalfan Al Subhi  
*Iowa State University*

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**Women's representation in majlis al shura in Oman: How do gender ideology, Islam,  
and tribalism matter?**

by

**Ahlam Khalfan Al Subhi**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Major: Political Science

Program of Study Committee:  
Amy Erica Smith, Major Professor  
David Anderson  
Stephen Graham Sapp

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2016

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## **DEDICATION**

To my father, Khalfan Rashid Al Subhi, who supported, encouraged, and loved me unconditionally until he left this world. Who still inspires me, and fills my heart and mind. God rest his soul.

To my mother, Raya Nasser Al Kharousi, for her endless love, support, and encouragement.

To my brother, Ghalib, who I sorrowfully lost during my studies, but his last words strengthened my faith in God, and kept me going. God rest his soul.

To my beloved country, Oman, for making my dream comes true.

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**ABSTRACT**

Little work examines women's representation in elected office in non-Western countries, especially in the Arab region. Cross-national studies considering Arabic countries have argued that Islam and culture are the main reasons the Arab region has the lowest rate of women's representation in the world. However, this topic cannot be fully understood without taking into account informal politics, especially tribalism and the practices of social elites in this region. This study investigates the determinants of voting for female candidates using data from the first electoral survey ever conducted in Oman, prior to the October 2015 elections for Majlis al Shura (the elected consultative council). It incorporates cross-nationally recognized factors (gender ideology and religion) with a factor heretofore largely unexplored (tribalism).

The analysis shows the strong effect of cultural factors in explaining women's legislative representation, as suggested in previous cross-national studies. Individuals with high religiosity and traditional attitudes toward women are less supportive for women in the council. In contrast to what this researcher had expected, tribalism has no direct effect on self-reported likelihood of supporting women candidates. However, there is an indication of its importance; tribal nomination is associated with traditional gender attitudes more generally. The more important tribal nomination is to an individual in selecting a candidate, the less egalitarian attitudes toward women an individual has. Implications of these findings and suggestion for further research are discussed.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

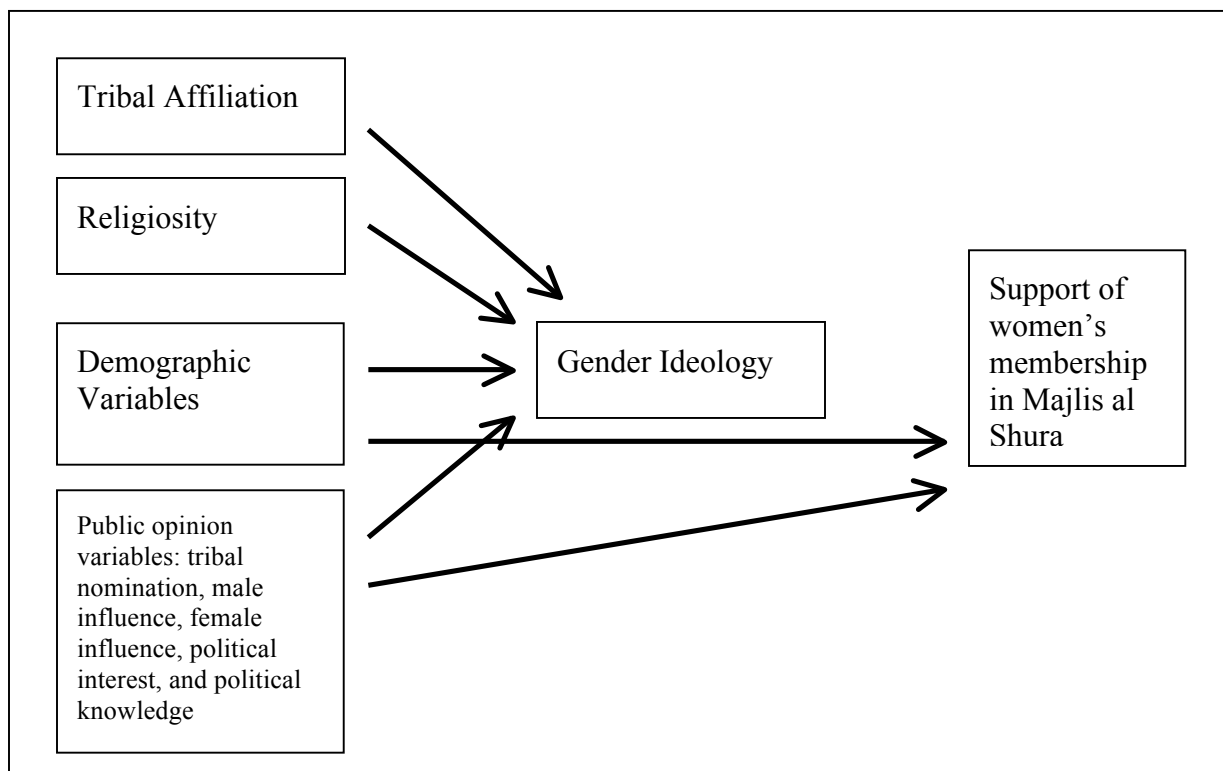
Women's underrepresentation in politics is a global phenomenon. While some countries such as Rwanda and Andorra have recently made significant progress in incorporating women in politics women are still unrepresented in most others. Understanding gender inequality in political representation is highly relevant because it indicates the extent to which women are able to influence politics more generally. This is particularly important in the context of the Arab region, where the rate of women's legislative representation is the lowest in the world —16% (IPU 2014). Focusing on Oman, an Arab Gulf state, what effect do gender ideology, Islam, and tribalism have on the low proportion of women in Majlis al Shura (the elected consultative council)?

The theoretical and practical reasons for women's representation in politics have motivated scholars to explore barriers to women's political access mostly in the West. Little work, however, has been done on non-Western countries, especially in the Arab region. Cross-national studies have considered some Arabic countries focusing on Islam and culture as the main reasons for the Arab region to have the lowest rate of women's representation in the world. However, without taking into account 'informal rules,' especially tribalism, and social practices in this region, a full understanding is missed.

The effect of 'informal rules' has been emphasized in recent political science literature (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2015; Schatz 2004). Some Western studies have already shown how informal rules, like internal party politics, could limit or increase women's access to politics (Kunovich and Paxton 2005). Ethnic-based patronage

politics play a significant role in limiting women's opportunities in cabinet positions in Africa (Arriola and Johnson 2013). Case studies (Al-Zayud 2009; Sabbagh 2005) of some Arabic countries have reported the powerful impact of tribalism on limiting women's access to the parliament. But there is no research on individual-level data testing the explanatory power of tribalism along with other defined factors such as gender ideology, and religion.

This study confirms that cultural factors (gender ideology and religion) strongly affect Omani citizens' levels of support for women in the legislature, and it finds indirect effect of tribal nomination on support for women in the legislature. It does so by using primary data from Oman to investigate the role of gender ideology, religiosity, and tribal affiliation in the low proportion of Omani women in Majlis al Shura. The suggested theoretical model is that gender ideology mediates the effect of religion and tribal affiliation on support of women in Majlis al Shura. See figure 1 below.



**Figure 1. Theoretical model**

The second chapter of this paper provides an overview of women's political participation, the three main explanations of women's legislative representation, and women's legislative representation in the Arab region and in Oman. It also includes the proposed hypotheses. The third chapter traces the nature and phases of political reforms in Oman with a focus on the elections of Majlis al Shura. Chapter four provides details of the data and methods used for this study. Descriptive and multivariate analyses of the data are provided in chapter five, with a highlight of the main findings. The last chapter (Chapter 6) provides conclusions, implications, and contributions of this study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Women are underrepresented in politics worldwide, although they have the right to participate in politics in almost every country in the world. Though they compose half of the population of every country (Paxton and Hughes 2007), the world average of women in parliament (both lower and upper houses) is 21.8% and 17.2% in ministerial positions. In the highest positions of state, women are 5.9% of heads of states, 7.8% of heads of government, 14.8% of speakers of parliament, and 26.5% of deputy speakers of parliament. Women make up 50% or more of the parliament (lower houses) in two countries only—Rwanda and Andorra, 63.8 and 50%, respectively (IPU 2014).

Historically, New Zealand was the first country to open the door for women's participation in conventional politics. It granted women the right to vote in 1893 (Paxton, Hughes, and Painter 2010). Australian women were the second to be enfranchised in 1902. In the United States, it took three generations (1840-1920) to enfranchise women (Ford 2010). By 1946, women had the right to vote in about 46% of the countries worldwide. In Finland during 1907, women were elected to office for the first time in history.

Today, the growth pattern of women's political representation differs significantly across regions and countries. For instance, the Nordic countries hold the highest rate of women in parliament (lower houses) at 42.1%, the Americas 25.2%, and Asia 18.9% (IPU 2014). In some countries, women's rate political representation is less than 5%, such as Kuwait and Haiti; whereas, other countries, like Cuba and Sweden, the rate exceeds 44%. However, there are still some countries, Micronesia and Qatar, that have no woman representative in their parliaments.

According to Paxton and Hughes (2007, 8), there are two types of arguments for the importance of women's presence in politics: (1) justice and (2) utility. Justice arguments are based on the fact women compose half of the population of every country in the world. Therefore, they should have equal chances of being 'formally', 'descriptively', and 'substantively' represented in politics. Equal formal representation simply means de jure equality when participating in politics, and granting equal opportunities for both men and women in law without any kind of discrimination; whereas, descriptive representation demands equality for women, based on their percentage in the population (50%). Substantive representation emphasizes the importance of the willingness of elected women to 'act for women' by initiating, supporting, and presenting their interests.

The second type of argument for women's representation highlights the practical consequences of including women in politics. Paxton and Hughes (2007) argue women's political presence improves the quality of decision-making because of a greater variety of skills and talents—more inputs of new ideas, values, and styles. Furthermore, others believe having women in politics helps motivate other women; they act as role models (Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006).

### **Explaining Women's Legislative Representation**

Cross-national studies on women's political representation have focused on comparing women's proportions in national legislatures and identifying the factors that have an impact on this issue. Scholars have classified these factors as social/structural, political/institutional, and cultural (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Paxton and Hughes 2007; Paxton and Kunovich 2003). According to Randall (1987) and Norris (1997), these are divided into two types of factors—supply and demand. On one hand, supply factors (structural and cultural) prepare women to contest in elections, and influence their decisions to run for office by supplying them with the

necessary experiences, skills, and psychological dispositions. On the other hand, demand factors (institutional) are the nature of political systems, electoral rules, political parties, and electorates that increase the likelihood of electing women to political offices. Next, social/structural, political/institutional, and cultural will be discussed in more detail.

### **Social/structural factors**

Structural factors focus on the social, economic, educational, and working status of women (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Norris 1985; Paxton 1997). Paxton and Kunovich (2003) anticipate women's rates of political representation are positively associated with women's educational achievements and workforce involvement. This means women in developing countries with a low level of socioeconomic status have lower proportions in politics; whereas, countries with higher levels of socioeconomic development have a greater proportion of women elected to political offices. However, some authors (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Moore and Shackman 1996; Paxton 1997) have found no effect of women's educational accomplishments on women's presence in politics. Additionally, women's working status (particularly in managerial or decision-making positions) has proven to have a strong impact in some studies (Kenworthy and Malami 1999) and no effects in others (Paxton 1997).

Furthermore, according to Norris and Inglehart (2001), structural factors have failed to explain why countries with similar social systems have different proportions of women in the legislature. As illustrated, Canada and the United States have similar levels of socioeconomic development, but different proportions of women in government offices (lower houses), 25.1 and 18.3%, respectively (IPU 2014). The same comparison can be made between Netherlands (38.7%) and Italy (31.4%); and between South Africa (44.8%) and Niger (13.3%). In addition, Norris and Inglehart reinforce their argument by showing how some poor countries

(Mozambique, South Africa, and Venezuela) have higher proportions of women in politics than the richest countries (the U.S., France, and Japan).

### **Political/institutional factors**

Political/institutional factors are another explanation for whether women participate in politics (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Paxton and Kunovich 2003). They emphasize the role of political systems, such as electoral rules and level of democracy, in empowering women politically. Cross-national studies have found electoral rules, especially proportional representation systems (PR), are positively related to women's proportions in parliaments (Lovenduski and Hills 1981; Norris 1985; Rule 1987). Proportional representation systems that use party lists are widely considered the most influential factor for women's presence. Parties publish a list of candidates so they are usually pushed to place some female candidates for equal opportunity between genders. Actually, some scholars have recommended effective reforms in electoral rules, especially adaption of a proportional representation system that would increase women's opportunities in politics (Norris 2004).

The degree to which a country is democratic is another institutional factor that has been examined in regards to gender representation (Norris and Inglehart 2001). However, the findings of its impact are mixed. Some scholars (Paxton 1997) found a positive relationship between democracy and women's representation in politics, and others (Reynolds 1999) found no relationship between these two factors. Although institutional factors are better supported by empirical evidence than structural factors (Paxton and Kunovich 2003), they have failed to explain the differences in women's proportions across countries with fairly similar political systems (Norris and Inglehart 2001).

## **Cultural Factors**

This explanation focuses on gender ideology as an important factor in limiting or enhancing women's political presence (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Paxton and Kunovich 2003). Attitudes regarding women's roles differ across cultures. Some maintain traditional attitudes that women's roles are within the home and family, while others support equality between women and men. These attitudes can be considered an influence on women's participation regardless of social and political systems. According to Norris and Inglehart (2001), gender ideology provides a reasonable explanation for the differences in women's representation between the Nordic region and other European countries (Switzerland, Italy, or Belgium) with relatively similar social and political systems. Additionally, this factor is considered a significant barrier to women's presence in many Islamic countries. However, there is insufficient cross-national empirical evidence of its impact. This is due to the lack of worldwide data on gender ideologies, forcing previous studies to substitute ideology with religion or region as noted by Paxton and Kunovich (2003), and Norris and Inglehart (2001).

Religion/region-based studies, such as Kenworthy and Malami (1999) and Paxton (1997) have provided interesting information. They noted women's presence is high in Scandinavian countries and low in Asia and the Middle East. Countries largely Muslim and Catholic have lower rates of women's representation than countries largely Protestant countries. Usually, Christian countries have higher proportions of women in politics than countries of other religions (Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism, and Hinduism). However, Norris and Inglehart (2001) argue religion/region explanations mirror attitudes or beliefs of a nation. These explanations do not capture significant differences within regions and religions.



According to Paxton and Kunovich (2003), some scholars have attempted to find more ‘precise’ measurements for ideology and avoid the use of alternatives (religion and region). Some of these measurements examined ratifications of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and legalizing women's movements and abortion. However, the effect of CEDAW is arguable as some scholars (Kenworthy and Malami 1999) found a positive effect and others (Paxton 1997) found no effect. As well, these measures do not reflect attitudes about women because they are “highly political decisions” (Paxton and Kunovich 2003, 92).

In an attempt to empirically demonstrate gender ideology has an important effect on women's representation, Norris and Inglehart (2001) use the index of political egalitarianism to measure ideology in many countries. They found women's proportions in the legislature are higher in countries with more politically egalitarian attitudes. Furthermore, Paxton and Kunovich (2003) introduce a ‘national’ measurement for ideology by using data from the World Values Survey to collect individuals' attitudes toward gender in 46 countries (Europe, North America, Eastern Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa). They combine responses to questions about women's roles in three areas: (1) politics, (2) education, and (3) participation in the labor force. They also utilize information from interviews conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). By applying these new measures in their analysis, they determined gender ideology has a stronger impact on women's presence in lower houses than structural and institutional factors.

### **Women's Legislative Representation in the Arab Region**

The Arab region has the lowest rate of women in parliament (both lower and upper houses) in the world—16% (IPU 2014). Emphasizing woman's conditions differ across Arab countries, some scholars have attempted to identify factors that impede women's political

presence in this region. In a case study of three Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, and Yemen), Sabbagh (2005) identifies some common factors across these countries, such as illiteracy, tribalism, lack of women's membership in political parties, and electoral systems. Some general themes in the Arab region, like patriarchy, religion (Islam), traditional gender ideology, and the perception that women's empowerment is part of a 'Western agenda', play an essential role in inhibiting women's advancement, in general (AbuKhalil 1993; Sabbagh 2005)

Among these common factors/themes, Western observers often argue Islam is the main impediment to women's political representation in this region. According to AbuKhalil (1993), the Arab ideology toward women is believed to be influenced by Islam without clear interpretation of the relationship between Islam and culture. He addresses this argument by assuring gender ideology is a worldwide issue across different religions. For example, AbuKhalil points to the protest that took place in Israel in 1992 for appointing a woman Minister of Education. Some scholars compared the status of women in pre-Islamic Arabian societies with that of Islamic tradition to show how Islam actually improved women's status in different aspects—marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Esposito 1975). Moreover, a significant difference was found between Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries in attitudes toward democracy and gender equality (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer 2007). In general, women's rights and democracy are more supported in Non-Arab Muslim countries than in Arab Muslim countries.

Sabbagh (2005) also argues women's political presence in non-Arab Islamic countries (Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan), and the support of women by some Islamist political parties to compete for office are sufficient evidence to refute the Western view of Islam. Apparently, Islam by itself is not the cause of the low presence of women in politics in the Arab

region. In fact, Iranian female activists utilized Islamic sources to gain their rights and social positions (Hashim 1999).

In line with these arguments, Ross (2008) refutes the role of Islam in the low proportion of women in politics in the Middle Eastern region. Instead, he argues oil is the main reason for this phenomenon. By analyzing oil production and employment data for all countries from 1960-2002, and data on female political presentation for 2002, Ross found oil production has a negative impact on female employment and political representation. According to him, a rise in oil production causes lower female participation in the work force in two ways: (1) by having lower female wages because of a drop in ‘traded sectors’ (agriculture and manufacturing) and (2) by having higher unearned female income because of high male wages and government transfers generated by the rise in ‘non-traded sectors’ (construction and services). In turn, lower female labor force participation leads to lower female political representation because women are disadvantaged in participating in outside home activities (collective actions, political conversations, and gender discrimination experiences), which are important to enhance their skills and encourage them to participate in the political arena. Consequently, this pattern in oil-producing countries leads to “strong patriarchal norms and political institutions” (Ross 2008,107).

Furthermore, Coffé and Dilli (2015), in their study of the gender gap in political participation in 13 Muslim-majority countries, found at the individual level men are more politically active than women in these countries. However, in examining cross-national differences in the gender gap, they found Islam, levels of modernization, and gender equality have no effect on the gender gap.

Although scholars believe the factors are "complex and intertwined" in this region (Sabbagh 2005, 64), there is no empirical research across the Middle East distinguishing among the impacts of these factors, especially gender ideology, which was empirically demonstrated as an important factor in cross-national studies (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Paxton and Kunovich 2003). Recently, Bush and Jamal (2015) examined if either Americans or religious supporters of Jordan's gender quota in parliament influence public attitudes toward women's representation in politics in Jordan. Interestingly, Bush and Jamal found neither of the two endorsements (American and religious) have an impact on supporting women's representation in politics. This finding challenges the assumption held by some scholars about the role of Arab sentiment that women's empowerment is part of a 'Western agenda' to restrain women's political representation.

Furthermore, in general, there is a lack of research on attitudinal behaviors of voters in this region that could contribute to explain women's obstacles. Most of the literature on elections and electoral outcomes in this region focuses on reasons authoritarian regimes implement democratic elections (Al Haj 1996; Ehteshami and Steven 2007; Rabi 2002). Recent research by Miguel, Jamal, and Tessler (2015) examines determinants of turnout in this region. By using data from surveys conducted in seven Arab countries between 2006 and 2009, Miguel et al. found people vote for the purpose of supporting their regimes, especially their economic performance, not only because of patronage, which had been thought to be the main reason for turnout in the Middle East.

In accordance, another recent study found patronage is not the main preference of voters for the National Federal Council in the United Arab Emirates (Yaghi and Antwi-Boateng 2015). Instead, candidates' personal characteristics (age, gender, education level, political experience,

oratorical skills) and the quality of their campaigns motivate Emiratis to vote. In terms of gender, the study concluded most Emiratis voters prefer male candidates.

### **Women's Legislative Representation in Oman**

Taking into consideration the complexity of the issue of women's political representation in the Arab region, the proportion of women in Majlis al Shura (the elected consultative council) in Oman is not surprisingly low (1.2%) relative to the overall pattern in the Arab region (IPU 2014). In fact, the highest proportion of women in any term of Majlis al Shura was 2.4% in 2000 and 2003 (IPU 2004).

Women's underrepresentation in Majlis al Shura in Oman has not been examined in depth to date. To this researcher's knowledge, no empirical studies exist that examine what impedes Omani women from making their way to the council. Previous studies (Al-Lamky 2007; Al-Hashmi, Al-Msalami and Hassan 2009; Al-Zedjali 2009; Varghese 2011) slightly touched this issue within the analysis of women's empowerment in Oman, in general. Moreover, as women's conditions are not homogeneous across the Arab region, it is not proper to generalize the obstacles in other Arab states to Oman.

Al-Lamky (2007), in her study of the perspectives of Omani female leaders, found Omani women in leadership positions are "highly motivated" (58). However, they are faced with the challenge of balancing between their positions and family/social responsibilities. Varghese (2011) measured economic, household, and social aspects of empowerment of 150 Omani women in the Sohar region. He found an Omani woman is empowered. However, "... still her interest towards domesticity affects her empowerment" (47). Varghese also found Omani women are aware of their legal/political rights and the factors positively associated to their empowerment.

Research by Al-Hashmi, Al-Msalami, and Hassan (2009) studied challenges of Omani women's participation in the public sphere, in general. Al-Hashmi et al. found (1) positive attitudes among men and women toward women's participation, with some reservations about political participation, especially among male participants; (2) Omani women are highly aware of women's issues in the country and the importance of their participation; and (3) culture was strongly considered by men and women to be the main obstacle for women's participation.

In an attempt to identify the challenges of women's empowerment in Oman, Al-Zedjali (2009) completed a survey in the capital city (Muscat) on a sample of 120 females in decision-making positions, such as minister, undersecretary of ministry, member of the state council, director general, and expert. The main findings of Al-Zedjali's research include: (1) Omani women are empowered by the government, but they seek more opportunities, especially in politics and law fields; (2) culture is the main obstacle for women to work, since some segments of the population still hold traditional attitudes toward women; (3) 84% of the sample cited they are supported and inspired by their parents and husbands throughout their careers; (4) 54% of the sample are married and have children, which indicates women can balance family and professional success; and (5) 55% of the sample believe education is the most powerful tool to achieve socioeconomic and political changes.

Most of these studies report culture as the main obstacle for Omani women to participate in the public sphere, in general. Religion seems not an obstacle for Omani women's advancement. Although culture and religion are highly correlated, and religion has been used as a proxy for gender ideology, gender ideology was more considered (38% strongly agreed) as an obstacle to women's empowerment than religion (26% strongly agreed) (Al-Hashmi et al. 2009). Based on these findings, and previous cross-national studies on the importance of the

explanatory power of gender ideology on women's political representation, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: The more egalitarian attitudes towards women, the greater the support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

Regardless of the counterarguments about religion and the findings from Omani research, individuals with greater religiosity are less likely to support women's representation in the council, since Islam is associated with low rates of women in parliaments as noted by Kenworthy and Malami (1999), and Paxton (1997). Furthermore, usually religious Omani men have reservations about women's involvement in the public sphere, in general. Even if they allow their wives, sisters, or daughters to work, these women would be involved in women-dominated jobs like school teachers and nurses. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H2: The greater the religiosity, the lower egalitarian attitudes towards women.*

However, when it comes to politics, informal rules also need to be taken account, especially tribalism. As mentioned earlier, tribalism plays a big role in elections in some Arabic countries, such as Jordan and Yemen (Al-Zayud 2009; Sabbagh 2005). According to Helmke and Levitsky (2004), informal institutions or informal rules, like clan-based norms and clientelism, are those rules "created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (725) and "...their origins are often unclear" (731). Basically, these are rules formed and expressed by social groups instead of the state. Helmke and Levitsky argue disregarding these rules in the political science field leads to an incomplete understanding of political behaviors. They are very important to create incentives that facilitate and limit political behaviors, explain institutional outcomes, and mediate the effect of electoral rules. Helmke and Levitsky explain

how the president of Mexico used to choose his successor, based on informal rules; no formal constitutional or electoral rules were followed.

By explaining how clan networks are present in modern Kazakhstan and how they play a big role in economic and political arenas, Schatz (2004) in his book, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power of "Blood" in Kazakhstan and Beyond*, refutes the assumption modernity eliminates clans from political life. He emphasizes the importance of studying clans in the field of political science to fully understand political phenomena in the current world. Schatz states, "By leaving explicit conceptualization of these identities to other disciplines, political science may misread their literatures and misunderstand the role these group solidarities play in the contemporary world" (4). In accordance with Schatz's view, a recent study (Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2015) found clan-based governance is a strong predictor of state instability and violence; non-clan-based societies are more stable than clan-based societies.

Informal institutions are also important to explain economic behaviors. Xu and Yao (2015) found lineage networks have strong effects on public goods expenditures in rural China. Their study indicated from 1986 to 2005, village public investments of 220 Chinese villages increased significantly when the village leaders were from the largest family clans in a village.

In the case of women's political representation, some Western studies have already shown how informal rules, like internal party politics, could limit or increase women's access to politics (Kunovich and Paxton 2005). In Africa, ethnic-based patronage politics limit women's opportunities in cabinet positions (Arriola and Johnson 2013). Some case studies in the Arab region have identified tribalism as an obstacle to women's presence in parliament. However, cross-national studies on women's legislative representation do not consider these informal



institutions, which vary across regions and countries. This leads to a misunderstanding of the actual factors that inhibit women's access to parliament in a particular region or country.

### **Tribalism**

In general, Arab culture and identity are based on tribalism where individuals have a strong feeling of loyalty to their tribes. The terms 'tribes', 'clans', and 'lineage groups' are used interchangeably in different contexts. However, the term 'tribe' will be used in this study per Torstrick and Faier's (2009) use of the term, because it deals with the Arab culture, specifically the Arabian Peninsula. According to Torstrick and Faier, tribes consist of clans and each clan consists of different families. Using the family name, one can determine which clan or tribe someone belongs. Tribes always express the male line of descent. A married woman keeps her family name (that is, her father's tribal name), but her children belong to her husband's family. Arranged marriage within the same tribe is favorable in the Arabic culture because it stresses cooperation and keeps wealth within the same tribe (Torstrick and Faier 2009).

Throughout history, a male tribal leader, *sheikh*, managed the social, economic, and political issues of his tribe in a sovereign territory. Succession of the sheikh was through bloodline, passing from father to eldest son, with some exceptions (Torstrick and Faier 2009). Tribes operated in a "decentralized" form (Salzman 2008). Members within a tribe had the responsibility of protecting each other from outsiders, and increasing the number of children for the purpose of strengthening the tribe's defense and economic conditions, based on nomadic pastoralism. Tribal wars over territories to extend geographic space and access to economic resources were common. Oftentimes, the losing tribes were forced to leave their territories, but in some cases they were allowed to stay and become dependent upon the winning tribe.

In the Arabian Peninsula when oil exploration began in the 1930s, tribes were repressed because they were considered obstacles to modernity by ‘oil imperialists’ and by local ruling families (Cooke 2014; Torstrick and Faier 2009). The oil revolution in the region brought many changes to the tribal system. Instead of a free nomadic system, borders were defined between the countries to facilitate access for foreign oil companies and form citizenships. Some tribes refused to register as citizens because they did not want to change their way of living, particularly in the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Now, they are known as *Bedoons* and have no civil rights in these states (Cooke 2014).

However, national identities did not eliminate or replace tribalism in this region. Tribalism still exists and is an important element in the Gulf societies. In *Tribal Modern*, Cooke (2014) uses the Qur’an word ‘*barzakh*’, which means ‘undiluted convergence’ to describe how tribal and modern ‘mix and separate’ in these societies. Cooke states “the tribal is the new aristocratic in the flattening anonymity of twenty-first century transnational movement and cosmopolitanism” (172). Younger generations acknowledge the importance of tribalism in everyday activities, and feel pride and honor in their tribal identities. Marriage within the same tribe is still preferable (Torstrick and Faier 2009) and ‘tribal compatibility’ is more important than money in marriage decisions (Cook 2014). This also plays a role in politics, especially in parliamentary elections, like in Oman (Al-Farsi 2013; Barber 2007).

In the Omani context, tribes before 1970 were the “main source of identity, support, and protection for the individual,” (Barber 2007,1) and had priority in determining people's loyalties (Al-Farsi 2013). Politically, the tribe played a big role in formatting the current state, transforming Oman from an *Imamate* state to a sultanistic state (Al-Farsi 2013; Al- Zayud and Al-Trawna 2012). Oman consists of two main Arab tribal blocks—Qahtani and Adnani—who

migrated to Oman after the collapse of the Ma'rab dam in Yemen during second century B.C. During this time, the Persians occupied Oman and the Qahtani tribes under the leadership of Malik bin Fahm overthrew the Persians and ruled the country. Since then, the Omani political system has remained dynastic until the first establishment of Islamic Imamate in Oman in 750 A.D. with the end of the Umayyad Dynasty (Al-Farsi 2013; Al-Zayud and Al-Trawna 2012).

Throughout Omani political history, all ruling systems were under the Qahtani block whereas, the Islamic Council of Elite was in the hands of the Adnani block. However, these two tribal blocks became involved in two major fights over political power—considered critical in Omani political history (Al-Farsi 2013). The first conflict occurred in 892 A.D., known as the Yemeni/Nizari War. Yemeni Imam Al-Salt bin Malik, who belonged to the Qahtani block, was overthrown by his Supreme Judge—Nizari. Nizari belonged to the Adnani block. The consequences of this conflict resulted later in Abbasids' occupation of Oman. The second conflict, the Hinawi/Ghafri War, occurred near the end of the Ya'ariba state in 1749. An Adnani Sheikh from Al Ghafri tribe declared himself the Imam after a fight among members of the Qahtani ruling family over the Imamate. The Adnani Sheikh fought with a Qahtani Sheikh from the Al Hinawi tribe. The conflict between these two tribes led the Persians to invade Oman.

As the case in most tribes in the Middle Eastern region, wars over territories were very common within the tribal Omani system. Major tribes owned specific areas of the country to become their 'sovereign' territories. Each tribe attempted to extend its territory to gain more geographic, economic, and political power at the cost of others (Al-Farsi, 2013). In this context, Al-Farsi expresses, “...tribalism does not depend on blood ties only but also on tribal alliances (*Shaff*) and political coalitions” (86). Today, tribal leaders are formally registered with the Ministry of Interior. They usually reside in provinces, their tribes' sovereign territories. Omanis

identify each other by their tribal names, and can easily distinguish their origins and provinces from tribal names.

When Sultan Qaboos came to power in 1970, he attempted to create a national identity for Omanis instead of tribal identity through national development plans (Chatty 1996). He initiated a containment policy, which incorporated master tribal leaders and opposition leaders in transforming Oman into a modern state (Al-Farsi 2013). These attempts are intended to loosen tribes' control over territories and people's loyalties. However, some research suggests tribal identities/values still remain unchanged in some aspects (Al-Farsi 2013; Barber 2007; Wikan 1982).

Wikan (1982), in her book *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman*, found tribal values continued to play a big role in the issue of marriage in the Sohar region during the mid-1970s. Barber (2007) examined the strength of tribal ties among rural and urban Zanzibaris in Oman. She found tribalism is still 'strong' in Oman, and individuals still value their tribe's role. Barber determined the tribe plays a consultative role in marriage and inheritance, but tribal affiliation is not used for job seeking. Most importantly, she found tribal affiliation plays a major role in voting for Majlis al Shura, and anticipated it would weaken in the future with more education and uncontrolled electoral campaigns. Interestingly, Barber found age and level of education have an effect on the strength of tribal ties, not urbanization as she hypothesized. Barber concluded the younger, more educated the person, the weaker the tribal ties.

Politically, Al-Farsi (2013), in his book *Democracy and Youth in the Middle East: Islam, Tribalism, and the Rentier State in Oman*, points to the 'implicit allegiances' to Qahtani/Adnani tribal blocks and the competition between these two blocks to maintain social status and political power. In turn, these affect Majlis al Shura elections. All three segments of the Omani population

that Al Farsi interviewed (government officials, religious institution members, and younger generations) agreed upon the positive role of a tribal culture as a social fabric, and a source of pride and honor for individuals. But, these groups also acknowledged the negative effects it has on the elections of Majlis al Shura. According to Al-Farsi's respondents, tribes play a clear role in nominating candidates to ensure support regardless of their competence. Thus, this leads educated people to be reluctant to participate in voting and running for office. The respondents also mentioned agreements are formed between some tribes in certain regions to 'circulate' Majlis al Shura membership between their representatives. On the other hand, some respondents believed tribes have a positive role in raising voter turnout by encouraging their people to vote for their candidates.

In a recent study about the relationship between clan governance and state stability (Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2015), Oman is characterized as a moderate clan-based society. It scores six out of eleven in the Clan Governance Index constructed by measuring eight types of female subordination types in marriage: (1) patrilocality, (2) inequality family law, (3) polygyny, (4) early marriage for women, (5) cousin marriage, (6) honor-based violence against women, (7) violence against women, and (8) women's property rights.

In terms of women's representation in Majlis al Shura, tribes play a similar role to that for political parties in western democracies in limiting women's access to parliament. Political parties are 'gatekeepers' for women's political power. Kunovich and Paxton (2005) argue political parties limit choices available for voters through candidate selection and supporting processes. They found women's presence in political parties increases the likelihood of women's candidacy and election to the office in different ways, depending on the electoral system. For example, in proportional representation systems female party leaders can increase the number of

female candidates and increase the number of elected female candidates in plurality-majority systems (Kunovich and Paxton).

In Oman, where political parties do not exist, tribes are the ‘gatekeepers’ for women's access to al Shura. Since tribes are based on patriarchal structures and play a clear role in nominating candidates, women are not considered in the selection process or in the supporting process during elections. Historically, Omani women were active in society through teaching illiterate women the Holy Qur'an and religious duties, and through discussing tribal/political issues with men (Andriyanova 2011). But, they were absent in the formal political system, specifically as tribal leaders or judges (Peterson 1989). Still today, women do not hold these two positions in Oman. Women are not involved formally in discussing tribal issues with tribal leaders. Therefore, within the tribal system there is no possibility for Omani women to play any role to support women candidates or elect them. Actually, women are influenced indirectly by their fathers, brothers, and husbands to vote for male tribal candidates, limiting their ability to support women. Moreover, in a patriarchal society, no tribe would take the lead of nominating a female candidate for fear of stigma.

Alliances among some tribes within a tribal block, Qahtani or Adnani, to secure seats for them in Majlis al Shura also limits women's opportunities. Membership circulation and ensuring the vote for a certain tribal candidate eliminate women and male candidates without support. These alliances are encouraged by the current electoral system in which the number of representatives is very limited; provinces with a population of 30,000 and above have a ‘single non-transferrable vote’ system with a district magnitude of two (that is, two candidates per district), and those provinces with less than 30,000 have a ‘first past the post’ system (Majlis al Shura 2008). This suggests women's opportunities to access Majlis al Shura might increase if the

number of seats per province increases. Still, this might not be the case because individual tribes may fight to gain more seats. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3: The greater the strength of tribal affiliation, the less egalitarian attitudes towards women.*

Religion might limit women's access to Majlis al Shura, but religious leaders do not play the gatekeeper role that tribal leaders play. They do not collectively nominate candidates or support certain candidates at the expense of others. The influence of religion might rather be more apparent on the individual level. Usually, individuals with high religiosity do not support women's participation in fields dominated by men. So, religious men definitely do not allow their wives, daughters, and sisters to compete for office. In any case, they would not vote for a female candidate. In addition, women with high religiosity will not compete for office or support a woman candidate.

Tribalism may affect the impact of structural factors (education, income, social class, employment, etc.) on women's representation in Majlis al Shura. Cross-national findings are inconsistent on the impact of these factors on women's legislative representation. However, in a tribal society, the level of education and economic status may have no or little effect on supporting women's representation in Majlis al Shura. Individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, still value tribal identity over their own identities. So, they are more likely to vote for a male tribal candidate than for a woman. Therefore, the following three hypotheses are proposed:

*H4. There is no relationship between level of education and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

*H5. There is no relationship between income and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

*H6. There is no relationship between employment status and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

This study will also investigate the impact of demographic factors (sex, age, marital status, place of residency, etc.) within a tribal society on attitudes towards women's political participation. Marital status and children do not appear to have an impact on Omanis' attitudes towards women. Al-Zedjali (2009), in her study on challenges to women's empowerment in Oman, found the majority (84%) of females in decision-making positions were supported and inspired by their parents/husbands throughout their careers. Most were married and had children. This indicates marital status and children have no effect on gender ideology and, consequently, no relationship with support for women's representation in the council, which leads to the following two proposed hypotheses:

*H7. There is no relationship between marital status and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

*H8. There is no relationship between having children and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

Omani men still have some reservations about women's political participation. Omani women are aware they are underrepresented in politics and law (Al-Hashmi et al. 2009). However, Varghese (2011) found Omani women in the Sohar region still prefer domesticity. This means they might not choose to compete for office and might not support women candidates. These findings contradict the argument there is a positive relationship between public knowledge of women's descriptive underrepresentation and support for women in office (Sanbonmatsu 2003). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H9. There is no relationship between sex and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*



Barber (2007) concluded urbanization has little or no effect on the strength of tribal ties in Oman. However, perhaps the place of permanent residency has an impact on support for women's representation in the council. This argument is based on the fact all women who made their way into Majlis al Shura were from the capital—Muscat. Tribal ties are weaker in Muscat because of mixed communities, which allow people to form new affiliations other than tribal. Moreover, cultural constraints are usually weaker in cities than in rural regions. This assessment leads to the following hypothesis:

*H10. Individuals who live in the capital are more likely than others to support women's membership in Majlis al Shura.*

Oman consists of different ethnic and linguistic minority groups, such as Zanzibari, Baluchi, and Lawati (Peterson 2004). Zanzibaris or Swahili speakers are Omanis (Arabs who belong to either Qahtani or Adnani tribes) who lived in Zanzibar and other parts of Africa during the Omani domination of the African coast or travelled back and forth for trade/employment purposes when the economic conditions of Oman were poor. Therefore, Zanzibaris hold the same tribes as those of Omanis who only speak Arabic and did not reside along the African coast. On the other hand, Baluchi and Lawati tribes are not Arab tribes. Baluchi are originally from Baluchistan and most are Sunni. Some moved to Oman for work and settlement during Omani control over the Gwadar Port until 1954. Lawati are of Indian origin and they are Shi'a. They traditionally lived in Matrah (Sur Al Lawatia), where they still have their mosque and celebrate their social and religious events.

According to Peterson (2004), the 'assimilation process' since 1970 has successfully reduced distinctions among these groups through property ownership, education systems, and political appointments, but discrimination still exists in Omani society, especially in marriage

and social inequality. Therefore, these groups, especially Lawati and Baluchi, have strong tribal ties and seek to reserve seats for themselves through male tribal candidates. For example, in Matrah province, one of the two winners is always a male Lawati because it is the homeland for Lawati people. Interestingly, in the 2011 elections a Lawati woman, a former ambassador, ran for office in Matrah, but the tribal support went to her male counterpart. The case within the Zanzibari group is different. Because Zanzibaris are originally Omanis, they hold the same tribe names as their counterpart ‘Arab’ Omanis. So, when it comes to elections, those who permanently live in Muscat in mixed communities do not consider tribal ties. Instead they might support a Zanzibari candidate, whether male or female. In addition, Zanzibari women in Oman were the first to enter the public sphere because of their educational experiences outside Oman (Peterson 2004). This indicates they are less likely to hold traditional gender ideologies. This background leads to the following hypothesis:

*H11. Zanzibaris are more likely than others to support women’s membership in Majlis al Shura.*

According to Barber (2007), age affects the strength of tribal ties in Oman; the younger the individual, the weaker the tribal ties. This might be true within an individual level decision. However, in elections, tribal identity is prevalent over individual identity. Individuals vote for tribal candidates over their own preferences. In addition, a cross-national study found no generational shifts in cultural attitudes in post-Communist and developing societies (Norris and Inglehart 2001). Younger and older generations in these societies tend to be alike in holding traditional attitudes. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H12. There is no relationship between age and support for women’s membership in Majlis al Shura.*

In sum, despite strong indications of its importance in limiting women's political representation in the Arab region, no empirical research has considered tribalism along with other determinants. In part, this could be due to the challenges of defining and measuring informal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). However, without considering tribalism, a full understanding of the phenomenon is missed. This factor is important to explain why the Arab region holds the lowest rate of women in parliament in the world.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **POLITICAL REFORMS IN OMAN**

This chapter traces the nature and phases of political reforms in Oman introduced by Sultan Qaboos, since he came to power in 1970. The aim of these reforms was to deal with the issue of political participation in Oman during major changes in the political climate in and around the region, as will be discussed later.

Oman is a sultanistic state (i.e. absolute monarchy). The Sultan Qaboos took power in a bloodless coup in 1970. Before that Oman suffered from isolation and a poor economic situation, which forced some Omanis to immigrate to east Africa and other gulf countries seeking education and job opportunities. The Sultan Qaboos is considered the leader of the ‘Renaissance Era’ in Oman. He is responsible for the transformation of the country to a modern state in all aspects: economic, politics, public services, and gender equality. Today, Oman has a high Human Development Index (0.783), and a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.348, ranking it 64 out of 149 countries in 2013 (United Nations Development Programme 2014). According to a study by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, Oman is the second best Arabian country in women’s rights (Kehoe 2013).

Over a period of four decades, political reforms have gradually established a popularly elected representative body in Oman; while this body does not have the full popular sovereignty or legislative authority of Western parliaments, since reforms in 2011 it is endowed in Basic Law not only with the power to propose legislation to the sultan but also with certain oversight over the state bureaucracy.

These reforms were implemented in three phases: the establishment of the State Consultative Council (SCC) in 1981; the Omani Consultative Council (OCC) in 1991; and the Council of Oman (the Consultative Council and State Council) in 1996. In his speeches and interviews, the Sultan emphasized the character of these reforms: that they are not meant to imitate others, but to develop something that is unique for the Omani society. He stated that "it is not our intention to import foreign brands of democracy into this country; the democratic process that you are witnessing is, and must always be an Omani one, which accords with our people's culture, religion and traditions and particular needs" (The Middle East 1995).

### **The State Consultative Council (1981-1990)**

The State Consultative Council (SCC) was mainly established to advise the government on economic and social policies/issues (Al-Haj 1996, Majlis al Shura 1997). The council had to submit its recommendations to the Sultan directly. It originally consisted of 45 members, including the chairman, who were all appointed by the Sultan. The council's membership included two sectors: government and public (provinces and business) with 17 and 28 members respectively. In 1983, the number of the members was increased by a royal decree to 55: 18 government representatives, 12 business representatives, and 25 provincial representatives. Some of the government representatives were undersecretaries of different services ministries.

The SCC had its own budget and consisted of the Chairman office, a general secretariat, an executive bureau, and a number of permanent and temporary committees (Majlis al Shura 1997). During its functional periods, it submitted many recommendations in different spheres: economic, social welfare, education, infrastructure and public services. 'Omanization' — the replacement of expatriate workers with Omanis, was among the most important recommendations the council submitted in 1988 and was implemented rapidly.

According to Al-Haj (1996), even though the SCC did not have any legislative role, it presented a step toward political change in Oman. The Sultan's approach of incorporating citizens in domestic issues was different from the former Sultan's (his father) strategy that never used the principle of consultation.

### **The Omani Consultative Council (OCC)**

The second phase of political change in Oman was the replacement of the SCC with the Omani Consultative Council (OCC) in 1991. In his speech at the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> National Day, the Sultan announced the establishment of the OCC with the emphasis on greater public participation in the development process of the country. He declared that " ... to provide more opportunities for Omani citizens' wider participation in the responsibilities and tasks in the construction of the Fatherland, we have decided upon the formation of a Majlis al Shura in which all the Wilayats [provinces] of the Sultanate are to be represented. There will be no government membership of this Majlis. The membership will be totally composed of representatives of the Wilayats. This is a further step on the road of participation which will serve the aspirations and ambitions of the citizens throughout Oman" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015).

The OCC started out in December 1991 with 59 members plus the chairman who was appointed by the Sultan. The 59 members represented the 59 provinces and they ran for office through provincial nomination and selection by the Sultan. Within each province, only men citizens had the right to run for office and tribal and opinion leaders were the only segment of the population who had the right to vote (not more than 100 persons). Through a secret ballot procedure, each province nominated the three top names to the government and the Sultan appointed the member (Majlis al Shura 2006).

For the second term (1994-1997) elections, the representation system was changed based on population density (Majlis al Shura 1997). Provinces that had a population of 30,000 and above had two representatives and those with less than 30,000 had one representative in the council, nominating four and two to the government accordingly. Therefore, the number of the members increased to 80 in the second term. In addition, the number of voters (still mainly tribal and opinion leaders) was increased to 200 persons for provinces with two representatives and 100 persons for those with one representative. It was in this term when women for the first time had the right to vote and run for office. However, these rights were limited to women in the Muscat governorate (with six provinces) only, and two women made their way to the council.

Many changes were introduced in the third term (1997-2000) elections. Each province had at least 250 voters, and the number of member increased to 82. Other segments of society like business and educated persons were included in the voting process as well. In addition, women in governorates outside Muscat were given the right to vote. In contrast to the two previous terms, members were elected based on the voting results without government intervention, and members had the right to run for office for a second term (Majlis al Shura 2004).

The fifth term (2003-2007) election was the first to be held under universal adult suffrage (Majlis al Shura 2008). All citizens (male and female) of age 21 and over were given the right to vote. The representation system remained the same; provinces with 30,000 and above held two seats and those with less than 30,000 held one seat in the council. In addition, the membership restriction was lifted; a member can run for office without restrictions on the number of reelections, and the term was extended to four years instead of three. In regard to candidates, no changes or new rules were introduced. As specified before, a candidate must be of age 30 and

above, be of good repute in his/her province, have work experience and reasonable knowledge (no specified qualifications), and cannot hold a government job if elected.

A formal election campaign was introduced for the first time in the sixth term (2007-2011) elections. Candidates were allowed to hold campaigns either through meetings with the public or through media, from the time of publishing the final list of candidates by the Ministry of Interior to the day prior to the elections. Candidates were allowed to announce their candidacies through publishing pamphlets, placing billboards, banners and posters in streets and public places, and publishing advertisements in the local press and on TV. Advertisements were allowed only inside the province the candidate was contesting, and they only could have the picture of the candidate, his full name, address, work experience, and academic/practical qualifications.

Before the seventh term (2011-2015) elections, major changes were introduced in the Basic Statute of the State by a royal decree (99/2011). The amendments include election of the Chairman and two deputies by a majority of the 84 elected members in the council, and a provision that candidates must hold at least a high school diploma. Voter turnout was the highest (76%) for this term and just one woman got elected.

Surprisingly, in 2015 elections for the eighth term (2015-2019) had the lowest voter turnout (56.6%). But more youths were elected, leading to around 70% new faces in the council (Kothaneth 2015). Again one woman (an incumbent) made her way to the office. Table 1 below presents a summary of all elections.

The OCC has its own budget and administrative system composed of the office of the Chairman, a general secretariat, and committees. Before the seventh term, the council mainly acted as an advisory body for the government with very limited legislative roles (Al-Haj 1996).



However, an amendment introduced in 2011 following protests associated with the ‘Arab Spring’ granted the council greater legislative and oversight roles. It is now responsible for approving/amending draft laws referred to it by the government (the Council of Ministers); proposing new laws to the government; discussing/commenting on annual development projects, budget plans, and economic/social agreements/conventions before ratification; and reviewing the annual report of the State Audit Institution. It also has the power of interpellation of services ministers such as ministers of Education, Higher Education, Housing, and Transportation, according to a request presented by not less than 15 members, and to refer the results of interpellation directly to the Sultan (Majlis al Shura 2011).

**Table 1: Summary of elections data**

Term	Candidates		Elected		Voter Turnout		
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1 <sup>st</sup> (1991-1994)	-	-	59	-	-	-	-
2 <sup>nd</sup> (1994-1997)	-	-	78	2	-	-	-
3 <sup>rd</sup> (1997-2000)	709	27	80	2 (incumbents)	-	-	-
4 <sup>th</sup> (2000-2003)	519	21	81	2	65%	35%	30%
5 <sup>th</sup> (2003-2007)	491	15	81	2 (incumbents)	-	-	-
6 <sup>th</sup> (2007-2011)	610	21	84	-	63%	60.7%	39.3%
7 <sup>th</sup> (2011-2015)	1056	77	83	1	76.6%	-	-
8 <sup>th</sup> (2015-2019)	570	20	84	1 (incumbent)	56.6%	32.8%	23.7%

### **The State Council (SC)**

In November 1996, The Sultan announced the Basic Statute of the State (*al-Nizam al-Asasi lil-Dawla*), which stated the relationship between the state and its people. In Article 58, it described the formation of a new council, the State Council (Majlis al Dawla), alongside the Consultative Council, together making the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman) (Rabi 2002). The Sultan appoints members of the State Council for a four-year term. They constitute former officials (ministers, undersecretaries, ambassadors, and senior officers), tribal leaders,

academians, and outstanding Omanis. The State Council reviews everything referred by the Majlis al Shura in regard to laws, annual development and budget plans, and agreements/conventions. According to Shaykh Hammud bin Abdallah al-Harhi, the first chairman of the council, the difference between the al Shura and al Dawla councils is the former is “more involved with constituency issues”; whereas, the latter “did not have to pay consideration to various groups and thus could help to set priorities, particularly financial priorities, for the country” (Rabi 2002, 46). In this sense, the Majlis al Shura serves as the lower house and Majlis al Dawla as the upper house. Currently, the council has 85 members, 13 are women (IPU 2015).

It is worth mentioning, by the royal degree (99/2011), the chairmen of Majlis al Shura and Majlis al Dawla have been added to the process of deciding a successor to the throne. Article (6) states, "The Royal Family Council shall, within three days of the throne falling vacant, determine the successor to the throne. If the Royal Family Council does not agree on a choice of a Sultan for the Country, the Defense Council together with the Chairman of Majlis Al Dawla, the Chairman of Majlis al Shura, and the Chairman of the Supreme Court along with two of his most senior deputies, shall instate the person designated by His Majesty the Sultan in his letter to the Royal Family Council” (Ministry of Legal Affairs 2015).

### **Explanations of Political Reforms in Oman and Other Gulf States**

The establishment of the Council of Oman (Majlis Oman), which consists of the State Council (Majlis al Dawla) and the Consultative Council (Majlis al Shura), was parallel with political changes in other Gulf States. In Kuwait, more power was given to the national assembly (Majlis al Umma) after liberation from Iraqi occupation; a Majlis al Shura was established in 1993 in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain; Shikeh Hamed overthrew his father in 1995 and made drastic

changes in Qatar; and the National Federal Council in the United Arab Emirates recommenced its meetings in 1993 and made a major cabinet reappointment in 1997 (Ehteshami and Wright 2007). Therefore, it is important to look at some interpretations of these political transformations.

To explain these reforms, Rabi (2002) and Ehteshami (2003) rely on the 'rentier model'. According to them, because the Gulf States support their societies economically through natural resources, such as oil, mines, land, and climate, they do not have an obligation of responding to their societies' demands for political participation. By contrast, states supported economically by their societies, through different forms of taxes, must respond to their societies' demands. Therefore, all political reforms in the Gulf States were from their respective rulers. These rulers initiated political reforms, not their civil societies. Ehteshami argues oil revenues strengthen rulers and "depoliticize" (58) people through benefits, such as free education and health care, government subsidized housing, food, electricity, petroleum, etc. Al-Farsi (2013) describes this model as a 'social contract' between the rulers and their citizens. According to him, this contract provides people with free services but "at the expense of their rights to political participation" (214).

The rentier model clearly explains much of the political society in the Arab Peninsula; yet, just as clearly it does not fully capture the political processes during the past two decades. Despite oil resources, many states have felt the need to provide growing spaces for institutionalized political participation. Internally, the GCC states had economic pressures that resulted from paying the bills for liberating Kuwait from Iraq, and dealt concurrently with the long-term consequences of the 'fiscal crisis' of the mid 1980s (Ehteshami 2003). In addition, the new 'democratic wave' after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989 caused major political movements in Iran and Yemen, which inspired the GCC population to demand economic and

political changes. All these threats were exacerbated by globalization, which brought mass media and pushed the Gulf States to introduce political reforms (Al-Haj 1996; Ehteshami 2003; Rabi 2002).

Taking into account the political structure of these states, Ehteshami and Wright (2007) argue the GCC rulers introduced these reforms to mainly safeguard their positions. Based on a tribal system, the GCC rulers have the desire to maintain their positions for a long time. Internal political activism is considered a threat in shifting power from tribal ruling families to civil societies, which means losing their “traditional tribal right” (915). They thought liberalization would fulfill their citizens’ appetites for change and increase their legitimacy at the same time. It would be perceived as ‘good governance,’ and accordingly they would be perceived as good rulers, since government is strongly tied to the ruling families in these states (Ehteshami 2003).

Ehteshami and Wright (2007) also argue the United States’ intervention in and occupation of Iraq and the U.S. agenda for the ‘war on terror’ have increased the pace of reforms in these states. They believe funding for democracy promotion in this region through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) will have a great impact on political reforms in the long term. In addition, U.S. and European Union funding for civil societies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will contribute to further changes and will lead anti-western Islamic parties to gain power in the region.

Western scholars and institutions have criticized these political reforms and political developments in the Middle East, in general. They claim they have failed to produce ‘democratic’ reforms (Jeremy and Ridout 2005). However, most of these views are based on comparisons with Western concepts without taking into account the social and cultural practices for each country in the region. In the case of Oman, Jeremy and Ridout believe the formation of

a constitution and the Council of Oman is a "gradual movement toward democratic practices" (378), which considers cultural factors in Oman, such as the principle of *al shura* (Consultation), cultural values of tolerance and compassion, tribal social status, etc. This interpretation is consistent with the Sultan's statement of implementing a gradual democratic process.

In summary, several internal and external factors have forced the rulers of the GCC states to introduce political reforms for the broader political participation of their people. Despite Western critics, they have succeeded in managing the state-society relationships to date. However, the GCC are not immune from future changes and further liberalization, especially given the Middle Eastern region is unstable, since the 'Arab Spring' revolutionary wave in 2010 and the ongoing war in a neighbor state (Yemen). Moreover, an expected economic crisis due to dropping oil prices may cause more internal economic pressure for these 'rentier' states. This time, civil societies and NGOs in these states might be more prepared by the U.S. and the EU for challenging the 'top-down' model. In Oman, this might not be the case, at least in the short term. A recent study suggests the current generation is not ready to challenge the Omani political structure and initiate a 'bottom-up' political process, due to its support for the current state-society relationship through Majlis al Shura (Al-Farsi 2013). According to Al-Farsi, the demand of the current generation is focused now on enhancing the legislative role of al Shura and other executive authorities.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses primary data that were collected using a self-administered survey questionnaire that was distributed to 500 Omani adults in the capital, Muscat, during the period of mid July–mid August 2015. Initially, the survey was translated into Arabic, the formal language of Oman. Twenty-five pretests were completed to uncover flaws and reveal an approximate time to complete the survey. Twenty pretests were emailed to friends and family members; whereas, the remaining five were face-to-face interviews where this researcher read the questions for interviewees. In addition, a pilot study with 50 participants was conducted from the end of June to early July 2015. This pretest helped further refine the survey, add questions, and determine the best procedure for recruiting participants.

Study participants were recruited from 13 organizations: 9 public, 3 private, and 1 academic. Public organizations were chosen primarily because most public employees have permanent homes outside the capital Muscat and commute to Muscat to work during the week, which enabled me to survey participants who live in different regions of Oman. The private sector was targeted to contact employees with different ethnicities and levels of income, in particular Swahili and Baluchi. Academic institutions provided an opportunity to contact diverse demographic groups among students and professors, as well as those with higher education (Master/PhD) and high income. Civil society organizations were also targeted to recruit retired people and those who don't work, especially housewives. But unfortunately most of these organizations were unwilling to help, and some lack access to the desired categories of retired people and housewives. Alternatively, I targeted public pension organizations to capture retired

people. However, I could only recruit few respondents through these organizations (11) because most pension services are provided online and it is rare for retired people to visit these organizations. I tried to capture housewives through religious lectures that were held in some mosques during the holy month of Ramadhan. But unluckily few of them attended these lectures and I came out with a very small number (5).

I contacted the CEO or the head of public relations department in these organizations, handed them a letter explaining the purpose of the study, the targeted number of participants in each organization, and asking for permission to distribute the survey to their employees/members. The letter was accompanied with a copy of the survey and an approval letter from the Ministry of Higher Education to carry out the study. I got immediate permissions in only three organizations, wherein I walked into the offices introducing myself and asking the employees if they were willing to participate in my study. Most employees welcomed me and participated voluntarily without promise of compensation. The rest of the organizations distributed the survey to their employees/members and I went back later to collect them. Generally, males were more cooperative than females. In most cases, I received back the exact targeted number of males and fewer of females. Consequently, I had to distribute the survey to females only in some organizations to reach the quota of 250. Also, I had few cases of females who refused to participate claiming that they were not interested in the topic at all.

The sample was based on sex quota only: 250 males and 250 females. Quota sampling based on age and level of education, as initially proposed, was difficult to apply due to time constraints, and most organizations were unwilling to handle it. Cases with missing values on the model scale variables are omitted, which leaves us with 470 observations.

## Variables and Measurements

### Independent variables

This study includes two types of independent variables: public opinion and demographics. The three main public opinion variables are related to gender ideology, religiosity, and tribal affiliation. They are all measured by asking participants to respond to statements from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (5) on a five-point response scale. The scales are coded so the higher the score, the higher are egalitarian attitudes and religiosity, and the lower tribal affiliation. Table 2 presents a summary of these three variables.

**Table 2: Summary of three main independent variables**

Variable	Concept	Variable type and range
Gender1	On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.	Five-point scale  1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Disagree 5. Strongly disagree
Gender2	A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.	
Gender3	When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.	
Gender4	For a woman, having a job is as important as being a mother.	
Religion1	Male and female university students should attend classes together.	
Religion2	It is acceptable for me to listen to music	
Religion3	It is acceptable for me to take "personal" loans from Banks	
Religion4	I don't mind a woman not wearing a hijab	
Tribal1	It is important for me to participate in my tribal events like attending ceremonies	
Tribal2	It is important to keep in contact with my tribal members	
Tribal3	It is important for me to be aware of my tribe's issues	
Tribal4	Tribal compatibility is important for me in deciding whom to marry	
Tribal5	Tribal affiliation is an important part of my identity	



For a "precise" measure of gender ideology, I use the first three statements (Gender1-Gender3) from the World Values Survey, while the fourth statement (Gender4) is adopted from the Traditional-Egalitarian Sex- Role (TESR) scale (Larsen and Long 1988). Gender ideology is measured by taking the mean of Gender1-Gender3 (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.65).

Religiosity is measured by asking participants to respond to four statements. The first (Religion1), third (Religion3), and fourth (Religion4) statements are adapted from the Arab Barometer Survey (Arab Barometer 2013), which collects individual-level opinions/attitudes in some Arab countries (i.e., Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia, and Sudan) about political, social, cultural, and religious values. The second statement (Religion2), which is added by the researcher, is reasonable since listening to music in Islam is forbidden (Haram). Religiosity is calculated by taking the mean of Religion1-Religion3 (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.66).

The third variable, tribal affiliation is measured by asking participants to respond to five statements (Tribal1-Tribal5), which the researcher developed. Usually, Omanis who have tribal affiliation are expected to participate in their tribal events, contact their tribal members, have knowledge about their tribes' matters, have restrictions in marrying outside their tribes, and consider tribal affiliation a major part of their identity. By factor analysis, these five statements are separated into two variables: Tribal participation, which is calculated by taking the mean of Tribal1-Tribal3, and Tribal identity, which is the mean of Tribal4-Tribal5. They have Cronbach's Alpha of 0.83 and 0.67, respectively.

Other variables that are also incorporated in the model include political interest, political knowledge about the actual level of women's representation in the council, and the importance of tribal nomination for vote choice. Political interest is measured by taking the average of two variables: *interest*, which captures how much an individual is interested in Majlis al Shura

elections; and *follow news*, which captures how often an individual follows news about the elections. Both of the two variables (*interest* and *follow news*) are measured on a four-point response scale, which are reversed coded so the higher the score the greater the individual's political interest. Political knowledge about the actual level of women's representation in the council is measured by asking participants to write down the current number of women members in the council or to check the "I don't know" box if they have no idea. The variable is coded as a dichotomous; where 1 means the number written is right and 0 means the number is wrong or the "I don't know" box is checked. The importance of tribal nomination for vote choice is measured by asking participants to respond from "Very Important" (1) to "Not Important" (4) on a four-point response scale. The scale is reversed coded so the higher the score, the more important the tribal nomination is to an individual in considering a candidate.

Two dichotomous variables of influence are created to distinguish between the influences of males' opinions and females' opinions on an individual in selecting a candidate: male influence and female influence. Participants are provided with a list of people (Father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, male friend, female friend, male colleague, female colleague, tribal leader, and religious leader) and they are asked to check those whose opinions they might consider in selecting a candidate. Checking any male persons means male influence is 1, and checking any female persons means female influence is 1. Table 3 presents a summary of these variables.

The other set of independent variables are demographic. They include sex, age, marital status, children, permanent place of residence, level of education, current employment status, and monthly income. Sex, children, and ethnicity are the only dichotomous variables. Age, level of education, and monthly income are continuous whereas marital status, permanent place of

residence, current and employment status are nominal. I collapsed the nominal variables into dichotomous variables (Married, Capital, and Employment) where 1 means the individual is married, living in the capital and working and 0 means the individual is not married, not living in the capital, and not working. Table 4 presents a summary of these demographic variables.

**Table 3: Summary of other independent variables**

Label	Concept	Variable type and range
Political interest	How interested an individual is in Majlis al Shura elections, and how often he follows news about the elections.	Four-point response scale 1=Very interested Very often 2=Somewhat interested Often 3=Not very interested Sometimes/rarely 4=Not at all interested Never
Political knowledge	Political knowledge about the actual level of women's representation in the council	Dichotomous 0 = No knowledge 1= Has knowledge
Tribal nomination	The importance of tribal nomination to an individual when he considers candidate's characteristics	Four-point response scale 1= Very important 2= Somewhat important 3= A little important 4= Not important
Male influence	The influence of males' opinions (Father or brother or husband or male friend or male colleague or tribal leader or religious leader) on an individual in selecting a candidate.	Dichotomous 0 = Did not check male persons 1= checked male persons
Female influence	The influence of females' opinions (Mother, sister, wife, female friend, female colleague) on an individual in selecting a candidate.	Dichotomous 0 = Did not check female persons 1= checked female persons

**Table 4: Summary of demographic independent variables**

Label	Concept	Variable type and range
Sex	Sex	Dichotomous 0 = Female 1 = Male
Age	Age	Ordered categorical ranging from 1 to 5
Marital status	Collapsed to Married or other	Dichotomous 0 = Other 1 = Married
Children	Have children living at home	Dichotomous 0 = No children 1 = Has children
Permanent place of residence	Collapsed to capital or other	Dichotomous 0= Other 1= Capital
Level of education	Level of education	Ordered categorical ranging from: 1 to 5
Employment	Collapsed to employee or not an employee	Dichotomous 0= Not an employee 1= Employee
Income	Monthly income	Ordered categorical ranging from 1 to 6
Ethnicity	Factor that captures if an individual speak Arabic only or Arabic and other languages	Dichotomous 0= Arabic only 1= Arabic and other languages

**Dependent variables**

My theory suggests that the relationship between tribalism and religiosity and the dependent variable (Support for women) is mediated by gender ideology (Baron and Kenny 1986). In this case, gender ideology functions as both independent and dependent variable. Thus my model has two dependent variables: gender ideology and support for women's membership in

Majlis al Shura. The variable *gender ideology* is calculated as the mean of Gender1-Gender3, as illustrated above. Support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura is constructed from responses to three questions: "Out of the 84 members of Majlis al Shura, what percentage would you prefer to be women?" "How important do you think it is to have women as members in Majlis al Shura?" and "How important do you think it is for women to run for office?" The responses to the first question are ordered categorically ranging from 1 to 8. The other two questions are measured by asking participants to respond from "Very important" (1) to "Not important at all" (5) on a five-point response scale. Since these three items have different ranges, they were standardized on a 0 to 1 scale to make support a continuous variable. Support is calculated by taking the average of these three items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.83). The second and third items are reversed coded so the higher the score, the more important women's membership in the council and women's running for office to an individual. Table 5 presents a summary of the dependent variables.

**Table 5: Summary of dependent variables**

Variable	Concept	Variable type and range
Gender ideology	Captures an individual's attitudes towards women's role in society.	Five-point scale ranging from: Strongly agree to strongly disagree
Support	Captures an individual's level of support for women's membership in the council by responding to three questions.	Continuous Ranging from low support (0) to high support (1)

**CHAPTER 5**  
**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

**Descriptive Analyses**

Table 6 presents a summary of simple statistics (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum) for the dependent and independent variables. The results show that all variables have small standard deviations, which indicates that, on average, the values are close to their means.

**Table 6. Simple Statistics**

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Support	0.491	0.248	0	1
Gender Ideology	2.785	0.936	1	5
Tribal Participation	2.011	0.750	1	5
Tribal Identity	2.678	1.028	1	5
Religiosity	3.250	0.923	1	5
Age	1.742	0.879	1	5
Sex	0.506	0.500	0	1
Education Level	3.562	0.998	1	5
Employment Status	0.841	0.365	0	1
Monthly Income	2.991	1.163	1	6
Ethnicity	0.099	0.299	0	1
Permanent Place of Residence	0.519	0.500	0	1
Marital Status	0.673	0.469	0	1
Children	0.699	0.459	0	1
Tribal Nomination	1.880	1.017	1	5
Male Influence	0.809	0.393	0	1
Female Influence	0.422	0.494	0	1
Political Interest	2.408	0.811	1	4
Political Knowledge	0.158	0.365	0	1
Tribal Participation * Sex	0.943	1.059	0	5
Tribal Identity * Sex	1.319	1.495	0	5
Male Influence * Sex	0.389	0.488	0	1
Female Influence * Sex	0.166	0.373	0	1

Table 7 presents frequencies for some public opinion variables. The results show that 55.7% of the sample reported that they are interested in the elections, but the majority (67.5%) doesn't regularly follow elections news. Also, 56.6% of the sample had never voted before, compared to 43.4% who had voted in at least one of previous elections. In regard to attitudes about the importance of women in the council, the majority believes it is important for women to run for office and become members in the council. But the modal preferable percentage of women in the council is 1%-10%, and only 9.4% of the sample doesn't want any women in the council. Interestingly, only 15.5% of the sample knows the number of women members in the council. For this year's elections, the sample is divided almost equally between those who would vote and those who would possibly not vote. And the majority reported that they would vote for a woman candidate if there were one running for office in their province.

Table 8 presents mean levels for the scale variables broken down by sex. It indicates that women have more egalitarian attitudes and they are more supportive of women compared to men. Men, on the other hand, have greater tribal affiliation and religiosity, and they are more interested in politics than women. In addition, they are more aware of the number of women members in the council than women themselves. The size of the gender gap in tribal participation is the largest, while the smallest gender gap is in the knowledge both men and women have about the number of women members in the council. Looking closely at tribal affiliation, there is a significant gender gap in tribal participation but not in tribal identity. This indicates that tribal identity is equally as important to men as to women.

**Table 7: Frequencies of some variables**

Variable	Categories	Percent (%)
Interest	Very interested	11.75
	Somewhat interested	44.02
	Not very interested	31.62
	Not at all interested	12.61
Follow News	Very often	11.09
	Often	21.32
	Sometimes/rarely	48.61
	Never	18.98
Voted	Voted in previous elections	43.40
	Never voted before	56.60
Women membership	Very important	32.41
	Important	21.96
	Somewhat important	26.01
	A little important	13.86
	Not important at all	5.76
Women Running for Office	Very important	28.09
	Important	24.89
	Somewhat important	23.83
	A little important	16.81
	Not important at all	6.38
Preferable percentage of women members in the council	None	9.48
	1%-10%	37.50
	11%-20%	16.16
	21%-30%	14.01
	31%-40%	10.34
	41%-49%	2.16
	50%	8.41
	More than 50%	1.94
Voting in this year elections	Definitely	17.48
	Very likely	10.87
	Somewhat likely	20.68
	A little	26.44
	Not at all	24.52
Voting for a woman candidate	Definitely	9.06
	Very likely	11.81
	Somewhat likely	31.50
	A little	20.08
	Not at all	14.57



**Table 8: Mean gender difference in attitudes**

Sex Variable	Male	Female	Difference (Men- Women)	Significance test (p-value)
Gender Ideology	2.39	3.19	- 0.8	<.0001
Religiosity	3.41	3.09	0.32	0.0002
Tribal Participation	3.09	2.17	0.92	<.0001
Tribal Identity	2.61	2.76	- 0.15	0.1179
Support	0.43	0.56	- 0.13	<.0001
Political Interest	2.58	2.22	0.36	<.0001
Political Knowledge	0.20	0.11	0.09	0.0213

### Multivariate Analyses

Based on my theoretical model, the hypotheses I am testing propose that certain independent variables help to explain the variance in two dependent variables: gender ideology and support for women's membership in Majlis al Shura. Thus, I test two different models, one for each of the dependent variables. They are the following:

Gender Ideology = f (tribal participation + tribal identity + religiosity + sex + age + marital status + children + permanent place of residence + level of education + monthly income + employment status + ethnicity + tribal nomination + male influence + female influence + political interest + political knowledge + tribal participation \* sex + tribal identity \* sex + male influence \* sex + female influence \* sex)

Support = f (gender ideology + sex + age + marital status + children + permanent place of residence + level of education + monthly income + employment status + ethnicity + tribal

nomination + male influence + female influence + political interest + political knowledge + tribal participation \* sex + tribal identity \* sex + male influence \* sex + female influence \* sex)

I test these hypotheses with Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which simultaneously calculates regression coefficients for direct and indirect relationships. This is a powerful tool to examine cause and effect within a theoretical model, and fit indices suggest models fit. The Chi-square static is small (4.284), and its corresponding p-value (0.232) is larger than 0.05 criterion. Other fit indices also show good fit: The AGFI is 0.924, which is larger than 0.90, the RMSEA is essentially zero (0.030), and Hoelter Critical N is 821. Table 9 below presents the results for the two dependent variables. It includes the standardized beta coefficients and the t-ratio to indicate the direction of the relationship and the significance level for each independent variable that I am testing. Significant values are in bold.

Two main hypotheses (H2 and H3) are examined in the first model, in which gender ideology is the dependent variable. Cross-national studies posit that Islam has significant influence on women's political representation because it is highly associated with traditional attitudes towards women. In fact, religiosity is significantly related to gender ideology in Oman. The result is consistent with what was proposed in H2: the greater the religiosity the lower egalitarian attitudes towards women.

I have proposed that tribal affiliation would have a strong explanatory power on gender ideology because tribes are based on a patriarchal structure and they play a clear role in nominating the candidates. In addition, some Arabic and African case studies suggest that tribe and ethnic-based patronage politics limits women's opportunities in politics. But the strength of tribal affiliation is not significantly related to gender ideology in Oman. There is thus no support for H3. However, a different measure of the importance of tribes (Tribal nomination) is

statistically significant. The more important tribal nomination is to an individual in selecting a candidate, the less egalitarian attitudes toward women an individual has.

**Table 9: Beta coefficients and t-ratio for two dependent variables: Gender ideology and support**

Dependent variable \ Independent variable	Gender ideology		Support	
	Beta coefficient	t-ratio	Beta coefficient	t-ratio
Gender Ideology	-	-	0.500	<b>12.168</b>
Tribal Participation	-0.017	-0.290	-	-
Tribal Identity	0.065	1.056	-	-
Tribal Nomination	-0.104	<b>-2.516</b>	0.004	0.104
Religiosity	-0.154	<b>-3.724</b>	-	-
Sex	-0.388	<b>-2.278</b>	0.029	0.218
Age	0.031	0.612	0.126	<b>2.509</b>
Marital Status	-0.071	-1.454	-0.057	-1.214
Children	-0.007	-0.163	-0.058	-1.410
Permanent residence in capital	0.090	<b>2.145</b>	0.057	1.388
Level of education	-0.029	-0.581	-0.033	-0.688
Monthly income	0.162	<b>2.629</b>	-0.067	-1.112
Employment	-0.042	-0.780	-0.039	-0.764
Ethnicity	0.012	0.294	-0.052	-1.265
Male influence	-0.043	-0.624	0.001	0.017
Female influence	0.085	1.364	0.032	0.542
Political interest	0.075	1.674	0.135	<b>3.131</b>
Political knowledge	0.084	<b>1.986</b>	-0.077	-1.883
Tribal Participation * Sex	0.047	0.381	0.091	0.987
Tribal Identity * Sex	-0.045	-0.361	-0.117	-1.351
Male influence * Sex	-0.063	-0.565	-0.078	-0.724
Female influence * Sex	0.062	0.936	-0.035	-0.551
R-square	0.301		0.341	

Other public opinion and demographic independent variables are incorporated in the first model to explore how they help explain the variance in gender ideology. Sex, permanent place of residence, monthly income, and political knowledge about the actual level of women's representation in Majlis al Shura are significantly related to gender ideology. Females and

individuals who live in the capital, with higher income, and aware of the number of women in the council hold more egalitarian attitudes toward women. Age, ethnicity, female influence, and political interest are positively but not significantly related to gender ideology. Individuals who are married, have children, have a higher level of education, and working hold less egalitarian attitudes toward women. Lastly, all the interaction terms between sex and tribal participation, tribal identity, male influence and female influence fail to reach statistical significance level. This model explains 30.1% of the variance in gender ideology. Neither societal structure and values (Tribalism) nor social factors could help explaining this phenomenon, which is an important determinant of support of women in the council, as posited in the second model.

The main hypothesis (H1) for the second model is: the greater the gender ideology, the greater the support for women's membership in Majlis al-Shura. Cross-national studies suggest that attitudes toward women have a more significant influence on women's political representation more than social and political factors. Indeed, this is the case in Oman. Gender ideology is significantly related to support for women in the council, which supports H1.

H4, H5, and H6 posit socioeconomic status (education, income, and employment) is not an important determinant of support for women in Majlis al Shura. The results are consistent with what was proposed in these three hypotheses. Level of education, income, and employment status are not significantly related to support for women. It was proposed that marital status (H7) and whether an individual has children or not (H8) would not be significantly related to support for women. The analysis supports these two hypotheses. Neither is an important determinant. The relationship between these two variables and support is negative, which means married individuals and those with children are less supportive of women's representation.

Although sex turned out to be significantly related to gender ideology, this is not the case with support for women. Sex is unimportant as a direct determinant of support for women in the council as posited in H9, though it is indirectly associated with support through its effect on gender ideology. Whether an individual lives in the capital or not is also not directly significantly associated with support for women, contrary to H10. H11 proposes individuals who speak Swahili are more likely to support women than others who don't, but ethnic background is not related to support. Whether an individual speaks Arabic only or Arabic and other languages is not significant, contrary to H11. In fact, analysis shows that individuals who speak Arabic and other languages are less supportive of women in Majlis al Shura than those who speak Arabic only, though differences are not statistically significant.

Finally, somewhat surprisingly, age is an important determinant of support for women. It is positively related to support: the older an individual, the greater the support for women. This is the opposite of what would be expected in a tribal society. Usually, older people have stronger tribal affiliation than younger persons, and thus are less supportive of women in public life. However, this could be explained by considering the relationship between age and gender ideology on one hand and between tribal affiliation and gender ideology, which both turned out to be insignificant.

Other interesting findings in this model are that political interest is significantly related to support for women. The greater the political interest of an individual, the more supportive he is for women. Tribal nomination, male or female influence, gender political knowledge are all not directly important determinants of support for women. However, some of them (tribal nomination and gender political knowledge) are indirectly associated with support through their effect on gender ideology. As in the first model, all of the interaction terms turned out to be

statistically insignificant. This model explains 34.1% of the variance in support for women in Majlis al Shura. Surprisingly, none of the tested determinants turned out to be significant in both models.

Separate analysis for males and females show consistent significance for religiosity in the first model and gender ideology in the second one. Interestingly, children and female influence are important determinants for gender ideology among men, while marriage is significant among women. This means men who have children and are influenced by women are less conservative. On the other hand, marriage makes women more conservative. See the appendix A for detailed results.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study investigated the supply-side determinants of supporting women's representation in Majlis al Shura in Oman. It incorporated cross-nationally recognized factors (gender ideology and religion) with a factor largely unexplored until now (tribalism). The researcher has argued the importance of considering tribalism to fully understand the low proportion of women's legislative representation in the Arab region.

By using survey data from 500 Omani adults in the capital Muscat, this study replicated two main findings from previous cross-national studies. First, it found that ideological beliefs toward women are important predictors of support for women in Majlis al Shura. Individuals with egalitarian attitudes about women are more supportive of women's representation in the parliament than individuals with traditional attitudes. Second, religion is highly associated with traditional attitudes toward women. Individuals with greater religiosity, have less egalitarian attitudes toward women.

Furthermore, this study confirms that cultural factors rather than social/structural ones (education, income, employment status) that matter in explaining women's legislative representation. And there is no generational shift in cultural attitudes. Younger and older generations are alike in holding traditional attitudes, confirming Norris and Inglehart's (2001) finding about developing societies. However, the significant effect of age on support for women's representation in Majlis al Shura is a striking finding-the older an individual, the greater the support for women in Majlis al Shura. One explanation for this could be the historical participation of Omani women in meetings with men discussing tribal and political issues

(Andriyanova 2011). Thus, older individuals, who are aware of Oman's political history and traditions, do not mind including women in the council, whereas the younger individuals who lack this awareness (Al-Farsi 2013) and might be affected by some fundamentalist Islamic ideas in neighboring countries oppose women's representation in the council, and in the public sphere in general.

In contrast to the researcher's expectation, tribal affiliation is not a significant determinant of gender ideology or support of women's representation in Majlis al Shura. This result may be due to the difficulty of measuring tribalism, as reporting that tribal nomination is important for vote choice *is* associated with traditional gender attitudes. The more important tribal nomination is to an individual in selecting a candidate, the less egalitarian attitudes toward women an individual has.

In respect to gender gap differences, Omani women are more pro-women than are Omani men. They hold more egalitarian attitudes toward women than men, and they are more supportive of women in the council as well. But, they are less interested in politics, and less aware of the actual number of women in Majlis al Shura than are men. This finding suggests that the 'gender affinity effect' in politics might not be as effective in Oman as in Western societies. Omani female candidates might lack the support of women in encouraging them to run for office, and vote for them.

Oman was the first state in the Arab Peninsula to enfranchise women and grant them the right to run for office. But to present, it holds the second lowest rate of women in the legislature, after Qatar that has no woman representative in its parliament. The advancement of women's legislative representation in some Gulf States comes from the adoption of gender quota, like in Saudi Arabia where women's rate is 19.9%, or the nature of electoral system that includes some



royally appointed members, like the case in the United Arab Emirates where women make up 22.5% of the parliament (IPU 2015). In states where elections are held by universal suffrage, like the case in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman, the proportions of women are low: 7.5%, 1.5%, and 1.2%, respectively.

Economic development in Oman during the past forty-five years did not bring massive cultural changes, as some modernization theorists claimed. Instead, its effect seems to be linked to the historical and cultural context of the Omani society. This ‘limited’ cultural change challenges the political future of Omani women as well as of women in most prosperous societies, like the United States, where gender equality in politics has still not been reached. Although attitudes are not bedrock and they can change over time, it is hard to alter them if they are associated with religion, as is the case in Oman.

However, it is not impossible to gain societal acceptability for women in politics and public sphere, in general, because religion is not a static factor. There are various interpretations of religious texts regarding women’s role in society. These different interpretations are reflected in the facts that there are some Islamic states that have been led by women, like Pakistan and Bangladesh. Also, Islam has no effect on the gender gap in political participation in Muslim-majority countries (Coffé and Dilli 2015). On the individual level, religiosity is not fixed as well. In Oman, while some individuals support women’s participation in public sphere, others support women in women dominated jobs only, and others do not accept women at all.

Introducing a ‘temporary’ gender quota in Majlis al Shura might help increase social acceptability for women in the council on one hand, and motivate women to actively participate in politics by contesting in elections, and influence their decisions to run for office on the other hand. However, this step has to be accompanied by continuous educational programs about the

importance of women's legislative representation, and provide women with the necessary skills and experiences to motivate them politically.

This study has some limitations that need to be noted. First, the non-representative sample limits generalizability of the findings. Future research should at least attempt to obtain a more diverse sample in terms of demographic factors such as age, place of residency, and level of education. The second limitation relates to reliability assessment of some scale variables. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for gender ideology (0.65), religiosity (0.66), and tribal identity (0.67) are below the acceptable level (0.70).

Despite these limitations, this study confirms that cultural factors (gender ideology and religion) have the strongest explanatory power on support for women's representation in Majlis al Shura. The significant effect of tribal nomination on attitudes toward women indicates the importance of considering tribalism in this topic, and that understanding the effect of tribalism on women's political representation may require more in depth research. Schatz (2004,109) emphasizes, "Clans are among those political phenomena that are hard to quantify. They are concealable, often invisible, private, and hotly contested. They are not election results or interest rates; they lend themselves poorly to quantification."

This researcher hopes to inspire scholars to carry further research and test the impact of tribalism on women's political representation in Oman or anywhere in the Arabic region. For example, future research could examine the role of tribal leaders in nominating and supporting male candidates. Understanding who participate in elections and why, may also help reveal the role of tribalism in this phenomenon.

In addition, future research could measure Omanis' perceptions about the need of women's intellectual resources and human capital in the Omani political system or the Omani

economy. This measurement would reveal to what extent Omanis acknowledge the need of incorporating women in the political and economic arenas for Oman to ‘survive’ in this contemporary world and not to be left behind. This functional argument might be important in explaining the Omani citizens’ levels of support for women in the legislature. For cross-national analysis, future research could use the Clan Governance Index (Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2015) to examine the relationship between clan-based societies and women’s political representation.

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## APPENDIX A

### SEPARATE ANALYSIS FOR MALES AND FEMALES

The results of conducting analysis separately for males and females show that religiosity, permanent place of residence, children, female influence, and political interest are significantly related to gender ideology for males and gender ideology is the only important determinant of support for women's representation among males. Although monthly income, the importance of tribal nomination, and knowledge about actual level of women's representation in the council turned out to be insignificant for males in the first model, their sizes are within the confidence intervals of these coefficients in the primary model. As well, age and political interest are not important determinants of support for women but their sizes are very close to the sizes of these coefficients in the primary model. Table 10 presents standardized results of both models for males.

For females, religiosity and marital status are the only important determinants of gender ideology. They are both negatively related to gender ideology: individuals with greater religiosity, and those who are married hold lower egalitarian attitudes towards women. For the second model, gender ideology, monthly income, children, and political interest are significantly related to support for women in Majlis al Shura. Women with higher egalitarian attitudes, higher political interest, and who have children are more supportive of women's representation, while those with higher income are less supportive. Monthly income, permanent place of residence, tribal nomination, and gender political knowledge turned out to be insignificant determinants of gender ideology but their sizes are within the confidence intervals of these coefficients in the primary model. Age also is unimportant as a determinant of support for women but its size is

within the confidence interval of this coefficient in the primary model. Table 11 presents the standardized results of both models for females.

**Table 10: Beta coefficients and t-ratio for males**

Dependent variable Independent variable	Gender ideology		Support	
	Beta coefficient	t-ratio	Beta coefficient	t-ratio
Gender ideology	-	-	0.493	<b>9.146</b>
Tribal participation	0.037	0.536	-	-
Tribal identity	0.0195	0.294	-	-
Religiosity	-0.198	<b>-3.253</b>	-	-
Age	0.125	1.575	0.133	1.812
Marital status	0.034	0.425	-0.020	-0.278
Children	0.153	<b>2.419</b>	0.014	0.242
Permanent place of residence	0.126	<b>1.999</b>	0.065	1.109
Level of education	0.074	0.933	-0.087	-1.195
Monthly income	0.115	1.246	-0.009	-0.111
Employment	0.004	0.054	-0.012	-0.179
Ethnicity	0.025	0.378	-0.078	-1.285
Tribal nomination	-0.113	-1.797	0.030	0.526
Male influence	-0.102	-1.518	-0.043	-0.699
Female influence	0.166	<b>2.551</b>	-0.005	-0.092
Political interest	0.148	<b>2.254</b>	0.050	0.853
Political knowledge	0.060	0.942	-0.045	-0.775
R-square	0.210		0.3185	

**Table 11: Beta coefficients and t-ratio for females**

Dependent variable Independent variable	Gender ideology		Support	
	Beta coefficient	t-ratio	Beta coefficient	t-ratio
Gender ideology	-	-	0.441	<b>8.101</b>
Tribal participation	-0.038	-0.542	-	-
Tribal identity	0.057	0.842	-	-
Religiosity	-0.141	<b>-2.171</b>	-	-
Age	-0.056	-0.759	0.079	1.194
Marital status	-0.184	<b>-2.570</b>	-0.091	-1.416
Children	-0.130	-1.936	0.130	<b>2.153</b>
Permanent place of residence	0.061	0.960	0.046	0.800
Level of education	-0.073	-1.098	-0.018	-0.307
Monthly income	0.117	1.699	-0.165	<b>-2.665</b>
Employment	0.012	0.178	-0.099	-1.585
Ethnicity	0.009	0.146	-0.035	-0.615
Tribal nomination	-0.114	-1.757	-0.012	-0.222
Male influence	-0.070	-0.982	-0.000	-0.005
Female influence	0.107	1.516	-0.009	-0.153
Political interest	-0.002	-0.030	0.216	<b>3.571</b>
Political knowledge	0.130	1.945	-0.102	-1.709
R-square	0.140		0.3040	

**APPENDIX B****THE SURVEY**

Worldwide, women's representation in politics is a controversial issue. Some people support women's participation in politics while others believe that it is not an appropriate field for them. I want to know your opinion about this important topic. This survey should take about five minutes of your time to complete. The results will be made public to the people of Oman and be used to complete a Master's degree thesis.

Your responses are voluntary and will be confidential. Responses will not be identified by individual. All responses will be compiled together and analyzed as a group. Data will be saved in a secure place and nobody will get access to it. If you have any questions or concerns now or after you have completed the survey, please contact me at the email and phone number provided below. If you have further concerns, you may also contact my advisor, Dr. Amy Erica Smith, Assistant Professor, at +(515) 294-1116 or [aesmith2@iastate.edu](mailto:aesmith2@iastate.edu).

Thank you,  
Ahlam Al Subhi  
[aalsubhi@iastate.edu](mailto:aalsubhi@iastate.edu)  
+ 96899347382

(1-5) The following questions are about your interest in Majlis al Shura elections. Please answer each question as indicated.

1	How interested would you say you are in Majlis al Shura elections?	1) Very interested 2) Somewhat interested 3) Not very interested 4) Not at all interested			
2	How often do you follow news about Majlis al Shura elections?	1) Very often 2) Often 3) Sometimes/rarely 4) Never			
3	Which of the previous Majlis al Shura elections have you participated in as a voter? Check all that apply.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2003 <input type="checkbox"/> 2007 <input type="checkbox"/> 2011 <input type="checkbox"/> I have never voted			
4	When you consider candidate's characteristics, would you say that each of the following characteristics is very important, somewhat important, a little important, or not important?	Very Important	Somewhat important	A little important	Not important
	Educational qualification	1	2	3	4
	Age	1	2	3	4
	Sex	1	2	3	4
	Tribal nomination	1	2	3	4
	Village affiliations	1	2	3	4
	Economic status	1	2	3	4

	Community participation	1	2	3	4
	The way he/she runs a campaign	1	2	3	4
	Other persons' opinions	1	2	3	4
5	If you do consider other persons' opinions in selecting your candidate, who is this person/persons? Check all that apply.	<input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Brother <input type="checkbox"/> Sister <input type="checkbox"/> Husband <input type="checkbox"/> Wife <input type="checkbox"/> Male friend <input type="checkbox"/> Female friend <input type="checkbox"/> Male colleague <input type="checkbox"/> Female colleague <input type="checkbox"/> Tribal leader <input type="checkbox"/> Religious leader <input type="checkbox"/> Other Specify _____			

(6 - 18) Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree

No	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree Nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6	On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.	1	2	3	4	5
7	A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl.	1	2	3	4	5
8	When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.	1	2	3	4	5
9	For a woman, having a job is as important as being a mother	1	2	3	4	5

10	Male and female university students should attend classes together	1	2	3	4	5
11	It is acceptable for me to listen to music	1	2	3	4	5
12	It is acceptable for me to take "personal" loans from banks	1	2	3	4	5
13	I don't mind a woman not wearing a hijab	1	2	3	4	5
14	It is important for me to participate in my tribal events like attending ceremonies	1	2	3	4	5
15	It is important to keep in contact with my tribal members	1	2	3	4	5
16	It is important for me to be aware of my tribe's issues	1	2	3	4	5
17	Tribal compatibility is important for me in deciding whom to marry	1	2	3	4	5
18	Tribal affiliation is an important part of my identity	1	2	3	4	5

(19-28) The following questions are about women's representation in Majlis al Shura. Please answer each question as indicated.

19	As part of my thesis, I would like to know how much information people receive about Majlis al Shura. Without looking it up, would you happen to know how many women are currently serving as members in Majlis al Shura? Please write the number on the blank. If you don't know off the top of your head, please just check the box that says " I don't know."	<p>_____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I don't know</p>
20	Out of the 84 members of Majlis al Shura, what percentage would you prefer to be women?	<p>1) None</p> <p>2) 1% - 10% (1-8 women)</p> <p>3) 11% - 20% (9-16 women)</p> <p>4) 21% - 30% (17- 25 women)</p> <p>5) 31% - 40% (26- 33 women)</p> <p>6) 41% - 49% (34-41 women)</p> <p>7) 50% (42 women)</p> <p>8) More than 50% (more than 42 women)</p>
21	How important do you think it is to have women as members in Majlis al Shura?	<p>1) Very important</p> <p>2) Important</p> <p>3) Somewhat important</p> <p>4) A little important</p> <p>5) Not important at all</p>

22	How important do you think it is for women to run for office?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Very important</li> <li>2) Important</li> <li>3) Somewhat important</li> <li>4) A little important</li> <li>5) Not important at all</li> </ol>
23	Have you ever voted for a woman candidate?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No</li> <li>2) Yes</li> <li>3) I have never voted</li> </ol>
For this year elections,		
24	How likely you are going to vote?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Definitely</li> <li>2) Very likely</li> <li>3) Somewhat likely</li> <li>4) A little</li> <li>5) Not at all</li> </ol>
25	How many women, if any, are running in your province?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) None</li> <li>2) One</li> <li>3) Two or more</li> <li>4) I don't know</li> </ol>
26	Have you already decided whom to vote for?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Yes ----- Go to Question (27)</li> <li>2) No ----- Go to Question (28)</li> <li>3) I am not going to vote ---- Go to Question (29)</li> </ol>
27	If you have decided whom to vote for, is this person a woman?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Yes ----- Go to Question (29)</li> <li>2) No ----- Go to Question (29)</li> <li>3) There is no woman running in my province</li> </ol>
28	If you have not decided whom to vote for, and if there was a woman running in your province, how likely are you to vote for her?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Definitely</li> <li>2) Very likely</li> <li>3) Somewhat likely</li> <li>4) A little</li> <li>5) Not at all</li> <li>6) There is no woman running in my province</li> </ol>



(29- 38) Personal information: select one answer for each category

29	Sex	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Female</li> <li>2) Male</li> </ol>
30	Age	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) 21-30</li> <li>2) 31-40</li> <li>3) 41-50</li> <li>4) 51-60</li> <li>5) 61 and above</li> </ol>
31	Marital status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Single</li> <li>2) Married</li> <li>3) Divorced</li> <li>4) Widowed</li> </ol>
32	Do you have children living with you at home?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) No</li> <li>2) Yes</li> </ol>
33	Current place of residence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Muscat</li> <li>2) Musandam</li> <li>3) Adh Dhahirah</li> <li>4) Ad Dakhliyah</li> <li>5) Al Wusta</li> <li>6) Dhofar</li> <li>7) Al Buraymi</li> <li>8) Al Batinah North</li> <li>9) Al Batinah South</li> <li>10) Ash Sharqiyah North</li> <li>11) Ash Sharqiyah South</li> </ol>
34	Permanent place of residence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Muscat</li> <li>2) Musandam</li> <li>3) Adh Dhahirah</li> <li>4) Ad Dakhliyah</li> <li>5) Al Wusta</li> <li>6) Dhofar</li> <li>7) Al Buraymi</li> <li>8) Al Batinah North</li> <li>9) Al Batinah South</li> <li>10) Ash Sharqiyah North</li> <li>11) Ash Sharqiyah South</li> </ol>
35	Level of education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Less than secondary school</li> <li>2) Secondary school</li> <li>3) Collage degree/AA ( 2 years)</li> <li>4) University degree</li> <li>5) Graduate degree (Master/PHD)</li> </ol>

36	Current employment status	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Employee in public sector</li><li>2) Employee in private sector</li><li>3) Retired</li><li>4) Housewife</li><li>5) Job seeker</li><li>6) Student</li></ol>
37	Monthly income	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Less than 325 OMR</li><li>2) 325-725 OMR</li><li>3) 726-1126 OMR</li><li>4) 1127 -1526 OMR</li><li>5) Above 1526 OMR</li></ol>
38	Beside Arabic, which of these languages do you speak?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) None</li><li>2) English</li><li>3) Lawati</li><li>4) Swahili</li><li>5) Baluchi</li><li>6) Other, Specify _____</li></ol>