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The State of Jordanian Women's Organizations—Five Years Beyond the Arab Spring

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Abstract
This paper explores the failure of women's organizations to effect the improvement of the status of Jordanian women during the Arab Spring. Through an examination of the regime's political liberalization strategy, leadership failures within women's organizations, and international donor influence on programmatic focus, the underlying explanation for this failure is found to be rooted in the historical depoliticization of women in Jordan. This is tested in the context of the Arab Spring through an analysis of the results of popular protests, proposed electoral law reforms, and efforts to amend the Jordanian constitution. The paper draws in part on a large collection of interviews and a focus group conducted in Jordan during the spring/summer of 2012, as well as analysis of primary documents from the government and a variety of women's organizations in Jordan.

1. Introduction

During the first weeks of the Arab Spring, democrats thought hopefully of a 'fourth wave' of democratization sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, initially, this potential wave seemed poised to increase the rights of tremendous numbers of previously disenfranchised people. The Tunisian regime quickly withdrew from power and work began on facilitating a transition to democracy. In Egypt, protests were more violent but shortly after the military chose not to crack down on demonstrators, the Mubarak regime was swept from power. Protest in both countries included great numbers of women and were supported by women's organizations. Some in the western media began to question if these events would lead to an 'Arab Spring for Women'. Referencing the 'striking role of women in the protests sweeping the Arab world' it was noted that women were at 'the forefront of those protests' (Cole & Cole, 2011, p. 1). Not only did women have a 'significant place' in the Tunisian demonstrations that sparked the Arab Spring, it was a video blog post by a woman, Asmaa Mahfouz, which initially called on Egyptians to protest in Tahrir Square on January 25. Likewise, women played a central role in the initial protests against Muammar Qaddafi in western Libya. Tawakkul Karman was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her role in protests in Yemen. Prospects of democracy were accompanied by hopes that the Arab Spring would usher in unique political opportunities for positive social change and improvements to the status of women in the region.

In the end, these hopes proved to be overly optimistic. There is no doubt that the protests produced results. Political upheaval in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen resulted in the removal of long-standing leaders from power. However the hopes of an enduring wave of democracy sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East quickly began to fade. Civil war broke out in Syria and democratic protests were put down in countries ranging from Yemen to Qatar to the United Arab Emirates.

Only in Tunisia does it appear that democracy has begun to take root. So, is the same thing true when we turn from democracy to the 'Arab Spring for Women?' Did the Arab Spring improve the status of women? The consensus seems to be no; or as Ashwath Komath (2014) put it 'a resounding no'. Looking at the broader MENA region, Abdalhadi Alijla (2015) contends that the dream of women being 'effective participants in political, economic and social life in the post-Arab Spring countries has been crushed'. Not only have the prosepcts for improvement failed to materialize, but Haifa Abu Ghazaleh (2016) argues for many it has gotten worse: 'The status of women has not improved in most Arab Spring countries. Their social, economic, and political demands have not been fulfilled; they have instead been dragged by terrorist groups into battlefields in several countries, thus becoming enslaved, widowed, or bereaved'.

As with the wider MENA region, the Arab Spring offered initial hopes for real, sustained change and improvements in the status of women in Jordan. Unfortunately, the answer in Jordan is also no. In an attempt to understand the answer, this paper addresses the question: why were women's organizations unable to effect the improvement of the status of Jordanian women during the Arab Spring? Drawing on a wide range of viewpoints from interviews conducted with people involved in women's organizations in Jordan, three main themes emerged. First, the use of political liberalization as a tool for regime survival resulted in a continuation of the depoliticization of Jordanian women and women's organization, undercutting their ability to achieve lasting change. Second, there was a failure of leadership. The professionalization of leadership in Jordanian women's organizations undermined efforts to maintain programmatic focus and to expand the base of the women's movement. Third, the reliance on funding from international donors impaired the ability of women's organizations in Jordan to independently identify programmatic focus and undercut their domestic support. This study references (see Annex) a variety of material including: 40 interviews conducted in Jordan (May to July 2012); a focus group attended by field workers in Jordanian NGOs; primary source material such as Jordanian government documents and NGO advocacy materials; and, normal academic secondary material.

2. Political Liberalization Effects

Political liberalization is employed as a theoretical framework for understanding the state of Jordanian women's organizations. When confronted with democratic challengers, one of the main responses of non-democratic regimes has been to repress, often violently, the opposition in order to maintain control. Political liberalization represents a different strategy. Here regimes advance what appears to be a reform-minded agenda in order to placate the opposition while maintaining control

over the country. This approach offers the potential for regime survival by venting opposition pressure usually through the use of less force than the repression strategy. The difficulty is that regimes undertaking political liberalization can lose control of the reform process and thus sow the seeds of their own demise. In this event, regimes can choose to further capitulate or attempt to undertake a cycle of repression.

Jordan has a long history of employing both approaches. Since the 1950s, the country has witnessed a number of cycles of liberalization and severe political repression (Rath, 1994, p. 530). Early on, the regime mainly employed naked repression relying on 'harsh crackdowns, shuttered institutions, and other highly visible forms of royal domination' (Yom, 2009, p. 152). At the end of the Cold War, when confronted with a crisis potentially threatening the existence of the regime, Jordan undertook a policy of political liberalization as 'a regime survival strategy of the monarchy' (Koprulu, 2012, p. 75). However, once initiated, it can prove difficult to completely control change. In this case, the policy 'initiated a political and liberalization process that included the revival of elections and parliamentary life' as well as 'the lifting of martial law, the legalization of political parties, loosening of restrictions on the media, and six rounds of national parliamentary elections (in 1989, 1993 ,1997, 2003, 2007, and 2010)' (Ryan, 2011, p. 370). Despite these seemingly democratic outcomes, it is important to remember that this was a strategy employed by an authoritarian state in order to maintain a tight grip on power (Yom, 2009, p. 370).

Thus, political reforms were introduced to vent opposition pressure as part of 'a state strategy to maintain the dominant political order' (Robinson, 1998, p. 389). Side by side with reforms was an effort to keep civilians from organizing political opposition and effective public engagement by employing reminders of the consequences of contesting state power (Wiktorowicz, 2000, p. 430).

The effect of the measures specifically aimed at Jordanian associational life were apparent; as formal citizen structures for organizing were disbanded, liberalization resulted in societal depoliticization (Robinson, 1998, p. 390). These effects were felt within women's organizations. As a prominent NGO director noted during the interview: 'It caused a culture of fear that we cannot integrate into political life...(and) the legacy has remained' (Interview A, 2012).[1]

The implications for the broader civil society are just as important. There was little space from which a populist social movement with an autonomous stance and critical mass could take root, bringing with it healthy norms of public engagement and state opposition (Wiktorowicz, 2000, p. 47). Instead, civil society evolved in direct response to institutionalized state policies that granted calculated political freedoms, rather than emerging as a distinct and opposing actor.

The influence of political liberalization can be seen

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[1] All interviews (A–M) were conducted in Amman, Jordan, in the Summer of 2012.

throughout civil society. The regime legalizes activities yet restricts their scope. So they are seen as reform policies but they allow for state control of the effects of the reforms. A variety of restrictions have been employed over the past few decades to push NGOs into state-approved spaces where they are administered by compartmentalizing organizations into narrow areas of work and strictly monitoring their actions. The purpose of this is to remove broader governance and regime survival issues from the goals of such organizations.

The clear example of this is the Law of Societies (No.51 of 2008 as amended by Law 22 of 2009) which defines civil society organizations as organizations that 'provide services or undertake activities on a voluntary basis…without aiming to achieve any political goals that enter into the scope of the work of political parties' (Law of Societies, 2008, as amended by Law 22 of 2009, Article [3] A. 1). And while the law prohibits civil society organizations from 'conducting political activity or having any political objectives…political activities are not defined in either the Societies Law or the Political Parties Law'. The problem with this definitional failure is 'such vague terminology invites government discretion and potentially subjects [civil] societies to chilling effects in their expressive activities' (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law [ICNL], 2017, p. 6). The effects of these efforts are felt by women's organizations, which are placed under the Ministry of Social Development, where their mandates are confined under the Ministry's mandate to focus on social welfare issues such as child development and poverty alleviation. This results in 'organizations, associations, and movements that support the status quo, advocate conservative reforms, or are simply apolitical' (Hawthorne, 2004, p. 3). Hence, the liberalization strategy legalizes activities but at the same time, seeks to assure that such activities will not evolve into ones that could challenge the regime itself.

A second example, can be seen when in 2006, the MIZAN Law Group for Human Rights began a campaign to address the status of women jailed under the protective custody law. This policy placed women who were in danger of becoming victims of honor crimes under the protective custody of the state by transferring them to jails. They could not be released until a male family member had signed them out and, in effect, would often remain in prisons for up to ten or twenty years (Interview I, 2012). MIZAN spearheaded a project that envisioned transferring some of these women to a 'safe house' and eventually reintegrating them into society. While certainly a noble objective, it is important to note the depoliticized and service-based approach in the organization's efforts. They basically pursued an apolitical response to a political problem rooted in legislative action. MIZAN did not engage in an effort to revoke or reform the law but instead attempted to provide services to those negatively affected by the law. When asked to explain this choice, one interviewee stated, 'To be honest, I don't know. I guess we didn't think of this' (Interview I, 2012).

Moreover, despite boasting links to several different women's networks, none of these institutions were encompassed into their advocacy efforts to exploit their 'critical mass' collectively. Despite the existence of a large base of civil society organizations that rally against administrative custody law in Jordan, including groups that protest torture and arbitrary detention, MIZAN did not appear to engage in an effort to mobilize them to undertake a shared response to the underlying issue. In short, the effort remained an isolated, unitary, institutionally-based approach towards addressing one outcome of a broader legal structure that disenfranchise women. Ultimately, the program was dismantled after a few years due to shortfalls in donor funding. At the time of this research, the 'jailed women' initiative had been erased from MIZAN's program of work, which now focuses almost solely on gender violence (Interview I, 2012). This example reinforces the notion that liberalization efforts broaden the scope of allowable action while at the same time attempting to preserve the status quo by taking the issue of regime survival off the table.

3. Leadership Effects

A second theme for understanding the lack of improvement of the status of Jordanian women during the Arab Spring is the failure of leadership. Based on the data collected for this paper, the activities of a large portion of Jordanian women's organizations appear to be directed by elites with strong regime ties. A more narrowly pointed criticism identified during interviews was that leaders in many of these groups appear to be involved more for social status purposes. As such, their attention tends to drift between popular issue areas and the actions pursued generally avoid political content. Specifically, actions avoid challenging the Jordanian regime and its positions. To evaluate these critiques, it is important to first understand the general construction of such organizations. Generally, the leadership of women's NGOs in Jordan is comprised of highly educated women holding degrees from North America and Europe. They are well versed in English and use modern methods of communication in their work (Clark & Michuki, 2009, p. 331). These characteristics are shared by organizational staff as both leaders and staff are often picked on the basis of their ability to be convincing, presentable, and able to deliver well-written reports and in-person presentations in order to attract funding from the regime as well as international donors. As such, it is easy to understand the elite nature of organizational personnel—ongoing operation demands funding and these are the types of people most likely to be successful in such endeavors. However, it is precisely this elite, professional culture that alienates many such women's NGOs from what one feminist organizer in Jordan described as the far more numerically significant, 'ground networks' they need in order to build critical mass to influence meaningful political change (Interview B, 2012). Thus, it seems that the structural and

leadership characteristics of these organizations seems likely to reinforce, rather than challenge, the status quo, at least in terms of regime stability.

Moreover a second issue is the universal, rather than local, outlook of many of these organizations. In surveying Jordanian women's organizations, it can be noted that most rely on modernized and globalized communication and educational tools, such as workshops and conferences, and through invoking discourse that speaks to 'universal human rights', of which women are a part, rather than relying on more localized understandings of concepts and priorities (Interview C, 2012). These are, in turn, effective at invoking discourse that seeks to 'educate' and 'empower' a predefined 'target group' for a limited period of time through conferences and workshops but have not set political education, organization, and mobilization as goals. While these tools may be effective at communicating with large audiences, they appear to be ineffective at engaging Jordanian women as political agents. Woman may receive the specific messages, but little interaction is achieved to articulate an autonomous feminist stance that mobilizes the preamble of 'human rights'. Moreover, the invocation of 'universal human rights', which is often a product of professionalized NGO environments, holds less meaning for the constituencies of these organizations, who conceive the projects as 'misinformed and paternalistic', since it disregards the 'specificity of their condition' (Schild, 1998, p. 237). These approaches limit the articulation of deeper social and political rights as they are often dictated and implemented by professionals hired to get the job done, rather than a pursuing an interactive process that evolves, with considerable time, into a mission involving conviction and organization around a political goal—that is, a social movement.

An alternative framework can be seen in the Palestinian-style neighborhood organizations, whom, as Isah Jad notes, were 'known and trusted by people', had 'easy access to them', and 'helped whenever needed' (2004, p. 38). She emphasizes that 'the task needed daily, tiring, time-consuming effort in networking and organizing. These organizations knew their constituency on a personal level, and communication depended on face-to-face human contact' (p. 39). Moreover, these efforts were informed by rhetoric that balanced a citizenship of universality, without assuming a monolithic constituency with identical interests (Molyneux, 1998). In effect, they were able to 'organize and mobilize' their base towards tackling the underlying social relations that discriminate against women. The contrast with the Jordanian situation was summed up by one interviewee who argued:

> It's the elitism. The women groups have become an elite entity that works on their own issues. The majority of the population are not connected to what's going on in the central capitals of Amman, Cairo, Beirut. That is the problem with women's movements. Because they are disconnected from ground networks,

they are limited. They lost the top support but don't have ground support. Unless they both meet somewhere, they will always be fragile. (Interview D, 2012)

Thus, the traits, interests and tools of leaders in many women's organizations in Jordan will help us understand the failure of women to achieve progress when we turn specifically to the events of the Arab Spring.

4. International Donor Effects

Before that, we must examine the third theme underlying the role and effect of women's organization: the international donor effects. The depoliticizing of women's organizations through the actions of the regime is complemented and compounded by the effects of international donor policies and neoliberal globalization. The larger transnational trend of neoliberal globalization plays a significant role in constraining women's organizations. As Schild suggests, the neoliberal thrusts of gender equity do not constitute real advancements to gender justice but, instead, transform political agendas of gender rights into technical tasks (2000, p. 25). In this regard, feminist movements seeking political change are often co-opted by reformist goals that constrain organizers to a narrow set of policy options that end up equating empowerment with overcoming marginality from the market, while disregarding the multiple oppressions faced by women (p. 28). She argues these effects are particularly acute in the context of nations under extended periods of authoritarian rule, as austerity economics often coincides with patronage politics of defensive democratization to transform demands of political change into service-oriented goals.

This view was largely confirmed in our interviews. Several interviewees expressed the idea that international donors in Jordan dichotomize the professional and the political, choosing to fund the former based on what Hawthorne refers to as their ability to act as 'professional [and] nonpartisan organizations' (2004, p. 18). As such, assistance is often targeted to groups with 'shallowest roots in the community', fundamentally missing the opportunity to aid groups that can 'develop links to and build coalitions across sectors' (p. 17). In addition, interviewees often complained that they were required to submit detailed proposals and undergo training programs to meet donor requirements, demands which only the most professionalized and well-resourced organizations could meet (Interview D, 2012). Finally, academics in Jordan have stressed that donors often cross the fine line between suggesting new ideas and imposing external policy priorities and political mandates on their aid recipients, a tendency that has resulted in civil society organizations that flit from issue to issue. It is important to note that these trends reinforce the state's goal of social control, as associational life is further encouraged to tread in apolitical and elite spaces, rather than transgressing into action that is political and tackles the underlying social relations that discriminate against women.

5. Depoliticization of Jordanian Women

The interplay of repressive state mechanisms resulting from political liberalization, the leadership challenges in women's organizations, and the structural effects induced by international donor policies result in the general depoliticization of Jordanian women's movement. The Jordanian women's movement has undergone a process quite similar to what feminist scholar Sonia Alvarez (1989) refers to as NGOisation. This helps explain why women's organizations have been unable to turn isolated institutionalized efforts at furthering gender equality into a broader social movement that would allow them to take advantage of the political openings engendered by the Arab Spring. One director of a Jordanian social organization summarizes the effects of this NGOisation: 'Women's movements have all consented to institutional movements. They have been set within boundaries and parameters that states have defined. I don't think there's a movement. Most of the women groups have become institutionalized into NGOs' (Interview E, 2012).

To understand the effect in Jordan, it is helpful to contrast the situation with women's movements in Latin America and South Africa. In observing the success of Latin American women's efforts to organize, Alvarez notes that women did not realize rights by pleading with an authoritarian state or by isolating women in women's organizations. They started off with their own organizations, enlarged their constituencies, allied with political parties, and participated in the struggle for democratization and political transition. (Alvarez, 1990). As such, they have managed to 'mainstream' their demands within the state and society. In South Africa, Georgina Waylen (2007) speaks to a similar 'linkage' effect: Women organized themselves as a part of the broad opposition movement to apartheid that mobilized a discourse of equal citizenship. They followed up with a 'triple alliance' of women academics, politicians, and activists to strategically articulate gender issues from different points during the transition. In this regard, the openly feminist organizations articulated the change in a radical manner and these demands were buoyed by 'insider women' and translated into policy outcomes.

The lack of these dynamic networks and linkage structures between insiders and outsiders, as well as across constituencies and issue bases, is evident in Jordan. Professionalization explains the inability for women's organizations to connect 'ground networks' of women but compartmentalization extends this phenomenon to discord within women's organizations themselves: that is, the inability of outsiders and insiders to work in tandem and to ally with key political actors outside their traditional constituency bases. While women's organizations have forged large networks on paper, they are seldom dynamically exploited to bring political weight to their demands. The few networks that do form are comprised of like-minded women's organizations that purposefully shut out others with different ideological tendencies and agendas. In this regard, efforts between openly activist organizations and elite-insiders to increase communication and move toward shared objectives and actions, is practically non-existent in Jordan. State engagement is conducted between elites, which favours the most professionalized and institutionalized NGOs. These actions are not backed and informed by a general movement or activist demands of outsiders (Interview F, 2012).

The resulting compartmentalization can be understood in the context of political liberalization where the regime employs a strategy of social control, in which the fear of dissolution prevents trust and cooperation among groups. In effect, they are structured in little pockets that are fragmented and weak, lacking the critical mass necessary to advance a broader agenda in the face of an unresponsive state. An NGO director speaks to this effect: 'They talk to particular social groups but if you don't have critical mass, you're likely not to make it' (Interview F, 2012). The result is that many NGOs are disillusioned about the prospects of enacting change through policy reform, rather choosing to focus their efforts on more concrete but often unsustainable programming.

These shortfalls manifest themselves as depoliticization, one of the main impediments to women achieving long-term change through the Arab Spring in Jordan. Though there are a substantive number of organizations addressing women's issues in name, 'there is no women's movement' (Interview F, 2012). It is this lack of transformation of institutionalized efforts into a broader movement that is a marked difference between Jordanian women's efforts and those of South African and South American women's groups. As a director of the one of the national commissions admits, 'If you want to be effective, social movements are important but they need political support, even a coalition with political parties or being more active in politics yourself....This is one major obstacle' (Interview G, 2012).

In this regard, Jordanian women's institutions are prevented from serving as mobilizing or organizing agents, so that however much they proliferate 'they cannot sustain and expand a constituency, or tackle issues related to social, political or economic rights on a macro or national level' (Jad, 2004, p. 39). In contrast, to acquire power, these institutions must morph into a type of social movement that, as Jad suggests, should permeate 'into the social networks and cultural symbols through which social relations are organized' (p. 40). Here, the social movement can take the form of a large number of small institutions, even with diverse agendas, coming together to constitute a women's movement. In this regard, there might not be an agreed agenda, but common goals. We see these fluid structures form out of existing institutions in the Latin American and South African context, but not in the Jordanian context. As such, they remain depoliticized and service-based, unable to put together the 'contentious collective action' needed to defeat a better armed opponent (Interview H, 2012).

The director of the above-referenced commission noted that the Associational Law 'creates a huge gap between the *real* role of NGOs and that of women's organizations by limiting their areas of working to development. This enhance[s] the same negative image of integration into political life. We have huge challenges to overcome to create this organization' (Interview H, 2012). What is important to note here is the distinction between what she believes to be the *real* role of NGOs and women's organizations in their current form. The aim of political liberalization can thus be seen. The subtle methods of social control employed by the state prevent women's organizations from fulfilling roles as distinctly *political* actors. This results in women's organizations that are constrained to providing traditional 'women's services' rather than engaging in policy advocacy and organizing that might bring more sustained advances to the status of women, and potentially threaten the existing regime. To be sure, the efforts of these organizations are laudable and the point is not to necessarily privilege one type of activity over the other, but reiterate the earlier argument about civil society existing to mimic the state's definition of feminism, rather than consolidating their own for use during key political opportunities during liberalization processes induced by events like the Arab Spring.

6. Jordanian Women and the Arab Spring

To understand why women's organizations were unable to effect the improvement of the status of Jordanian women during the Arab Spring, we examine the failure of three sets of events that might have resulted in such change: popular protests, electoral law reform, and amending the constitution. As protests spread from Tunisia to Egypt to Libya and then to Jordan in the spring of 2011, the Kingdom once again turned to the strategy of political liberalization. In December 2010, just prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring, the new government of Prime Minister Samir al-Rifa'i was sworn in. When Arab Spring protests began in Jordan, the demonstrators called for the dismissal of the new government but not for removal of the royal family from power (Ryan, 2011, p. 383). On February 1, as a preemptive response to the crisis overtaking a number of other regimes in the region, King Abdullah II removed al-Rifa'i from power and replaced him with Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit (Koprulu, 2012, p. 87). That move alone did not quell the protests. The March 24 Shabab Movement staged an all day and all night protest in the Ministry of Interior Circle in Amman that included demonstrators from all walks of Jordanian life. The peaceful demonstration was broken up the following morning by nationalist youths at the cost of hundreds of injuries (Ryan, 2011, p. 386). In response, the new Prime Minister blamed Islamist forces for the violence and the King publicly pledged support for the reformation process, promising to stand 'firm against non-democratic moves that threaten the country's national unity' (The Jordan Times, 2011). While the King

clearly indicated a willingness to negotiate democratic reforms, he also firmly established a 'red line: the survival of the monarchy' (Koprulu, 2012, p. 88). And the strategy appeared to have the desired effect, as 'despite the setbacks such as the March 25 violence, most Jordanians remain strongly in favour of reform rather than full regime change' (Ryan, 2011, p. 387).

The subsequent protests that were organized in Jordan were small and isolated compared to the 'street based' movements that arose during the Arab Spring in other countries in the region. Upon meeting with Jordanian women that were instrumental in organizing many of the protests during the Arab Spring, the influences of liberalization, leadership problems, focused, donor-driven objectives and the effects of depoliticization can all be observed. The legacy effects of past liberalization efforts and their effect on the manner in which Jordanian women view political participation was made clear in one interview: 'They think, I will not be a part of political parties and life because there is a negative image of it in our minds' (Interview A, 2012). Of the women that did participate in protests, it was difficult not to notice that most were in the upper-middle class elite, situated in the urban core of the capital Amman. In addition, these protests were often thrown together last minute using Facebook and other forms of social media that are utterly inaccessible and out of reach to women that are not part of a specific class/geographic region (Interview K, 2012).

Moreover, though the issues that were chosen often related to bodily rights, an issue that disproportionately affects rural and lower class women, the discourse surrounding the campaigns was entirely alien to those outside of the Western education system. Indeed, even the signs held were often written in English, sometimes without the Arabic counterpart (Interview L, 2012). One interviewee drove this point home relating the time she witnessed a security guard who asked protesting women, 'Why don't you go hold up signs in front of City Mall?' (Interview N, 2012). Unlike successful cases in the South Africa and Latin America, in Jordan there was little emphasis placed on integrating the interests, needs, and opinions of women in rural areas and lower classes into the protests.

Given the urgency of the protests, it might be unreasonable to expect the establishment of these links with women outside of the traditional constituency base of NGOs. However, most NGOs themselves would not have knowledge of these protests, despite an open willingness to collaborate. The protests comprised of 30–50 women tackling issues related to bodily rights, without any semblance of critical mass or pressure on the regime (Interview K, 2012). A young elected official in Jordan speaks to this gap:

> I think this is where consistency matters. It's not enough to draft it and drop it until the government makes some action. This is when I say consistency and long-term advocacy is important. There is no sus-

tained push. We've never had a campaign for a million signatures to advocate for a change in legislation, to raise the marriage age for example. We talk about it in meetings and conferences. We accept and delegate but what we accept is not what we want. We compromise. We don't take it down to the streets. I've never witnessed a huge movement. (Interview M, 2012)

She goes on to say that what women's organizations need in the future is 'more coordination and consistency', and suggests that if she gives 'an example of what is happening on the streets, this is how governments listen' (Interview M, 2012). These comments make evident the ramifications of depoliticization in Jordan: there is a lack of contention and the 'collective' in the protests. As such, the critical mass needed to defeat a better armed opponent, in this case the state, was not mobilized.

A second example of a lost opportunity to change the status of Jordanian women can be seen in the proposed electoral law reform. As part of the Arab Spring's political liberalization processes, King Abdullah II revisited the election law to create more favourable conditions for the proliferation of political organizations, including political parties. During this period of change, instead of organizing themselves into a broader struggle for more political openness, a matter that severely inhibits their operation, most women NGOs understood their role to be focused on increasing the quota for women (Interview H, 2012). Advocating for legislation that allows stronger political party formation might have enabled women's groups to connect with key sectors and actors—such as political parties and academics—outside of the realm of women's NGOs. With these expanded constituencies, activists could have found it easier to mobilize the level of support and pressure needed to push forward important gender-specific legislation, including, but not limited to, the creation of sweeping gender quotas. Instead, the ongoing effects of depoliticization again undermined a push for broader change.

A final example can be observed in the efforts toward constitutional reform. During the political liberalization process, the constitution was opened for amendments. Among the changes discussed was a specific gender-equity mandate. Women's groups sought to insert the word 'gender' into Article Six of the constitution, which read, 'Jordanians shall be equal before the law. There shall be no discrimination between them as regards to their rights and duties on grounds of race, language or religion' (Constitution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 6A). The importance of such an amendment cannot be understated. It would have provided women with constitutional grounds on which to challenge the prevalent gender discrimination under Jordanian law. Unfortunately, the leadership issues clearly came into play. Three highly professional women that were or had previously been engaged with the regime were chosen to represent the interests of all women to the constitutional committee: an MP, a former minister, and the director

of a semi-governmental organization (Interview K, 2012). This delegation of 'insiders' provided assurances that the requests of women's organizations would be met.

The problems with this attempt at representation are clear. Since few civil society organizations in Jordan engaged in the cross-class network creation through sustained contact that was aimed at organizing and mobilizing the masses—the 'ordinary' woman was removed from these larger discussions, even if she was to be directly affected. There was no grassroots-level awareness-raising about the significance of the proposed constitutional amendment for ordinary Jordanian women. Though some efforts were undertaken, they were hardly enough to establish the substantive clout needed to create a movement of women demanding change (Interview J, 2012). Further, the dynamic interaction within civil society itself was largely missing, as activism on the ground by organizations with different ideological associations was not pushed forward by those engaged in constitutional talks (Interview J, 2012). The committee eventually returned the final draft without the inclusion of the word gender, citing 'political' reasons for being unable to do so (Interview J, 2012). As an interviewee notes, 'If the women had political weight, the government wouldn't have gotten away with it. The reason they don't have popular weight is the women did not have a popular base. Women did not form popular movements' (Interview J, 2012). To be sure, the importance of these powerful insiders cannot be discounted, since they give access to strategic space to engage directly with the regime. However, in the absence of sustained consolidation from outsiders, they are unable to transform the regime's cosmetic inclusion of women in the talks into substantive changes through contentious collective action.

7. Conclusions

The advent of the Arab Spring was hailed by democrats in the region and across the globe as holding the potential for meaningful reform. Given the prominent role of women in a variety of locations, many held out the hope for a broader Arab Spring for Women. While this does not appear to be the case, particularly in Jordan, the lack of sweeping change should not be seen as an indication that such reforms are impossible. It is for this reason, the question motivating this research is: why were women's organizations unable to effect the improvement in the status of women in Jordan during the Arab Spring? To arrive at an answer, the paper examines political liberalization, the failure of leadership, and international donor influence on programmatic focus. The underlying effect of these three forces can be seen in the depoliticization of Jordanian women. This framework is examined in light of three sets of events that took place during the Arab Spring.

As with similarly situated countries, Jordan witnessed political protest during the onset of the Arab Spring. In response, they pursued a strategy of political

liberalization. While addressing some of the protesters' concerns, the Kingdom drew a 'red line' at regime survival. The monarchy was willing to oust elected leaders and undertake reform efforts as long protests observed the red line. The strategy worked, insofar as the survival of the regime was never seriously in doubt. The ability of women's organizations to effectively seek change in the status of women was impaired by the elite-driven interests of their leadership as well as the inability to expand their programmatic focus to issues more concerning to the broader female population in the country. A similar story is observed when examining the regime's electoral reform proposals. Instead of using this opportunity as a springboard for more wide-sweeping changes, women's organizations maintained their position inside of previously established political liberalization boxes, maintaining a very narrow focus on quota reforms.

Finally the regime-led efforts to reform the constitution appear to confirm the answers proposed in this paper. While initially seeking to insert gender into a list of intolerable forms of discrimination, the effort ultimately failed. Again, some of the explanation for this 'political' failure can be tied to the choice of leadership to represent the interest of Jordan's women. The inability to mobilize support for reform as well as an effective response to the failure can also be seen in the lack of a broader women's movement. This, at least in part, is tied not only to the issues of representation relying on elite leadership but also on the inability of organizations' to pursue programmatic foci grounded in the concerns of Jordanian women writ large, rather than those driven by international donors. The 'culture of fear' toward women's political action driven by the history of political liberalization, the failure of leadership in women's organizations, and the influence international donor's hold over programmatic focus of these organizations undergirds the depoliticization of Jordanian women. While future hopes for sweeping changes in the status of women should not be lightly dismissed, they seem less likely to occur until the forces behind such depoliticization are addressed.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Peter A. Ferguson is an Assistant Professor in Political Science at Western University. He is a Director of the Leadership and Democracy Laboratory. Dr. Ferguson specializes in comparative politics, particularly democratic transitions and democratic stability in the developing world. He has authored a book on the stability of democratic regimes and the role of democratic uncertainty in explaining reversions (titled *Undertow in the Third Wave*) which forthcoming from UBC Press. His new work concerns research on political risk assessment mitigation strategies.

Annex

Methodology

The forty, semi-structured interviews were conducted with non-governmental organization workers, government bureaucrats, parliamentarians, and journalists concerned with women's issues in Jordan. As most of this group consists of women, there were thirty eight female and two male interviewees. They were primarily middle-age professionals who were established in their careers. However, two activists and one parliamentarian, all in their late twenties, were also interviewed. Of the civil society actors contacted, all were either directors or in similar senior positions within the organizations. Several elected officials as well as bureaucrats in relevant portions of the Jordanian government were also interviewed. All interviews took place in Amman.

The focus group convened fieldworkers from both genders responsible for implementing projects within urban and rural settings. The questions directed to the focus group concentrated more on the problems involved with implementation and community relationships, rather than organizational strategy.

In addition to this fieldwork, primary documents that outlined the legal frameworks for civil society in Jordan were collected. Different pieces of legislation are analyzed and referenced in the paper. Further, advocacy materials, such as educational pamphlets, training manuals, and annual reports, from organizations where interviews took place are examined. This allowed for a more systemic analysis of the organization's overall vision, strategy, and area of work. These materials were also compared to the interview discussions to note similarities and discrepancies.

Primary materials were supplemented by a literature review that analyzed methods of democratization undertaken by authoritarian regimes, civil society in the Middle East, and women's movements in democratic transitions of the past, particularly in Latin America and South Africa. This literature was used to supplement our understandings how trends and strategies were used by women as peripheral groups in the political transition context.