



NEWSLETTER BY REPAK

WOMEN & POLITICS

In this issue of the newsletter, the role of women in politics and elections in the different parts of Kurdistan is highlighted.

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WOMEN AND POLITICS

Ethics and politics are fundamental components of societies. They are closely intertwined and shape the fabric of society. Ethical norms provide a guideline for social interactions and for the promotion of community relations. At the same time, they determine the framework for the political structures of society. In this context, the recent provincial elections in Turkey and Northern Kurdistan, which took place on March 31, 2024, and the ongoing preparations for the provincial elections in the areas of the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria, scheduled for June 10, 2024, are two events worth highlighting.

As part of the work of the Kurdish Women's Relation Office (REPAK), this month we want to take a closer look at the role of women in the political and social sphere. The term "siyaset", originating from the Middle Eastern languages, and the term "politics", originating from the European languages, are both mostly interpreted and used today as "administration of state affairs".

his points to the historical foundations and continuity of patriarchal state systems in which men dominate the political landscape. As women are excluded from active, self-determined participation and forced into a subordinate or passive role, decision-making processes predominantly reflect male perspectives and interests. This in turn reinforces patriarchal structures that systematically ignore the will and needs of women.

Although there have been many struggles for women's rights throughout history, particularly for the right to vote, such efforts have often not been enough to comprehensively challenge the systematic oppression of women. As a result, a hierarchical structure of governance continues to exist in which central authorities, in collusion with capitalist corporations, dictate the political agenda. As they place their own power and profit interests above the well-being of society, social divisions and contradictions are deepening.

In contrast, a democratic and ecological social policy shaped by women offers an alternative. In many regions, women play an important role in shaping grassroots democratic, participatory and transparent policies. They are committed to overcoming authoritarianism and patriarchal norms and offer alternative paradigms in the fields of economy, education, administration, climate and environment protection. This makes women the bearers of hope for democratic and ecological change in society and politics. Through dialog and collaboration with diverse cultural, national and social communities, women challenge patriarchal, nationalist and authoritarian power structures.

Kurdish women embody this transformative force in the four parts of Kurdistan and different regions.

Through decades of experience organizing the Kurdish women's movement based on the principles of Reber Apo's (Abdullah Öcalan) women's liberation ideology, Kurdish women have become actors in political and ethical society: From political activism, social mobilization and resistance to building structures of democratic autonomy, from media work to academic work, Kurdish women are promoting the philosophy of “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” (Women, Life, Freedom). Through this, they have created a new, ethical understanding of politics based on challenging the patriarchal state mentality by strengthening democratic self-administration of women and society.

***Kurdish Women's Relation Office
REPAK***



THE EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN NORTHERN KURDISTAN:

During the 1990s, Northern Kurdistan witnessed the imposition of a colonialist regime characterized by a series of aggressive measures, including attacks, forced displacements, mass detentions, torture, kidnappings, and assassinations, aimed at subjugating the Kurdish populace. Despite these adversities, this period emerged as a seminal juncture in the Kurdish struggle, heralding the onset of a transformative era.

Concurrently, Kurdish women embarked on a quest to locate their abducted spouses, children and kin, ensnared within the confines of state penitentiaries and other institutionalized apparatuses. Furthermore, women assumed pivotal roles as the veritable heart and soul of resistance gatherings and emancipatory assemblies. This epoch witnessed a palpable surge in the visibility and agency of women, both within the broader socio-political landscape and more specifically within the sphere denoted as the "Political and Kurdish Field."

Confronted with mounting demands for female emancipation, the Turkish government responded with escalating levels of cruelty and inhumanity.

This era witnessed the arbitrary arrest, sentencing, and illicit torture of hundreds of women. Nevertheless, Kurdish women's voices resounded with unwavering tenacity, steadily gaining traction within the public sphere. Thus, a robust and dynamic women's movement, endowed with decision-making capacities and political agency, emerged and proliferated.

In pursuit of justice and rights, women commenced the establishment of civil centers and organizations. Foremost among these initiatives was the Kurdish Patriotic Women's Association, notwithstanding the governmental impediments and subsequent proscription by Turkish authorities merely five months after its inception. Undeterred by such challenges, Kurdish women persevered, inaugurating the Tigris Center in Ilh, Amed, shortly thereafter. This protracted struggle, punctuated by cycles of closure and reestablishment by governmental authorities, typified the Kurdish women's renaissance of the 1990s, marked by the rapid proliferation of women's groups, centers, associations, and publications.

The burgeoning political engagement of Kurdish women commenced within the framework of the People's Democratic Party (HADEP) and culminated in the institutionalization of women's self-governance policies. Notably, HADEP's mandate stipulated a 40% quota for female participation, precipitating a surge in women's involvement across all party branches and engendering a novel and robust female political ethos. The provincial elections of April 18th, 1999, witnessed the historic victory of women in Merdin, Derik, Agri, Baizdi, Amed, and Bsimle, inaugurating a new era of female political participation. Subsequent electoral cycles further solidified this trend, culminating in the establishment of a co-leadership system in the May 30th, 2014 regional elections, wherein women assumed leadership roles alongside their male counterparts in 102 administrative regions, including major cities, provinces, and towns.

However, the democratic gains achieved by Kurdish women encountered formidable opposition from the governing regime, which forcibly seized control of all previously won provinces in 2016, replacing democratically elected representatives with government-appointed governors. Notwithstanding these setbacks, the Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) triumphed in the 2024 elections, securing 77 municipalities and implementing a co-presidency system across all victorious jurisdictions.

The political ascent of Kurdish women transcended regional boundaries, exemplified by Layla Zana's historic election as the first Kurdish female parliamentarian in 1992. Subsequent electoral cycles witnessed a steady increase in female representation, culminating in the election of 30 Kurdish women as Members of Parliament in the 2018 elections.



Pioneering political parties in Turkey, including the People's Democratic Party, Democratic People's Party, Democratic Society's Party, Peace and Democracy Party, Democratic Region's Party, and Equality and Democracy Party, identified race and gender inequities as systemic issues, endeavoring to rectify them through the establishment of inclusive mechanisms and gender-sensitive policies. This concerted effort culminated in the implementation of a co-leadership system within party structures, regional administrations, and provincial councils, epitomizing a significant stride towards gender parity and inclusive governance.

The enduring struggle of Kurdish women in the realm of democratic politics has yielded profound societal transformations, fostering a paradigm shift towards gender equality and engendering a newfound belief in women's capacity for leadership and governance. Despite relentless opposition from the AKP government, Kurdish women remain steadfast in their pursuit of justice and emancipation,

affirming their resolve to surmount all obstacles in their quest for equality and freedom.

Today, Kurdish women occupy prominent positions within legislative bodies and policymaking arenas across numerous regions and provinces of Kurdistan, heralding a more equitable and just society. The enduring legacy of the Women, Life, Freedom movement underscores the indomitable spirit of Kurdish women, whose unwavering commitment to democratic ideals continues to inspire transformative change within both Kurdish and Turkish political landscapes.

Dîrayet Taşdemîr, former Member of Parliament





WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTHERN KURDISTAN: CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

Amidst the contemporary landscape of societal advancement, considerable discourse surrounds the pivotal role of women in political and social development, alongside the attainment of social justice and fundamental rights. While strides have been made in translating many of these aspirations into tangible legal frameworks, the realm of politics remains disproportionately dominated by men. This imbalance underscores a multifaceted predicament influenced by various factors, including social consciousness, cultural norms, religious considerations, the efficacy and inclusivity of political parties, governmental structures, as well as varying levels of women's engagement and interest.

Throughout history, women across the globe, including those in Kurdistan, particularly in Southern Kurdistan, have participated in politics to varying degrees. Across epochs, as societal dynamics evolved, women's participation gradually expanded, with their voices, presence, and influence gaining increasing prominence.

Whether amidst the epochs of kingdoms and empires or the contemporary landscape characterized by state formation, political party dynamics, national liberation movements, and urban insurgencies, women, though numerically limited, have demonstrated their mettle across diverse spheres, including overt, covert, and armed struggles.

While women have not consistently occupied central leadership roles conducive to effecting substantive change and decision-making, their influence remains palpable.

The engagement of Kurdish women transcends mere activism, imbued with a rights-based ethos encompassing national and ethnic realms. A distinguishing feature of Kurdish women's struggle lies in its context as a struggle waged by a stateless and marginalized demographic.

Within the political milieu of Southern Kurdistan, female leadership remains a rarity, with women significantly underrepresented in decision-making

positions within institutional structures. The pervasive patriarchal ethos within governance formations further exacerbates this disparity.

While the Kurdistan Region has implemented a quota system earmarking 30% of parliamentary seats for women, similar provisions are not extended to other branches of government. Although certain political parties have instituted analogous quota mechanisms, the substantive empowerment of women remains elusive, with women often relegated to secondary roles, primarily within social spheres such as healthcare and education. Furthermore, women's political participation, often superficial in nature, frequently sidelines them from pivotal domains such as peacebuilding, developmental initiatives, and issues directly pertinent to women's rights.

Nevertheless, contemporary Kurdish women in Southern Kurdistan exhibit a broad spectrum of participation across various domains, including political leadership, entrepreneurial endeavors, and economic spheres. They occupy prominent roles within governmental institutions, academia, media, arts, security forces, and myriad other sectors, indicative of a gradual diversification of their engagement.

The inception of political parties in Southern Kurdistan catalyzed women's political involvement,

building upon historical precedents wherein women exercised leadership roles within their tribes and mediated conflicts with sagacity and acumen. Notable examples include the Iraqi Communist Party, wherein women played instrumental roles in advocating for human rights and gender equality. Similarly, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan have espoused ideologies conducive to women's political participation, fostering an environment conducive to women's advancement within their ranks.

The inclusion of women in politics holds profound significance for national development, as it addresses a spectrum of socio-economic challenges, fosters principles of justice and equality, counters entrenched conservative mentalities, enhances productivity, raises social consciousness, and contributes to conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavors.

In conclusion, while considerable progress has been achieved, persistent challenges persist in ensuring substantive gender parity and empowerment within the political sphere of Southern Kurdistan. Upholding the principles of justice, equality, and inclusivity remains paramount in fostering an environment conducive to the full realization of women's political potential and societal advancement.

Nermîn Osman, writer



WOMEN AND POLITICS IN THE AUTONOMOUS ADMINISTRATION OF NORTH AND EAST SYRIA

The trajectory of women's engagement in political spheres within the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria reflects a divergence from historical patriarchal systems that have shaped human societies. Throughout history, patriarchal structures have shifted societal dynamics away from a natural trajectory, resulting in exacerbated challenges for women and youth. In advocating for the establishment of democratic systems, particular emphasis must be placed on the inclusion and evaluation of women's roles within the ethical and political fabric of society.

A notable case study is the experience of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, where despite myriad challenges, a discernible operational framework has emerged. This prompts an inquiry into the disparities between the current governance model and preceding eras characterized by nationalist monolithic administrations.

The Situation of Women in Syria under the Administration of the Ba'ath Regime:

The status of women within Syria during the tenure of the Ba'athist regime warrants examination, particularly concerning legislative provisions outlined in the Syrian Constitution. Article 45 of the constitution ostensibly affirms the state's obligation to facilitate women's participation across various societal domains. However, the absence of specific quotas or mandates for achieving gender parity renders this provision susceptible to interpretation as a nominal gesture rather than a substantive commitment to women's empowerment.

1- Legislative council: In 1949, women gained the right to vote. The Syrian People's Assembly was formed with a 2.8% turnout, and in the most recent statistics, the participation rate of women increased by 11%, which is 30 out of 250 women members of the House of Representatives.

2-Executive Council: A woman became a minister for the first time in 1976 and in 2000 the number rose to two women in the Council of Ministers, which is 6% of the Council of Ministers.

3-Diplomatic Engagement: Women's participation is 11%.

4-Presidency: the Syrian constitution states that only men are allowed to hold the position of the presidency.

5-Judicial Inclusion: Women's participation is 14%.

Contrastingly, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria represents a paradigm shift in women's political participation, particularly for Kurdish women historically marginalized within patriarchal systems. Guided by the ideological framework of Reber Apo (Abdullah Ocalan), pivotal reforms such as the adoption of a co-leadership structure and the stipulation of 50% female representation across all sectors have catalyzed transformative change.

Key points that became exemplary model for humanity and the history of humanity:

Key milestones include the establishment of a Women's Assembly and the enshrinement of gender-inclusive rights within the Social Contract, notably articles 19, 24, 25, 26, 50, and 110. These provisions safeguard women's freedoms, endorse economic parity, and condemn all forms of violence as criminal acts, signaling a substantive commitment to gender equality.

The impending provincial elections scheduled for May 31st, 2024, signify a pivotal juncture in furthering women's political agency within the region.

In the forthcoming election, a total of 121 mayoral positions will be filled utilizing a co-leadership framework. Concurrently, 121 women will assume roles as co-mayors, with an additional 121 women appointed as deputy co-mayors.



Moreover, within the municipality councils, women will occupy 50% of the available seats, thereby ensuring gender parity and inclusive representation within the local governance structures. The adoption of a co-leadership model for mayoral positions, alongside mandated gender quotas within municipal councils, underscores a concerted effort to institutionalize women's representation and foster substantive empowerment.

In anticipation of the elections, the Women's Confederation Organization has embarked on initiatives to ensure transparent and inclusive electoral processes, empowering women candidates through autonomous decision-making structures. The establishment of a Women's Autonomous Council and enhanced representation within the General Council reflects a strategic commitment to advancing gender-responsive policies and safeguarding women's rights.

The culmination of these efforts augurs a transformative shift towards an ethical society founded on principles of gender equality and democratic governance. As women continue to navigate inherent challenges and confront systemic barriers, their steadfast determination and collective agency serve as catalysts for societal evolution away from patriarchal paradigms.

Kongra Star - Women's Movement in Rojava/ North and East Syria

