

Globalization of Human Rights and Reform of the System for the Protection of Women's Rights in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf: A Comparative Study of Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia

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Adopting a review-based comparative approach and drawing on Persian, Arabic, and English sources, the present study examines the impact of the globalization of human rights on the reform of women's rights protection systems in six Arab states of the Persian Gulf: Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. The findings indicate that, despite their accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the countries under study have restricted the scope of their obligations through extensive reservations, particularly in matters relating to family, marriage, and nationality. This situation has resulted in a form of "symbolic acceptance" of global standards on women's rights. Reforms undertaken in these countries have primarily focused on the economic sphere, employment, and women's professional empowerment and have largely been aligned with economic development requirements, labor market needs, and national development programs. By contrast, fundamental areas of gender inequality, including personal status laws, guardianship, divorce, inheritance, and child custody, remain substantially influenced by patriarchal structures and traditional jurisprudential interpretations. A comparative analysis of the countries under study reveals three distinct patterns: a minimal and tradition-oriented model in Oman and Saudi Arabia; an intermediate and symbolic model in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain; and a controlled-transition model in the United Arab Emirates. A common feature of all three patterns is the existence of a structural gap between governments' formal commitments, legal reforms, and women's lived realities. Accordingly, the principal challenge confronting women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf lies not in the absence of laws and legal instruments, but rather in weak institutional commitment, ineffective implementation mechanisms, and the lack of a localized theoretical framework for the interpretation and application of human rights. Therefore, reconstructing the system for the protection of women's rights requires a transition from symbolic reforms to structural reforms, a fundamental reconsideration of personal status laws, the strengthening of independent civil society institutions, and the development of an indigenous discourse on women's rights grounded in human dignity, equality, and gender justice.

Keywords: globalization of human rights, women's rights, Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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1. Introduction

The globalization of human rights is a multidimensional and pervasive process that, through the expansion of transnational communications, the development of international institutions, and the emergence of shared norms, has affected the traditional boundaries of national sovereignty and subjected states to international scrutiny and evaluation. Within this framework, the degree to which fundamental human rights are recognized and guaranteed has become an important criterion for assessing the legitimacy, justice, and effectiveness of states, while women's rights, as an integral component of human rights, constitute an important indicator for evaluating states' adherence to the principles of equality, human dignity, and non-discrimination (Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014).

Women's rights encompass a broad range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the rights to education, employment, property ownership, security, equal access to justice, political participation, health, freedom from violence, family rights, divorce, and social protection. Despite the formal recognition of some of these rights in recent decades, the actual status of women in many societies continues to be characterized by structural inequalities. These inequalities result from the complex interaction among power structures, family laws, judicial practices, economic arrangements, cultural norms, religious interpretations, the capacity of civil society institutions, and the degree of judicial independence.

Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, despite their regional commonalities, differ considerably in terms of political systems, legal structures, economic conditions, and institutional capacities. Although these countries share monarchical political systems, economies substantially dependent on oil and gas, and legal systems influenced by Sharia, they are not homogeneous with respect to development policies, administrative structures, and governmental approaches to social reform (Mansouri Moghadam & Lari Monfared, 2021).

In recent decades, the increasing interaction of these countries with international institutions, global markets, and communication networks has heightened attention to women's rights. The expansion of women's higher education, their increased participation in the labor

market, and reforms to certain regulations concerning family and nationality are among the manifestations of this transformation. Nevertheless, these reforms have differed in speed, scope, and depth, and in some instances formal changes have been accompanied by weak enforcement guarantees, the persistence of family-related restrictions, economic dependency, and predominantly symbolic political participation. The fundamental issue, therefore, is not merely whether legal reforms have occurred in these countries, but rather the extent to which such reforms have been transformed into rights that women can effectively claim and realize in their everyday lives.

The globalization of human rights has considerable potential to promote women's rights through the development of shared normative frameworks, international monitoring, greater public awareness, and the strengthening of civil society institutions. However, the diffusion of global norms is neither direct nor unidirectional; rather, it depends on domestic acceptance, political will, institutional capacity, cultural conditions, and the manner in which these norms are interpreted and localized within each country. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obliges states to reform discriminatory laws, establish protective mechanisms, and ensure women's equal access to justice. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the Convention depends on the manner of its acceptance, the scope of reservations, and the degree of harmonization between international obligations and domestic legislation (Mousavi, 2016). Broad reservations or references to Sharia principles have, in some instances, restricted the scope of implementation of these obligations and perpetuated the gap between states' formal commitments and the practical protection of women's rights.

One of the most important areas in which this gap manifests itself is family law. Regulations relating to marriage, divorce, child custody, guardianship, nationality, inheritance, and women's financial rights remain influenced by a combination of Sharia, customary norms, civil legislation, and state policy. Moreover, judicial practice, judges' interpretation of legislation, litigation costs, and access to legal counsel may restrict the extent to which women can benefit from their statutory rights. Violence against women represents

another important area of concern. Despite the enactment of certain protective laws, weak reporting mechanisms, fear of familial and social consequences, and the absence of effective enforcement mechanisms may prevent genuine and sustainable protection of victims of violence.

Women's political and economic participation constitutes another important criterion for evaluating the depth of reform. Women's formal presence in governmental institutions and the labor market does not necessarily signify their effective participation in decision-making processes. Power structures, restrictions on political organization, political culture, and limited quota arrangements may reduce women's participation to a symbolic level. Under such conditions, a distinction must be drawn between "presence" and "effective influence."

Migrant women, particularly those employed in domestic service, are more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and violations of rights because of residency dependency, the kafala system, and restricted access to judicial services. Another important factor is the relationship between legal reform and the socio-cultural context. Patriarchal attitudes, traditional gender roles, and restrictions on the activities of civil society institutions may complicate implementation of protective legislation. Sustainable protection of women's rights therefore requires gradual cultural reform, enhancement of legal literacy, expansion of public education, strengthening of civil society organizations, and increased participation by women themselves in processes of legal and policy reform (Pahlavani & Golestani, 2016).

Accordingly, the globalization of human rights should be conceptualized as an interactive process through which international norms enter domestic legal systems by means of acceptance, interpretation, adaptation, and localization. The principal question of the present study is: What impact has the globalization of human rights had on reforming systems for the protection of women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf? In which areas—including family rights, the right to divorce, financial rights, protection against violence, employment, and political participation—has this influence been more successful, and in which areas has it encountered greater obstacles? Using a review-based comparative approach, the present study examines the

legal, political, economic, and social status of women in six countries and seeks to analyze how reforms have been influenced by global norms and to identify the barriers to their practical realization.

2. Research Background

The globalization of human rights may be regarded as one of the most important normative and discursive transformations of recent decades, affecting the traditional boundaries of national sovereignty and confronting the legal and political systems of different countries, including the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, with fundamental questions concerning the relationship between global norms and indigenous legal and cultural orders. Women's rights occupy a distinctive position within this process because they simultaneously lie at the intersection of the global human rights discourse, Islamic Sharia, domestic legislation, institutional structures, and social norms. Accordingly, a comparative examination of the impact of the globalization of human rights on reforming systems for the protection of women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf requires a review of studies that have examined each of these dimensions from different perspectives.

A review of the existing literature indicates that relevant studies may be organized around several principal themes: the theoretical foundations of the globalization of human rights; dialogue between human rights and Islamic Sharia and jurisprudence; legal and institutional reforms; women's political and social participation; employment and economic security; and, finally, cultural and normative transformations.

3. Globalization of Human Rights: From Global Discourse to National Commitment

The theoretical foundation of the globalization of human rights rests on the assumption that human dignity, freedom, equality, and non-discrimination are transnational values and that national legal systems cannot entirely exempt themselves from the normative scrutiny of the international community. Wellman (2019), from a theoretical perspective, regards women's rights as an inseparable component of human rights and identifies human dignity, freedom, equality, and non-discrimination as their principal foundations (Wellman, 2019). This approach provides the necessary theoretical

foundation for assessing the degree of consistency between national legislation and global standards. Shenhav (2020) likewise emphasizes the relationship among religious law, family law, and women's human rights and regards reform of women's rights as a simultaneously legal, social, and institutional process that cannot be confined to a single domain or level of policymaking (Shenhav, 2020). Mousavi (2016), through an examination of the role of the United Nations and international instruments in advancing women's rights, demonstrates that the acceptance or ratification of international instruments alone is insufficient to generate social and legal transformation and that the gap between formal commitments and national implementation remains one of the principal barriers to the realization of women's rights (Mousavi, 2016). This finding is directly related to the central problem of the present study because it demonstrates that the globalization of human rights may broaden discourse and formal commitments, whereas their actual realization at the national level remains dependent on domestic mechanisms.

At the level of Arabic-language scholarship, Sharif (2023), in examining Arab women's rights in the context of globalization, highlights the gap between the global recognition of women's rights and their social realization and identifies traditional and patriarchal attitudes as factors contributing to the persistence of this gap (Sharif, 2023). Research on women's human rights in Muslim societies has likewise emphasized the influence of historical, political, and security factors on women's status and demonstrates that the globalization of human rights in these societies does not operate in a linear or uniform manner but is mediated through local contexts and power relations (Landman, 2005). Taken together, these studies indicate that the globalization of human rights should not be regarded merely as a top-down process; rather, it must be understood as an outcome of interaction between global norms and national capacities and structures.

4. Globalization and the Relationship Between Human Rights and Islamic Sharia

One of the most important themes in the existing literature concerns the relationship between global human rights norms and Islamic Sharia as one of the principal normative frameworks of the legal systems of

the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Jahangiri and Garousi (2019), in comparing women's rights in Islam with CEDAW, demonstrate that a significant proportion of existing differences derives from divergent interpretations of concepts such as equality, justice, and family rather than solely from disagreement over fundamental principles (Jahangiri & Garousi, 2019). Montazeri (2017) similarly discusses the possibility of convergence between international human rights law and an Islamic legal system and conditions such convergence on precise interpretation appropriate to the relevant legal and cultural context (Montazeri, 2017). These studies demonstrate that the globalization of human rights does not necessarily imply confrontation with Sharia and that meaningful dialogue between the two normative frameworks is possible.

At the substantive level, Malekshah (2025), in "Human Rights Violations in Domestic Violence against Women," characterizes domestic violence as a social, legal, and cultural phenomenon and as a violation of women's fundamental rights, emphasizing the necessity of reforming protective legislation, expanding public education, increasing legal awareness, and empowering women (Malekshah, 2025). Safari, Ayati, and Arabian (2023), in a comparative study of women's rights in the scriptures of divine religions, likewise emphasize recognition of women's human dignity and rejection of instrumental approaches toward women, attributing a significant part of women's historical restrictions to social and cultural interpretations (Safari et al., 2023). Movahedian, Esmaeili, and Roshan (2023), in examining women's financial rights under Islamic family law in Iran, Egypt, and Morocco, demonstrate that reform of family law and the use of contemporary Islamic interpretations may be compatible with gender justice (Movahedian et al., 2023). Abedi and Amini (2021), in examining women's right to divorce from religious and human-rights perspectives, discuss the possibility of employing justice-oriented jurisprudential interpretations to strengthen women's agency in marital dissolution (Abedi & Amini, 2021). Fallahi (2021), through a maqāṣid-oriented reading of Tahar al-Haddad's thought, regards social justice, human dignity, and the overarching purposes of Sharia as foundations for reconsidering traditional understandings of women's rights (Fallahi, 2021). Jafari and Khajvand (2022), by distinguishing between legal equality and absolutely

identical treatment, likewise argue that equitable differentiated protection for women is not necessarily inconsistent with the principle of equality (Jafari & Khajvand, 2022).

Overall, these studies demonstrate that the globalization of human rights has created a new interpretive space for reconsidering jurisprudential traditions and may strengthen possibilities for reforming family-law systems without necessarily requiring departure from the framework of Sharia.

5. Globalization and Legal and Institutional Reforms in the Persian Gulf States

The third group of studies concerns legal and institutional reforms in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf as responses to pressures associated with the globalization of human rights. Ben Brik (2025), in examining women's empowerment policy in Qatar, demonstrates that reforms relating to women have gradually been institutionalized within the country's policymaking structure under Qatar National Vision 2030 and that increased women's participation in education, employment, and decision-making processes has become part of national development policy (Ben Brik, 2025). Legal and social reforms, therefore, do not necessarily proceed through direct confrontation with traditional structures but may be implemented through gradual and development-oriented policies.

Waheedi (2022), in examining women's-rights litigation in Gulf monarchical systems, identifies judicial independence and the balance of political power as determinants of the transformation of formal rights into claimable rights (Waheedi, 2022). From this perspective, the existence of legislation alone does not guarantee protection of women; the capacity and independence of the judiciary and women's genuine access to justice are of fundamental importance. Tripp (2020), in a comparative study of women's rights in the constitutions of the Maghreb and the Middle East, similarly emphasizes the importance of legal coherence, the role of political parties, and the activities of women's movements in determining the actual protection of women's rights (Tripp, 2020).

Regarding international obligations, Ali (2019) and Talbi (2019) emphasize the importance of reforming domestic legislation and reducing Arab states' reservations to CEDAW (Ali, 2019; Talbi, 2019), while Ashour (2022)

regards harmonization of national legislation with international obligations as a requirement for improving legal protection of women (Ashour, 2022). Al-Dardour (2014), in examining the civil and political rights of women in the United Arab Emirates, similarly emphasizes the role of legislation and governmental policies in enhancing women's status (Al-Dardour, 2014).

These studies demonstrate that the globalization of human rights has encouraged Persian Gulf states to undertake gradual revision of domestic legislation through mechanisms such as international conventions, periodic reporting, and diplomatic pressure. Nevertheless, the quality, pace, and depth of these reforms have varied across countries and have depended substantially on institutional capacity and political will.

6. Globalization and Women's Political and Social Participation

The fourth strand of literature concerns the effect of the globalization of human rights on women's political and social participation. Jalali and Mousavi (2013), in examining women's political rights from the perspectives of Islam and international instruments, recognize the principle of women's political participation in both domains but regard its practical realization as dependent on social support, appropriate interpretation, and effective enforcement mechanisms (Jalali & Mousavi, 2013).

Noruzi and Ghorbani (2017), in examining women's political participation in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, demonstrate that women's effective participation is not merely a function of formal legislation and that power structures, political culture, and genuine opportunities for participation in the public sphere play an important role in its realization (Noruzi & Ghorbani, 2017). Shokoohi (2021), in a study of feminist resistance in Kuwait, likewise characterizes women's activism as a gradual and negotiation-oriented process and demonstrates that women may influence public discourse and redefine their social roles through social and political activism (Shokoohi, 2021). Tétreault, Meyer, and Rizzo (2009), in a longitudinal study of women's rights in Kuwait, similarly emphasize the relationship among advances in women's rights, political opportunities, power structures, and cultural norms (Tétreault et al., 2009).

In Arabic-language studies, Mansour (2020), Muhammad (2019), Boumaraf (2017), Makhoulf and Boudherhem (2017), and Awqati and Al-Azzawi (2022) identify traditional culture, weak party structures, legal barriers, and social restrictions as major obstacles to women's effective participation and demonstrate that gender quotas, in the absence of structural and cultural reform, may increase women's numerical representation without increasing their actual power (Awqati & Al-Azzawi, 2022; Boumaraf, 2017; Makhoulf & Boudherhem, 2017; Mansour, 2020; Muhammad, 2019).

Al-Masaeed (2024) also emphasizes the need to integrate gender considerations into transitional justice processes and demonstrates that women face heightened risks of structural violence and exclusion from decision-making during conflict and political transition (Al-Masaeed, 2024). Taken together, these studies highlight the distinction between "formal presence" and "effective participation," a distinction that is central to evaluating the impact of the globalization of human rights on reform of systems for protecting women's rights in the Persian Gulf states.

7. Globalization, Employment, and Women's Economic Security

The fifth strand of literature addresses the impact of globalization on women's employment and economic security. Kodoth (2025), in a study of paternalist governance and women's labor mobility in the Middle East, emphasizes the role of restrictive labor-migration regulations and practices in increasing women's legal and occupational vulnerability and demonstrates that economic globalization, in the absence of legal and institutional reform, may reproduce existing inequalities (Kodoth, 2025).

Mehdiyeva (2025), through a study of marital dissolution in a transnational context among Iranian migrants in Qatar, examines the simultaneous influence of Iranian law, Qatari law, Islamic Sharia, the kafala system, and economic pressures on women's status and demonstrates that legal pluralism can create compounded inequalities and vulnerabilities for migrant women (Mehdiyeva, 2025).

In Arabic-language studies, Khalaf (2022) emphasizes legal protection of women's right to decent work (Khalaf, 2022), while Al-Awadi, Ezzat, and Fadl (2017) demonstrate that globalization and technological

transformation, while increasing women's employment opportunities, may also generate employment insecurity and weaken certain acquired rights (Al-Awadi et al., 2017). Al-Aqayleh (2009) discusses the compatibility of legal protections for working women with Sharia foundations (Al-Aqayleh, 2009), while Kazem (2017), focusing on workers' rights, emphasizes the coexistence of protective instruments with weak enforcement guarantees (Kazem, 2017).

Kalaivani (2025) emphasizes the importance of women's education and economic independence and the role of gradual cultural reform in their empowerment (Kalaivani, 2025). Elneil et al. (2025), in examining women's health in the Middle East, likewise highlight the relationship between legal, economic, and migration-related inequalities and women's access to health services (Elneil et al., 2025). These studies demonstrate that globalization has created new economic opportunities for women but, in the absence of an adequate legal and institutional protection network, may simultaneously expose them to new forms of insecurity.

8. Globalization and Cultural and Normative Transformations

The sixth strand of literature concerns cultural and normative transformations associated with globalization and their role in redefining women's status. Qotrunnada and Hakim (2025) examine women's emancipation in Arab patriarchal culture from a discourse perspective and emphasize the role of cultural, historical, and social factors in perpetuating gender inequality (Qotrunnada & Hakim, 2025).

Al-Asadi and Jamil (2022), through a reconsideration of Qasim Amin's thought, demonstrate the historical legacy of Arab reformism and efforts to redefine women's status within the framework of Sharia and social transformation (Al-Asadi & Jamil, 2022). Dorsey (2014), in examining women's sporting rights in Saudi Arabia, similarly identifies sport as a sphere for redefining women's social roles and considers gradual policymaking compatible with local values effective in increasing women's participation (Dorsey, 2014).

At the regional level, Sabri (2023), in examining women's status in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, demonstrates the persistence of structural and institutional barriers despite women's increased social and political presence (Sabri, 2023). Research on women in Iraq likewise

highlights the historical and institutional roots of gender inequality and demonstrates that political transformations alone do not necessarily lead to sustainable improvement in women's status (Mojab, 2013).

Mahadew (2025) likewise highlights the persistence of domestic violence and the gap between law and implementation even where relatively advanced legal frameworks exist (Mahadew, 2025), while Miawad (2017) emphasizes the role of shadow reports and civil society institutions in exposing violations of women's rights (Miawad, 2017). These studies indicate that the globalization of human rights must become institutionalized not only at the legislative level but also within social norms and public culture if legal reforms are to produce meaningful changes in women's lives.

9. Synthesis of the Literature

The overall body of reviewed research indicates that the globalization of human rights has had three principal effects on systems for protecting women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf: first, expansion of the global discourse on women's rights and the creation of international legitimacy for articulating and claiming such rights; second, increased pressure on governments to reform domestic legislation and reduce reservations to international instruments, particularly CEDAW; and third, the creation of social and economic conditions conducive to broader participation by women in education, employment, and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the most important common finding across the literature is the distinction among the "recognized right," the "claimable right," and the "realized right," because protective legislation and international commitments constitute necessary but insufficient conditions for the actual realization of women's rights. Their realization depends on factors including enforcement guarantees, judicial independence and capacity, access to justice, the quality of public policymaking, political power structures, social participation, economic security, cultural attitudes, and the effectiveness of civil society institutions.

The literature further demonstrates that the Arab states of the Persian Gulf have not followed a uniform trajectory in responding to the globalization of human rights and may instead be situated along a continuum extending from gradual, development-oriented reform

to the preservation of institutional and cultural restrictions. This diversity provides an appropriate basis for comparative analysis in order to determine which combinations of legal, institutional, and cultural factors contribute to successful reforms and why certain countries have been more effective than others in transforming formal rights into realized rights.

In this regard, the reviewed studies suggest that reform of systems for protecting women's rights in these countries is a three-level process in which the legislative level, including reform of laws and reduction of reservations; the institutional level, including strengthening the judiciary, policymaking mechanisms, and civil society institutions; and the cultural level, including transformation of social norms and attitudes, must advance simultaneously and complementarily. By adopting a comparative approach to Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia, the present study seeks to address this research gap by explaining how the globalization of human rights has affected reform of systems for protecting women's rights and by identifying the factors associated with the success or failure of such reforms across the legal, institutional, and cultural levels.

10. Globalization of Human Rights and Women's Rights in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf

Globalization is a concept that refers both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of awareness of the world as a single whole. The expansion of temporal and spatial horizons, together with the possibility of social life within a highly decentralized environment, has created the conditions for the emergence of a holistic form of awareness that provides the basis for understanding the political, economic, social, and cultural consequences of globalization processes. Understanding the world as an interconnected whole has expanded communication among states and peoples and contributed to weakening rigid political boundaries. Within this environment, human rights and the protection of human dignity have become central issues in international relations in the age of globalization and have contributed to the emergence of a form of global public law that seeks, irrespective of racial, linguistic, gender, and cultural differences, to establish common normative standards

for the protection of human beings (Goudarzi & Kaffash Neyri, 2019).

Although barriers such as states' power-oriented interests and the cultural characteristics of developing societies continue to challenge the full realization of human-rights policies, globalization has created new conditions in international relations that have substantially blurred the boundary between power-based politics and norm-based politics. Consequently, states have gradually recognized that sustainable interests and international legitimacy depend increasingly on respect for human rights and adherence to international norms rather than solely on military capacity.

The penetration of human-rights ideas into constitutions and the political and social institutions of states has elevated the position of human rights within the international system. Efforts to transform these principles into customary international law and, ultimately, peremptory norms have likewise transformed human-rights protection from a secondary issue into one of the central concerns of international politics. Within this framework, widespread international attention to human-rights standards and the significance of their fundamental principles have meant that human-rights violations in the twenty-first century are no longer regarded exclusively as domestic matters but are increasingly considered within the broader framework of states' international responsibilities (Goudarzi & Kaffash Neyri, 2019).

Within this context, women's rights, as an integral component of universal human rights, have become one of the principal themes of international discourse. Through the development of covenants and conventions, international conferences, declarations, and instruments in diverse areas, women's rights have acquired a distinctly legal and global status. These efforts have sought to guarantee women's rights in a globalized world and to establish a balance between national legal orders and international human-rights standards (Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014).

International concern regarding women's rights, despite cultural and political differences, has gradually become an influential factor in national and international policymaking. Nevertheless, in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, this concern has translated into legal and

institutional reforms more slowly because of resistance from traditional structures and political considerations. One of the most significant manifestations of the globalization of human rights in relation to women has been the development and institutionalization of international mechanisms for protecting women's rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights represented a manifestation of the shared commitment of states to recognize common rights regardless of race, color, nationality, or sex. The Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (1957), and the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962) constituted early efforts to expand international protection of women's rights. Among these instruments, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) occupies a particularly important position and represents a major step toward consolidating the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

It should nevertheless be recognized that the globalization of legal norms and institutions, when accompanied by extensive transformation of states' traditional and governing structures, may also intensify domestic disputes and challenges. Consequently, as globalization expands, the importance of comparative law increases. Understanding the different legal systems on which Arab states of the Persian Gulf draw in their legislative processes, as well as the legal foundations they regard as binding, is essential to understanding the degree of acceptance of global norms. Otherwise, states' symbolic conformity with international standards may encounter significant problems at the implementation stage, reflecting the familiar gap between "law in the books" and "law in action" (Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014).

Alongside institutional harmonization, new understandings of global solidarity among women have also emerged. Shared concerns and demands among women in different parts of the world, particularly in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, have contributed to a form of global solidarity capable of influencing the approaches of Arab governments toward women's social and legal status. This solidarity conceptualizes "women" beyond national boundaries and transforms the category into a global concern capable of common articulation.

The United Nations designated 1975 as International Women's Year and subsequently, in 1977, adopted a

resolution inviting Member States to recognize March 8 as a day devoted to women's rights and international peace (Gillis, 2017). Contemporary social transformations have also produced substantial changes in relations between women and men, particularly in societies where women's access to education and economic participation has increased considerably. As women have entered spheres previously dominated primarily by men, traditional boundaries in the gendered division of labor have gradually weakened (Secretariat of the National, 2008).

An examination of transformations at national and global levels within the assumptions of globalization demonstrates that the process operates principally across the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Technological developments in media and communications have strengthened cultural and political awareness globally and contributed to the emergence of a form of "shared global consciousness." Women, drawing on this shared awareness generated through information systems and visual and communication media, have developed increasingly similar behavioral patterns and social orientations in areas such as clothing, nutrition, fertility, and literacy. Within this context, the concept of political globalism has also emerged, seeking common global solutions through international organizations and universal rules for the formation of a global civil society (Ghezelsofloo, 2000). Nevertheless, strengthening mechanisms for implementing human rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf faces serious challenges. Following World War II and the establishment of the United Nations, numerous measures were undertaken to prevent human-rights violations. The drafting of international instruments, clarification of human-rights concepts, establishment of treaty obligations for states, and creation of monitoring and implementation institutions have been among the most important of these measures. Yet, apart from mechanisms with comparatively stronger enforcement capacity in particular domains, many international monitoring mechanisms lack direct and effective instruments for compelling states to comply. This structural weakness has allowed human-rights violations in some countries, particularly states possessing substantial economic and political power, to continue without proportionate consequences (Mehrpour, 2009).

International human-rights instruments may generally be divided, from a legal perspective, into declarations and treaties. Although declarations articulate fundamental principles and concepts of human rights, they do not ordinarily possess the same level of direct legal binding force as treaties and more commonly represent normative aspirations and political or moral commitments. Treaties, by contrast, once ratified or acceded to by states, create international legal obligations and engage states' responsibility under international law.

Within this framework, CEDAW occupies a distinctive position because it commits states to reform discriminatory legislation and adopt effective policies for realizing gender equality. Although the possibility of entering reservations has facilitated state accession, the breadth of certain reservations may in practice restrict achievement of the Convention's principal objectives. Nevertheless, United Nations monitoring mechanisms, through reporting procedures and specialized review, remain important instruments for strengthening a culture of legal accountability at the global level (Mehrpour, 2009).

Nongovernmental organizations also constitute an important component of global civil society and have played an active role in promoting and protecting human rights. Through education, awareness-raising, advocacy for legislative reform, and monitoring implementation of human-rights obligations, these organizations contribute to strengthening human-rights culture (Gholami, 2018). In the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, civil society organizations may likewise, where sufficient space for activity exists, function as intermediaries between society and government in identifying and pursuing citizens' rights-based demands (Ramezani & Mashhadi, 2015). Within this framework, the human-rights regime operates as a transnational network in which governmental and nongovernmental actions become interconnected and human rights emerge as a form of "global public policy" (Sharif Shahi & Jalali, 2012).

Overall, the globalization of human rights has transformed human dignity into a transnational concern, enhanced the position of human-rights norms within the international system, and compelled states to consider normative and humanitarian considerations alongside power-oriented interests. Despite weaknesses in

enforcement, contemporary global human-rights requirements have created a normative framework from which states, including the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, cannot entirely distance themselves and with which they are compelled, at least at the level of discourse and legislation, to demonstrate some degree of alignment. Nevertheless, the practical realization of these norms remains dependent on political and cultural structures and the genuine degree of governmental commitment. New forms of global solidarity among women, although strengthening transnational networks and shared discourse, still require more favorable political and cultural conditions and more constructive engagement with traditional institutions in order to generate sustainable structural and institutional transformation.

11. Expansion of Monitoring Mechanisms for Women's Rights with Emphasis on the Domestic Incorporation of Global Women's Rights

With respect to obligations concerning women's rights and in order to ensure that states undertake positive and effective measures to fulfill their duties, international human-rights instruments have established a range of monitoring mechanisms. Among the most important are specialized treaty-monitoring committees that have developed since the 1960s and have provided an institutional basis for supervising states' implementation of their international obligations.

The most important of these bodies include the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1966); the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under CEDAW (1979); the Committee against Torture under the Convention against Torture (1984); the Committee on the Rights of the Child under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the Committee on Migrant Workers under the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990). The Optional Protocol to CEDAW additionally provides, within the international system, a mechanism through which certain individual communications may be submitted. Alongside these treaty bodies, special declarations such as the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) and the Declaration on

Human Rights Defenders (1998) have contributed to clarifying states' obligations and increasing public awareness of individual rights. Furthermore, working groups and special rapporteurs that engage directly with state practices investigate alleged violations and submit reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council and General Assembly (Raei, 2012).

Nevertheless, although these international monitoring mechanisms are institutionally significant, their operation in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf encounters challenges relating to national sovereignty, political structure, and interpretive considerations. In certain instances, these states have accepted instruments such as CEDAW subject to reservations concerning provisions regarded as related to domestic law and personal status, thereby limiting the impact of international supervisory bodies on foundational areas of domestic law.

The influence of these mechanisms in the region may therefore be described as dual. On the one hand, international human-rights institutions constitute important instruments of reputational and diplomatic pressure and may encourage governments to undertake reforms in order to preserve their international standing and reputation. On the other hand, reports issued by committees and working groups can provide important resources for domestic activists and social networks seeking to frame their demands in accordance with global standards.

Accordingly, domestic incorporation of global women's-rights standards in these countries occurs not through an international coercive legal authority but primarily through diplomatic pressure, international monitoring, public awareness, and domestic processes of rights-claiming. Nevertheless, unless these pressures generate structural change in civil and family legislation, monitoring mechanisms can, at best, identify and document inequalities and cannot independently eradicate them.

12. Attention to Enhancing Women's Participatory Rights and Social Advancement

The status of women constitutes one of the most fundamental issues in any human society, and the structure and level of development of a society cannot be adequately understood without examining women's position and status within it. Analysis of women's social

life, beyond gender characteristics, is in fact an analysis of human social life as a whole. Women's value and social standing may serve as indicators of the level of societal development, such that examination of the dimensions of women's lives reflects not only the distribution of equal opportunities but also the extent of respect accorded to individuals' inherent and acquired capabilities irrespective of ascriptive criteria such as sex or ethnicity. Within such an environment, women may achieve substantial social mobility and advancement through their capabilities, efforts, and participation in social life (Astaraki, 2009).

Women's status in society reflects the values and images through which public culture conceptualizes women's roles. Patterns of interaction, customs and traditions, collective beliefs, literature, and even culturally embedded proverbs and expressions may all reveal societal attitudes toward women's social standing. Despite legal advances, differences in the social positions of women and men remain evident in many historical and contemporary societies and have become central concerns of contemporary movements and theoretical discourses concerning gender equality.

As Garrett emphasizes, social differences between the sexes are not exclusively natural but are to a significant extent constructed by human thought and culture and possess a historical and social character that may be analyzed through interdisciplinary approaches (Garrett, 2001). Advancement of women's legal and social status has historically encountered diverse barriers and restrictions. Such barriers sometimes appear in the form of longstanding traditions and at other times through cultural or religious interpretations, marginalizing women as a "social Other" within the public sphere.

As a result of this historical marginalization, many women have been deprived of opportunities for active participation in social and cultural life, thereby limiting a significant component of societies' human capacity. Even where formal opportunities for participation exist, women may continue to encounter structural barriers to achieving meaningful involvement in decision-making spheres. Power has historically been distributed unequally in many societies, with political and economic decision-making structures largely controlled by men. Nevertheless, the social and political transformations of the twentieth century, particularly the expansion of egalitarian discourse and international reform, created

conditions for women's emergence at higher levels of decision-making. Proportionate and effective participation by women in social institutions constitutes an important indicator of the effectiveness of civil structures and the sustainable stability of social systems. Women's role in the human and ethical development of societies should therefore be understood not merely as complementary but as productive and strategic, intertwined with their human, cultural, and social capacities (Sheibani & Majedi, 2016).

The role of power in strengthening women's participation may be interpreted through two principal theoretical approaches: the structural-functionalist perspective, which analyzes participation within the framework of maintaining structural equilibrium, and the critical perspective, which interprets participation as requiring reconsideration and redistribution of power relations (Samadi Rad, 2006).

13. Structural-Functionalist Theory

This perspective regards social continuity as dependent on cooperation among members and consensus regarding fundamental values and identifies institutions such as the family, school, and state as mechanisms sustaining social equilibrium. Parsons analyzed the functional transformation of the family through a gendered division of labor in which men perform managerial roles and women assume responsibility for childrearing. Gender-role analyses have similarly linked social roles to biological differences. Within this approach, major transformations are generally regarded as arising from internal and micro-level factors, and the foundations of participation are sought in a society's culture and collective mentality (Samadi Rad, 2006).

14. Critical Theory

The critical approach emerged in response to criticisms of structural functionalism and encompasses both sociological conflict theory and feminist studies. The former, through critique of power relations, conceptualizes participation as a process through which subordinated groups may challenge unequal relations. The latter, through criticism of patriarchal relations, identifies transformation of power structures as a prerequisite for broader participation by women. From this perspective, participation is directly connected to

the distribution of power within the social system, and increasing the power of marginalized groups can enhance their public participation. Feminist discourse similarly links participation to gender relations and criticizes mainstream sociology for neglecting women's lived experiences (Samadi Rad, 2006).

On this basis, women's participation in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf may to a considerable extent be understood as managed within a structural-functionalist framework, with governments often emphasizing incremental change and limited reform rather than redistribution of power. Unless this approach evolves toward reconsideration of power relations and strengthening of effective participation, women's participatory rights are unlikely to become fully institutionalized and will remain significantly dependent on governmental will and decision-making.

15. Domestic Factors Affecting Reform of Systems for Protecting Women's Rights in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf

An examination of women's rights in the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia—as the target population of the present study requires analysis of the complex interaction between these states' domestic structures and global human-rights norms. Until approximately the last three decades, women in these countries, under the influence of traditional tribal, cultural, and religious structures, possessed relatively restricted civil and social rights in certain areas. Following the institutionalization of the global women's-rights regime and the expansion of regional and international interaction, however, women's status has undergone significant transformations. These transformations have occurred not only in legislation but also at discursive and cultural levels.

Domestic factors affecting reform of women's-rights protection systems reflect the manner in which traditional power structures respond, adapt, and selectively absorb external normative pressures. These factors include the cultural context of interaction with the wider world, the degree of alignment between domestic legislation and global women's-rights standards, and structural differences among the countries under study.

Cultural globalization refers to the process through which values, norms, and cultural patterns are shared or transmitted across national borders. In the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, this process has operated primarily through media, social networks, political and economic interaction, and international treaties, contributing to the transmission and reinterpretation of certain global norms, including human-rights standards.

Within this context, cultural interaction between the dominant global order and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf is sometimes perceived as asymmetrical and unidirectional. A "top-down" orientation on the part of core states in the global system, supported by their economic, military, and political advantages, may present their culture as a normative model and expect peripheral states to move toward that model. Arab culture, which in Arabic scholarship encompasses a collection of spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional characteristics including ways of life, traditions, beliefs, arts, and customs, differs in certain areas from liberal conceptions embedded in global human-rights discourse.

Given that Arab cultural perspectives did not exercise proportionate influence over the formulation of certain principal norms of international law, cultural relations between these states and the global system are sometimes perceived less as an equal dialogue among cultures and more as a relationship of external influence. Nevertheless, traditional structures in the Persian Gulf states do not passively accept this process but instead engage in selective absorption.

Cultural changes concerning women, such as increased participation in employment, are more readily accepted when aligned with states' economic development objectives. By contrast, reforms that directly challenge male-centered power structures in the private sphere, such as family laws or male guardianship, encounter greater resistance and may be restricted through particular religious interpretations. Nevertheless, expanding communication and greater interaction with the international system have gradually transformed societal and governmental attitudes toward women's roles. This transformation may be understood as an incremental process whose pace and depth remain substantially dependent on the political will of rulers and the institutional capacities of each country.

Women's participation in the political and social spheres of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf has likewise historically been influenced by governmental perspectives and conservative religious-political currents. Because of monarchical or hereditary systems and concentrated political authority, these countries have generally provided relatively restricted domestic political space for independent civil society and activism. Nevertheless, the last two decades have witnessed a more strategic approach toward women's presence in social and, to some extent, political relations.

This approach may be interpreted through the concept of "modernization without democratization," according to which states, in pursuit of development objectives and in response to international reputational pressures, implement legal reforms in areas such as public law, employment, and women's social participation. Such measures have generated controlled openings in the public sphere and increased women's formal participation in universities, the workforce, and certain governmental positions.

Nevertheless, a substantial gap persists between global women's-rights standards, which emphasize structural equality and non-discrimination in all spheres, particularly the private sphere, and the domestic legal systems of these countries. Recent positive reforms have predominantly occurred in areas aligned with macroeconomic interests, national development programs, and Vision 2030 initiatives and that do not directly challenge the political system.

By contrast, the core areas of inequality—personal-status laws shaped by traditional jurisprudential interpretations governing concepts such as guardianship, divorce, inheritance, and child custody—remain, in many instances, distant from global standards. Consequently, women's domestic rights in the Persian Gulf states exist in a dual condition: in the public sphere, including education and employment, movement toward selected global standards has proceeded more rapidly, whereas in the private and foundational sphere of family and guardianship-related law, traditional structures and established interpretations continue to play a decisive role. This lack of alignment constitutes one of the most important domestic barriers to reforming systems for protecting women's rights.

16. General Overview of Women's Rights in Arab Countries

Women's legal and social status differs considerably across Arab societies. According to the data used in the present study, the dates on which selected Arab countries acceded to CEDAW are as follows:

Table 1

Accession of Arab Countries to CEDAW (Ali, 2019)

No.	Country	Year of Accession
1	Egypt	1981
2	Yemen	1984
3	Tunisia	1985
4	Iraq	1986
5	Libya	1989
6	Jordan	1992
7	Morocco	1993
8	Kuwait	1994
9	Algeria	1996
10	Lebanon	1997
11	Saudi Arabia	2000
12	Mauritania	2001
13	Bahrain and Syria	2002
14	United Arab Emirates	2004

17. Women's Rights at the Center of Contestation in Arab Countries

At the time of accession to CEDAW, most Arab states issued declarations or entered reservations excluding the full or partial application of certain provisions. The principal areas of disagreement concerned Article 2 of the Convention, personal-status rights, nationality, and women's political rights. While accepting the general principle of protecting women's rights, Arab states raised qualifications concerning the full incorporation and interpretation of such rights, particularly where they were considered related to particular understandings of Islamic Sharia, and emphasized preservation of their religious and cultural distinctiveness within the global human-rights regime (Ali, 2019).

On the basis of the preceding discussion, the status of women's citizenship rights in the Persian Gulf monarchies is not merely the result of an absence of legal instruments or lack of knowledge of international standards but is produced through a structural overlap among political authority, interpretive traditions, and tribal social orders. Accession by Arab states to international conventions has, in some instances, remained at the level of "symbolic compliance" and has

not been accompanied by the institutional commitment required for structural implementation.

The concentration of disagreement in the field of personal status demonstrates that women's rights in certain areas have not yet become fully detached from traditional frameworks and ideological and political considerations. Moreover, the discursive gap between imported forms of feminism and indigenous Islamic approaches to women's rights represents an additional factor complicating the development of sustainable domestic discourses on women's-rights reform.

Ultimately, realization of women's citizenship rights in the Persian Gulf monarchies requires movement from symbolic to structural reform, reconsideration of personal-status legislation, strengthening of independent civil society institutions, and development of an indigenous discourse on women's rights grounded in human dignity, gender justice, and international human-rights obligations. Otherwise, the gap between formal commitments and women's lived realities will continue to be reproduced.

18. Comparative Examination of Women's Rights in the Selected Persian Gulf States

Following the analytical framework of the study and the elaboration of theoretical, legal, and institutional foundations concerning women's rights within global and Arab human-rights systems, it is necessary to examine women's rights in the selected Persian Gulf states on a country-specific and comparative basis. Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia were selected because they combine significant structural commonalities with institutional, political, and legal differences in their approaches to women's rights, thereby permitting meaningful comparison and identification of intra-regional variation (Mansouri Moghadam & Lari Monfared, 2021).

On the one hand, these countries possess political structures based on hereditary monarchies or emirates; on the other hand, they have undergone gradual transformations in women's rights in recent decades under the influence of globalization, interaction with the international system, and obligations arising from human-rights instruments (Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014). Nevertheless, the intensity, depth, and character of these changes have differed across the six countries and have been shaped by combinations of legal, cultural, religious,

economic, and security factors. Consequently, analysis of women's status in these states requires simultaneous examination of existing laws, their implementation mechanisms, and the prevailing socio-cultural context (Mousavi, 2016).

In this section, women's rights in each of the selected countries are examined separately and systematically according to the following dimensions:

18.1. Women's Legal Status and Rights

This dimension includes constitutional provisions, civil and criminal legislation, particularly personal-status laws, the status of the principle of gender equality within domestic legal systems, the degree of conformity of national laws with CEDAW, and the nature and scope of reservations entered by states. The review indicates that all six countries have acceded to the Convention, but broad reservations, particularly in relation to family, marriage, and nationality, have restricted the scope of these commitments and in certain instances have produced a form of "symbolic acceptance" (Ali, 2019; Mousavi, 2016).

18.2. Political Rights and Women's Participation in Power Structures

This dimension encompasses voting rights, eligibility to stand for election, women's presence in parliaments, consultative councils, governments, and decision-making positions, as well as formal and informal obstacles to women's political participation. Existing evidence indicates that women's formal presence in political institutions does not necessarily signify effective participation in decision-making and that power structures, restrictions on political organization, and political culture may reduce women's participation to a symbolic level (Noruzi & Ghorbani, 2017; Shokoohi, 2021).

18.3. Educational Rights and Women's Position in Higher Education

This dimension includes girls' and women's access to primary, secondary, and university education, literacy, women's participation in universities, their representation in specialized and scientific disciplines, and the role of higher education in improving women's social and economic position. The expansion of women's

higher education constitutes one of the most visible indicators of transformation in these countries and has been aligned with national development strategies and Vision 2030 programs (Ben Brik, 2025).

18.4. Women's Economic Status and Employment Rights

This dimension covers women's economic participation rates, employment legislation, wages, job security, employment in public and private sectors, informal work, domestic work, and cultural and legal restrictions affecting women's employment. Economic and employment-related domains have undergone reform more rapidly than civil and political domains, suggesting a pattern of "selective reform," whereby governments initially reform areas carrying lower political costs while generating greater economic and international benefits (Khalaf, 2022; Kodoth, 2025).

18.5. Family Rights, Guardianship, and Legal Dependency

This dimension encompasses guardianship systems where applicable, women's rights in marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, maintenance, and guardianship, and the role of these rules in reproducing or reducing women's legal dependency. Personal-status laws influenced by traditional jurisprudential interpretations remain, in many instances, inconsistent with global standards and constitute one of the principal areas of gender inequality (Abedi & Amini, 2021; Samadi Rad, 2006).

18.6. Social and Civil Rights and Individual Freedoms

This dimension includes freedom of movement, choice of residence, access to public services, participation in civil society institutions, and the degree of legal and customary control over women's bodies, behavior, and

lifestyles. Patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender roles may impede implementation of protective legislation and make sustainable protection of women's rights dependent on gradual cultural reform and enhanced legal literacy (Pahlavani & Golestani, 2016).

Each dimension is examined in order to identify the gap between governments' formal commitments and women's lived realities. At the same time, the analysis seeks to highlight intra-regional differences among the selected countries and thereby avoid presenting a homogeneous or stereotypical account of women's status in the Persian Gulf (Mansouri Moghadam & Lari Monfared, 2021). Ultimately, this comparative analysis provides the basis for the final assessment of the need to reconstruct systems for protecting women's rights and for identifying reform strategies appropriate to indigenous contexts within the framework of international human-rights standards (Mousavi, 2016; Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014).

19. Comparative Examination of Women's Rights in the Arab States of the Persian Gulf

Although the Arab states of the Persian Gulf share significant cultural, religious, and historical characteristics, they have followed different trajectories in institutionalizing women's rights and aligning domestic systems with international human-rights standards. These differences arise from varying levels of economic development, political systems, degrees of interaction with the international system, and the reformability of legal and social structures. Comparative examination demonstrates that "accession to international instruments" does not necessarily mean "effective implementation of obligations" and that, in many instances, a structural gap exists between legal commitments and women's social realities.

Table 2

Status of Accession to International Women's-Rights Instruments

Country	CEDAW Membership	Extent of Reservations	Practical Level of Compliance
Bahrain	Yes	Moderate	Moderate
Kuwait	Yes	Extensive, particularly regarding family matters	Weak to moderate
Oman	Yes	Extensive	Weak
Qatar	Yes	Extensive	Moderate
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Very extensive	Weak
United Arab Emirates	Yes	Moderate	Moderate to relatively high

Almost all countries under review have acceded to CEDAW; however, broad reservations, particularly concerning family, marriage, nationality, and gender

roles, have reduced the effectiveness of these commitments. This situation reflects a form of “symbolic acceptance” of international women’s-rights law.

Table 2

Comparison of Women’s Civil, Political, and Economic Rights

Country	Women’s Political Participation	Employment Status	Equal Pay	Family Laws
Bahrain	Limited	Moderate	Incomplete	Tradition-oriented
Kuwait	Limited	Moderate	Incomplete	Discriminatory
Oman	Very limited	Limited	Weak	Tradition-oriented
Qatar	Limited	Moderate	Incomplete	Discriminatory
Saudi Arabia	Very limited	Increasing	Weak	Highly restrictive
United Arab Emirates	Controlled but visible	High	Relatively better	Reformed but unequal

Overall, economic and employment-related areas have undergone reform more rapidly than civil and political domains. This reflects a pattern of “selective reform,”

whereby governments initially reform sectors that involve lower political costs and offer greater economic and international benefits.

Table 3

Comparison of Institutional and Social Support for Women

Country	Legal Employment Protection	Maternity Protection	Women’s Social Security	Support Institutions
Bahrain	Moderate	Limited	Weak	Partially active
Kuwait	Moderate	Limited	Weak	Limited
Oman	Weak	Very limited	Weak	Weak
Qatar	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Limited
Saudi Arabia	Transitional	Weak	Weak	State-centered and controlled
United Arab Emirates	Relatively strong	Incomplete	Moderate	Active but state-centered

The findings of the comparative review indicate that weakness of independent civil society institutions and the predominance of state-centered and regulatory mechanisms constitute major obstacles to sustainable social protection for women in the countries under study. This institutional weakness remains observable even in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, which have developed more extensive support structures, because institutional protection remains predominantly managerial and top-down, with limited opportunities for independent civil society participation. Comparative analysis of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf demonstrates that, despite profound cultural and religious commonalities, their policies concerning women’s rights may be classified into three distinct patterns:

19.1. *Minimal and Tradition-Oriented Model*

This model is most visible in Oman and Saudi Arabia, particularly in the sphere of family law. Emphasis on traditional interpretations of religious sources, structural resistance to certain legal reforms, and a

minimalist approach to legislative change constitute its principal characteristics.

19.2. *Intermediate and Symbolic Model*

Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain may be located within this model. These countries have introduced limited and fragmented legislative reforms, but implementation remains incomplete and the institutionalization of reform has not been fully achieved.

19.3. *Controlled-Transition Model*

The United Arab Emirates falls within this model. Through a managerial approach to legal reform, the country has facilitated substantial progress in women’s economic and social status; nevertheless, women’s political participation remains situated within controlled institutional parameters.

Two common elements can be identified across all three models: first, a persistent gap between law and implementation; and second, the predominance of political and cultural considerations over human-rights requirements. These two elements demonstrate that the principal problem in these countries is not merely a

shortage of legal norms, but also the absence of sufficiently effective mechanisms for transforming legal rules into social realities.

On the basis of the present analysis, the fundamental challenges facing women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf may be examined at three levels: insufficient institutional commitment, weakness of effective implementation mechanisms, and absence of an adequately localized theoretical framework for interpreting and applying human rights. Accession to international instruments without simultaneous reform of cultural, educational, and judicial structures may produce a form of "formalized women's rights" that functions more as a symbolic and political instrument than as a mechanism of women's empowerment and may, in some circumstances, serve the management of states' international image rather than the full realization of gender equality.

From the perspective of interdependence theory, women's-rights policymaking in these countries is significantly influenced by pressures originating in the international system, requirements of the global economy, and considerations of external legitimacy. Consequently, reforms have primarily occurred in domains linked to labor markets, foreign investment, and enhancement of states' international image, whereas more sensitive areas such as family, political participation, and structural gender justice have been less exposed to fundamental reform because of their direct relationship with traditional social order.

Overall, reconstructing systems for protecting women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf will be possible only if four essential conditions are realized simultaneously: first, recognition of human rights as an obligatory rather than selectively applicable normative system; second, differentiation between cultural and traditional interpretations of religion and the foundational texts and overarching objectives of Sharia; third, strengthening independent protective institutions and accountability mechanisms; and fourth, integrating legal reforms with social and educational transformation so that new norms become embedded in the cultural and institutional contexts of the societies concerned.

20. Conclusion

The globalization of human rights, as one of the most significant normative and discursive transformations of

recent decades, has affected the traditional boundaries of national sovereignty and confronted the legal and political systems of different states, including the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, with fundamental questions concerning the relationship between global norms and indigenous legal and cultural orders. Women's rights occupy a distinctive place in this context because they simultaneously lie at the intersection of global human-rights discourse, Islamic Sharia, domestic legislation, institutional structures, and social norms.

The present comparative study of Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia demonstrates that the globalization of human rights has had three principal effects on systems for protecting women's rights in these countries: first, expansion of the global discourse of women's rights and the creation of international legitimacy for asserting such rights; second, increased pressure on governments to reform domestic legislation and reconsider certain reservations to international instruments; and third, creation of social and economic conditions facilitating broader participation by women in education, employment, and decision-making (Mousavi, 2016; Rafiei & Dabbaghi, 2014).

Nevertheless, the principal finding of the study concerns the gap among the "recognized right," the "claimable right," and the "realized right." All countries examined have acceded to CEDAW, but broad reservations, particularly in matters concerning equality within the family and domestic legal arrangements, have in certain cases restricted implementation of these commitments and generated a form of "symbolic acceptance" (Ali, 2019). This finding is consistent with Mousavi (2016), who demonstrates that acceptance or ratification of international instruments alone is insufficient to generate social and legal transformation and that the gap between formal commitments and national implementation remains one of the principal barriers to realization of women's rights (Mousavi, 2016). At the level of Arabic-language scholarship, Sharif (2023), through an examination of Arab women's rights in the context of globalization, likewise highlights the gap between global recognition of women's rights and their social realization and identifies traditional and patriarchal attitudes as contributing factors (Sharif, 2023).

Comparative examination of the six countries reveals three distinct models: a minimal and tradition-oriented model in Oman and Saudi Arabia, particularly in the family sphere; an intermediate and symbolic model in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain; and a controlled-transition model in the United Arab Emirates. The first model is characterized by the continuing role of traditional interpretations and structural resistance; the second by limited legislative reforms, incomplete implementation, and insufficient institutionalization; and the third by managed legal reform and improvements in women's economic position while political participation remains situated within restricted and controlled frameworks.

The common element across all three models is the "gap between law and implementation" and the "predominance of political and cultural considerations over human-rights requirements." This finding is consistent with research emphasizing that women's participation in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf remains substantially shaped by structural-functionalist approaches, with governments tending to prioritize gradual change and limited reform rather than redistribution of power (Samadi Rad, 2006).

One of the most important findings of the study is the prevalence of a "selective reform" model in the countries examined. Economic and employment-related areas have undergone reform more rapidly than civil and political spheres. This suggests that governments initially reform areas that entail lower political costs while simultaneously producing greater economic and international benefits. Ben Brik (2025), in examining women's empowerment policy in Qatar, demonstrates that reforms affecting women have gradually been institutionalized within Qatar National Vision 2030; legal and social reform therefore need not proceed through direct confrontation with traditional structures but may be pursued through gradual and development-oriented policies (Ben Brik, 2025).

Nevertheless, the core domains of inequality—personal-status laws shaped by traditional jurisprudential interpretations governing concepts such as guardianship, divorce, inheritance, and child custody—remain, in many instances, distant from global standards. This finding is consistent with research emphasizing the possibility of employing justice-oriented jurisprudential interpretations to strengthen women's agency within

family law (Abedi & Amini, 2021; Jafari & Khajvand, 2022).

In the political sphere, the findings demonstrate that women's formal presence in official institutions does not necessarily amount to effective participation in decision-making. Power structures, restrictions on political organization, political culture, and lack of independence among civil society institutions may reduce women's participation to a symbolic level. Noruzi and Ghorbani (2017), in examining women's political participation in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, demonstrate that effective participation is not merely a function of formal law and that power structures, political culture, and genuine opportunities for participation in the public sphere play an important role (Noruzi & Ghorbani, 2017). Shokoohi (2021), in examining feminist resistance in Kuwait, likewise characterizes women's activism as a gradual and negotiation-oriented process and demonstrates that women can influence public discourse and redefine their social roles through social and political activism (Shokoohi, 2021). Arabic-language studies similarly identify traditional culture, weak party structures, legal barriers, and social restrictions as major obstacles to effective participation (Boumaraf, 2017; Mansour, 2020; Muhammad, 2019).

Regarding violence against women, the study demonstrates that although the enactment of legislation and establishment of protective institutions in certain countries indicate increasing formal attention to the issue, weak reporting mechanisms, fear of familial consequences, restricted access to shelters and support services, and inadequate enforcement continue to impede effective protection of victims. Malekshah (2025), in "Human Rights Violations in Domestic Violence against Women," characterizes domestic violence as a social, legal, and cultural phenomenon and a violation of women's fundamental rights, emphasizing legislative reform, public education, enhanced legal awareness, and women's empowerment (Malekshah, 2025). Mahadew (2025) likewise highlights the persistence of domestic violence and the gap between law and implementation even in contexts where advanced legal frameworks are formally available (Mahadew, 2025).

The status of migrant women in the Persian Gulf states constitutes another major finding. Migrant women, particularly those employed in domestic and care work,

are more vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and rights violations because of residency dependency, restrictions associated with the kafala system, and limited access to legal representation and judicial services. Kodoth (2025), in examining paternalist governance and women's labor mobility in the Middle East, emphasizes the role of restrictive labor-migration regulations and practices in increasing women's legal and occupational vulnerability and demonstrates that economic globalization may reproduce inequalities in the absence of legal and institutional reform (Kodoth, 2025). Mehdiyeva (2025), through a study of marital dissolution in a transnational context, likewise examines the combined influence of Iranian law, Qatari law, Islamic Sharia, the kafala system, and economic pressures and demonstrates that legal pluralism may create compounded inequalities and vulnerabilities for migrant women (Mehdiyeva, 2025).

From the perspective of interdependence theory, women's-rights policies in the countries examined are substantially influenced by pressures within the international system, the requirements of the global economy, and concerns regarding external legitimacy. Consequently, reforms have predominantly occurred in areas connected with labor markets, foreign investment, and states' international image rather than in more sensitive domains such as family, political participation, and structural gender justice. This finding is consistent with research indicating that globalization has created new conditions in international relations and substantially blurred the boundary between power-oriented and norm-oriented politics (Goudarzi & Kaffash Neyri, 2019).

On the basis of the findings, reconstructing systems for protecting women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf requires realization of the following conditions:

First, human rights must be recognized as an obligatory rather than selective normative framework. As long as international human-rights norms are not treated as binding legal obligations and governments can restrict their implementation through broad invocations of national sovereignty or cultural interpretation, the gap between formal commitments and women's lived realities will persist. Wellman (2019), from a theoretical perspective, regards women's rights as an inseparable component of human rights and identifies dignity,

freedom, equality, and non-discrimination as their foundational principles (Wellman, 2019). Montazeri (2017) likewise discusses the possibility of convergence between international human rights law and Islamic legal systems, provided that such convergence is based on precise interpretation appropriate to legal and cultural contexts (Montazeri, 2017).

Second, cultural and traditional interpretations of religion must be distinguished from the foundational texts and overarching objectives of Sharia. Research indicates that meaningful dialogue and convergence between international human rights and Islamic legal systems are possible and that a substantial proportion of historical restrictions affecting women may be rooted in social and cultural interpretation rather than necessarily in foundational principles of Sharia (Fallahi, 2021; Montazeri, 2017; Safari et al., 2023). Fallahi (2021), through a maqāṣid-oriented reading of Tahar al-Haddad, regards social justice, human dignity, and the overarching objectives of Sharia as foundations for reconsidering traditional understandings of women's rights (Fallahi, 2021). Justice-oriented and maqāṣid-based jurisprudential interpretations may therefore create opportunities for family-law reform without departure from the framework of Sharia.

Third, independent protective institutions and accountability mechanisms must be strengthened. Weakness of independent civil society institutions and the predominance of state-centered and regulatory mechanisms represent major obstacles to sustainable social protection for women in the countries examined. Waheedi (2022), in examining women's-rights litigation within Gulf monarchical systems, identifies judicial independence and the balance of political power as decisive factors in transforming formal rights into claimable rights and demonstrates that legislation alone cannot guarantee protection where judicial capacity, independence, and genuine access to justice are insufficient (Waheedi, 2022).

The experience of countries such as the United Arab Emirates demonstrates that institutional support, even where substantial reforms have occurred, may remain predominantly managerial and top-down and may lack complete independence. Strengthening nongovernmental organizations, establishing independent monitoring institutions, enhancing judicial capacity, and guaranteeing women's access to justice are

therefore essential requirements for reforming systems of women's-rights protection.

Fourth, legal reforms must be accompanied by social and educational transformations. Sustainable protection of women's rights requires gradual cultural reform, enhancement of legal literacy, expansion of public education, and increased participation by women themselves in legal and policy reform processes. Patriarchal attitudes, traditional gender roles, and prioritization of male authority within the family may obstruct implementation of protective laws. Sustainable reform therefore requires cultural transformation, expansion of legal awareness, stronger civil society institutions, and increased participation of women in law- and policymaking processes (Pahlavani & Golestani, 2016). Kalaivani (2025) likewise emphasizes the importance of women's education and economic independence and the role of gradual cultural reform in their empowerment (Kalaivani, 2025).

Ultimately, the present study demonstrates that the globalization of human rights should be understood as an interactive process in which international norms, domestic legislation, judicial and executive institutions, governmental policies, civil society, and cultural transformation mutually influence one another. Global norms do not enter domestic legal systems automatically or uniformly but through internal processes of acceptance, interpretation, adaptation, and localization. Accordingly, the impact of globalization on women's rights in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf requires a three-level approach in which the legislative level—including legal reform and reduction of reservations—the institutional level—including strengthening the judiciary, policymaking mechanisms, and civil society institutions—and the cultural level—including transformation of social norms and attitudes—advance simultaneously and complementarily.

Such an approach conceptualizes the globalization of human rights not as a substitute for domestic reform but as a facilitating factor in reconstructing systems for protecting women's rights in the countries under study. Otherwise, the gap between formal commitments and women's lived realities will continue to be reproduced, and women's rights, even where legislative reform continues, may remain largely symbolic and political rather than substantively realized.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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