



Muslim Women's Studies

Journal homepage: <https://womenstudy.abu.ac.ir/>



A Study of the Jurisprudential Arguments Concerning the Political Participation of Women at the Elite Level

Elham Vahidi,¹ Mohaddeseh Babaei,²  DOI: 10.22034/MWS.2024.729884

1- Assistant Professor, Department of Women's Studies, Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Ahlul Bayt International University, Tehran, Iran.

2- Master's Student in Women's Studies, Ahlul Bayt International University, Tehran, Iran.

* **Corresponding author:** poorabdollah @ut.ac.ir

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 17 April 2024

Revised: 18 April 2024

Accepted: 1 May 2024

Keywords:

Women's political participation, Shi'i jurisprudence, Political management, Political elites, Women's rights in Islam.

ABSTRACT

The question of women's participation at the highest levels of political leadership has been one of the contentious issues within Twelver Shi'i jurisprudence and has long been the subject of divergent opinions among religious scholars. This study, employing a qualitative approach and thematic analysis, investigates the views of contemporary Shi'i jurists by consulting authoritative jurisprudential texts and conducting semi-structured interviews with researchers in the field regarding the permissibility of women holding senior governmental offices. In the first part, the pertinent jurisprudential foundations are introduced based on recognized sources of Shi'i law and then analyzed; in the second part, the perspectives of researchers are collected and evaluated through thematic analysis of the interviews. The findings indicate that Shi'i jurisprudence does not adopt an absolutely prohibitive stance toward women's political participation at senior managerial levels, and affirmative interpretations are possible within its framework. Moreover, contemporary Shi'i thinkers disagree on this matter: some, citing jurisprudential principles and religious foundations, regard women's assumption of high offices as permissible, while others consider it incompatible with certain religious and customary requisites. However, because the prohibition of holding such offices is not established as an incontrovertible juristic certainty, it is not possible to issue a definitive ruling declaring it categorically impermissible.

E-ISSN: 000-000

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How to cite this article:

E. Vahidi, M. Babaei, (2024). A Study of the Jurisprudential Arguments Concerning the Political Participation of Women at the Elite Level. 1(2), 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.22034/mws.2024.713858>.
Muslim Women's Studies, 1(2), 29-43. <https://doi.org/10.22034/mws.2024.729884>



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1. Introduction

God has conferred no superiority based on sex for either women or men and has designated piety and God-consciousness as the sole criterion of excellence (Qur'ān, 49:13). Consequently, the allocation of social and political offices and responsibilities of any kind depends on ability, knowledge, skill, competence, and merit—not on sex. Nevertheless, examinations of women's positions across social spheres have tended to emphasize their presence in the private domain, and, historically, women's work, responsibilities, and employment outside the home have not been treated as serious matters for public debate. Iranian women began to engage seriously in political participation during the Constitutional Revolution, and subsequently, in 1962 (1341 SH), Iranian women entered modern political participation in earnest by obtaining the right to vote. A significant and pressing question today is whether Islam permits women to assume the highest levels of societal governance: are women allowed to hold the office of head of elective bodies, appointed posts, or ministerial positions? According to prior research, some traditional jurists have opposed women's assumption of judicial and governmental offices on jurisprudential and hadith-based grounds. Shaykh al-Tusi, in *al-Nihāya fī Mujarrad al-Fiqh wa al-Fatāwā*, considers maleness a necessary condition for wilāyah (authority) and rejects women's judicial office (al-Tusi, 1400 AH). Allāma Ḥilli, in *Tadhkirat al-Fuqahā*, invoking consensus (ijmā') and certain traditions, rejects women's service as judges (al-Hilli, 1414 AH). Muḥaqqiq Karaki, in *Jāmi' al-Maqāsid*, citing some traditions, regards female leadership as invalid (al-Karaki, 1408 AH). Ayatollah Khū'ī, in *Mustanad al-'Urwa al-Wuthqā*, considers women's judgeship contrary to consensus and deems it impermissible (al-Khū'ī, 1410 AH).

Ayatollah Golpayegani, in *Hodāyat al-'Ibād*, also prohibits women from holding high governmental offices, citing hadiths and the consensus of jurists (al-Golpayegani, 1414 AH). Consequently, one of the main barriers to women's political participation at the highest managerial levels in the country is the jurisprudentially negative views regarding their presence in these roles. This article aims to critique the interpretations of those who oppose women's political participation at the elite level by consulting the perspectives of researchers in this field and contemporary Shi'i jurists, as well as examining the existing jurisprudential arguments. The objective of this study is to explore the feasibility of women holding senior political positions based on Shi'i jurisprudential evidence and the views of researchers in this area. To achieve this goal, we first seek answers to the following questions:

- Question 1: What is the stance of contemporary Shi'i jurists regarding women's political participation at the elite level, based on jurisprudential evidence?
- Question 2: What are researchers' perspectives and interpretations of the jurisprudential arguments presented by contemporary Shi'i jurists concerning women's political participation at the elite level?

Review of Literature

The concepts of “political participation” and “levels of political participation,” as fundamental elements of this study, necessitate definition and clarification.

Political Participation and Its Indicators

In 1993, the United Nations defined political participation as engagement in the exercise of power—power that has long been concentrated in the hands of certain individuals, groups, and social classes while the populace had no role in the political processes of their society. Active political participation and vigilance regarding one's own fate and that of society is not only a right but also a necessary duty and valued good for the general public and citizens (Ghaffari, 2010 [1389 SH]: 2). Furthermore, Mohseni Tabrizi, citing Lipset, defines political participation as a conscious and purposeful action by individuals and groups with three aims: acquiring political power, sharing in power, and influencing programs and policies (Mohseni Tabrizi, 2004 [1383 SH]: 73). Numerous indicators for measuring political participation have been proposed by scholars in this field. MacClosky includes the following: voting, acquiring political information, discussing political topics, making financial contributions to political activities, attending political meetings, negotiating with representatives, membership in political parties, campaigning for political parties, writing articles and delivering political speeches, participating in political struggles, and competing for election to political and public offices (MacClosky, 1968: 252). Tajzadeh lists

indicators such as voting, seeking information, debating and adopting new ideologies, attending rallies, providing financial support to parties or political activists, communicating with representatives, formally registering with a party, campaigning to collect votes, voter registration, essay writing, public speaking, and competing for party and governmental positions (Tajzadeh, 2002 [1381 SH]: 6).

Theoretical Framework

Women's political participation at the elite level is one of the most significant topics discussed in both political science and Shi'i political jurisprudence. This study primarily focuses on examining the jurisprudential foundations and evidentiary bases for this form of participation. From the perspective of Qur'an and hadiths, verses of the Qur'an that emphasize the principle of consultation (shūrā) (e.g., "and their affair is [one of] consultation among them," (Qur'an 42:38), the practice of bay'ah (pledge of allegiance) ("O Prophet, when the believing women come to you to pledge allegiance to you" Qur'an 60:12), and the injunction to enjoin good and forbid wrong (e.g., Qur'an 3:104) collectively affirm the general basis for political participation. Furthermore, the presence of women in the bay'ah to the Prophet and their involvement in social and political events in early Islam bolster these foundations with historical evidence (Jalali Kondori).

Within jurisprudential (fiqh) premises, principles such as human dignity (karāmah), justice ('adālah), consultation (shūrā), and the presumption of permissibility unless a specific prohibition exists have been invoked by jurists. These principles indicate that women, like men, possess political capacity and rights—unless a specific scriptural reason precludes them.

Contemporary Shi'i jurists' views on women's political participation can be broadly categorized into three groups:

- Affirmative interpreters: Those who, relying on the generality and universality of scriptural evidence, allow women's participation in political spheres such as representation and certain executive offices.
- Partially permissive interpreters: Those who accept the general principle of women's political participation but restrict their eligibility for specific posts—such as judicial positions or supreme political leadership—on jurisprudential grounds.
- Restrictive interpreters: A smaller group of jurists who, by applying narrow interpretations to the religious texts, limit women's political roles primarily to non-managerial domains.

This tripartite classification illustrates that Shi'i jurisprudence does not present a single, monolithic stance on the matter; rather, divergent and at times conflicting interpretations are possible (Morvārid, 2016 [1395 SH]).

Although the core framework of this study is jurisprudential, attention to social-scientific theories can further elucidate the issue. Theories of political participation (for example, MacCloskey's typology, 1968) and political socialization (Verba and Nie, 1972) suggest that obstacles to women's participation are often not solely jurisprudential but frequently social, cultural, and structural (Lipset, 1960; Huntington, 1991). Accordingly, jurisprudential analysis should be conducted in conjunction with these social conditions.

In summary, the theoretical foundations of this research rest on Qur'anic and hadith evidence, principles of Islamic jurisprudence, and the views of Shi'i jurists; furthermore, social-scientific theories are utilized to clarify the social and cultural contexts shaping political participation. This combined framework enables a more comprehensive examination of women's political participation at the elite level.

Studies on women's political participation

A number of studies have been conducted on women's political participation in elite positions. Below, key works closely related to the subject of this study are highlighted.

Table 1: Previous Research

No.	Research Title	Author / Type of Work	Year (Persian calendar)
1	Women's Political Rights in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in Popular (General) Jurisprudence	Tahereh Emami / Thesis	1391
2	Examination of the Issue of a Woman Holding the Office of the Presidency in the Islamic Republic of Iran	Seyyed Mohammad Sadeq Tabatabai, Vahid Ghasemi, Monir Pashami / Article	1390
3	Women's Political Participation in Early Islam	Nahlah Ghavari / Article	1389
4	The Social Determinants of Women's Political Participation in Shi'ism	Karim Khan Mohammadi / Article	1390
5	A Substantive Study of Public Political Participation in the Opinions of the Jurists of the Constitutional and Islamic Revolution Periods	Abdollah Ataei, Sajad Ali Mohammadi, Aref Bashiri / Article	1393
6	Examination of the Jurisprudential Foundations of Women's Political Rights in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran	Gholamreza Behroozi Lak, Maryam Sharifpour / Article	1394
7	Women's Political Rights from the Perspective of Islam and International Human Rights Instruments	Mohammad Jalali / Article	1392
8	The Limits of Women's Political Participation in Islam	Mohammad Mahdi Shamseddini / Book	1376
9	Woman, Religion, and Politics	Zahra Ayatollahi / Book	1381
10	Women's Political Rights in the Constitution of Iran (Before and After the 1368 Revision)	Marziyeh Shoa' Hashemi / Thesis	1389
11	Women's Judging (Female Judges) in the Viewpoints of Opponents and Supporters	Azra Khalili / Article	1385
12	Qur'anic Foundations Permitting Women's Political Participation in the Islamic Revolution	Ali Sharifi / Article	1394
13	Social Rights and Women's Political Participation from the Perspective of Islam	Mahmoud Qayoumzadeh / Article	1387
14	Analyzing Women's Political Participation in the Muslim World: With Emphasis on Egypt	Hasan Ghiyasvand, Khorshid Najafi / Article	1395
15	Theological Principles of Women's Participation in the Process of Political Development	Ahmad Akouchakian, Marziyeh Arabnejad / Article	1389
16	Al-Makahin al-Takaful al-Ijtima'i fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi al-Islami (The Spaces of Social Solidarity in Islamic Political Jurisprudence)	Abolfazl Shokuri / Article	

This research distinguishes itself from prior studies in several fundamental ways.

- Methodological innovation: While most previous investigations into the jurisprudential arguments for women's political participation have relied solely on library methods, confining themselves to the analysis of textual sources, this study employs a *mixed approach* that combines documentary research with semi-structured interviews of scholars in the field. This combined approach allows for a deeper examination of the possibility or impossibility of elite-level political participation by women, drawing on both theoretical and textual data, as well as field data.
- Focus on political elites: Another distinguishing feature of this research is its specific focus on women's elite-level political participation. While the majority of prior studies have examined women's political

participation in general and across multiple levels, this study specifically assesses the feasibility of women's involvement in the highest decision-making echelons and political offices. This focus, along with qualitative data collected through interviews, enhances the depth of analysis and significantly addresses a gap in the literature at this level.

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive-analytical in design and employs a combination of library/documentary techniques and semi-structured interviews. Initially, existing sources were consulted to examine the opinions and jurisprudential arguments presented by proponents and opponents of women's participation in the political management of the country. Subsequently, adhering to the principle of theoretical saturation, 45 individuals were selected through purposive sampling to participate in the study.

- Participants: The interviewees included (1) university professors who, due to their jurisprudential and legal expertise, possess scholarly experience relevant to the research topic, and (2) religious scholars who hold political positions.
- Data analysis: The interview data were analyzed using *thematic analysis*. To validate the findings, participant validation (member checking) with both groups of participants and an audit technique were employed. Member checking involves asking participants to evaluate the overall findings and comment on their accuracy. To ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings, the procedures of coding, conceptualization, and category extraction were reviewed and confirmed by five experts — three specialists in Islamic jurisprudence and two specialists in women's studies and political science — all holding the academic rank of assistant professor or higher. Necessary revisions were made based on their feedback. Conventional techniques for establishing the validity and reliability of the extracted codes were applied to enhance credibility and dependability in qualitative findings; these techniques included: (1) prolonged and sustained engagement; (2) persistent observation; (3) progressive subjectivity (iterative reflexivity); and (4) participant review. In this study, to assess data reliability, not only were the interviews recorded and transcribed accurately, but the concepts as understood by the researcher were also repeatedly presented to respondents during each interview for their review, enabling them to verify and confirm the accuracy of the findings.

1. Findings

This section first explores the legal (*sharʿī*) perspective on women's political participation at the elite level. To address this question, the following issues must be examined:

1. What is the stance of Qur'anic evidence regarding women's political participation at the elite level?
2. What is the stance of hadith evidence regarding women's political participation at the elite level?
3. Is recourse to consensus (*ijmāʿ*) a valid reason for opposing women's political participation at the elite level?
4. Is appeal to the principle (*aṣl*) a valid reason for opposing women's political participation at the elite level?

3-1- The *sharʿī* (scriptural/legislative) view on women's political participation

In this study, "political participation" specifically refers to elite-level involvement, including holding offices and positions in the legislative and executive branches (e.g., the presidency, vice-presidency, ambassadorships, ministerial posts, and directors-general of ministries), as well as membership in institutions such as the Assembly of Experts, the Expediency Discernment Council, and the Constitutional Council. Although earlier periods, including early Islamic history, did not exhibit these modern institutional forms, and classical jurisprudential manuals lacked explicit fatwas regarding women serving as ministers, presidents, or representatives for the aforementioned offices, societal development has led to significant changes in the forms and modalities of participation. Proponents and opponents of women's involvement in the political management of the country have drawn upon the Qur'an, hadiths, consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and legal-principal arguments—often invoking analogies to rulings on judiciary, *marjaʿiyya* (religious reference), and *velāyah* (authority)—to bolster their positions.

A. Qur'anic evidence

1. Qur'ān 27:23 (Sūrah an-Naml): “Indeed, I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a magnificent throne.” The most significant Qur'anic passage addressing women's political participation at the highest level is found in verses 23–44 of Sūrah an-Naml. In these verses, God refers to the presence of a woman in major decision-making and the highest executive responsibility of a polity in an affirmative and approving manner. Commentators, such as in the author of *Al-Mīzān* (vol. 15: pp. 140, 270), interpret these verses as conveying a positive stance on female leadership; had the matter been disapproved by divine law or general prophetic practice, the Qur'ān—consistent with its customary method—would have pointed it out and criticized it. Furthermore, there is no exegetical hadith indicating a discriminatory restriction or a scriptural prohibition regarding this issue, and the exegetes have not treated this verse as establishing a religious limitation on women's participation in high office.
2. Qur'ān 60:12 (Sūrah Al-Mumtahanah): “O Prophet, when the believing women come to you to pledge allegiance that they will not associate anything with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor fabricate falsehoods with their own hands and feet, and will not disobey you in what is right—then accept their pledge and ask forgiveness for them. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.” The bay'ah (pledge of allegiance) is a socio-political covenant between the people and the leader of the community, aimed at consolidating the foundations of governance and providing support to the leadership (Jalali Kondori, 2004 [1383 SH]: 83). Before the establishment of the Islamic polity in Medina, the inhabitants of that region sent delegations twice to represent themselves and pledged allegiance to the Prophet. Women were present in both delegations; indeed, the first 'Aqaba pledge is also referred to as the “women's pledge” (bay'at an-nisa) (Tabatabai, vol. 4: 359). Ibn Sa'd, in the eighth volume of his *Tabaqat al-Kubrā*, lists 489 women among those who participated in the pledges (Ibn Sa'd, vol. 8: pp. 68–76). Another notable pledge involving women occurred during the Conquest of Mecca; women were also present at the pledge associated with the event of Ghadir Khumm, alongside men (Majlisi, vols. 15, 37–38: pp. 370, 140, 219). The cited verse explicitly affirms women's participation in an act that plays a decisive role in the political fate of society and in the reciprocal relationship of command and obedience between rulers and the people. The Prophet, as the religious and political authority of the community, underscores this participation.
3. Qur'ān 3:159 and 42:38 (Sūrahs Āl 'Imrān and Shūrā): “So by mercy from Allah, you were lenient with them. And had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So, pardon them and seek forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter. Then, when you have made a decision, rely upon Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who place their trust [in Him].” “And those who responded to their Lord and established prayer and whose affairs are [one of] consultation among them, and from what We have provided them, they spend.” According to prevailing exegeses, the term “the believers” in both verses encompasses both believing women and men, who, at all times and in relevant matters, possess the right to participate and express opinions in consultative councils. The Prophet (peace be upon him) similarly based his social and governmental decisions on consultation, and among his advisers were women as well (Doost Mohammad, 2013 [1392 SH]: 9). The exegesis of *al-Mizan* likewise refers to the generality of believers regardless of gender distinction (*al-Mizan*, vol. 100: 18). In general, the universality and broad application of both verses, together with exegetical hadiths and the commentators' explicit affirmations—which effectively establish the apparent meanings—rise to the level of conclusive evidence.
4. Verse 34 of Sura an-Nisa: “Men are guardians (qawwāmūn) over women by virtue of what Allah has bestowed upon one over the other and because they spend of their wealth for them. Thus, righteous women are devoutly obedient, safeguarding in their husband's absence what Allah has commanded them to protect. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, separate from them in bed, and idribūhunna. But if they obey you, seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted, Great.” Opposing jurists argue that, based on this noble verse, the guardianship of women is assigned to men, and that men—due to the advantages they possess in knowledge, reason, and management—require *qiwāma*, which entails their authority and dominion over women. In response, it should be noted that *qiwāma* does not equate to *wilāyah* (custodianship) or sovereignty, and several lexicographers interpret the root *q-w-m* as denoting the assumption of responsibility for someone's affairs, fulfilling needs, as well as protecting and reforming (Ibn Manzūr, 1408 AH, vol. 12: 497). Furthermore, a careful reading of the verse reveals that two reasons are provided for the ruling: 1) distinction and preference (virtue) and 2) financial provision. In fact, the ruling is contingent upon these two causes, and neither cause alone necessarily leads to the ruling. It may be asserted, therefore, that *qawwām* is used in the sense of a guardian or head of household—that is, the individual

responsible for managing the home and providing for the family's essential needs—rather than indicating dominion. As Qadi Ibn al-Barr states: “Men are responsible for the rights of the women who are their wives.” Hence, the verse is not universal in the manner claimed by some (al-Alusi, 1417 AH, vol. 5: 21; Ḥaḳī Bursawi, 1405 AH, vol. 2: 201; Rashid Rida, 1373 SH, vol. 5: 67).

5. Verse 33, Sūra al-Aḥzāb: “And remain in your houses and do not display yourselves like the display of the former ignorance. Establish prayer, give zakāh, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah only intends to remove impurity from you, O People of the Household, and to purify you completely.” Because political governance necessitates leaving the home and interacting with men, opponents of women's political participation interpret this verse as evidence for prohibiting women from political office, asserting that the legislator does not wish for them to assume such roles. Supporters of women's political participation respond as follows. First, a contextual reading of the opening clause indicates that (a) this verse was revealed specifically concerning the Prophet's wives, and its addressees are the those women by virtue of their relationship to the Prophet. Second, the imperative verbs used in the verse do not imply an absolute prohibition on women leaving the home; rather, they suggest that the default sphere of women's life is the home, with other places being exceptions to that default. Therefore, when necessity arises, going outside is not forbidden. Historical precedent shows that during the Prophet's time, women undertook social functions such as being present on battlefields, engaging in trade, and participating in other public affairs (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 52: 325).
6. Verse 228, Sūra al-Baqarah: “Divorced women shall wait [as regards their marriage] for three menstrual periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. Their husbands have the better right to take them back in that matter if they desire reconciliation. And for women are rights similar to those against them in a just manner, but men have a degree over them. And Allah is Mighty, Wise.” Opponents of women's political participation interpret this verse to mean that men possess a higher rank than women. They argue that for women to participate in political governance would require them to hold a position or rank superior to men (Mamdūhī, 1394), which, they claim, contradicts the clear wording of the verse and thus the sacred law. They also read the clause “*wa lir-rijālī `alayhinna darajah*” (“and for men is a degree over them”) as a continuation of the previous sentence, which established parity of legal justice between men and women; in other words, although the law treats men and women justly and similarly in obligations and rights, this does not imply equality of status. Given the biological and psychological differences between women and men, they contend that women should assume the sensitive duty of motherhood, while social functions such as governance, judicial roles, family headship, and similar offices should be assigned to men, who thereby occupy a superior station. Proponents of women's participation in political offices, citing Sayyid Qutb, counter this argument by arguing that this verse pertains specifically to divorced women and that the remark about men's “degree” (and the husband's priority of return in reconciliation) relates to the particular legal situation of divorce; the assertion that men are universally superior because they can repudiate and then return after divorce is thus context-dependent and not a general principle negating women's eligibility for political roles (Sayyid Qutb, 1400 AH, vol. 1: 246).
7. Verse 18, Sūrah Zukhruf: Opponents base their objection primarily on two interpretations of this verse. First, that women always perceive their personhood and perfection through ornamentation and adornment; and, second, that women are governed by their emotions and, when caught in the turmoil of events and misfortunes, are overwhelmed by feelings and follow their emotions. From these attributes, they conclude that women lack the competence to undertake significant responsibilities (Ha'iri, undated: 68). In response to these claims, the following points should be made. First, the verse addresses the attitudes of the pre-Islamic Arabs regarding women, not the reality of women's nature in the sacred law of Islam. God is addressing these people by referencing their own assumptions and condemning that mindset. In other words, this verse serves as a rhetorical refutation and debate (*jidal al-aḥsan*), not as a syllogistic demonstration based on empirical and objective facts. Second, being governed by emotion is a relative condition: there are many contexts in which men—more than women—have acted emotionally, lost their rational composure, or been driven by passions, while, in the same circumstances, women have demonstrated prudence and restraint. Numerous examples in Islamic history illustrate this (Tabarsi, 1415 AH, vol. 5: 43), for instance, the conduct of Umm Salamah during the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah. The independent thinking of Asiya, Pharaoh's wife, the qualities of Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba), and the words and actions of Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) after the events of 'Āshūrā all indicate that such generalizations warrant careful scrutiny. Third, the verse is directed against the polytheists' claim that angels are female servants or daughters of God; it, therefore, rejects a

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specific pagan belief. One must acknowledge that this verse does not aim to describe the essence or true status of women, and that the characteristics it describes reflect the beliefs of pre-Islamic society, rather than the divine valuation and true identity of women from an Islamic perspective (Ghorbāniyā, 1384: 207).

B. Narrative Evidence

1. The first hadith cited by opponents is one transmitted by Abu Bakrah from the Messenger of God. Regarding the context of this hadith's issuance, it is reported that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) learned that the people of Iran had accepted the daughter of Khosrow as their ruler, he remarked: "A people who entrust their affairs to a woman will not prosper." (Hanbal, 1415 AH, vol. 5: 54, hadith no. 20462.) Consequently, since women's assumption of governmental authority is viewed as a reason for a people's failure to achieve prosperity, such positions should not be entrusted to women. Prominent Shia jurists like Shaykh al-Tusi (al-Tusi, 1424 AH; Tusi, 1388 SH) and Sayyid Ahmad Khansari (Khansari, 1405 AH) relied on this hadith as the foundation for their stance against women's wilāyah. These two jurists argue that the hadith indicates prohibition, and that the term "affairs" (amr) therein encompasses all matters related to the administration of the Muslim community. Based on this, they contend that women are barred from all forms of wilāyah—both political and social—and it is impermissible for them to hold positions of authority. This interpretation relies on a broad understanding of the term "affairs," considering it to include every sphere of decision-making and management in society: since women are purportedly deemed lacking in competence and suitability for wilāyah, the people should not assign them roles such as government and judiciary (Khansari, 1405 AH, vol. 6: 7). Several objections are raised against using this hadith as evidence. First, these reports appear in Sunni hadith collections, and they are not recorded in the Four Books of the Shia tradition; in Shia compilations, they are transmitted only in works such as Tuhaf al-'Uqul and Khilaf in a mursal (unlinked) form, and thus they are not entirely reliable.

Consequently, regarding textual authority, their evidentiary force is questionable, and they cannot definitively demonstrate the prohibition of women's participation in political governance (Tusi, 1388 SH, vol. 4: 324). Second, the propositional content of the hadith is debatable. Considering the occasion of revelation and the historical context, it becomes evident that this hadith pertains to a specific period when the Sasanian monarchy was in decline due to a lack of capable administrators and the rise of internal disputes. When it was reported that the people of Iran had chosen the daughter of Khosrow as their sovereign, the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that a people will not prosper if a woman assumes their leadership. Therefore, the significance of such reports is situational and exceptional (*qaḍāyā khārijīyyah*)—they address specific historical contingencies, rather than establishing a universal rule applicable to women across all epochs. Advocates for women's participation generally argue that relying on this hadith and similar reports to deny women's competence for governance depends on several conditions. First, it necessitates that the hadith's transmission be unquestionably traced to the Infallible (al-Ma'sūm). Second, it requires accepting that these reports uniformly signify the incompetence of women to govern at all times and in all political contexts. They assert that even if one sets aside the weaknesses in the chain of transmission (*isnād*) and provisionally accepts the narration's content, doubts persist as to whether it conclusively demonstrates that women are unfit to rule. Some of their arguments are given below.

- Contextual and exceptional nature of the reports: As noted above, hadiths that seem to negate women's suitability for rulership are often *qaḍāyā khārijīyyah* (extraordinary, context-specific cases) and specifically refer to women who held power at the time the report was made. The occasion of utterance (*shā'n al-ṣadr/sabab al-nuzūl*) supports this limited interpretation. Some scholars argue that the historical context—particularly the political and social conditions in Iran and the Sasanian monarchy during that period—enhances the likelihood that the statement was meant for that specific situation. Even if the narration regarding that episode is authentic, it cannot be reliably interpreted as establishing a general, universal ruling applicable to women across all eras and regimes (Murtazavi, 1384 SH: 188–189).
- Non-judicial wording and legal force: The report is not articulated in clearly prescriptive juridical terms (i.e., it does not employ imperative or categorical prohibitive formulae that would unequivocally create a *ḥukm shar'i*). Phrases such as "lan yufliḥa" or "lā yufliḥ" (they will not prosper) are not framed as direct prohibitions; they do not necessarily imply *ḥurma* (prohibition). At most, they may suggest a *rujḥān*—a strong recommendation against or a preference for abstaining—yet a presumption of abstention (*rujḥān*) is

not synonymous with legal impermissibility (*hurma*). Consequently, some jurists conclude that such expressions do not indicate categorical non-permissibility of women's leadership (Khansari, 1405 AH, vol. 6: 7).

- Several opponents of women's participation in political governance appeal to a set of hadiths that caution against consulting women. Examples cited include "Beware of consulting women except those tested in full reason" (Majlisī, vol. 100: 253); "Beware of consulting women, for in them is weakness, frailty, and incapacity" (Kāfī, vol. 5: 517); and "Beware of consulting women, for their opinion leads to ruin" (Qummī, 31: 307). From these reports, it is inferred that one should avoid consulting women because their judgments are unstable or stem from poor reasoning; thus, if a woman lacks reliability in judgment and is, therefore, unfit to serve even as a consultant, a fortiori she is unfit to hold governmental offices. These reports have faced extensive criticism. One objection against such arguments is that many of the cited hadiths are *mursal* (unfinished chain) or possess weak chains of transmission, and thus lack authoritative weight and are unsuitable as proof. In some narrations, an added qualifying clause mitigates the absolutism of the statement—for example, the phrase "illa man jarrabat bi-kamāl 'aql" ("except those who have been proven by complete reason/prudence") indicates that the report's scope is not absolute. The qualification demonstrates that the hadith is aimed not at a blanket prohibition of consulting women but at cautioning against placing full trust and delegating authority to women who lack the requisite experience, expertise, and sound judgment.
2. A third category consists of reports that caution against being governed by or obeying women, such as "Obedience to a woman brings regret" and "Whoever is governed by a woman is cursed; there is no blessing in the rule of women" (Kulaynī, vol. 5: 517). These reports are often interpreted to imply a prohibition on obeying women, as such obedience could involve yielding to arbitrary, unilateral, and domineering demands or to women's independent and absolutist decision-making in matters of significant public concern. As previously noted, even if one accepts the literal interpretation of these hadiths, their apparent force is aimed at unilateral, autocratic leadership exercised without reference to law and consultation (*shūrā*), not against all forms of female participation subject to legal and consultative constraints. In light of the above, it becomes evident that the numerous hadiths cited to deny women's competence for governmental office do not, in fact, carry conclusive meaning in that regard; furthermore, they are often flawed in their chains of transmission (Shams al-Dīn, 1388 SH: 114). Lastly, as some contemporary jurists have pointed out, the substantive import of these reports is primarily rational-advisory (*'aqli-irshādī*)—that is, exhortatory guidance—rather than a binding juridical ruling (Janāti, 1380 SH: 389–390).

C. Consensus (Ijmā')

It seems that the most significant argument for necessitating male leadership is consensus (*al-ijmā'*) (al-Zahīlī, 1409 AH: 693). It has been claimed that Shī'a and Sunnī jurists concur that a woman cannot hold *wilāyah* (authority) or rulership (al-Najafī, undated: vol. 4: 12–14). However, the argument from consensus that supports the exclusion of women from political leadership faces several challenges. Imāmī jurists' conception of consensus (*ijmā'*) fundamentally differs from the Sunni understanding of the term, and in the Shī'a scholastic tradition, *ijmā'* lacks intrinsic legal authority. Consensus can only serve as a normative source of legal inference when the statement of an Infallible (*ma'ṣūm*) figure is included among the consensus participants, and the number of those who agree does not influence the legal authority of that consensus (Ḥillī, 1364 SH, vol. 1: 31). Based on the findings of this study, early Shī'ī jurists did not directly engage with issues of governance and statecraft. Therefore, given the presence of dissenting opinions on the matter and the absence of a *ma'ṣūm*'s statement among the alleged consensus participants, the claimed consensus lacks legal force and cannot be regarded as authoritative (Jubbā'ī 'Āmilī, 1414 AH, vol. 2: 70).us (Ijmā')

D. The Principle (al-aṣl)

Appeal to a general principle is another argument presented by opponents of women's assumption of managerial offices. God is the absolute Creator and Sovereign of the world; all creatures, including human beings, fall under His governance and dominion. From this perspective, the default principle is that no one rules over another (Khalīlī, 1385

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SH: 3). Of course, in specific instances, God may confer the right of governance upon particular individuals, thereby creating exceptions to the general principle.

a. The Infallibles (al-ma‘šūmīn): God has exempted the Infallibles from this general principle in specific scriptural passages. In Q. 33:6 and 4:59, God places obedience to the awliyā’ al-amr (those in authority) alongside obedience to God and the Messenger, and commands obedience to them. In the exegesis of Q. 4:59, the primary and intrinsic referents of awliyā’ al-amr are identified as the Imāms (al-Imāmah al-muṭlaqah) (Tabātabā’ī, undated: vol. 4: 563).

B. Men: In the absence of an Infallible (ma‘šūm) to prevent disorder in society, there must be just and learned judges who, when necessary, adjudicate disputes among the people, settle their enmities, and render judgments. There are several narrations concerning the necessity of having such judges; for example: “Beware of judging one another before the unjust; rather look to a man among you who knows something of our judgments and appoint him as judge, then refer your disputes to him” (Tusi, 1424 AH, vol. 6: 245). The phrases “look to a man” and “appoint a man among you” in this and a related narration attributed to Imam Sadiq, according to some jurists, have been interpreted to indicate that Imam Sadiq designated men to occupy the judicial office and that women cannot serve as judges. Indeed, some jurists, citing this narration, have treated men as exceptions to the general principle that one person should not rule over another; they view the narration as excluding men from the default prohibition on governance by others, while not extending that exclusion to women. Consequently, they infer that the default principle of non-rule and non-judicial authority applies to women as well, thereby precluding women’s participation in political management and judicial office. In response to this line of reasoning, however, several jurists — among them Muḥaqqiq Khū’ī — have argued otherwise. Khū’ī contends that the context of the narration and its intended meaning indicate that Imam Sadiq was denouncing the illegitimacy of Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd rule and urging people not to resort to tyrannical rulers; he was not prescribing that judicial office be conferred specifically upon men while excluding women. In Khū’ī’s interpretation, the term *rajul* (“man”) in these narrations carries no ontological or categorical significance that would justify confining judicial and political authority exclusively to men. Rather, *rajul* is employed in a contextually predominant sense (i.e., by way of prevalence) and is not determinative; thus, one cannot, based on these narrations, restrict the right to adjudication and political leadership to men alone (Khū’ī, 1418 AH, vol. 1: 187).

3-2 Analytical Findings

3-2-1 Demographic Characteristics

This category of statistics is intended solely to describe the study population for the interview section and aims to calculate the demographic parameters of the population.

Table 2:

Variable	Category	Count	Percentage
Gender	Female	9	52.9%
	Male	8	47.1%
Education	Master's degree	7	41.2%
	Doctorate (PhD)	10	58.8%
Specialization	Researcher in the field of Women, Politics, and Jurisprudence	17	100%
Total	17 Persons		

To extract data and components, interviews with researchers were reviewed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews conducted with participants were transcribed and compiled, serving as the primary database for the thematic analysis. The table below presents a sample of quotations along with the underlying themes.

Table 3: Quantification of Core Themes from Quotations

Interviewee	Summary of Quotations	Core Themes
1	Women should participate in politics, but our society's culture is an obstacle.	Women's participation in politics; cultural conditions

Interviewee	Summary of Quotations	Core Themes
2	Women, in Islamic history, played a role in social transformations.	Women's role in history; social transformations
3	The hadith “A people will not prosper who appoint a woman as their leader” is cited to indicate that a woman cannot hold wilāyah/leadership.	Women's participation in decision-making; cultural barriers
4	Women should be present in collective decision-making.	The hadith about “amr”; prohibition of women's wilāyah
5	Women’s education is a prerequisite for empowering them to participate politically.	Women's education; empowerment
6	Women played an important role in jihad and defense.	Revising perspectives; women's wilāyah
7	Women can also play a role in Islamic policymaking.	Consultation; collective decision-making
8	Women’s presence in political offices contributes to social justice.	Women's role in jihad; women's bravery
9	Mothers play a role in educating future generations for political participation.	Women's political participation; social justice
10	Religious perspectives on women’s wilāyah should be revisited.	Women's wilāyah; specific conditions
11	Women should participate in both the economy and politics.	Women's participation in consultation; decision-making
12	Women should be more active in social and political decision-making.	Women's education; social capabilities
13	Women enjoy an important position in the Qur'an and Islamic history.	Women's role in Islamic history; guiding society
14	Women’s role in education and upbringing of society is of great importance.	The hadith about “amr”; prohibition of women's wilāyah
15	Women’s political participation increases transparency and justice.	Women's political participation; transparency
16	Women made many sacrifices during the Islamic Revolution.	Women’s participation in the economy; social participation
17	Women’s education in Islam helps to empower them.	Women's participation in politics; cultural conditions

In the next stage, the organizing and overarching themes were identified from the basic themes that had been addressed. Due to the large volume and the numerous themes obtained from the semi-structured interviews, a sample of these is presented in the table below.

Table 4: Quantification of Organizing and Overarching Themes from Core Themes

Row	Overarching Themes	Organizing Themes	Core Themes
1	Policy-making in Islam	Political participation; culture and religion	Women's participation in politics; cultural conditions
2	Social history	History of Islam; women's role	Women's role in history; social transformations
3	Islamic policy-making	Cultural barriers; social participation	Women's participation in decision-making; cultural barriers

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Row	Overarching Themes	Organizing Themes	Core Themes
4	Women's wilāyah	political Prohibition of wilāyah; hadith	The hadith “amr”; prohibition of women's wilāyah
5	Education and empowerment	and Women and education; women's empowerment	Women's education; empowerment
6	Women's wilāyah	political Critique of religious views	Revising perspectives; women's wilāyah
7	Policy-making in Islam	Women's political participation	Consultation; collective decision-making
8	Women's role in social change	Women's jihad; participation in war	Women's role in jihad; women's bravery
9	Social justice in Islam	Advancing social justice	Women's political participation; social justice
10	Women's wilāyah	political Social conditions; women's wilāyah	Women's wilāyah; specific conditions
11	Policy-making in Islam	Women's social participation	Women's participation in consultation; decision-making
12	Education and empowerment	and Women's empowerment	Women's education; social capacities
13	Social history	History of Islam; women's role	Women's role in Islamic history; guiding society
14	Wilāyah in Islam	Women's political wilāyah	The hadith “amr”; prohibition of women's wilāyah
15	Islamic policy-making	Social justice; political participation	Women's political participation; transparency
16	Social justice	Women and economic participation	Women's participation in the economy; social participation

In the analysis of the interviews, the extracted themes were categorized into three levels: *basic themes*, *organizing themes*, and *overarching themes*. At the basic themes level, items such as “women’s participation in politics,” “cultural barriers,” “the role of women in history,” “hadith of command,” “women’s education,” “women’s empowerment,” “women’s guardianship (wilāyah),” “consultation,” “collective decision-making,” “women’s courage,” “social justice,” and “women’s economic participation” were identified. These themes were subsequently grouped into organizing themes such as “political participation, culture, and religion,” “the role of women,” “cultural obstacles,” “critique of religious viewpoints,” “women’s empowerment,” “women’s political participation,” “women’s jihad,” “promotion of social justice,” and “social conditions of women’s guardianship (wilāyah).” Finally, these findings were synthesized into six overarching themes: “policy-making in Islam,” “social history,” “women’s political guardianship,” “education and empowerment,” “women’s role in social transformations,” and “social justice in Islam.” This classification indicates that, according to researchers in the field, women’s political participation is shaped by religious, cultural, historical, and social factors, while also emphasizing the need for empowerment, re-evaluation of prevailing viewpoints, and the establishment of equitable policy frameworks.

2. Conclusion

Considering the totality of the cited evidence, along with the interviews and the religious rulings regarding women’s participation in the country’s political leadership, we conclude that women’s attainment of power has not been explicitly or implicitly rejected. The question of its permissibility or impermissibility is one of the most debated issues that Islamic jurists have confronted from early times to the present, and there is no unanimous opinion on the matter. From what can be gleaned from the early Islamic historical record, women were not trusted with major executive responsibilities; however, it should be noted that the cultural context of the early Islamic period did not necessitate a broader presence, and the absence of women from high managerial and executive roles should not be interpreted as evidence of prohibition. It appears that the actual factors currently hindering women from participating in the country’s political leadership include lack of awareness regarding the religious foundations of women’s rights—such as

conflating appointed guardianship (wilāyah by appointment) with elective guardianship (wilāyah by election); erroneous interpretations of jurisprudential norms; exigencies of the temporal context; mistaken environmental and social traditions; blind and misplaced prejudices; shortcomings on the part of women and their lack of self-confidence; men's patriarchal attitudes and injustices to women; cultural weakness; and some mottos, beliefs, and unreliable hadiths. Taking into account the aforementioned evidence, along with the interviews and the religious verdicts obtained from some of the senior marāji '(high-ranking jurists) who responded, we conclude that women's access to power has not been explicitly or implicitly censured. Based on the cited sources, there is no reliable evidence establishing the unsuitability or prohibition of women's participation in the country's political leadership. Rather, based on the original presumption (principle of permissibility) and in accordance with the evidence for a person's guardianship over their own affairs, there exists the possibility of delegating that authority to another (elective guardianship), whether male or female. Consequently, a woman—being a complete human being endowed with reason and sound judgment—may assume such offices, provided that she meets the other required conditions. A review of the arguments presented by opponents—including Qur'anic verses, hadiths, principles, and consensus—reveals that there is no conclusive, incontrovertible evidence supporting a prohibition. The impermissibility of women's participation in the country's political leadership is not a settled jurisprudential axiom and remains a matter of dispute. Accordingly, in light of the principle of *asālat al-jawāz* (the presumption of permissibility), women may occupy the highest levels of political leadership in the country. It should, therefore, be recognized that excluding half of the active population—who, since the Revolution, have demonstrated their capacity, competence, and merit in all social and political spheres—and depriving them of high-level responsibilities is contrary to justice and fairness and harms the nation. In conclusion, the legal/religious stance toward women's holding of political offices, including the highest offices such as presidency, is not negative or prohibitive but affirmative. Consequently, within the Islamic Republic of Iran, given the explicit provisions of the Constitution to follow religious rulings, there should be no legal barrier to women's appointment to senior political managerial positions,

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International Journal of Muslim Women Studies

The Evolving Role of Women in Civil Engineering and Architecture

Payam Tarighi  DOI: 10.22034/MWS.2024.729885

Associate Professor, Faculty of Technology and Engineering, Ahlul Bayt International University, Tehran, Iran..

* **Corresponding author:** p.tarighi@abu.ac.ir

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13 April 2024

Revised: 15 April 2024

Accepted: 8 may 2024

Keywords:

Women in Engineering, Gender Inclusion in Civil Engineering, Women Architects and Engineers, Barriers to Female Participation in Engineering, Gender-Responsive Urban Development.

ABSTRACT

Women have long faced structural and cultural barriers in civil engineering and architecture, traditionally male-dominated fields. Despite these challenges, they have made significant contributions to innovation, sustainability, and the transformation of the built environment. In recent decades, greater access to higher education and professional opportunities has increased women's visibility in these disciplines. In Iran, for example, women account for over 55% of civil engineering graduates but occupy less than 20% of positions in the professional workforce. Using a mixed-method approach—including case studies, statistical analysis, and literature review—this study examines women's role in advancing sustainable structures, technological progress, and inclusive urban development. Findings highlight that women's participation enhances creativity, problem-solving, and resilience in engineering teams, leading to more effective outcomes. Historical and contemporary figures such as Emily Warren Roebling, Zaha Hadid, and Patricia Galloway illustrate how women have driven breakthroughs in leadership, design, and policy. Nevertheless, persistent obstacles—including gender stereotypes, workplace discrimination, limited leadership opportunities, and work-life balance pressures—continue to hinder women's full integration. Case studies from countries such as Sweden, India, and Rwanda demonstrate that gender-responsive policies, mentorship programs, and family-friendly workplace reforms can significantly improve women's retention and advancement. This paper argues that integrating women into civil engineering and architecture is not only a matter of gender equity but also a strategic necessity for innovation, sustainability, and global development. Encouraging greater female participation ensures more diverse perspectives and inclusive solutions to 21st-century challenges such as climate change, urbanization, and infrastructure resilience.

E-ISSN: 000-000

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How to cite this article:

P. Tarighi 1, (2024). The Evolving Role of Women in Civil Engineering and Architecture.

Muslim Women's Studies, 1(2), 43-56. <https://doi.org/10.22034/mws.2024.729885>



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