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Findings

The present study examined the nature, dimensions, challenges, and prospects of women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through a comparative framework. Based on the analysis presented in the preceding chapters, the study identifies several important findings that contribute to a better understanding of the changing status of women in the two Gulf countries.

The study finds that women's empowerment extends beyond legal equality or economic participation alone. It encompasses educational, economic, political, legal, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions that collectively determine women's ability to exercise agency, make independent decisions, and participate equally in national development. The comparative analysis demonstrates that progress in one dimension strengthens advancement in other dimensions. For example, improved educational attainment enhances employment opportunities, economic independence, political participation, leadership capacity, and social confidence. Likewise, legal reforms become more meaningful when accompanied by supportive educational policies, employment opportunities, institutional reforms, and changing societal attitudes.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Islam, as a religion, does not constitute an impediment to women's empowerment in either Saudi Arabia or the UAE.

The analysis demonstrates that Islamic teachings provide women with rights relating to education, inheritance, property ownership, employment, marriage, financial independence, and personal dignity. Both countries have increasingly justified many recent reforms within the framework of Islamic principles, indicating that modernization and religious values are not mutually exclusive. The study finds that many of the historical restrictions experienced by women originated primarily from patriarchal social structures, tribal customs, conservative cultural traditions, and restrictive interpretations of religious texts rather than from Islam itself. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of the study is supported.

The findings indicate that women's empowerment in both Saudi Arabia and the UAE has largely been state-led rather than movement-led. Unlike many Western countries where feminist movements significantly influenced public policy, the transformation in both Gulf countries has been initiated primarily through governmental reforms, institutional restructuring, national development strategies, and long-term policy planning. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's national development strategies have integrated women's empowerment into broader programmes of economic diversification, administrative modernization, human capital development, and sustainable growth.

The study finds considerable improvements in women's political representation in both countries. Women now occupy ministerial positions, parliamentary or consultative institutions, diplomatic services, judicial appointments, and senior governmental offices. The UAE has achieved comparatively higher female representation in several national institutions, whereas Saudi Arabia has witnessed rapid progress through recent reforms.

Legal empowerment represents one of the most significant achievements identified in this study. Saudi Arabia has implemented reforms relating to mobility, employment, civil documentation, business ownership, and several aspects of guardianship regulations. Similarly, the UAE has enacted legislation promoting equal remuneration, workplace equality, protection against discrimination, business participation, and legal safeguards for women. These reforms have substantially strengthened women's legal position..

Despite substantial governmental reforms, the study identifies social and cultural barriers as the most persistent obstacles to women's empowerment. Patriarchal attitudes, traditional gender roles, tribal customs, conservative social expectations, and gender stereotypes continue to influence women's opportunities in both countries. Although younger generations generally demonstrate more supportive attitudes towards gender equality, social transformation progresses more slowly than legal reform.

An important comparative finding is that both countries have pursued different pathways towards women's empowerment. Saudi Arabia has experienced relatively rapid transformation during the last decade through extensive legal reforms implemented under Vision 2030. The UAE adopted many gender-related reforms earlier and has gradually institutionalized women's participation within governance, education, innovation, entrepreneurship, diplomacy, and public administration.

These key findings demonstrate that women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia and the UAE is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by the interaction of state policy, education, economic development, legal reform, institutional capacity, and socio-cultural change. Although significant progress has been achieved in both countries, the realization of substantive gender equality requires sustained political commitment, continued investment in women's human capital, effective implementation of legal reforms, and the gradual transformation of social attitudes. The comparative analysis further shows that while the UAE has generally advanced through earlier institutionalization of gender-inclusive policies and Saudi Arabia through accelerated reform under Vision 2030, both countries have increasingly recognized women as indispensable partners in national development and modernization. This shared trajectory underscores that women's empowerment is not only a question of individual rights but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development, social cohesion, and long-term national progress.