



Woman in Culture and Arts

Women's Legislative Performance in the Eighth Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran (2008-2012)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received: 15 January 2025 Received in revised form: 11 August 2026 Accepted: 20 August 2026 Published online: 2 October 2026 Keywords: <i>Eighth Majles, Islamic Consultative Assembly, Legislation, Legislative Role, Women.</i>	Introduction The proportion of women in the Iranian Parliament (Majles) is a significant indicator of the Islamic Republic's evolving social dynamics and political participation. Despite the fact that women's involvement in parliamentary politics can be traced back to the Constitutional Revolution, their representation has historically fluctuated in response to political and institutional constraints. The gradual yet significant progress toward institutionalizing women's roles in national policymaking, particularly in areas such as women's rights, family policy, and social welfare, was marked by the formalization of women's participation through reserved seats. This process began in the Fifth Majles (1996–2000) and continued in the Sixth and Seventh terms. In March 2008, the elections for the Eighth Majles were conducted under particularly restrictive political circumstances. A highly centralized, ideologically cohesive, and male-dominated legislature was the result of the Guardian Council's extensive disqualification of reformist candidates, intense factional competition, and the overwhelming victory of conservative principalists, who secured approximately 70% of parliamentary seats. Voter turnout was 55.4 percent. The numerical representation of women in the Eighth Majles experienced a significant decline, from 13 representatives in the Seventh Majles to only 8. This occurred within this environment. This quantitative setback requires a more thorough assessment of qualitative performance. Accordingly, the primary research question inquires about the performance of women representatives in the Eighth Majles and the extent to which they were able to advance their legislative objectives. The study posits that female legislators successfully pursued women-related issues despite structural obstacles, numerical marginalization, and a reactionary political climate. Through strategic mechanisms—such as proposing relevant legislation, active engagement in parliamentary committees, and coalition-building with supportive male colleagues—they were able to enhance the quality and impact of legislative outcomes related to women's affairs compared to the preceding parliamentary term. Methodology The legislative performance of the eight female representatives in the Eighth Majles is assessed using a descriptive-analytical methodology that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods. From 2008 to 2012, data were primarily obtained from official parliamentary sources, such as published proceedings (Mashrouh-e Mozakerat), legislative texts, enacted laws, and government decrees. Qualitative analysis investigated the strategic orientation and substance of initiatives related to women and family issues, particularly in the bill proposal, amendment, and approval processes, while quantitative analysis quantified the levels and frequencies of participation in legislative activities. The contextual findings indicate that the number of female applicants for the Eighth Majles increased marginally to 585 compared to the previous term. However, the number of successful candidates was limited to eight due to the extensive vetting process. It is important to note that six of the elected women had prior parliamentary experience from the Seventh Majles, which suggests that legislative expertise has persisted despite the reduced numerical representation. Results During the 8th Majles, the assembly deliberated on a total of 628 proposed bills and laws, from which the legislative output regarding women and family issues was derived. Of these, 73 items—which account for approximately 10% of the total legislative agenda—directly or indirectly addressed issues related to women and the family unit.

The success rate of these gender-specific proposals is a significant discovery. A total of 28 out of the 73 submitted items were finally approved and enacted into law, demonstrating an approximate 40% increase in the volume of approved legislation in this domain when benchmarked against the output of the 7th Majles.

These 28 approved laws can be categorized across several key areas:

- **Development and Budgetary Support:** The 5th National Development Plan or related budgetary allocations comprised five laws that prioritized the empowerment of female heads of household and direct support for families.
- **Civil and Legal Status:** Three critical statutes involved the amendment or interpretation of articles within the Civil Code that directly affected the legal standing and rights of women within the family structure.
- **International Commitments:** Two items that concentrate on the adherence to or implementation frameworks of international bodies and conventions that are pertinent to the status of women.
- **Cooperation and Social Programs:** Three laws were passed to establish new cooperation agreements that were designed to address the social welfare disparities that affect women.
- **Specific Social Issues:** Two of the four approved laws were concerned with educational reforms that affected women, while the other two were focused on the welfare and rights of children. Furthermore, two laws addressed particular criminal and family offenses.
- **Employment and Economic Participation:** It is of the utmost importance that seven laws were successfully enacted to specifically address the employment opportunities and social and economic participation of women in the formal economy.

The process was characterized by substantial obstacles, despite these accomplishments. Forty-five proposals that were related either failed to obtain majority approval, were stalled indefinitely due to opposition from critical specialized commissions, faced objections from the Guardian Council, or simply ran out of legislative time as the parliamentary term concluded.

The qualitative analysis of individual contributions, as demonstrated in detailed records, revealed a variety of engagement patterns. The most extensive volume of parliamentary activity was recorded by Zohreh Elahian, with 107 instances of interventional participation. Nayereh Akhavan-Bitaraf exhibited the most targeted focus, with 30 recorded instances, when segregating focus specifically on gender and family-related issues. Fatemeh Rahbar was very closely followed, with 28 instances. This distinction underscores that a high level of general activity does not always directly correlate with an intense focus on core gender advocacy issues.

The eight representatives' demographic profile indicated that they were a highly educated cohort. Three of them held PhDs, while the remaining five held Master's degrees, primarily in medicine and humanities. It is noteworthy that two members also had seminary education, which suggests a combination of traditional religious roots and contemporary academic qualifications. These women were strategically positioned in critical parliamentary bodies, such as the Cultural Commission, the Social and Education/Research Commission, and the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, which enabled them to exert influence across a variety of policy domains.

It is also important to note that a proactive effort to structurally protect female representation failed. Often aligned with groups such as the Society of Zainab, conservative female legislators proposed a proposal that advocated for legally mandated quotas. This proposal included the provision of at least one female representative in districts that elect more than two members, as well as ten seats reserved for the highly populous Tehran constituency. The structural resistance to formalizing increased female representation was underscored by the fact that this proposal ultimately failed to succeed.

Conclusion

The key finding of the performance evaluation of the eight women representatives in the 8th Iranian Majles is that, despite a reduction in numerical strength and operating within a politically conservative and overwhelmingly male-dominated legislative environment, the *quality* and strategic focus of their parliamentary action demonstrated a demonstrable

improvement compared to prior terms.

These eight legislators effectively secured a permanent position on the legislative agenda for critical women's and family demands. The final ratification of 28 laws that directly affect this domain was the result of their concerted efforts, which included the processing of 73 specific proposals. When compared to the performance metrics of the 7th Majles, this result indicates a considerable 40% increase in the rate of enacted legislation related to women's affairs.

In conclusion, the influential and qualitative presence of female representatives ensured that their advocacy translated into tangible positive outcomes in parliamentary results, despite the fact that the proportion of the national legislative agenda dedicated to women and family issues remained relatively modest (approximately 10% of all deliberations). This term established a foundation of legislative success based on strategic engagement, even as the fundamental structural challenges limiting comprehensive gender equality in political representation continued to persist.

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