

Sustainable Governance in Higher Education: Tracking Women’s Representation in Jordan’s Public Universities

This study investigates the representation of women in senior leadership positions across four public universities in Jordan, focusing on the number of female deans—both current and former—the presence of women on boards of trustees, and their membership on Deans’ Councils. By examining women’s participation in these key governance bodies, the study assesses the extent to which gender equality is integrated into university leadership structures.

Despite policy rhetoric supporting inclusivity, the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles raises questions about the effectiveness of institutional commitments to gender equity. The research situates these patterns within the broader framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), to evaluate how well these universities align their governance practices with global development targets.

Using a quantitative, descriptive approach based on publicly available institutional data, the study offers a comparative analysis that highlights both progress and enduring disparities. By mapping gendered power dynamics across institutions, it contributes to critical debates on the role of higher education in advancing sustainable development and inclusive governance. The findings are intended to inform institutional policy reforms and broader strategies aimed at enhancing women's leadership in the academic sector.

Keywords: *gender representation, university leadership, female deans, boards of trustees, Deans’ Council, public universities, higher education governance, gender equality, Sustainable Development Goals, Jordan.*

1. Introduction

The role of universities in advancing sustainable development is increasingly acknowledged, especially through their governance practices and institutional cultures. In this context, gender mainstreaming within academic leadership is both a benchmark and a driver of inclusive, equitable progress. Although Jordan has made strides in women's access to higher education, significant disparities remain in leadership and decision-making roles within universities. This study focuses on the University of Jordan—one of the country's largest and most influential public institutions—along with other public universities to explore how gender is represented at the highest levels of academic and administrative authority.

Achieving sustainable governance in higher education requires inclusive decision-making that reflects the diversity of the academic community. In Jordan's public universities, women's participation in academic leadership and governance has historically been low (Dandan & Marques, 2017). This report presents a detailed gender-based analysis of women's representation at the faculty level in selected universities, and a comparative assessment of women's participation in key governance structures across all ten public universities. Trends, disparities, and gaps are analyzed to understand progress toward gender-inclusive leadership—a critical aspect of sustainable governance aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 on women's full participation in leadership (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024).

Sustainable development has ascended to the forefront of global agendas, emerging as a paramount concern for nations worldwide. It is gauged primarily through sustainable development indicators, which serve as yardsticks for evaluating societal progress and overall global development (Mahmoud, 2012). Defined as the type of development that is sustained by the populace, sustainable development entails meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own (Ghoneim and Abu Zant, 2006; United Nations, 2019).

The concept of sustainable development has engendered the notion of social capital, comprising both a capital aspect and a social aspect. Social capital accrues over extended periods and is rooted in social groups, offering advantages and assets to their members (Abdul Hamid, 2020).

Moreover, the advent of sustainable development has given rise to the concept of "Education for Sustainability," which encompasses the acquisition and application of knowledge, values, and

skills aimed at harmonizing economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development. This educational approach prioritizes the cultivation of values, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies alongside cognitive understanding, fostering a disposition towards sustainable practices across various domains of life (Al-Buraidi, 2015).

1.1 Research Problem

While female enrollment and graduation rates in Jordanian universities are often equal to or higher than those of men, women remain underrepresented in key academic leadership positions. This gap raises concerns about institutional commitment to gender equality and the university's role in fulfilling its social responsibilities under the SDGs.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To quantify the presence of women in leadership roles (deans) and senior academic ranks (full professors) at the University of Jordan.
- To assess the gender distribution across faculties and disciplines.
- To examine how these patterns reflect or contradict the university's stated commitment to sustainable development and gender equality.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What proportion of deans and full professors at the University of Jordan are women?
2. How is female representation distributed across faculties and academic disciplines?
3. What institutional image is projected regarding gender equality and sustainability, based on the current leadership structure?

1.4 Research Significance

This research contributes to the limited but growing literature on gender and governance in higher education in the Middle East. It provides empirical evidence on leadership representation at Jordan's leading public university and offers insights into the institutionalization of SDG 5 and

SDG 16. The findings can inform policy discussions on gender equity in academic leadership and serve as a diagnostic tool for higher education reform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women's Leadership in Higher Education

Recent statistics from the United Nations (2023) reveal that Jordan's male-to-female ratio (107.332 per 100 females) surpasses the global average (101.016 per 100 females), highlighting a demographic imbalance with implications for gender representation in education and leadership. The higher education sector in Jordan has expanded considerably in recent decades, as evidenced by the growth of universities and the steady rise in student enrollment. Women now represent more than half of university students, marking a remarkable achievement in access to education. However, their presence among faculty members, though improving, remains disproportionately low. While women comprised only 13.7% of faculty members in 2000/2001, this figure doubled to 26.65% by 2014/2015 (Dandan & Marques, 2017). Despite this progress, female academics remain concentrated at the lower ranks of the academic hierarchy, with limited advancement into senior roles.

Globally, women's progress into higher education leadership has been similarly constrained. Although women have reached their highest-ever representation among leaders of top-ranked institutions, the numbers remain modest. According to the Times Higher Education (2023), only 24% of the top 200 universities worldwide are led by women—an increase from 19% in 2020 but still far from parity. These figures demonstrate the persistence of structural barriers despite evidence that women consistently outperform men in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Yet women's underrepresentation in leadership is not confined to global contexts. In the United Kingdom, for instance, only 27.9% of university professors are women, and a mere 17.1% hold leadership positions, despite women comprising nearly half of the academic workforce (AdvanceHE, 2021). In the Middle East and North Africa, gendered cultural norms reinforce teaching as a "suitable" profession for women, while leadership remains framed as a male domain (Cubillo & Brown, 2003). This dynamic is especially evident in Arab higher education institutions,

where predominantly male leadership structures restrict women's professional growth, limit opportunities for skill development, and constrain career advancement (Dahlan, 2023).

Over the past two decades, scholars have emphasized both the necessity and the potential impact of women's leadership in higher education. Madsen (2012) argues that women's advancement strengthens not only institutional governance but also societal progress. Contemporary studies highlight how women have become increasingly dynamic actors, demonstrating readiness and capability to assume top leadership positions. Female leaders often bring distinct qualities—such as determination, resilience, and strategic foresight—that enable them to succeed in highly competitive organizational environments. Nonetheless, systemic barriers continue to undermine these strengths.

A robust body of scholarship has investigated these barriers, including institutional politics (Morley, 1999), management structures that stifle women's leadership aspirations (Currie et al., 2002; Deem, 1998), persistent gender disparities (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; O'Connor, 2014), and unconscious biases that marginalize women in academia (Young, 2004; Carnes et al., 2008). Despite national frameworks promoting equality and anti-discrimination measures, the underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership remains entrenched (O'Connor, 2018). Much of this research, however, is situated within Western contexts, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of women's leadership experiences in Jordan and the broader Arab world.

Jordan, often recognized as one of the most educated nations in the region, provides an illustrative case. Women consistently outperform men in higher education enrollment, yet their progression into senior academic and leadership roles remains limited. Higher education institutions have historically prioritized access and opportunities for female students but have paid comparatively little attention to advancing female faculty and leaders. This underscores the need to critically examine the structural and societal barriers that shape women's trajectories in Jordanian higher education leadership.

2.2 Barriers Facing Women in Higher Education Leadership

The barriers hindering women's advancement into higher education leadership are multifaceted and deeply rooted in institutional and societal structures. One of the most significant challenges is the underrepresentation of women in professorial roles, often considered a prerequisite for occupying senior leadership positions such as president, vice president, or dean. While professorship increases women's eligibility for leadership, it does not necessarily dismantle systemic discrimination. Indeed, O'Connor (2017) argues that increasing the number of female professors is insufficient without parallel efforts to normalize women's leadership presence at the highest levels. Disciplinary divisions further exacerbate this disparity, as fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) remain dominated by men and continue to serve as gateways to leadership roles.

Geographic mobility also presents a complex challenge. Limited mobility often constrains women's career development, particularly in regional universities, while international experience can enhance leadership opportunities (Henry Brown & Campbell Lewis, 2005). Psychological barriers add another layer: the "imposter syndrome," first identified by Clance and Imes (1978) and later expanded by Clance and O'Toole (2014), describes high-achieving women's persistent feelings of inadequacy, despite clear evidence of competence. This self-doubt, combined with structural discrimination, contributes to women's reluctance to pursue or sustain leadership roles.

Economic disparities further undermine progress. The gender pay gap persists across higher education, especially in the private sector (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Chung et al., 2018). Women who do secure leadership roles often report needing to work harder than their male counterparts to establish legitimacy and authority (Glass & Cook, 2016). In male-dominated environments, solidarity among women could mitigate some of these challenges, yet such support networks are not always guaranteed (Bagilhole, 2002). Nevertheless, when they do exist, networks provide mentorship, sponsorship, and crucial backing for women leaders (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Another barrier is the shortage of female role models. Research has shown that women's limited visibility in leadership perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation, discouraging younger women from aspiring to senior positions (Moodly & Toni, 2019). Structural issues, such as inadequate support for flexible work arrangements, further entrench inequalities. Although job-sharing and

flexible schedules could help retain women in leadership, such practices are rarely institutionalized in higher education recruitment (Barrett & Barrett, 2011).

Cultural and societal expectations intensify these challenges. In many contexts, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities, with maternity leave and reduced working hours often limiting opportunities for advancement (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Traditional gender norms, reinforced by societal expectations, frame leadership as a masculine domain and discourage women from pursuing such roles (Aisoli-Aurik et al., 2022; Coetzee & Mussa, 2020). Research confirms that women in traditional societies are burdened with disproportionate family responsibilities (AAUW, 2023), reinforcing stereotypes that limit their authority in professional settings (Balducci, 2023).

These cultural and structural barriers combine to erode women's confidence in their leadership potential. As Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) note, women often question their ability to exert authority comparable to male leaders. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) and Yousaf & Schmied (2017) similarly underscore how discriminatory perceptions persist, with women deemed less capable of leadership. At a deeper level, academic meritocracy itself often reflects masculine norms: long working hours, heavy research output, and competition are valorized as markers of academic success, reproducing gendered inequalities (van de Brink et al., 2010).

3. Methodology

Research Design:

The study employs a quantitative descriptive research design based on secondary data.

Data Sources:

- Official University of Jordan website (faculty/staff listings, organizational charts)
- University strategic plans and annual reports
- Public documents (e.g., university council membership, faculty directories)

Units of Analysis:

- All deans currently serving across faculties
- All members of board of trustees listed by university and gender

Data Collection and Analysis:

- Systematic review of available public data to identify and code gender by position and faculty
- Descriptive statistics to calculate gender ratios and distributions
- Visual representations (tables, charts) to highlight patterns
- Interpretive discussion linking results to SDG indicators and university sustainability rhetoric

Ethical Considerations

As the study uses only publicly accessible data and does not involve human subjects, no ethical approval is required. The identities of individuals are not the focus; analysis will be conducted at an institutional and aggregate level to ensure academic integrity and privacy.

Limitations

- The study is limited to one institution and may not be generalizable to all Jordanian universities.
- The use of secondary data restricts deeper exploration of institutional culture or barriers to women's advancement.
- Titles and roles are self-reported or web-listed, which may occasionally lead to outdated information.

4. Research findings and discussion:

4.1 Gender Analysis at the Faculty Level (University of Jordan, Yarmouk University, Mutah University)

To gauge women's representation in academic units, we examine faculty-level leadership in three of Jordan's largest public universities. Table 1 summarizes the number of female and male members in each broad sector (Health-related faculties, Humanities and Social Sciences, Scientific faculties, etc.) for the University of Jordan (UJ), Yarmouk University (YU), and Mutah University. These "members" include faculty-level leadership roles (such as deans, vice/assistant deans, and department heads) – positions that influence academic governance within each faculty (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024).

Table 1. Faculty-Level Leadership by Sector (Female/Male/Total) in Selected Universities

Sector	UJ (Female/Male/Total)	YU (Female/Male/Total)	Mutah (Female/Male/Total)
Health Faculties	22 / 57 / 79	3 / 4 / 7	3 / 31 / 34
Humanities & Social	9 / 111 / 120	5 / ~60 / ~65†	2 / 90 / 92
Scientific Faculties	3 / 82 / 85	0 / 43 / 43	0 / 58 / 58
Deanships* & Graduate	5 / 57 / 62	0 / ?? / 8†	0 / 24 / 24

Notes: *Deanships here include administrative academic units like Deanship of Scientific Research and Student Affairs. †YU humanities and deanship totals are approximate as some faculty data (e.g. Sharia, Fine Arts) were not fully captured in the dataset.

University of Jordan (UJ)

At UJ – the largest university – women hold notable leadership roles in health sector faculties. For example, the School of Nursing’s faculty council has 10 women out of 14 members (~71% female) and the School of Pharmacy council is ~42% female (5 of 12) – reflecting the higher female presence in medical and allied fields. In total, health-related faculties at UJ have 22 women vs. 57 men in leadership (Table 1), the highest female ratio among sectors. This aligns with national trends where fields like nursing and pharmacy approach gender parity in leadership (49% and 46% female, respectively) (Hawatmeh et al., 2024).

By contrast, scientific faculties (Science, Engineering, IT, Agriculture) at UJ show extremely low female representation: only 3 women vs. 82 men in combined leadership roles (~3.5% female). Notably, UJ’s School of Engineering and School of Agriculture have no women in their 16–18 member councils. This mirrors the broader pattern in STEM fields – women constitute only 7–16% of leaders in engineering, IT, and science faculties across Jordan (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024).

The humanities and social science faculties at UJ occupy a middle ground. They include 9 women vs. 111 men in leadership (~7.5%), with some faculties (Arts, Law, Business) having one female department head or dean, while others (e.g. Shari’a, Political Science) have none. UJ’s data exemplifies the stark gender gap between “feminized” fields (health and education) and male-dominated fields (engineering, science) in academic leadership (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024).

Yarmouk University (YU)

The role of universities in advancing sustainable development is increasingly acknowledged, especially through their governance practices and institutional cultures. In this context, gender mainstreaming within academic leadership is both a benchmark and a driver of inclusive, equitable progress. Although Jordan has made strides in women’s access to higher education, significant disparities remain in leadership and decision-making roles within universities. This study focuses on the University of Jordan—one of the country’s largest and most influential public institutions—along with other public universities to explore how gender is represented at the highest levels of academic and administrative authority.

Achieving sustainable governance in higher education requires inclusive decision-making that reflects the diversity of the academic community. In Jordan’s public universities, women’s participation in academic leadership and governance has historically been low (Dandan & Marques, 2017). This report presents a detailed gender-based analysis of women’s representation at the faculty level in selected universities, and a comparative assessment of women’s participation in key governance structures across all ten public universities. Trends, disparities, and gaps are analyzed to understand progress toward gender-inclusive leadership – a critical aspect of sustainable governance aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goal 5.5, which calls for women’s full participation in leadership (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024).

Mutah University

Mutah University, a comprehensive university with both civil and military-oriented colleges, exhibits the most pronounced gender gaps. Humanities and social science faculties at Mutah had only 2 women among 90+ leaders (<3% female). As of 2022, none of Mutah’s Arts, Law, Sharia, Business, or Education faculties had a female dean or department head apart from two instances (perhaps in the Arts and Business faculties where one woman each held a leadership post). The scientific faculties (Science, Engineering, IT, Agriculture) were exclusively male-led with 0 women out of 58 total leadership roles (Table 1). Mutah’s health-related faculties (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing, Allied Medical Sciences) also had minimal female representation – 3 women vs. 31 men (~8.8% female). Notably, the Faculty of Nursing at Mutah included 2 women in its council (likely reflecting nursing’s traditionally female workforce), but other health

faculties (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy) had no women in leadership. These figures underscore that at Mutah, women’s inclusion in academic decision-making remains extremely limited across all fields. In fact, the university’s Deans Council in 2022 had only 2 women among 25 members

【16†】 (the lowest share among the large universities), and several faculties had **zero** women in any leadership capacity. Such disparities highlight an ongoing challenge: many academic units at Mutah (and similar institutions) operate without any female voices in governance, raising concerns about the inclusivity and sustainability of their decision-making processes.

4.2 Women’s Participation in University Governance Structures (All Public Universities)

Beyond faculty-level roles, women’s involvement in top governance structures – Boards of Trustees, University Councils, and Deans Councils – was examined across all ten public universities in Jordan. Table 2 presents a comparative overview of the gender composition of these bodies in 2022. These structures represent three tiers of university governance: Boards of Trustees (BOT) are external governing boards for each university; University Councils (sometimes called academic councils) are broad bodies that include senior administrators and faculty representatives; and Deans Councils consist of the university president and all faculty deans (the key academic executive committee within each institution).

Table 2. Women’s Representation in Governance Bodies of Jordan’s Public Universities 【16†】

University	Board of Trustees (Female / Male / Total)	University Council (Female / Male / Total)	Deans Council (Female / Male / Total)
University of Jordan (UJ)	2 / 14 / 16	20 / 36 / 56	4 / 25 / 29
Yarmouk University	1 / 12 / 13	1 / 12 / 13	6 / 13 / 19
Mutah University	1 / 15 / 16	6 / 34 / 40	2 / 23 / 25
Jordan Univ. of Science & Tech. (JUST)	1 / 12 / 13	8 / 30 / 38	6 / 15 / 21
The Hashemite University	3 / 10 / 13	14 / 32 / 46	4 / 20 / 24
Al al-Bayt University	1 / 12 / 13	1 / 31 / 32	1 / 19 / 20

University	Board of Trustees (Female / Male / Total)	University Council (Female / Male / Total)	Deans Council (Female / Male / Total)
Al-Balqa' Applied University	1 / 12 / 13	8 / 52 / 60	3 / 28 / 31
Al-Hussein Bin Talal University	2 / 11 / 13	4 / 26 / 30	1 / 13 / 14
Tafila Technical University	1 / 12 / 13	5 / 20 / 25	0 / 10 / 10
German-Jordanian University (GJU)	0 / 13 / 13	7 / 20 / 27	3 / 13 / 16

Several observations emerge from this comparative assessment:

Boards of Trustees:

Women remain a small minority on most Boards of Trustees. In 2022, half of the public universities (JUST, Al al-Bayt, Al-Balqa', Tafila) had only one female trustee (out of ~13 total members, i.e. ~7–8% female). Two universities had no women on their boards (German-Jordanian University's 13-member board was all-male). Encouragingly, a few institutions have begun to break the pattern – The Hashemite University's board had 3 women out of 13 members (23% female), and Al-Hussein Bin Talal University had 2 women (15%). The University of Jordan, being the oldest and largest, had 2 women on a 16-member board (~12.5%). These numbers represent a slight improvement over the past; in 2016, women were only 4.6% of public university trustees and many boards lacked any female members (Dandan & Marques, 2017). However, the majority of trustee boards in 2022 still fell far short of gender balance, indicating that strategic appointments are needed to reach even a critical mass of women. This shortfall in female trustees is significant because boards set strategic directions and oversee university governance – areas where diverse perspectives can strengthen sustainability and responsiveness.

University Councils:

The University Council is typically a large governing body (often 30–60 members) including top administrators and representatives from each faculty. Here we see more variation and some progress in women's inclusion. At the high end, Hashemite University's Council had 14 women out of 46 members (~30% female), and UJ's Council had 20 women out of 56 (~35.7%). These figures reflect the presence of female deans and elected faculty representatives (e.g., UJ has several women representing faculties in its Council). In contrast, a few universities had effectively no

women in their Councils – for example, Yarmouk University’s council had only 1 female out of 13 members (the council size at YU was relatively small, possibly reflecting a different structure). Smaller institutions like Al al-Bayt and Al-Hussein University had just one or a few women on their councils (around 4–13% female). Even technology-focused GJU managed 7 women in its 27-member council (~26%). On average, these councils show better female participation (typically 10–30%) than the boards or deans councils. Yet, the disparities are evident: universities with more diversified fields and larger faculty bodies (UJ, Hashemite) have significantly higher female representation, whereas others still struggle. It is worth noting that even at ~30% female, none of these councils achieved parity, and some fell well below, underscoring an ongoing gap in inclusive governance at the academic-policy level (Hawatmeh et al., 2024).

Deans Councils:

This executive body, composed of the president and all academic deans, had the lowest female representation overall. In 2022, several public universities had not a single woman dean (Tafila’s Council was 100% male, and Al al-Bayt had just 1 female dean among 20 members). Mutah and Al-Hussein University each had only one female dean as well. In the best cases, a few major universities have begun appointing women as deans: Yarmouk University stood out with 6 women in its 19-member Deans Council (31.6% female), and JUST and Hashemite University each had 4–6 female deans (~20–25%). The University of Jordan’s Council of Deans included 4 women out of 29 (13.8%). These numbers show modest improvement from mid-2010s: previously, women comprised only 5.7% of public-university deans councils and many universities had zero women deans (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017; Yarmouk University, 2023). By 2022, a few institutions (YU, JUST) have multiple female deans for the first time, indicating slow but positive change. Still, out of 10 public universities, the majority have one or no women at the dean’s level, reflecting a persistent glass ceiling. The deanship is a pivotal leadership tier (managing faculties and sitting on higher councils), so the near absence of women in these roles – especially in science and engineering faculties – remains a critical gap in sustainable governance (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024).

In summary, the comparative data in Table 2 highlights a continued trend of underrepresentation: as one moves up the hierarchy from faculty councils to university-wide governance, the proportion

of women generally decreases. While some progress has been made (e.g. more women deans and trustees than a decade ago), women are still far from equal participants in the highest decision-making bodies of Jordan's universities. Only one university (Hashemite) had female representation above 20% in all three governance structures; others show patchy inclusion, with women often concentrated in one council but absent in another. This uneven integration of women's voices suggests that structural and cultural barriers continue to limit women's access to leadership roles.

4.3 Trends, Disparities, and Gaps in Women's Inclusion

Trends:

The data reveals a slow upward trend in women's participation in academic governance. Compared to past studies, which found virtually no women in top posts (e.g., zero female public university presidents or vice-presidents as of 2016; Dandan & Marques, 2017), Jordan's universities have started to include women in mid- and upper-level leadership. The presence of multiple female deans at Yarmouk, JUST, and Hashemite University, and the increased counts of women on some boards and councils, indicate incremental progress. Nationally, men still outnumber women in the "uppermost positions" by nearly 10 to 1 (Hawatmeh et al., 2024), but that gap decreases at lower ranks of leadership – suggesting a pipeline effect where women are beginning to assume roles like department chair and assistant dean in greater numbers (Hawatmeh et al., 2024). Indeed, in fields such as nursing, pharmacy, and media studies, women have approached parity in leadership (Yarmouk University, 2023). The overall trend is that women's representation is improving slowly in certain disciplines and at certain universities, aligning with global patterns of rising women's leadership in academia, albeit from a low base.

Disparities:

Despite this progress, stark disparities persist across different fields and institutions. The gender breakdown is highly field-dependent: Women cluster in disciplines stereotypically seen as "feminine" (health, education, humanities) and are notably scarce in STEM fields and high-prestige positions. For example, not a single woman leads an engineering faculty in any public university, and women form under 15% of leadership in science and IT faculties (Hawatmeh et al., 2024). Conversely, faculties of nursing and pharmacy often have significant female leadership (in some cases near 50%; Yarmouk University, 2023). These horizontal disparities reflect enduring gender segregation in academic specializations, which feeds into leadership roles. There is also a

vertical disparity: women's presence drops at higher levels of authority. Many women serve as lecturers or department deputies, yet few advance to dean or president. As of 2022, still no public university had a female president or vice-president, and only a handful of women have ever reached those positions in Jordan (mostly in private universities; Dandan & Marques, 2017). Even within governance bodies, we see disparities: for instance, Hashemite University's Board of Trustees had three women while GJU's had none – indicating that institutional culture and policies can make a difference. Smaller or newer universities, especially in rural areas, tend to have fewer women in leadership (e.g., Tafila, Ma'an's Al-Hussein University), whereas larger, older universities (UJ, YU) have comparatively more women involved. This suggests an urban-rural or center-periphery disparity in attitudes toward women's academic leadership. Such gaps highlight that progress is uneven and not yet systemic.

Gaps and Challenges:

Key gaps remain in achieving gender-inclusive governance. First, a representation gap: women are still far from proportional representation in decision-making. Although women make up roughly 35–45% of faculty in Jordan (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017; Dandan & Marques, 2017), their share in leadership roles is much lower (often below 15% in public universities). Second, a pipeline gap contributes to this – fewer women reach senior academic ranks (only ~10–12% of full professors are female; Hawatmeh et al., 2024), limiting the pool eligible for top posts like president or dean (which often require professorial rank). This structural barrier was noted as a policy issue: by requiring leaders to be full professors, the system indirectly favors men, since the majority of full professors are male (Hawatmeh et al., 2024). Third, a cultural gap persists. Traditional gender norms and unconscious bias often sideline women from leadership in a male-dominated academic culture (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). Studies have documented barriers such as discriminatory promotion practices, work-family role conflict, lack of mentorship, and persistent stereotypes that women are less fit for authority (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). These factors create an environment where women may self-select out or be passed over for leadership roles, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation. Finally, a policy/legislative gap exists in actively promoting women's inclusion. While Jordan's laws do not overtly discriminate (all leadership posts are legally open to women; Ministry of Higher Education, 2017), there have been few proactive measures (such as gender quotas or mentoring

programs) to ensure women advance. The absence of formal mechanisms to boost women's leadership means progress relies on ad hoc efforts and individual breakthroughs.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The representation of women in the governance of Jordan's public universities remains limited, though signs of improvement are evident. Women are gradually assuming more leadership roles at the faculty level and in academic councils, particularly in fields aligned with their higher enrollment and employment (e.g., health and education sectors). However, governance structures are still male-dominated, especially in STEM faculties and upper administrative echelons. This imbalance is not merely a matter of equity; it impacts the sustainability of governance. Diverse leadership teams tend to make more holistic and innovative decisions, enhancing institutional resilience and responsiveness (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). In the context of sustainable development, Goal 5.5 emphasizes women's full participation at all levels of decision-making (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, 2024) – an outcome that Jordan's higher education system has yet to achieve.

To move toward sustainable governance in academia, concerted efforts are needed. Policy interventions could include leadership development programs for female academics, mentorship and networking to prepare women for administrative careers, and revisiting criteria that may unintentionally disadvantage women (for example, broadening the eligibility pool for certain posts beyond full professors; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). The Higher Education Council and university boards should also consider setting targets or minimal thresholds for women's representation on councils and committees, in line with global best practices for good governance. Cultural change is equally important: universities must foster environments that value inclusive leadership, challenge gender stereotypes, and provide support (such as flexible policies) to balance professional and personal responsibilities – a burden that often falls more heavily on women (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). Additionally, highlighting and learning from success stories (e.g., the universities and faculties that have achieved relatively higher female participation) can provide models for others. Hashemite University's approach to appointing women in key positions or Yarmouk's breakthrough in female deans could be studied and replicated.

In conclusion, while Jordan's public universities have begun the journey toward gender-inclusive governance, significant gaps remain. Women's voices are still underrepresented where strategic decisions are made, raising questions about whether current governance fully meets the needs of all stakeholders. Achieving sustainable governance will require purposeful actions to integrate more women into leadership pipelines and decision-making forums. The evidence suggests that without such interventions, progress will continue at a slow pace, given deeply entrenched structures. Jordan's commitments to gender equality and sustainable development call for closing this representation gap. By empowering qualified women to take on leadership roles in academia, universities can not only uphold principles of equity but also enhance their governance quality, innovation, and societal relevance (Dandan & Marques, 2017; Hawatmeh et al., 2024). The pursuit of sustainable governance in higher education, therefore, must include sustained efforts to track and improve women's representation in all facets of university leadership – from faculty councils to boards of trustees – ensuring that the higher education system evolves to fully harness the talent and perspectives of both women and men.

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