

**Protecting Women, Protecting the State: Militarism, Security Threats, & Government Action on  
Violence Against Women in Jordan**

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**ABSTRACT:**

Contrary to our understanding of when states act on women's rights, Jordan adopted a violence against women policy at the same time that it faced a number of external and internal security threats. In this paper, I query the relationship between militarism and the gender policymaking process in Jordan to make sense of this puzzle. I specifically consider the ways that a feminist conceptualization of militarism offers a more fruitful understanding of government action on VAW in Jordan than studying this policy development through the lens of patriarchy, state institutions, and/or feminist activism alone. Indeed, evaluating the development of the Family Protection Law through the lens of militarism and the related security practices reveals the depth and breadth of these phenomena: the martial values and priorities of the Jordanian regime extend beyond the realm of traditional, "high politics" security issues, and impact civil, social, and even interpersonal relations – relations that are always already gendered – that are seemingly far removed from military concerns. I argue that the Jordanian government adopted the violence against women policy because it enhanced the state's image in the international arena and appeased domestic audiences by adhering to a gendered logic of protection that maintains the state as the ultimate protector of women. Overall, the paper deepens our understanding of how militarism and the security climate influence the gender policymaking process, particularly in semi-authoritarian regimes.

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The early 2000s were a tumultuous time for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Iraq war raged across its eastern border while, to the west, the second *intifada* (or uprising) in Palestine was underway. Within Jordan, demonstrators in the south took to the streets protesting austerity measures. And the deadliest terrorist attack in the country's history happened in 2005, with suicide bombers attacking wedding parties at three hotels in Amman. Despite this series of security threats, in 2008 the Jordanian government approved the Law on Protection from Family Violence to combat domestic violence and provide greater services to survivors.

That the regime would act on women's rights at this moment is surprising. In the years leading up to 2008, Jordanian policymakers were tasked with addressing a number of "high politics" issues such as domestic instability, war, and terrorism which purportedly supersede "low politics" issues like violence against women (Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde 1998; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; Schroeder 2015; Williams 2003). Extant literature suggests, then, that 2008 would be the *least* likely time for the Jordanian government to adopt progressive policies and it would, instead, enact much more regressive laws. In some ways, the Jordanian regime adhered to this expectation: the government suppressed civil rights like freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and instituted another policy, the 2008 Associations Law, that curbed the expansion of civil society organizations under the guise of protecting order and national security interests. Why, then, did Jordan deviate from the expectation and adopt a progressive social policy on violence against women?

In this paper, I query the relationship between militarism and the gender policymaking process in Jordan to make sense of this puzzle. I specifically consider the ways that a feminist conceptualization of militarism offers a more fruitful understanding of government action on VAW in Jordan than studying this policy development through the lens of patriarchy, state institutions, and/or feminist activism alone. Building on feminist work that links gender(ed) violence to militarism, I contend that the *policy* on violence against women and militarism are similarly related in Jordan. Indeed, evaluating the development of the Family Protection Law through the lens of militarism – and the related security practices – reveals the depth and breadth of these phenomena: the martial values and priorities of the Jordanian regime extend beyond the realm of traditional, "high politics" security issues, and impact civil, social, and even interpersonal relations – relations that are always already gendered – that are seemingly far removed from military concerns.

Drawing on data from 16 months of fieldwork conducted in Amman, Jordan between 2015-2016, I argue that the 2008 Family Protection Law (FPL) enhanced Jordan's image as a modern, appropriately democratic player in the international (especially security) arena, and appeased domestic audiences by adhering to a gendered logic of protection that maintains the state as the ultimate protector of women. That is, both the external and internal facing aspects of militarism permeate the political processes that

animate gender policymaking in Jordan. In following sections, I discuss the feminist literature on militarism that informs my own conceptualization of and insights into this subject. Then, I discuss the literature on VAW policymaking, paying particular attention to the Middle East and North Africa region, before turning to the case of Jordan. I conclude by reflecting on how this case can inform our broader conceptualizations of when, where, and how militarism manifests in other parts of the world.

### **Militarism, Security, & Gender Policymaking**

I ground my conceptualization of militarism in the rich work of critical feminist scholars who have described militarism as an ideology that shapes social structures, gender relations, and ideas about masculinity and femininity (Cohn 1987, 2013; Decker 2014; Enloe 1983, 2007; Kelly 2000; Lutz 2018; Sjoberg and Via 2010; Wibben 2018). Furthermore, feminist scholars have shown that militarism is not neatly confined to war rooms or military bases, but infuses the everyday lives of those in the military *and* the societies in which these militaries operate (Åhäll 2016; Basham 2016; Cuomo 1996; Enloe 2000, 2007; Wibben 2018). Militarism is entwined in the interstices of civil, political, and social life, and we can never succinctly delineate between “the personal, national, and international level of war and militarism” (Sjoberg and Via 2010, 233). By emphasizing the importance of the everyday as a site of international politics, feminist scholars show that “war is not just an event” (Coumo 1996). Instead, there is a continuum of violence – uniquely gendered violence – that precedes conflict and lingers long after a ceasefire (ibid; Cockburn 2004, 2007; Howell 2018). In taking seriously the everyday as a site of (inter)national political maneuvering, critical feminist work resolutely contends with the gender(ed) power dimensions and ramifications of militarism. As Cockburn (2004) explains: “we need to observe the functioning of gender as a relation, and as a relation of power, that compounds other power dynamics” (25).

Using these observations as my starting point, I define militarism as: the infiltration of military relations and values into everyday social relations, relations that are always already imbued with gendered power.<sup>1</sup> This conceptualization situates military practices and norms within the very societies that create and sustain them. To fully appreciate the gender(ed) power relations of militarism vis-à-vis the societies in which they operate and manifest, it is analytically imperative to parse out the mutually reinforcing nature of militarism and patriarchy, given that both systems are reliant on gender power imbalances (Decker 2014; Enloe 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> To be clear, the military, as a standalone institution, is *not* the referent object in this definition. Instead, the concept of ‘military’ maps onto the “social relations, institutions, and values relating to war and war preparation” (Shaw quoted in Stavrianakis and Selby 2013, 14).

Security practices and war preparations are neither gender neutral nor “natural or automatic” (Enloe 1983, 246), but, instead, stem from patriarchal social orderings (Enloe 2000; Sjoberg and Via 2010, 8). Inherent to militarism are the patriarchal assumptions that masculinity should be privileged, women – and anything or anyone – considered feminine should be subordinated. Militarism perpetuates the practices that sustain and legitimate these hierarchical distinctions (Enloe 2000, Elshtain 1985) Put differently, militarism promulgates notions of what it means to be a “properly” masculine man or feminine woman, relying on patriarchal narratives and assumptions about gender/race/sexual hierarchies, power, and inequitable societal/political/familial gender roles (Basham 2016; Horn 2010; Wibben 2018; Zalewski 1995).

What, then, does the concept of militarism add to analyses of patriarchal power? Studying militarism as a discrete phenomenon allows us to trace the unique political, economic, social, and discursive ramifications of security practices, military institutions, and war on human life, along with the gendered, patriarchal dimensions embedded in the phenomenon of militarism (Enloe 2000; Lutz 2018; Wibben 2011, 2018;). Paying attention to militarism helps us, for instance, make sense of masculinist war and security rhetoric that has the power to legitimate leaders, direct fiscal resources away from social issues and into war chests, and undermine women’s agency (Lutz 2018; Steihm 1982; Wadley 2009; Young 2003). An analysis of militarism, not *just* patriarchy, illuminates the gendered logic of protection that renders certain social configurations intelligible in times of war, conflict, or crisis; analyses of militarism help us understand, for example, why the Bush administration could justify invading Afghanistan to save ‘oppressed’ women (Abu-Lughod 2013). Analyses of militarism, not *just* patriarchy, shed light on the uses of women’s bodies and sexuality in state building, conflict, and occupation (Enloe 2004, 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; Young 2003; Yuval-Davis 1997). Militarism and patriarchy are certainly reinforcing and intersecting concepts – but one does not take the place of the other.

Jordan’s colonial experience with Britain exemplifies how militarism normalizes and reifies patriarchal gender hierarchies built around certain masculinities – after all, not *all* men are appropriately masculine – in political and social institutions (Jabiri 2016; Massad 2001; see also Enloe 2000; Tickner 1992; Yuval-Davis 1997). In the transition from a British colony to an independent state, British officers constructed the Jordanian military in the likeness of Britain’s army and then used the military to engender a unified national identity (Massad 2001). British forces feminized traditional Bedouin modes of dress, hairstyles, and social interactions and sought to remodel Bedouin men to align with their “colonial masculinity” (ibid). Colonial military forces promulgated a hypermasculine identity that Jordanian soldiers adopted and then transferred to Bedouin Arabs. This militarized masculine identity, in turn, reshaped other gender relations. Jabiri (2016, 6) shows that British policies and practices undercut the relative autonomy and freedom that women enjoyed prior to the militarized state-building processes. If

we were to limit our analyses of the existence or pervasiveness of gender hierarchies to the role of patriarchy, then we would overlook a powerful force that justifies, reinforces, and promulgates a system of domination built on, but distinct from, patriarchal ideology; again, as suggested by Cockburn (2004), militarism compounds patriarchal power dynamics.

### *Militarized Security & Gender(ed) Policy Outcomes*

Security threats marshal an expansion of militarism by creating situations in which preparations for war are justified on the basis of securing the nation, even though war preparations and security practices prove disastrous for many women and marginalized groups (Rodriguez 2018; see also Shaw 2013). In practice, “militarism aimed at securing social collectives [...] and political entities such as states engenders various forms of insecurities” (Parashar 2018, 124, emphasis added; see also Elshtain 1995; Sahadevan 2002). A feminist analysis of militarism, then, necessarily attends to the way (in)security ebbs and flows alongside the identification of and reaction to security threats, *and* how (in)security is gendered, raced, classed, sexualized, and more (Åhäll 2016; Wibben 2018).

Part of the way that militarism infiltrates social relations is through leaders invoking national security threat language (see Buzan 2007). As Young (2003) notes, “Public leaders invoke fear and then they promise to keep those living under them safe” (13; see also Peterson 1977). When the polity is made to feel vulnerable, hypermasculine responses and leaders are lauded as the appropriate choice for restoring order and security (Lawless 2004; Falk and Kenski 2006), while women are shunted out of the realm of (inter)national politics and relegated to subjugated positions to await protection (Elshtain 1995; Tickner 1992; Young 2003). Responding to security threats affords leaders the opportunity to demonstrate their masculine credentials. 9/11, for example, allowed George W. Bush to display his capability for violence and decisive action – traits associated with masculinity – and, in doing so, he invoked the image of war hero masculinity (Wadley 2009). Hypermasculine leaders are cast as foils to subordinate, feminine civilians in need of protection (Enloe 2000; Lutz 2018; Stiehm 1982; Tickner 1992; Wadley 2009; Young 2003).

The gendered logic of protection underscoring the relationship between the militarized state and the citizenry has consequential policy effects and outcomes. Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration swiftly passed the USA PATRIOT Act which allowed the government to surveil “threatening” individuals and organizations, to limit their movement and activities, and to detain individuals without due process in order to, purportedly, ensure the protection of US citizens (Tickner 2002; Wibben 2011; Young 2003). In exchange for relinquishing some of their civil liberties, the state provides citizens with order, security, discipline, and protection (Peterson 1977; Young 2003; see also Elshtain 1995). When individuals push back against the security state (what Peterson (1977) described as

the “protection racket”) and decline these so-called security services, the state can question the patriotism of these individuals, can justify withholding protections, or even inflict violence in retaliation (Young 2003). More pointedly, in advocating for women’s rights during times of duress, feminist activists are deemed naïve at best and treasonous as worst (Kelly 2010).

Additionally, analyses of the agenda-setting process in the US context show that national security, a masculinized policy domain, dominates policymakers’ agendas, usually at the expense of feminized social issues (Jones and Baumgartner 2005; see also Horn 2010; Tickner 1992). Defense and state security concerns (along with economic security) similarly dominate the *public* agenda and “it is clear that all other issues take a back seat” (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, 266; see also Schroeder 2015). The emergence of explicitly feminist foreign policies in Sweden, Canada, and previously under former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the US, suggests that it is possible to challenge the seemingly incontrovertible dominance of security issues *over* women’s rights. However, recent events suggest that these states are still likely to privilege militaristic responses to security threats. For example, when 160,000 asylum seekers sought refuge in Sweden in 2015, Sweden instituted border controls and strict family reunification processes that disproportionately affected women (Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond 2016; True 2015). When faced with a perceived threat, even states with self-defined feminist practices like Sweden struggle to radically shift and reimagine power structures in ways that prioritize gender justice.

### *Violence Against Women Policy Adoption*

Thus far, I have discussed the myriad ways that militarism is implicated in gendered social phenomena and how it specifically underscores policy decisions. How, then, has militarism factored in to analyses of government action on VAW? As there is an extensive body of work linking militarism to gender violence (Adelman 2003; Decker 2014; Kelly 2000; 2010; Leatherman 2013; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009), it is surprising that there are few interrogations of the connection between militarism and VAW *policy outcomes* at the national level.<sup>2</sup> Instead, when tracing the emergence of violence against women policies, scholars typically point to: 1) transnational feminist activism that activates international norms against gender violence and 2) strong, autonomous domestic feminist movements (Chen 1995; Datta and

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<sup>2</sup> To be sure, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (UNSCR 1325) explicitly connects international security to combating gender violence (Shepherd 2008; Hudson 2010). However, UNSCR 1325 specifically situates VAW in the context of armed conflict and peacebuilding. Advocates of national or sub-national VAW policy adoption – even in post-conflict states – have not used this international instrument in the same way that they have used others like the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (see, e.g., O’Brien 2013; Ampofo 2008).

Kornberg 2002; Ferree and Tripp 2006; Friedman 1995; Htun and Weldon 2013; Gottfried and Reese 2003; Montoya 2009, 2013; O'Brien 2013; Prugl and Meyer 1999; Weldon 2006). As these studies suggest, feminist mobilization at both the international and local level is critical to establishing gender violence as a public policy problem, then mobilizing political forces to address this issue (Weldon 2002). After analyzing VAW policy change in 70 countries across four decades, Weldon and Htun (2012) conclude that “the most important and consistent factor driving [VAW] policy change is feminist activism” (231).

Despite this robust finding in the gender and politics literature, the relationship between women’s movements and VAW policy adoption in the MENA region is less established. MENA women’s movements have succeeded in shifting the public and political discourse on gender violence (Al-Ali 2003; Brand 1998; Hasso 2005; Naciri 1998), but their advocacy efforts for the adoption of policies criminalizing VAW have led to fewer policy changes, relative to other regions of the world. As of 2005, states in the Middle East had some of the poorest governmental responses to VAW in the world – at that time it was the only regional bloc in which governments had taken little to no action on VAW (Weldon and Htun, 2012, 238).

Part of the reason for the delayed development of gender policies in the region is that women’s movements face opposition from conservative political and social factions, restrictions on civil society, and state involvement in women’s organizing (Al-Ali 2003; Lowrance 1998; Wiktorowicz 2002). This latter phenomenon manifests in the paradoxical arrangement of governmental non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) or royal non-governmental organizations (RONGOs) (Brand 1998; Lowrance 1998; Tadros 2014). In states like Jordan, Egypt, and Iran, these state feminist machineries infiltrate the inner workings of women’s movements through regime-controlled organizations and can steer the development of women’s rights in ways that can benefit women, but ultimately still align with the state’s interests (Al-Ali 2003; Hatem 1992; Lowrance 1998; Wiktorowicz 2002).

Even though women’s movements in Jordan contend with extensive governmental oversight (Lowrance 1998; Pratt 2015) and historical legacies that deter broad-based mobilization (Abu Rish 2012), Jordan was still one of the earliest adopters of a VAW policy, instituting the Family Protection Law in 2008. In comparison, Bahrain and Algeria adopted VAW policies in 2015, while Tunisia adopted a policy in 2017. Even Morocco, with its vibrant and powerful women’s movement (see Moghadam 2003, 2005), only adopted a VAW policy in the spring of 2018. That Jordan was this far ahead of the regional curve in adopting a VAW law makes the puzzle I established earlier, “why this policy and why now?,” even more intriguing.

To briefly recap, feminist scholarship establishes militarism as a gendered power relation that impacts civil, political, and social institutions. For example, men are more likely to be promoted as viable

state leaders in militarized states; hypermilitarized states repress radical feminist activism; and, according to the extant literature at least, women's rights tend to be overshadowed by security and defense issues in militarized states. In what follows, I analyze the historical trajectory of the FPL, paying attention to the indicators of government action on VAW established by scholars of gender and politics (i.e., women's movements, state feminism, and conservative opposition) *as well as* the influence of militarism in the policymaking process. The case study uses primary data, including 54 semi-structured interviews in both Arabic and English with activists, journalists, government officials, lawyers, and NGO directors and their staff as well as newspaper articles, speeches from policymakers, and field notes, that I collected in Jordan over the course of sixteen months (during 2015 and 2016). By analyzing the historical trajectory of the Family Protection Law (FPL), I endeavor to provide an empirically grounded claim about how militarism operates across levels of analysis (i.e., the personal, the national, and the international) and impacts the everyday through its influence on both the gender policymaking process and policy output.

### **The Case of Jordan: Militarism, Security, and VAW Policymaking**

The Hashemite regime has long relied on the military and security apparatus for support and legitimacy. This proclivity is a remnant from the colonial era as the military afforded the regime a way to create and then unify a Jordanian identity among the disparate parts of the new nation (Massad 2001). Now, the regime still relies upon the military and security forces (and Bedouin tribes) for legitimacy and support, but we need to consider the ways that militarism has evolved in both Jordan and the rest of the world. Precarious economic conditions precipitated the growth of Jordan's military industrial complex to support employment and welfare provisions (Baylouny 2008). Foreign aid, in large part from the US, bolsters this militarized welfare regime, and these aid packages motivate Jordan's ongoing yet controversial support for US security missions in the region (ibid). Thus, we cannot consider domestic militarism outside of or separate from the international dimensions of Jordan's position in the global military industry.

But militarism – conceptualized as the infusion of martial values into society – goes beyond analyses of the military as an institution. Militarism now manifests in the dramatic persona of the “warrior King” who operates as the paternalistic protector of subordinate citizens. And the population is constantly reminded that the way to promote security is through hypermilitarized means: from fighter jet statues to the positioning of armed tanks and guards at important intersections in Amman, the regime “performs security” (Wadley 2009) through prominent displays of military might. I interpret these domestic and international security politics as a politics of gender (Prügl 2011); I use the lens of militarism to investigate who and what gets attention and why, and how women and women's activism are policed to fit within the acceptable security framework.

### *1996 – 2002: The Origins of the Family Protection Units*

In the summer of 1996, the rape and subsequent police mistreatment of a British-Iraqi woman brought international attention to women's issues in Jordan (Warrick 2009). Patricia Salti, a British National working on Prince Hassan's staff, pressured the prince to create a police unit that would handle domestic violence, sexual violence, and violence against women and children broadly (ibid.). Salti and Prince Hassan arranged for British police officers to train Jordanian police officers in the proper techniques for handling the aforementioned forms of violence. On February 7, 1998, the first Family Protection Unit opened as part of the Public Security Directorate. The year proved monumental for raising awareness on multiple forms of violence against women; Rana Hussein, a well-known journalist with the *The Jordan Times*, published a series of investigative articles that highlighted the problem of so-called honor crimes in Jordan. In 1999, Hussein and another private Jordanian citizen started a campaign to end these crimes in Jordan (Hussein 2009; Nanes 2003). Hussein and the campaign gained international notoriety – even winning an award from Human Rights Watch in 2000 – and broke the taboo for discussing so-called honor crimes in the kingdom (Al-Atiyat 2012; Nanes 2013). Yet policies mitigating the punishment for honor related crimes remained on the books.

In 1999, King Abdullah II was crowned king after the death of his father, King Hussein, and this shift in power sent ripples throughout the kingdom. Abdullah II drew support from the military, intelligence services, and from tribal factions loyal to the throne for legitimizing his new position (Baylouny 2005; Schwedler, 2002). The process of deliberalization that started in earnest in 1994 (though setbacks occurred as early as 1991) under King Hussein hastened in the early years of King Abdullah II's reign (Brand 1998; Ryan and Schwedler 2003). The regime, for instance, signaled its intolerance of dissent, especially with regards to the wildly unpopular peace treaty with Israel, by cracking down on the Jordanian offices of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in September 1999 (Lucas 2003). After the start of the second Palestinian *intifada* in the fall of 2000, the government violently repressed thousands of demonstrators participating in protests around the country. In the spring of 2001, the king dissolved parliament and essentially ruled by decree over the next two years, issuing over 250 temporary laws between June 2001 and June 2003 that severely curbed civil liberties such as freedom of assembly and freedom of speech (Ryan and Schwedler 2003).

In 2002, a series of large-scale protests over the implementation of International Monetary Fund protocols began in the southern governorate of Ma'an. In October of that year, a US diplomat was shot outside of his home in Amman. Once again, the government intensified its restrictions on civil society under the auspices of promoting national security. Demonstrators were detained without due process. Journalists were banned from reporting on certain events. The government continued announcing new

temporary laws even though, according to the constitution, temporary laws are admissible only if the security of the state is at risk (Schwedler 2002). In this way, the government construed civil liberties as threats to national security and those who dared to violate the new laws by holding rallies or writing investigative exposes found themselves answering to the State Security Court (rather than the civilian court) (ibid.).

Yet, during that same period of deliberalization, the government advanced some women's rights and issues in the kingdom. In March 2000, the king established the Royal Commission for Human Rights (RCHR), with Queen Rania as chair. The purported mission of the RCHR was to determine the status of human rights in the country and to ensure all laws comply with the international conventions that Jordan had signed (RCHR, 2000). In July 2001, a royal decree established the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA)—the institution that would eventually draft the Family Protection Law in 2008. Additionally, mixed in amongst the overwhelmingly regressive temporary laws, the king issued a series of progressive amendments on women's rights in the country in December 2001 (Al-Atiyat 2012; Clark and Young 2008). While the regime construed freedom of speech and freedom of the press as state security threats that should be constrained through royal decree, the government never framed changes to the status of women as antithetical to the security of the state. In fact, the inclusion of progressive policies addressing women's rights in the bundle of temporary laws indicated that promoting women's rights is *vital* to national security, while the repression of other social rights will protect the state.

### *2003-2008: Shifts in Domestic Politics and Shifts to 'Security-Mode'*

Up to this point, attempts to address family violence centered on creating the family protection department within the public security directorate, establishing the NCFA, and on gaining government support for a women's shelter. At the time, the Jordanian Women's Union was the only organization in the country that offered shelter services. Women were routinely held in prison for their own protection given the lack of shelters and the stigma surrounding them. Shelters, conservatives claimed, threaten families by encouraging women to leave their husbands. Islamists and other conservatives emphasized reconciliation over women's autonomy, which had consequential outcomes: in April 2003, the Minister of Social Development met with the head of the Jordan Family Protection Project, Momen Hadidi, to discuss all aspects of the proposed safe house. In this meeting, the two explicitly decided that the house would not be labeled a "women's shelter," but would, instead, be known as a "Family Reconciliation House" (Husseini 2003a).

As the monarch continued to embrace militaristic practices and quietly abandon the earlier democratic reforms, it loudly proclaimed its position as a regional leader in women's rights. The international community validated Jordan's image, especially as a regional leader on combating violence

against women through the establishment of the family protection units. In 2003, the UN awarded the Jordanian Family Protection Project with the United Nations Prize in the field of Human Rights. The President of the 58<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly announced the award and described the family protection project as “a ground-breaking initiative that had helped to lift the taboo on the subject of domestic violence...and may provide a useful learning experience for countries around the world” (United Nations, 2003).

The June 2003 parliamentary election produced a conservative lower house, and this proved troublesome for the longevity of the women’s rights policies that the king had issued. The 250-plus temporary laws were examined by parliament and, in August 2003, the lower house voted against the amendments to the personal status laws (PSLs) and on a policy that would allow Jordanian women to pass citizenship to their children, rather than limiting that right to Jordanian men (Al-Atiyat 2012; Ryan and Schwelder 2004). Before the defeat, both the king and queen publicly supported these policies, yet afterward, neither came out against the parliamentarians’ decision (Ryan and Schweder 2004). King Abdullah II has certainly followed in the path of his father in this regard; both King Hussein and King Abdullah II forged arrangements with members of parliament<sup>3</sup> that allowed them to direct social and cultural issues – including women’s issues – in exchange for their support on foreign policy issues (Baylouny 2008; Clark 2003; Ryan and Schwedler 2004). Simply put, quelling parliamentary dissent over the 1994 peace treaty with Israel and the US invasion of Iraq (along with other US military projects in the region) proved more important to the regime than taking a hard line in support of controversial progressive gender policies.

Despite these setbacks, activists continued organizing around domestic violence. The Salma Network, an expansion of the 2003-2005 Salma Project, brought together women from around the Arab world to draft policies and initiate campaigns on domestic violence (Nusair 2013). A prominent activist and former Jordanian parliamentarian who helped organize the Salma Network explained that early versions of the FPL grew from these meetings. At a 2005 event, the activists drafted laws that aligned with the international standard on gender-based violence. However, they acknowledged that “the society is not ready to focus on [gender-based violence] so we decided that we would call it a family protection act” (interview 1). Later that year, she joined a delegation to Germany with the Minister of Social Development to visit women’s shelters and police centers. This minister took interest in improving facilities for Jordanian women and passing a law against domestic violence. As the activist explained:

[The minister] said ‘when we go back we will try to present a draft law on domestic violence’ ...

So I sent [the draft] to him and a few days later there was a piece of news in the newspaper that

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<sup>3</sup> Though the former much more explicitly than the latter - see Ryan and Schwedler 2004 on this point.

the Minister of Social Development sent a draft of a domestic violence act to the [Upper House]. Of course, they cut half of it, but then we decided to keep silent because we want the idea to pass at least. (ibid.)

Although a draft of the FPL appeared before the members of the Upper House of parliament, this did not result in the adoption of the policy in 2005.

On November 9, 2005, Jordan experienced the worst terrorist attack in its history. Al-Qa'ida linked terrorists attacked wedding parties at three major hotels in Amman, killing nearly 60 people and injuring more than 100. Within days of the Amman bombings, a hawkish career military and intelligence services man, Ma'rouf al-Bakhit, replaced the more moderate Prime Minister, Adnan Badran, and "many understood the signal of a military officer taking charge of a government at a time of severe insecurity" (Ryan 2018, 38). Indeed, security was central to the regime prior to the bombings, but the state shifted into full scale security-mode after the attacks: counter-terrorism became the key policy focus for the monarchy (Ryan 2008). The security emphasis permeated civil, political, and social structures. In an address to the nation following the attacks, King Abdullah II implored "everyone in beloved Jordan to consider themselves a security officer and soldier" ("King of Jordan Address to His Nation," November 11, 2005) while Queen Rania became the face of grief, the quintessential grieving mother, for the entire country. A long-time parliamentarian explained, "Terrorism has raised the level of security to the maximum. Everything now is dominated by security. Security is there in every single thing. From arts to music to sports. It's in everything. It's element number one" (interview 2).

The regime's counterterrorism strategy centered on eradicating militant forms of Islamism. Members of the decidedly *not* militant Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Action Front (IAF) nonetheless faced harassment from the security services – including the arrest of an IAF leader in January 2006 for criticizing the government online (Ryan 2008). On November 1, 2006, Jordan passed sweeping and vague anti-terrorism laws, much like the USA PATRIOT act, that expanded the roles of the intelligence and police services, allowed military prosecutors to detain suspects without charge for up to a week, and further curbed freedoms of the press and expression in the kingdom (HRW 2007; Ryan 2008). In May 2007, the government proposed a new NGO law that further limited freedom of association in the kingdom (Wilke 2007). Jordan's elections in 2007 did little to improve the kingdom's autocratic image. The 2007 elections were widely dismissed as fraudulent and included reports of government sponsored vote rigging through ballot box stuffing and bussing in soldiers to polling places to support pro-regime candidates (Susser 2008).

Yet during these years of authoritarian practices by the government and the regime-empowered security services (HRW 2007), Jordan made a series of moves to bolster its human rights credentials in the international arena, particularly by advancing and then publicizing women's rights. In June 2006, the

UN elected Jordan to the newly formed Human Rights Council. In the document announcing its candidacy, the Jordanian delegation specifically indicated that “Jordan’s commitment to the empowerment of women and gender equality has been a priority in national policy” (UN HRC 2006) as evidence of its commendable human rights practices. Bakhit, the hawkish Prime Minister, in a speech at a World Bank sponsored event in January 2007, reiterated the government’s commitment to revising all gender-discriminatory laws and announced that the government would refer CEDAW to parliament for endorsement (Husseini 2007). The latter came to fruition on August 1, 2007, when the government published CEDAW in the National Gazette making it a binding treaty. Further, after years of delay, the first government run shelter for victims of violence opened in Amman in 2007.

Queen Rania continued to advocate for a formal VAW policy. At a September 2007 training workshop held by the NCFA, she implored lawmakers to institutionalize family protection through codified laws because “the family unit is the most important component of our society and we *must work hard to protect our children and women*” (*The Jordan Times*, 12 September 2007, emphasis added). A few months later, under the guidance and urgings of the queen, the NCFA worked with NGOs and the Ministry of Social Development to draft the FPL, which was subsequently endorsed by the lower house in January 2008 (Hussein 2008). The monarchy touted this development with international partners and donors and received lavish praise for their work on family protection. At an International Women’s Day event in New York City on March 4, 2008, the UN Foundation President introduced Queen Rania as a guest speaker and emphasized her role in Jordan’s recent advancements in combating VAW:

One doesn’t have to spend much time in Jordan to see the difference [Queen Rania] has made...I saw firsthand [her] contributions to protect families from domestic violence and abuse. When my colleagues and I met with public safety officials in Amman they proudly describe their efforts to prevent and treat cases of abuse...they said nothing would have been possible without her majesty’s support. And today Jordan is among the first of the first in the Arab world leading to far-reaching reforms. (Kathy Bushkin Calvin, March 4, 2008)

Yet, domestically, the FPL did not generate the same level of excitement among women’s right advocates. Ahead of the January vote, a prominent independent women’s rights NGO revoked their support for the bill because they felt that the proposed law was too lenient and failed to provide adequate protection to victims (interview 3). Another prominent activist claimed that the law was “just ink on paper” (interview 4). This “ink on paper,” however, generated an international buzz for the Jordanian regime and continued to signal Jordan’s progressive stance on *women’s* human rights, despite its marred record human rights more broadly.

### **Repressing Rights, Fortifying Families**

The al-Qa'ida sponsored terrorist attack in November 2005 strengthened militarism in Jordan and effectively hastened a pattern of deliberalization already under way in the kingdom (Ryan 2008). For instance, the 2007 amendments to the press and publications law curbed the rights of the press by providing provisions for the state to stop the publication of material that it deems offensive (Muasher 2011). IAF members who paid condolences to the family of late Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, the man who orchestrated the Amman bombings, were arrested and tried for crimes against the state in June 2006. Political Parties Law No. 19 of 2007 eroded the independence and freedom of such parties by allowing the ministry of the interior – not an independent institution – to oversee elections, a move intended to undercut opposition to the regime (ibid). And the disastrous elections of 2007, in which the security establishment systematically rigged outcomes in favor of the government, marked a low point for political reform (Susser 2008).

Yet, all the while, the regime fiercely and publicly defended women's rights and championed its efforts to combat violence against women - especially through the establishment of the Family Protection Units. Even though the international community documented the erosion of civil liberties in the kingdom, Jordan's position on women's rights signaled that it was a modern, democratic partner (Baylouny 2005; see Avdeyeva 2007; Salime, 2007). Indeed, it was selected as an inaugural member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2006, and, as described above, Jordan was called a "first of firsts" for its work on VAW in 2008. The message, then, is that the regime can violently repress protestors and demonstrators, can repeal press freedoms, undermine electoral processes, and curb the freedom of assembly and *as long as* they highlight their progressive stance on women's rights, the international community will applaud their efforts at improving and protecting human rights. The international community can, *in good faith*, continue to make Jordan a key actor in the global military industry because of its progressive stance on women's rights. Simply put, Jordan's militaristic practices at home and its role in international military projects underscored the regime's aggressive and widely publicized embrace of initiatives combating violence against women.

Domestically, the family protection project and the FPL were negotiated in such a way that, rather than emphasizing women's autonomy and agency, they tapped into the gendered logic of protection. We see strategic negotiations among activists, policy elites, and conservative forces over the language and framing of the policy. Two different instances illustrate how progressive, feminist language is exchanged for paternalistic language that explicitly adheres to a protectionist narrative. First, the director of the NCFA worked with the Minister of Social Development who demanded women's shelters be named "reconciliation homes." This renaming trivializes women's agency and emphasizes their position as members of the family unit. As the secretary general of the Ministry of Social Development

explained, “one of the main aims behind this pioneering project is to strengthen family bonds” (Husseini 2003b). Similarly, the director of the Family Protection Project – the same person who negotiated the name change – contended that “the focus would be to try and reconcile the two parties as well as focus on the psychological, economic, and social empowerment of the victims *in order to guarantee that families would remain solid and undivided*” (ibid, emphasis added).

The second instance involves feminist activists preemptively labeling the proposed VAW policy in a way that adhered with paternalistic protection language. In this case, activists manipulated a security trope and strategically chose to call the bill the family protection act, not the gender-based violence act (see Noonan 1997; Salime 2007). Framing the law as a gender-based violence act would be too radical and subversive to gain traction with either the Jordanian government or the polity. This suggests that it is not enough to have a strong and autonomous women’s movement; activists must strategically navigate the militarized political terrain and justify their campaigns as bolstering security initiatives or, at the very least, not distracting from them. By situating the law within the familiar and accepted rhetoric of protection, the law neither challenged nor disrupted the status quo. The protection of women comes from paternalistic state institutions – the police or the courts – and this reflects the broader protectionist narratives prevalent in Jordan at that time. Because the state has a responsibility to protect vulnerable constituents, paradigmatically women and children, to validate its masculine strength, a policy like the FPL that bolsters this arrangement is unlikely to elicit opposition. Similarly, Jordan’s response to national security threats like the war in Iraq, the *intifada*, economic downturns, etc., is to partner with the US in its military missions and repeal civil and social liberties in the name of protecting the state.

Returning to our puzzle, a feminist conceptualization of militarism provides critical insight into why the Jordanian regime acted on VAW in the early 2000s. The law improved Jordan’s international image at a time when Jordan’s position in the “war on terror” and the pursuit of security engendered rollbacks in civil and political rights. The FPL thus helped solidify Jordan’s place as an accepted democratic ally for western powers. Domestically, the law tapped into militaristic national myths about protectors and the protected. On the surface, the domestic politics involved in the gender policymaking process may seem like a straightforward case of patriarchal, conservative groups wielding power to shape women’s rights in ways that align with their ideology. However, patriarchy does not fully explain why the monarchy used women’s rights as a bargaining chip with these conservative groups to achieve its foreign policy goals. Nor does an analysis of patriarchy provide a satisfactory explanation as to why Jordan’s militaristic practices at home and its role in international military projects coincide with the regime’s aggressive and widely publicized embrace of initiatives combating violence against women. Quite simply, these conservative domestic politics are implicated in and affected by international politics. As such, we

can't ignore the role of militarism in shaping both the policymaking process and the policy outcome.

## **Conclusion**

This paper makes the case that militarism matters for understanding how, when, and why governments will act on VAW. To be sure, there are multiple, important factors at play in any policymaking process and I am certainly not claiming that militarism is a panacea for understanding every aspect of gender policy change or continuity. Feminist analyses of religious institutions and conservative backlash, for example, further deepen our understanding of when and why governments adopt women's rights. Be that as it may, I still contend that analyses of militarism illuminate how the infusion of martial values into state and social structures shapes a state's policy agenda priorities, affects the degree to which elites and the polity will accept progressive feminist policy initiatives, and influences the tactics and campaigns deployed by women's rights activists.

Evidence from other states in the MENA region suggest that this process is not unique to the FPL or to Jordan. Writing on Morocco, Salime (2007) traces how both feminist and Islamist women's groups used rhetoric from the Global War on Terror to support their policy goals. Both feminist and Islamist groups, Salime notes, were working in a context in which women's issues were not a priority (5). To gain political traction, women expressed their demands as aligning with and advancing Morocco's interest in countering extremism and contributing to the Bush administration's war on terror. As such, activists appropriated the language and rhetoric of the state and defined their initiative (to get legal reform on family law) as a democratic imperative that worked as a frontline defender against religious extremism. Islamist women, in comparison, wanted access to positions of religious leadership; they appropriated the language of moderation in their efforts to reform hegemonic religious structures. Using these tactics, both groups made headway in their campaigns. Salime warns, however, "by accepting the framework of the war and speaking its language, both groups, with notable differences, have contributed to making the war hegemonic" (2007, 21).

I contend that this is also the case with militarism and the FPL in Jordan. The FPL exemplifies a pro-militarism, non-transgressive law that relies on gendered assumptions about power, control, and people's accepted roles in public and private domains. Women's groups acted strategically to frame the VAW policy as aligning with the dominant discourse of the state as the paternalistic protector of women, but, in doing so, they inadvertently reified the logic of militarism. This is not to suggest that it would be better for victims of violence if there were *no* law in place – most scholarship shows that even weak VAW laws provide some legal recourse for women seeking justice (see Weldon 2002). Rather, my goal is

to call attention to the social and political structures that engendered the policy and, in turn, to reflect on how the policy might be maintaining and reproducing those structures.

While this analysis has centered on a national level policy within a semi-authoritarian state, it is important to reiterate that the policymaking process cannot be considered separate from the international security climate. The interconnectedness of states through militarized interactions and pursuits, then, are not unique to semi-authoritarian regimes and we should continue interrogating the ramifications of justifying progress through militaristic means (Enloe 2007; Howell 2018; Hudson 2010; Salime 2007; Wibben 2018). Indeed, in any state, domestic policy battles for women's rights (and other progressive social policies) are not disconnected from the martial politics (see Howell 2018) inherent to the international security climate. When we fully consider how gender politics are shot through with international relations, we find that an analysis of militarism is imperative for a deep understanding of when and why governments act on women's rights.

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#### Interviews Cited

Full names withheld to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors. All interviews were conducted in Amman, Jordan.

Interview 1: Former governmental minister and current director of an international women's rights organization. October 10, 2016

Interview 1: Parliamentarian. May 21, 2016

Interview 3: Senior activist and current director of a domestic women's rights organization. June 29, 2016

Interview 4: Activist and journalist. October 20, 2016