Jordanian lawmakers trade punches in Parliament amid heated discussion on women's rights

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<https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/29/middleeast/jordan-parliament-fight-intl/index.html>

Chaos erupted in Jordan's Parliament on Tuesday, with lawmakers throwing punches at each other after a discussion on a constitutional amendment that would afford greater rights to women got heated.

Video of the event shows a handful of lawmakers in a physical altercation, fighting and hurling threats and insults at each other. Even the speaker of Parliament resorted to angry outbursts to manage the commotion.

The fight broke out between conservative lawmakers Hassan Riati and Shadi Udwan after insults were exchanged and blasphemous remarks were made, according a source who saw events unfold first-hand. Several other MPs subsequently got caught up in the pushing and shoving.

The fracas unfolded as lawmakers were preparing to debate a change to the constitution to address Jordanian citizens in both the feminine and masculine tense. Jordanian women currently enjoy equal rights with respect to their entitlement to health care, education, political participation and employment, but are not afforded the same rights when it comes to nationality and citizenship as men. For example, women cannot pass on their nationality to children or spouses -- but men can.

The proposed amendment, part of a series of changes backed by [King Abdullah II](https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2021/07/25/exp-gps-0725-king-abdullah-biden-middle-east.cnn)aimed at modernizing Jordan, was met with fierce opposition from conservative parliamentarians who view the change with disdain. One of those parliamentarians, Mohammad Al Fayez, said the proposed changes were ultimately "against morality and motherhood."

Parliamentary proceedings were stopped after several lawmakers began yelling at lawmaker Abdulmunim Oddat, who was trying to defend the amendment by arguing it adds no new provisions to the constitution and was only meant to create "linguistic equality."

Reem Abu Hassan, an attorney who served on a royal committee tasked with modernizing the constitution, told CNN that the language in the current constitution reflects the norms of written Arabic in the 1950s, when groups of people were referred to by masculine terms.

"We thought that it was time that the constitution of the country should refer to a woman in a very clear manner," she said.

Abu Hassan explained that while some lawmakers fear the amendment will override the terms of inheritance or citizenship law, the main objective of the amendment is to ensure that women have a more active role in public life. Inheritance laws in the country, which are based on Sharia law, often sees a man's share double that of a woman's.

Gender equality is a contentious topic among social conservatives in Jordan, who have long resisted granting equal rights to women.

Salma Nims, secretary-general of the Jordanian National Commission for Women, told CNN that Jordan's extreme right-wing and Islamic movements equate the fight for women's equality as a stain on women's morality and open the door to further freedoms.

"To them, equality of women means women will get to enjoy freedom over their bodies, and that changes the morality of society and the unity of the family," Nims said.

"Every time the women's movement gets closer to achieving something, closer to living in dignity in this country there is a fear coming from the patriarchal system that this will mean a change in the power relations within society," she said.