

20 women win seats in Saudi municipal poll

Twenty women have won seats in municipal councils in Saudi Arabia as the ultraconservative Muslim kingdom allowed females to vote and run as candidates for the first time in history in an election on Saturday.

The 20 elected females represent just under one percent of the roughly 2,100 municipal council seats that were contested in the election, reports the rt.com.

It was also only the third ever election in Saudi Arabia. Just men participated in the 2005 and 2011 polls.

The development is viewed as historic for Saudi Arabia where women have fewer rights than men, being forbidden to drive cars and making major life decisions without consent from male relatives, among other restrictions.

"I deeply believe in the importance of voting in order to be part of my country's drive to empower women and elevate their status. The turnout was good and the voting proceeded smoothly. I personally voted based on the candidates' programs and plans," says one of the female first-time votes.

However, the election was only for two thirds of municipal council seats which have no legislative or national powers but are rather limited to local affairs.

The turnout was also quite low, with just 25 per cent of the voters casting ballots due to election still being a new thing for the Saudis.

Salma bint Hazab al-Otaibi, who won a seat in the Madrika district of Mecca, was hailed as first woman councilor in Saudi Arabia on social media.

Huda al-Jeraisy, a daughter of a former head of the chamber of commerce, was elected in the country's capital, Riyadh.

Two women were elected in Saudi Arabia's most conservative region, Qassim, but their names were not released as well as the name of another female councillor from al-Babtain.

The late King Abdullah announced that the women would vote in 2015 as he had been looking to increase the public role of females in the country.

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