

- It allows men to marry up to four wives, and also to have sex with slave girls: “If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice” (4:3).
- It rules that a son’s inheritance should be twice the size of that of a daughter: “Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children’s (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females” (4:11).
- It allows for marriage to pre-pubescent girls, stipulating that Islamic divorce procedures “shall apply to those who have not yet menstruated” (65:4).

Even some passages that appear to benefit women don’t end up doing so. The Koran requires a husband to give his wife a dowry (4:4). The wife, however, may choose to free the husband from this obligation: “If the wife gives him part or all of that dowry with a good heart, her husband is allowed to take it. . . .”⁹ In reality, this supposed choice is sometimes forced on women and justified by this Koranic verse.

These passages are not archaisms or dead letters; they are imposed wherever Islamic law is enforced—as in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where large numbers of women turned out during the June 2009 post-election demonstrations. Clearly, these women’s grievances went far beyond a single rigged election. One explained, “I see lots of girls and women in these demonstrations. They are all angry, ready to explode, scream out and let the world hear their voice. I want the world to know that as a woman in this country, I have no freedom.” This was not surprising, since Iranian law was formulated in scrupulous adherence to the Koran and Islamic tradition and law.