



## **“Women’s Political Participation: The Case of Morocco”**

Rachida Tahri

Association Démocratique des femmes du Maroc

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### **The Implementation of Quotas: African Experiences**

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Under-representation of women in politics is a common feature of many countries of French-speaking Africa. The purpose of this paper is to present some aspects of Morocco’s experience of women’s access to elective positions and offices.

The electoral process that began in Morocco in September 2002 culminated in October 2003. It started with the renewal of the Chamber of Representatives (September 2002), including the election of members of the professional associations (July 2003), representatives of wage earners (10 October 2003), local council members (12 September 2003), provincial and regional council members, and finally, one-third of the members of the Chamber of Councillors (the lower house).

#### **What Role for Women in this Process?**

In Morocco, under the first Constitution, women have enjoyed the right to vote and to run for elective office since 1962. While women account for just over 50 per cent of the population, and while their rate of electoral participation is the same as that of men, if not higher, they have continued to be excluded, for decades, from the corridors of power. This is despite the fact that the number of female candidates has increased with each successive election.

Article 8 of the Constitution states that:

‘Men and women enjoy equal political rights’ and ‘all citizens of age of both sexes, in the exercise of their civil and political rights are voters’.

In addition, Morocco has ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with reservations about the articles regarding personal status, but not with respect to political rights.

Nonetheless, the granting of these political rights has not been accompanied by measures and mechanisms to make it possible for women to gain real access to elective institutions. One had to wait until 1993, for example, for the first two women to gain access to the legislature, accounting for 0.66 per cent of deputies. It was only in the legislative polls (September 2002) that a major step forward was taken: 35 women became members of the Chamber of Representatives.

### **The 2002 Legislative Elections**

All of the previous elections were based on one-round majority uninominal voting, which did not provide women with any chance of being elected. It was on the eve of the 2002 polls, and in accordance with the review of the organic law on the Chamber of Representatives, that list voting was introduced.

Article 1 of the organic law on the Chamber of Representatives stipulates that:

The Chamber of Representatives is to comprise 325 members elected by direct universal suffrage based on list voting: 295 members are elected in the districts (set by decree); and 30 members are elected nationally.

In response to the grievances of women, the political parties agreed to set aside all of the places on the national list for female candidates. Subsequent to this decision, 35 women were elected to the legislature:

- 30 women were elected via the national lists presented by 24 of the 26 parties that participated in the elections; and
- five women were elected via local lists.

This measure led to the mobilization of women on a scale that had not been seen before.

Accordingly, in relation to the 1997 legislative elections:

- the number of women candidates increased 12 fold (966 candidates: 697 via the national lists, and 269 via the local lists);
- the number of women elected increased 17.5 fold;
- the percentage of women legislators increased from 0.66 to 10.77 per cent.

Consequently, Morocco now ranks 69th in the world, instead of 118th, in terms of female representation in politics. In the Arab world, it is surpassed only by Tunisia, where 14 per cent of legislators are women.

The introduction of the national list is viewed as a positive and encouraging step. This is because female representation on the local lists was weak: 269 women out of a total of 5,873 candidates (five per cent). In addition, only 47 women were placed at the top of the list—in losing districts in most cases.

Since the national list is reserved for women, however, most of the political parties believe that they do not need to include female candidates on the local lists.

**Table 1: Women candidates versus women elected in various legislative elections**

	1977	1984	1993	1997	2002
Number of female candidates	8	16	36	87	967
Number of women elected	0	0	2	2	35
Percentage	0	0	0.66	0.66	10.77

### **The Stages of the Process**

People have long been aware of the political under-representation of women and their struggle for full citizenship and access to decision-making positions. The result of the 2002 legislative elections is the culmination of a process that goes back many years.

In effect, the pre-electoral period, the review of the election law, the celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March have all presented opportunities for the women's rights movement to raise awareness and to press for female representation in male dominated elective institutions.

While the struggle for women's rights traditionally focussed on reforming the code on personal status, in the early 1990s, particularly after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, a larger mobilization emerged to secure better representation for women.

In 1992–93, the 'Committee for the Participation of Women in Political Life' was formed in Casablanca. This body launched a campaign to raise awareness vis-à-vis the political parties and the media in order to unlock the doors of parliament on behalf of women (the idea of quotas was raised, but it did not receive support).

In a context characterized by political changes favourable to the promotion of human rights (the ratification of CEDAW by Morocco, 14 years after it was signed), this action contributed to two women being elected to the Chamber of Representatives for the first time. In 1997, a coordinating committee of women's associations drafted a series of proposals to review the electoral code, which were targeted at the political parties. These proposals concerned the need:

- to introduce proportional list voting to facilitate the election of women; and
- to adopt a quota of 20 per cent of women on each list.

These demands were based on international experience, which demonstrates that proportional list voting is most conducive to the election of women. Statistics reveal that the proportion of women elected is generally higher in countries that employ a system of proportional list voting.

Only two women were elected in the 1997 legislative elections. The poor result forced women's organizations, including the ADFM (Association Democratique des

Femmes du Maroc), to reassess their activities and to mobilize themselves better. This response contributed to the recent gains.

In tandem with training activities targeting women from different political parties and potential women candidates—undertaken by the Centre pour le leadership féminin (CLEF) (Centre for Women’s Leadership), which has approximately 200 women members - many different initiatives were organized nationwide (such as meetings, seminars, roundtables, and lectures) with intellectuals, women’s organizations, and political parties. Furthermore, the media began to focus on issues like different forms of voting and affirmative action measures. This was how the debate on the concepts of quotas and parity began, gradually but very slowly, to make headway as voluntary measures that would make it possible to remedy the patriarchy rooted in society and to break the circle of women’s exclusion and to show results.

### **The First Victory**

Most of the political parties that held conventions in 1999, 2000 or 2001 adopted a quota of between ten and 20 per cent of women in their decision-making bodies at the national level (the central committee and the political bureau, for instance).

#### ***Coalition activities***

In the run-up to the 2002 legislative elections, some 20 entities (women’s organizations, human rights groups, and women’s wings of political parties) mobilized themselves and undertook advocacy and consciousness-raising campaigns. These were directed at the political parties, parliamentary groups, cabinet ministers, and the public at large. This grouping drafted a memorandum and formed a ‘monitoring committee’ [to ensure that the three stages of the electoral process were observed:

- before and during the review of the organic law on the Chamber of Representatives;
- prior to the election campaign; and
- during the election campaign.

The memorandum, which was the subject of consultations and dialogue, and which was to be submitted to decision-makers, presented proposals for enhancing the political representation of women. Two main proposals were articulated.

- The replacement of one-round uninominal majority voting with proportional list voting.
- The adoption of a quota setting aside 30 per cent of candidacies for women, with alternate positioning of men and women on the list. Accompanying measures were also recommended to encourage women and men to support the female candidates.

<b>Table 2: Composition of the Monitoring Committee for Women’s Access to Decision-Making Positions</b>
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Eight women’s organizations (ADFM, AMDF, Jousour, ESPOD, UAF, LFF, LDDF, Amal) Five women’s committees of political parties (PI, UC, USFP, FFD, PPS) Three associations for promoting citizenship (Alternatives, Afak, EDF)
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Two human rights organizations (OMDH, Comité des Droits de l'Homme)

These efforts generated the political will that led to the positive results in the 2002 legislative elections.

Nonetheless, progress made in the legislative polls was fragile and reversible, since the quota system was not institutionalized by the organic law on the Chamber of Representatives, and depends on the will of the political parties. In addition, women are absent from decision-making bodies in the legislature: only one woman is the head of her parliamentary group; two women are among the officers; and no woman chairs a committee.

### **Local Elections: What Place for Women?**

Women are still largely excluded from the local power base. Women account for only 0.5 per cent of all local council members.

In effect, the local elections of 12 September 2003 were a bitter failure for women.

- Only 127 women were elected out of a total of 22,944 local council members, increasing their percentage from 0.34 to 0.55 per cent.
- Just one woman was elected to the post of local mayor (Essaouira).
- Another woman was elected president of a district in Casablanca.
- A third was elected president of a rural district.
- Very few women were elected to other levels (provincial and regional councils and the lower chamber of the legislature).

This failure was foreshadowed when the legislature rejected the proposals of the women's rights movement regarding the institution of quotas.

During the review of the electoral code in March 2003, the women's rights movement continued its advocacy campaign vis-à-vis legislators and political parties, calling on them to institutionalize quotas and to secure better positions for women on candidate lists.

The proposal was worded as follows: 'Not more than two-thirds of the persons on the lists of candidates shall be of the same sex'.

It should be noted that the electoral code has now been revised, consolidating the provisions in the organic law, such as the holding of a single ballot and the use of indelible ink.

Two types of voting were provided for:

- proportional list voting in localities with a population greater than 25,000, of which there are only 159; and
- uninominal voting in localities with less than 25,000 inhabitants, of which there are 1,388.

The proposals of the women's rights movement were rejected on the grounds that quotas are unconstitutional. At the same time, though, promises were made to reapply the approach to the legislative elections—that is, getting the political parties to enter into a 'gentlemen's agreement'. These promises were not respected. As a consequence, the women's advocacy campaign did not achieve the results that women had anticipated.

When the lists of candidates were published, women accounted for only five per cent of all candidacies (6,024 out of a total 122,658 candidates); and very few headed their lists. For example, one large party that presented 159 lists had only four women at the head of a list (0.02 per cent). Most of the candidates were in unelectable positions.

The number of female candidates increased by more than 350 per cent compared with the 1997 elections, refuting the notion that women do not want to run for office.

### ***The candidacies***

The promise that the national list would be re-examined and the willingness of parties to sign a gentlemen's agreement with the National Committee of Women Members of Political Parties suggested that these parties were going to stick to their commitment to ensure that at least 20 per cent of all candidates were female, which would make it possible to consolidate the gains made in the legislative elections. This did not happen, though. It was not possible for certain parties that had committed themselves to ensuring at least 20 per cent of female candidates on the lists (USFP, PI, RNI, PPS, PSD, FFD, UC and PND) to follow through on this pledge. This was due to several factors, two of which are outlined below.<sup>1</sup>

- The party structure is dominated by males at the grassroots and local leadership level, and candidates are proposed locally, not centrally.
- The rough-and-tumble nature of the race for seats forces most of the parties to seek candidates who are 'professionals at elections'. Since women have so little experience, they are ruled out.

These factors, and the absence of institutional measures, work together and help to shape the strategies for recruiting candidates adopted by the parties, rendering their discourse hollow.

### **Women Elected**

Women's representation is still very limited. Only 127 women were among the 23,689 persons elected in September 2003, accounting for 0.5 per cent, with only one woman being appointed mayor, and one being appointed district president.

In 1983, 43 women were elected, out of a total of 377 female candidates. On 13 June 1997, 84 women were elected, out of a total of 1,651 female candidates. On 12 September 2003, 127 women were elected, out of a total of 6,024 female candidates.

A simple reading of these figures reveals that, as the number of female candidates has increased in the different elections, rates of representation have not followed suit. In the 20 years from 1983–2003, for example, the number of female candidates increased 16 fold (from 377 to 6,024), while the number of women elected rose by a factor of 2.5 (43 in 1983, compared to 127 in 2003).

**Table 3: Women Candidates and Women Elected in the Various Local Elections**

	Total number of candidates	Women candidates	Women elected/ total elected
<b>1960</b>	17,174	14	0
<b>1976</b>	42,638	76	9
<b>1983</b>	54,165	306	34/15,423
<b>1992</b>	93,000	1,086	75/22,820
<b>1997</b>	102,179	1,651	83/24,230
<b>2003</b>	122,658	6,024	127/944

**Table 4: Female Representation According to Party**

Party	Percentage
PJD	1.7
USFP	0.8
UD	0.6
MNP	0.6
PPS	0.6
UC	0.6
PI	0.5
MP	0.3
RNI	0.2

**Table 5: Women Elected as a Percentage of All Persons Elected for Each Party**

Party	Total elected	Women elected	Percentage
PI	3,872	18	0.46
USFP	3,346	27	0.80
RNI	2,834	7	0.24
MP	2,241	7	0.31
UD	1,506	9	0.59
MNP	1,398	8	0.57
PPS	1,200	7	0.58
UC	953	6	0.62
PND	886	3	0.33
FFD	722	4	0.55
PJD	583	10	1.71
PSD	466	3	0.64
P.AC A	434	3	0.69
Alliances des libertés	427	2	0.46
GSN	302	1	0.33
MDS	299	2	0.66
Réforme et Développement	253	–	0
CNU	238	2	0.84
P Environ et dévelopt	167	1	0.59
P.Renouveau et	124	1	0.80
PML	112	2	1.78
SAP	106	3	2.83
P Democrat Indépendant	96	–	0
I.C.D	71	–	0
F.C	71	–	0

M.S	66	1	1.51
P.A	43	–	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,816</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>0.56</b>

### **Women and Local Councils: A Very Limited Presence**

Guaranteeing balanced representation means allowing women to have access to community councils, but essentially to participate in their direction by gaining access to the decision-making bodies (for instance by serving as president of the local community or as the chair of committees).

What is the reality today? In the six largest cities (with a population exceeding 500,000), no woman has been elected mayor, and only one woman has been elected deputy mayor, in Tangier. In regard to the district councils, in 41 districts, just one woman has been elected president (in Casablanca, Anfa). In relation to the localities that adopted list voting (those with a population of over 25,000), only one woman has been elected local president (in Essaouira). In the localities that have adopted uninominal voting (with a population of less than 25,000), just one woman has been elected president (in a rural locality in Khémisset).

Resistance to women entering politics via mechanisms that make it possible to correct democratic dysfunctions, such as quotas, is largely explained by the attitude of the political class. It does not look favourably on female representatives, who are not yet considered key players in the effort to bring about democracy and sustainable development.

### **Prospects**

Given the absence of women from decision-making circles, they are not in a position to influence the processes of change. Accordingly, women need to mobilize on a larger scale within and without of political parties.

The lack of a wide-ranging political debate on the concepts of quotas and parity means that the experience of the legislative elections is still limited. Hence there is a need to advance the debate on the democratic foundation of affirmative action, and to hold decision-makers accountable in regard to their commitment to implement the Constitution and CEDAW.

There is a need for the legislature to move from abstract equality (discriminatory), through recourse to affirmative action measures, to equality of outcomes. The quota system will only contribute to improving the level of female representation if it is institutionalized and accompanied by initiatives like ensuring certain positions on the lists, and the introduction of limits in relation to terms.

Two laws to address such issues are currently in the offing.

**The law on political parties:** The current review of the law on political parties represents an opportunity for the women’s movement to press for the introduction of affirmative action mechanisms in party leadership structures and on electoral lists, and the introduction of incentives tied to the financing of political parties and their electoral campaigns.

**The review of the Constitution:** The rejection of institutionalized quotas by the political class on the pretext that they are unconstitutional points to the need for a wide-ranging debate with a view to modifying the Constitution to include the parity system, along the lines of the French experience with parity.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The absence of women from these 'recruitment circuits' is due to several reasons that are identified in *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance).