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# **WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF REPRESENTATION AND MARGINALIZATION IN MOROCCO:**

TAKING STOCK AND OUTLINING FUTURE  
TRAJECTORIES

*Sana Benbelli*

## About the Author

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Cover photo: Moroccan members of the parliament engage in debates during the setting-up of the parliament in Rabat, Morocco, 19 December 2011. - © EPA/ZACARIAS GARCIA

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# 1 Women's Experiences of Representation and Marginalization in Morocco

## Introduction

The trajectories of and challenges to women's political participation in Morocco are complex. This complexity can be better understood by unpacking three dimensions for the analysis: the legal reforms, party structures, and women's individual experiences.

Since the 2002 legislative elections, the antinomic evolution of women's political participation in Morocco has challenged researchers in the political field. We speak of antinomy in the sense that this observation is recorded at the numerical level and is accompanied by a decline in the effective representation of women in decision-making positions. The different governments that have alternated over Morocco since have introduced a series of reforms and measures aiming at encouraging women's political participation, notably the integration of the principle of positive discrimination, better known as the quota system.<sup>1</sup> The introduction of these measures has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the number of women candidates and elected officials at the communal, regional, and national levels. For example, the number of women deputies increased from 2 in 1997 to 30 after the application of the quota system in 2002 and to 96 in 2021. The national and international press hailed this increase at the time, even announcing, after the 2009 elections, the advent of a new era for women in Morocco (Barakat, 2009).<sup>2</sup> As for the works that focus on the implementation of gender quotas in the Middle East and North Africa - one of the regions of the world where the rate of women's political participation is the lowest (Dahlerup, 2013; IPU, 2021) - many had presented the Moroccan experience as "singular and remarkable".

Morocco, it should be recalled, underwent a constitutional reform following the events of the democratic spring in the MENA region in 2011. In response to the demands for reform made by the February 20 movement under the slogan "freedom, dignity, and social justice",<sup>3</sup> the Moroccan

government proceeded to a comprehensive reform of the Moroccan constitution. For example, Article 19 of the old constitution on the sacred character of the king was replaced by the consecration of the principle of parity between men and women that the State must work towards its implementation and operation.

### Women Representation in the Moroccan Parliament

Number of elected women in	Combined List	Quota system list (after 2002)	Total
1963	0	--	0
1977	0	--	0
1984	0	--	0
1993	2	--	2
1997	2	--	2
2002	5	30	35
2007	4	30	34
2011	7	60	67
2016	10	71	81
2021	6	90	96

However, recent developments since then show that the numerical increase in women candidates and elected women in Morocco is only a glimpse since it is also accompanied by a regression that can be raised according to two major indicators: firstly, the low representation of women in regional bodies and secondly, the inability of women to obtain seats in parliament from local constituencies.<sup>4</sup> While the government that was formed after the 2007 elections had seven female ministers, the one formed after the 2011 elections had only

1 See in this context the various works carried out by associations and thematic action networks, notably the Movement for the Third of the Seats which took the name of the Movement for Parity in 2011, the Democratic Association for the Women of Morocco, especially the documents produced within the framework of the Center of the Feminine Leadership (CLEF). See also the work of Hanane Darhour, Yasmine Berriane, and Drude Dahlerup on the quota system in Morocco.

2 This is mainly due to the increase in the representation of women at the communal level, from 127 elected women in 2003 to 3,408 elected women in 2009.

3 It should be noted that despite the massive presence of women in the movement and in the demonstrations, their demands for equality between men and women were not taken into consideration,

nor accepted by the different components, especially the movement Al adl wa al Ihsan (justice and benevolence) with conservative Islamist referential. Moreover, women were always silenced every time they completed the slogan "Freedom, dignity, social justice, and effective equality" which meant equal rights between men and women. See Sana Benbelli, "Mobilisation and collective action on gender issues and violence against women in Morocco following the 2011 Arab uprising", Chapter in Yasmine Berriane, (ed.) *Beyond Arab Exceptionalism: Transnational Social Movements in the Arab region*. Asfari institute 2020.

4 Of the 96 female deputies in the House of Representatives only six came from local constituencies in 2021, while in 2016, 81 women were elected to the House of Representatives including 21 elected from outside the national list.

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one. In 2021, in an attempt to set the record straight, a return to the appointment of women is recorded by naming five women ministers, a minister delegate in addition to three mayors of major cities, namely Casablanca, Rabat, and Marrakech. These appointments are not without pitfalls for these women in responsibility. Sometimes they are kept in the shade by the presence of male delegate ministers who put themselves forward before the media.<sup>5</sup> At other times, they find themselves with two responsibilities simultaneously, which raises several questions about the image and the real responsibility that decision-makers want to give to women.<sup>6</sup> Is there really room for women in power?

Thus, in this paper, we will demonstrate how the increase in the number of women candidates and elected officials gives nominal visibility to women in the political arena but paradoxically contributes to keeping them away from the effective exercise of political power and the political decision-making arenas. To do this, the paper will focus on three dimensions. First, we will focus on the changes (without focusing only on the obstacles) that have taken place over time and following a great struggle of women in civil society on the regulatory framework that concerns electoral politics, especially with regard to quotas. Second, we will analyze the functioning mechanisms of the partisan structures where political actors are made and where the vacillation between putting forward and the shading of the women is also drawn. Finally, we explain the individual political trajectory of a candidate from a case study that aims at the restitution of the course of political participation.

### A methodology that reflects the field

The complexity of the reality of women's political participation in Morocco has meant that our research object covers several dimensions at once. It questions both the public policies that organize women's political participation in an attempt to grasp the phenomenon from a macro-sociological point of view and digs into an individual trajectory to grasp the modes of participation, the constraints, the strategies as well as the choices made by the individualized political actor,

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5 Nadia Fettah El Alaoui was appointed Minister of Economy and Finance, a position attributed for the first time in Morocco to a woman, but she is followed by a Minister Delegate in charge of the Budget, Faouzi Lakjaa, who is often in the spotlight at the Moroccan and African level because of the position he also holds as President of the national soccer federation.

6 Fatima-Zahraa Mansouri is both Minister of Housing and Urban Planning and Mayor of the city of Marrakech.

drawing on the features of political parties as incubators (or not) for women with the ambition of becoming elected representatives.

The articulation of these three levels from a methodological point of view was done by multiplying the entries. An analysis of the legislative documents and the productions of the civil actors concerning the organization of the elections, namely the reforms which touched the organic laws of the House of Representatives, the House of Councillors, the political parties, and the one relating to the election of the members of the councils of the territorial communities. This will allow us to understand the current figures by tracing their evolution from the legislative framework.

From a micro-sociological point of view, we need to understand the participation of politically engaged women in Morocco in a longitudinal and transversal way. The longitudinal study allows us to capture the evolution of this participation from 2002 to 2022 by following the trajectory of a candidate during three successive legislative campaigns: 2011, 2016, and 2021. However, the cross-sectional part of this study examines the speeches of women from four political parties, namely the National Rally of Independents (RNI), the Justice and Democracy Party (PJD), the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS), and the United Socialist Party (PSU).

The choice of the political parties interviewed is not random and can be justified by the fact that the RNI is the party at the head of the current government, and which most displays the parity model either in terms of internal regulations or in terms of allocation of decision-making positions.<sup>7</sup> The PJD is chosen as a party with an Islamic referential and which presided over the government during two successive mandates following the events of the Arab Spring and has a different mode of recruitment and promotion of women than other parties. The PPS is a left-wing party to which the candidate whose career we are analyzing belongs. Finally, the PSU is a neophyte party in the House of Representatives with the participation of its secretary general who is the first woman secretary general in Morocco and the first to represent her party in the parliament through the principle of positive discrimination that she sometimes tended to criticize as a kind of usufruct for the women. The interpretations made by the different members of the four political parties chosen for this study, as well as the representations gleaned from informal discussions with different citizens, may help to understand how political parties have been able to adapt to the context, or rather how women in political parties have been able to build know-how that allows them to change their situation within the

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7 The party has implemented the principle of one-third in its political bureau and is also the party that has put the most women at the head of regional and communal councils and as mayors of cities.

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parties. How do they run their campaigns? What discourse do they put forward? How do they manage relations with their opponents as well as their relationship with the voters and the practices in place?

We cannot talk about this research without talking about our point of view, that of a researcher engaged in this field since 2009 and having studied empirically the legislative elections since 2011 by following simultaneously and effectively the advocacy campaigns conducted by the thematic associations to improve women quota and push towards an effective and quality participation of women in elected bodies and political parties as well as by ethnographically observing a political actor during three legislative campaigns and by conducting interviews with women belonging to various parties after the September 2021 elections.<sup>8</sup> The research is also influenced by the author as a woman engaged in a spontaneous way since 2004 in the fight for equality between men and women and since 2010 institutionally within the Democratic Association of the Women of Morocco (ADFM) and in the Movement of One-Third of Elected Seats for Women later to become after 2011 the Movement for the Paritarian Democracy. This membership allows me proximity to the feminine struggles for political participation and a better understanding of their mechanisms.

The data collected from the field was classified and coded manually. The themes identified respond to elements of context; according to the 2021 election, they allow a first reading of the results and explain how after years of work and advocacy for the improvement of women's representation we are still below one-third and why women stumble and fall before reaching parliament.

## A brief history of women's political participation in Morocco

The work done so far on women's political participation in Morocco has focused particularly on the barriers that limit women's participation in electoral institutions and decision-making bodies within political parties (Darhour & Dahlerup,

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<sup>8</sup> Two women for each party, one who managed to win a seat in parliament or in the regional or communal council, and one woman who could not. To respect the principle of anonymity, the names of the interviewees as well as the candidate studied will not be revealed in this work.

2013; Khaoulani, 2019; Parejo-Fernandez & El Khamsi, 2021; Hattabi & Belhousine, 2021). These barriers are generally related to a society dominated by powerful patriarchal structures, the gendered division of labor that burdens women's tasks, and the resistance of male-dominated political party structures (Berriane et al, 2015).

Since the 2000s, scientific research in Morocco has shown a great deal of interest in the relationship between gender and politics, and often the research into women in politics was carried out by women researchers, notably Houria Alami-M'chichi, Zakia Daoud, Rabéa Naciri, and many others who began to question the absence of women from the Moroccan political scene from a gender perspective (Belarbi, 2001; Alami-Mchichi; 2002; Daoud, 2004), but without addressing this participation from the party structure. Political parties appear in research works from the perspective of the efforts they make to promote women's representation and recognize it in their internal regulations (Hattabi and Belhousine, 2021) or as one of the factors explaining, along with others, women's under-representation. On the other hand, research on political parties pays only marginal attention to gender relations within them (Berriane & al, 2015). Indeed, when researchers do examine gender tensions within political parties, they tend to take men and especially women as monolithic categories without an intersectional perspective that is sensitive to the interweaving of affiliations and trajectories, such as geographical location, economic resources, intellectual level, profession and other elements that may constitute markers or discriminating elements not only between men and women but also between women themselves.

Recently, longitudinal studies have examined the career paths of political elites in Morocco, such as the work of Khalid El Harrak, who attempted to "identify changes in parliamentary careers over the last two decades", specifically between 1997, with the beginning of the alternation government, and 2021, the date of the last elections in Morocco (El Harrak, 2022). In El Harrak's work, where the issue of gender was completely absent, we can point to two interesting conclusions that can be mobilized in our study. First, the author notes that "if the renewal of parliamentarians does not encourage the emergence of a new elite with a particular know-how that could promote parliamentary work while improving the role of the parliamentary institution in the Moroccan political system, other studies have shown that high rates of turnover in the composition of legislative assemblies could negatively affect the professionalization of their activities. Thus, the renewal of the parliamentary elites does not only consist in the replacement of already experienced political executives but in the pure and simple access to the parliamentary seats by individuals foreign to the political field". This idea will be explored through the reading of the new legislative reforms governing women's political participation through positive

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but restrictive measures, notably the article that limits the number of women's participation within the lists (national before 2020, then regional afterward), something which does not allow the capitalization on women's political know-how.<sup>9</sup> El Harrak's second interesting conclusion is that while the trajectory followed and the time invested in the career indicates the extent to which politics constitutes its own field, access to which requires the appropriation of resources and the mastery of techniques and relationships that are particular to it. This phenomenon shows the precariousness of the formation of a political field, in contrast with the history of public institutions. As a result, generational

renewal is not politically neutral because it handicaps the institutionalization of the parliamentary arena and reduces the degree of professionalization of political personnel. Through generational renewal, we can see the in-depth transformation of the recruitment channels of parliamentary elites, due in particular to the emergence of political issues, but also a redefinition of the relationship to politics in general and to partisan commitment in particular (El Harrak, 2022).

### The Main Changes in the Electoral Laws before the 2021 Elections

Laws	Main Changes
<b>Organic Law No. 04.21 on the House of Representatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of a voting system with a new electoral quotient.</li> <li>• Abolition of the 3% electoral threshold.</li> <li>• Ensuring a better regional representation as well as a greater representation of women.</li> <li>• Encourage the political commitment of elected officials by sanctioning political transhumance.</li> <li>• Incompatibility between the mandate of the deputy and the president of the council.</li> </ul>
<b>Organic Law No. 05.21 on the Chamber of Councillors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain the most representative professional organizations of employers in a parliamentary group.</li> </ul>
<b>Organic Law No 06.21 on the Election of Members of the Councils of Local Authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the control of the candidacy procedure for the elections to the councils of the communes and the provinces.</li> <li>• Ensuring women's representation by guaranteeing women one-third of the seats in each commune or province council.</li> </ul>
<b>Organic Law No. 07.21 on Political Parties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing the amount of public subsidy to political parties to improve their performance.</li> </ul>

Source: Jaldi Abdessalam and Mjahdi Hamza, "Analyse retrospective des élections marocaines de septembre 2021", Policy Center for the New South, January 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Since 2011, the number of reserved seats has increased to 90: 60 for women and 30 for young men under 45 = 67 seats for women.) In 2016, the 30 reserved seats for youth included young women in addition to the 60 for women (result: 81 Women in Parliament). In 2021, the quota system reserves 90 seats for women through regional lists (result: 96 women in parliament).

## **Legislative reforms on the eve of the 2021 elections, what constraints?**

The reform of the laws governing women's political participation in Morocco is not a seasonal demand that appears at each election. Rather, it is a continuous work in which women's associations are mainly involved. After each electoral season, the associations are involved in the preparation of election reports. Quantitative reports are managed and distributed according to age and geographical location,<sup>10</sup> which allows one to note the evolution or regression of women's representation. Qualitative reports, on the other hand, look at the positions assigned to elected women while taking into consideration the stakes. Then, the associations get involved in training, capacity building,<sup>11</sup> and support of elected women in the different bodies without ceasing to network among themselves in their partisan and career differences. This work of capacity building, monitoring, and evaluation allows the associations to draw up another assessment of the claims that they will use later as arguments in their advocacy memorandums.

The 2021 elections in Morocco came after a long history of advocacy whose roots go back to the eighties and nineties and which culminated in the two years before September 2021 by the reforms that affected four organic laws that frame the elections in a general way and one related to women's representation, namely the Organic Law No. 04.21. This law amended Organic Law No. 27.11 related to the House of Representatives and reflected the debate on the electoral quotas and allowed the increase of 50% of the quota related to women by the adoption of the regional lists with 90 reserved places instead of the national list with only 60 reserved places. However, contrary to this positive discrimination, a discriminatory provision in the true sense of the word was put in place which forbids women who were elected through the national lists to run as candidates in the regional lists. Women MPs who have accumulated experience in the political exercise will be obliged to run in local districts that are generally difficult and may exclude them, thus putting an end to their career and their acquired political expertise,

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that before the Ministry of the Interior began to disseminate results by gender, this was done mainly by feminist associations.

<sup>11</sup> For the past few years, the Ministry of the Interior has been contributing to the funding of capacity-building workshops for local elected women and women parliamentarians.

which will have a direct consequence in the sense that women who are elected in the House of Representatives will be continuously building a political experience on which they cannot capitalize and consequently women will be invariably in apprenticeship in the parliament, contrary to men who do not have any limitation of the number of mandates in the parliament (see case study below).

The amendment of the Organic Law No. 06.21 amending Law N°59.11 on the Election of the Members of the Councils of the Local Authorities allows supporting women representation by reserving one-third of the seats of the communal or provincial councils to women without depriving them of the right to run for the two-thirds of the other seats on an equal footing with men. This being said, it should be noted that the amendment of the Organic Law No. 05.21 amending Law No. 28.11 on the Chamber of Advisors and especially Law No. 07.21 amending Law No. 29.11 on Political Parties, did not touch the issue of women's representation, which raises questions about the role political parties should play in the promotion of women's participation and the extent to which they contribute to the professionalization of women's political activity.

A brief reading of the results of the September 2021 elections is essential to interpret the role of these reforms. Indeed, women constituted 54% of the electorate in Morocco in 2021<sup>12</sup> and went to the polls. This massive participation of women as voters has resulted in the following election rates: 24% of women in parliament, 38.5% of women in the regions, 26.64% of women in the communal councils, and only 7.7% of women in the professional chambers. On the surface, these results can be explained by the fact that women's votes do not go to women, a very simplistic reading of the real situation. However, an in-depth examination shows that, firstly, the election of women candidates is already locked by the organic laws that we presented above and that only allow these results for women. If the Organic Law No. 04. 21 increases the quota of women in the regional lists, it limits on the other hand their chances to win seats from the local constituencies by the act of compulsory rotation. Indeed, these women who have worked during a mandate at the level of the parliament on files that reach them from local points but with which they had no direct contact cannot finally capitalize on this work carried out but not recognized by the local populations who only trust people of proximity.

In the absence of a clear will on the part of political parties to increase the number of women candidates and in positions of political responsibility, a will that is translated into

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<sup>12</sup> It should also be noted that political parties have mobilized mainly women to campaign at the local level and for proximity actions. We will not dwell on this aspect in this work because it deserves a paper on its own.

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effective measures favoring women candidates at all levels and especially by integrating them into the decision-making bodies of the parties, political offices, general secretariats, as well as in the different sections. Without taking responsibility, women cannot acquire experience nor claim to be professionalized politically by being outside of this exercise, nor constitute a female political elite.

*"The time we start to build an experience and a political knowledge through practice, the time we understand the real functioning of the political game in the House of Representatives, which is totally different from what we know in the party, the mandate ends, and we are forced to choose another level of participation, to start a new learning. This does not happen to men, because some of them have been in parliament for three decades. And then they ask from us the same performance as men!"* interviewee 2 of National Rally of Independents party (RNI).

As explained by Berriane et al (2015), men tend to put themselves forward as "mentors", "trainers" or as can be expressed sociologically as "passers" of political knowledge or know-how for women. Berriane et al explain this, on the one hand, by the fact that women are not considered to have the "natural" skills necessary for politics, and on the other hand, by the numerical and historical predominance of men, who have more experience than women in the parties. One can add to this the rapid rotation system imposed by Organic Law No. 04.21 which ejects women from political responsibility in the House of Representatives before they can make a political career for themselves and become "mentors", "trainers" or transmitters of political knowledge and know-how to other generations of women. Thus, not only do women have no numerical or historical predominance, but they also find it impossible to hold multiple mandates or decision-making positions within their own parties.

A candidate who has already had a long partisan career in the different instances of her party, who had a double parliamentary experience in 2007 and 2011, and who has been the head of a ministerial department informs us that women have internalized the idea of the superiority or political competence of men over women.

*"Even when you have already spent two terms in parliament - because you could have done so before 2021- and even when you have had experience in leading a ministerial department, women tend to ask for advice from brothers rather than sisters. Because they unconsciously think that they are always one step ahead of women in politics, no matter how experienced they are"* Interviewee 1 of the Justice and Democracy Party (PJD).

This lack of consideration for women's political competence, which exists among men in political parties, and which is sometimes internalized by women, including this PJD

interviewee, reveals the still-existing representations of women in the political field as eternal minors. Their occupation of certain positions of political responsibility can be considered accidental or a response to certain requirements or international and regional commitments and a negotiation with civil society. For this reason, whenever women face problems in the exercise of their political mission, they are automatically called back to their kitchens "Kouzintek" (your place is in the kitchen) – an expression that forcefully marks the place assigned to women in politics and the border that exists between the public and private spheres. This boundary is doubly drawn during political meetings to call to order women who strongly oppose men, but also through the choice of the time meetings where important decisions can be taken, in particular on women's representation or the remuneration of positions of responsibility. Thus, as Berriane et al (2015) point out, women complain about meetings that take place at late hours, that continue in places other than the premises of the parties, sometimes where the presence of the political actress can damage her reputation and her career.

If the woman in politics is not attached to the reproductive role through the nurturing image of the kitchen, she will be attached to it through the evocation of her body or her sexuality.

Women who succeed in imposing themselves in politics and who manage to have important positions are confronted with different situations. They are often accused of being "masculine", of abuse of power, or of a tyrannical exercise of responsibility. They will be taken thereafter as examples of women that reproduce the same male patterns they criticize as soon as they have power in their hands.

*"Since Nabila Mounib is in charge of the party, they do not stop sticking to her the image of the Macho, of the zealous, of the power of the dictatorship because she dares to shout and to impose herself as general secretary of the party, and this on behalf of the men and women of the party as well as the leaders of the left coalition. They want Nabila with all her qualities as a 'leader' and they also want her to be a 'woman' in doing so".* Interviewee 1 from the United Socialist Party (PSU).

Nabila Mounib is not the only one to suffer this image of a "masculine" or "macho" woman in the exercise of power, other women have received similar treatment.<sup>13</sup> Taxing Nabila Mounib in this way did not prevent her detractors from using the traditional way of attacking her about her

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13 We can mention for instance, Meriem Bensaleh Chaqroun who was the head of the General Confederation of Enterprises of Morocco (CGEM), Halima Assali first woman in the popular movement party.



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body and sexuality. In 2020, during the preparation for the 2021 elections and the controversy around whether to keep together the left-wing coalition known as the Federation of the Democratic Left (FGD), comprising the United Socialist Party (PSU), the Party of the Democratic and Socialist Vanguard (PADS) and the National Ittihad Congress (CNI), the official Facebook account of Nabila Mounib, who was in favor of dissolving the coalition, was hacked repeatedly to post obscene images of pornographic nature.

Beyond what we presented, we retain the idea we have noted from the interviews conducted with activists of the PSU and other parties on the gender of the leader, action, and political responsibility. As explained by interviewee 1 of the PSU (who has been a member for about 30 years and is currently a member of the party's central committee), the male and female political activists in the party want the qualities of their general secretary as a "political leader", in a non-gendered way, with universal qualities that define a good leader regardless of his sex while opting for the masculine to express it.

The ambition to make an agentic politics, to distance oneself from the feminine clichés in the management of the political thing and the assumption of political responsibility is, according to our interviewees, what made Nabila Mounib as well as the other women leaders fall into the cliché of the "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2020).

*"Comrade Nabila is a remarkable politician, she did not arrive at the head of her party by chance, she is an intelligent, hard-working woman with firm and respectable positions that can only be praised. But what we criticize in her is that she wants to do politics without being always brought back to herself as a woman. She has removed everything that concerns women from her agenda!"* Interviewee 2 from Progress and Socialism Party (PPS).

Therefore, the question relating to the gender of politics as an action, as an exercise, as a responsibility, and as a decision is a construct that does not only depend on the expectations of politically committed men and women, but it is a construct that must find its origin in the political institution, primarily in political parties as the main breeding ground and the "device" in charge of the training and shaping of the political agent.<sup>14</sup>

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14 We use the concept of "device" according to the definition given by Foucault as a heterogeneous whole constituted by discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, rules, and laws inscribed in a relation of power with a more or less constraining character.

## Amel and the others: Women's struggle to make a political career among men

The observation of electoral campaigns carried out from inside a candidate's team allows one to get closer to understanding, albeit roughly, the functioning of the political party machine. In this part, the crossing of the speeches of the women politicians of the four chosen parties with the biographical account of Amel,<sup>15</sup> our main candidate, as well as our observations of three electoral campaigns that she led as a candidate, will allow us to clarify the relationship of political parties to their women activists and their role in the access of women to positions of representation and political decision.

Our main candidate, Amel, aged 52, knows well the other candidates interviewed in this study. They have often crossed paths in political action, and their voices will also cross paths in this study to paint a more or less complete picture of women's political participation in 2022. Our choice to look at the political trajectory of Amel is not random; she is a partisan activist whose journey we have been following for more than 15 years. We observed her during the 2011 electoral campaign as part of her "militant candidacy"<sup>16</sup> at the local constituency level. She was at the head of the additional women's list and her campaign had little chance of winning a seat in the municipality, but her votes would benefit the main list leader. She is a candidate who has passed through three levels of candidacy for political representation: communal (2011), national (2016), and local legislative (2021). She has a great associative and trade union career and has held positions of political responsibility within her party, including as a member of the central committee, a leader of the parliamentary group, and a member of the party's general secretariat.

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15 We would like to remind that both the candidate's name and her party's name are anonymized according to the ethical requirements of the study.

16 The "militant candidacy" is said about a candidate who presents himself or herself in a local constituency knowing well that he or she will never be able to win the election, but he or she does it to help the other candidates with his or her electorate or to complete the number of the lists indicated by the Ministry of the Interior in order for the list not to be rejected.

## Ethnography of an activist trajectory

Before presenting Amel's biography, it is essential to present my relationship as a researcher with her over the years in her role as an associative, union, and political activist, and in particular the relationship to the field that brought us both together, that of electoral campaigns. Since 2011, my presence and observation of Amel's campaigns were negotiated with her. She knew my research project well and allowed me to follow her work, sometimes by granting me assistant positions in her campaign team while keeping my researcher status unknown to others to avoid changes in behavior or reactions. During the inter-campaign periods, I kept an eye on Amel's work and activities through her social networking pages, media reports, and discussions with members of her party, other parties, and feminist associations. I also had several meetings with her.

The ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted on women's political participation in general and in particular through the specific moments of the elections and the electoral campaign of a woman candidate was not only about the observation of the candidate in situ of the respondent. It was also a question of exploring her "political agenda" or what is commonly called agenda-building; in other words, her central issues as well as her "personal agenda" or organizer as a tool of time management and domestication during the electoral campaign between 10 August and 8 September 2021. Since the personal agenda is considered by Philippe Veitl (2017) as the traces of a "political practicality, a kind of individualized machine dedicated to political action, specified by the political sites that have ecologically and temporally shaped them and where they are anchored".

The personal diary of our political candidate lends itself to analysis as a content, a corpus, a tool of time management, as a constraint, and a resource (Marel & Godmer, 2017). It can also be examined as a container, an object, an image of the distribution of time, the analysis of which makes it possible to reconstruct the electoral campaign as an effective, concrete work that reflects the relational, communicational, and operational power of its owner.

In the case of Amel, we are talking about two personal agendas, one individual in paper format and the other collective in digital format shared with her team. We analyzed the latter. While we considered that the professional and the personal intersected, which is very interesting and allows us to measure the adaptations and reconciliations made daily by women with a political career, analyzing the personal agenda requires additional time and work and did not fit into the objectives of this work. In addition to these observations and data processing, non-formal discussions of an explanatory

nature, notes taken in the different meetings and gatherings of the candidate, as well as her biographical account were collected to complete the elements of this research.

## An activist career that spans several decades

The daughter of a teacher, Amel was born and lived in the Maarif district in Casablanca. Towards the end of the 1980s, she finished her education and joined the local commune as a cadre of the Ministry of the Interior. Together with other executives and civil servants of the municipality, she formed a group that unionized there, although at the time only the employees were allowed to unionize. They constituted the first group of civil servants of the Ministry of the Interior to unionize. At the beginning of the 1990s, she joined a left-wing party, a choice she made after a discussion with the secretary general of the regional office of the party in Casablanca where he managed to convince her that any change must be done from within the political parties and with political action.

The party already had a women's section that created a feminist association outside the party to promote the political participation of women of all political affiliations even the most conservative as well as a center for training women in political leadership.

After two years, Amel went from a member of the party youth to becoming a manager of the office of a section of the party at the level of Casablanca, an elected member of the regional office, and then the secretary general of the regional office after winning the necessary votes in the national congress of the party.

"I passed from one responsibility to another always thanks to the vote of the members convinced by my work and those of the sympathizers, and thereafter I understood that voting for me sanctioned the other candidates who presented themselves against me, but that I understood it only later. Once I understood the game, I began to use it as a means of negotiation!"

As her progress began to take great strides, the constraints appeared, and the confrontations also started to appear. Like the other interviewees, insults and rumors about her reputation were the most common, but Amel felt that these were part of the risks of choosing a political career as well as late-night meetings, travel, and other constraints. She confirmed that these confrontations were less intense than those within the union and that the fact that she continued to be active in both plus her work at the level of the association helped her build a strong shell and better understand the mechanics of power.

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"There is no book or university that can teach you how a party works, even the training it gives to supporters. These are things that you discover as you go along in the political exercise, sometimes alone, sometimes thanks to your male and female comrades, and sometimes because of the bad blows you receive! Without forgetting that I was always on the ground, which gave me an edge over others in terms of managing problems, and that in itself is an experience."

In 2011, Amel ran as an activist in support of the candidate who ran in her district. She led a campaign whose votes went largely to the candidate of the main list, but her campaign was also in favor of the women on the national list. In 2016, she meritoriously won her place at the head of the national list presented by her party. She led a campaign by building her electoral team which was composed of close comrades and digital communication experts. While managing her electoral campaign, she was responsible for supervising and accompanying the candidates of another region according to the division of tasks assigned by the party. Her campaigning at the local level via focal points, the network, and door-to-door and at the national level through the digital campaign and participation in various meetings in the regions allowed her and other women on the national list to win seats in parliament.

During her mandate, she fought to form a parliamentary group and was elected as its president. This allowed her to gain visibility and to work on national issues while trying to solve local issues and remain close to the local level, something the election through the national list does not favor. Every oral question asked during the parliamentary sessions broadcast on TV channels, every issue exposed in the media and on social networks, and every problem solved at the local level is an electoral base gained for the party. During this mandate, she was elected as a member of the political bureau, so she had an additional task for the party. In 2020 and with the amendment of the Organic law No. 04.21, it was no longer possible for her to run for elections via the regional list, and the party validated her candidacy for the local legislative elections in the "death constituency" in Casablanca with a small chance of winning the race against five heavy male candidates.

### The 2021 elections: A lost battle for women

Despite her long experience in trade unions, parties, and associations as well as her presence in the decision-making bodies of her party and her network at the local level, Amel began her campaign to win her parliamentary seat with many obstacles related first of all to financial resources, since the financing of an electoral campaign, especially in Casablanca,

is costly and the party, convinced that the battle is lost in advance, preferred to direct resources to other constituencies where it had better chances of winning. Secondly, family and tribal networks are always a pool of votes even in a very heterogeneous city like Casablanca (we can cite among others the families of Souss who hold the trade in Casablanca or the Fassies families), while our candidate did not have this social capital.

Finally, although Amel's electoral campaign was among the best in Casablanca and the media ranked her as having the best chance of winning the elections based on her performance during her parliamentary mandate, her integrity, and her commitment to associations and unions, the last days of the campaign and the last meetings that Amel organized confirmed the opposite. The lack of financial and human resources, the disengagement of her party which was absent from her campaign and which, knowing the weakness of her chances, used her constituency as a means of negotiation against other gains, and the limited calculations of voters in search for instant solutions, have all combined to deprive her of any chance of renewing her experience as a deputy of the people.

To conclude, while Morocco has undertaken multiple reforms since the 2000s to promote women's political participation, the latter remains below the expectations of women in general and those advocating and fighting for it. Women in political parties who struggle to win seats and reap the fruits of their efforts within their political parties and women in civil society who have been investing for several decades in women's training, in the creation of women's leadership programs as well as in advocacy for the increase of women's quota in decision-making bodies and political representation. In this sense, the results of the last elections in Morocco show that we are not yet ready to move away from the quota as a remedy because women in politics still face systemic and structural obstacles.

In addition, women are incapable of forming an elite or building a political career by becoming professionals in political activity for several reasons explained in the paper and through the case we studied. Chief among them is the high turnover rate and the impossibility of renewing the mandate if they come from the quota system, which prevents them from capitalizing on successful experiences or correcting errors.

Moreover, it has become important to understand the kind of relationship political parties have with women, how they shape them, and to what extent they believe and work to reserve a place for them in the political world other than that of responding to international considerations or enhancing the image of political parties and without sacrificing them at the first turn. This cannot be achieved without working on the

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“black box” which is the political party both as a system and as actors - women and men - composing and evolving inside it.

Finally, if women are condemned to this rotation and this limited presence in parliament by the force of Organic Law No. 04.21 on the House of Representatives, what breeding grounds are then available to political parties to refresh their female members, and what preparation and formation are put to their benefit to be able to significantly represent them, and what what is the outcome of this political race?

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## About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.



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