

Chapter Eighteen

Political Parties in Algeria: The Position of Women in Operation and Representation

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In modern democracies, political parties have a very important political role: the principle is to allow individuals or groups sharing similar objectives to join forces to promote a common agenda. Algerian law under the different constitutions amended by laws on the creation of 1989, 1997 and 2012 political parties has led to the creation of political parties by defining them as (according to Article 3) a grouping of national citizens sharing the same ideas and who gather in order to implement a common political project and have access, through democratic and peaceful channels, to the exercise of powers and responsibilities in the conduct of public affairs.

Obviously, access to the exercise of power cannot be done without the involvement of women. However, it can be noted that women are underrepresented in politics. Despite equal rights enshrined in the constitution (Article 29), despite the right of women to vote and stand for election, the difference between the number of elected men and the number of elected women is a significant problem. Some would argue that if there is an overrepresentation of men elected, this is not a problem, as the interests of the whole population will be taken into account—both men and women. Others argue that equal representation is necessary, since there is equality before the law. Some even say that since women can stand for election there is no discrimination.

Equal rights are not enough—we must strive to achieve *de facto* equality. One of the main functions of political parties is to train, designate and support their candidates logistically and often financially, which makes them an essential part of the steps necessary to an election. The selection process of candidates is thus crucial to ensure the representation of women. Nevertheless, many parties have no specific approach to encourage women to stand as candidates. Only the Labor Party uses equality of opportunity and alternating on lists it proposes.

Political parties do not make much effort to encourage women to practice politics. In an interview, party member Mr. Hachid says that “parties do not like women,” yet “they are found everywhere.” He adds, “When it comes to women, parties of all persuasions, whether Democrats, Republicans, conservatives or Islamists, speak differently about them, but they unanimously grant them a secondary role.... Despite their role in Algerian society today, women seem to be a topic of discussion for politicians,” he concludes.

The construction of de facto equality and the fight against prejudice, against the secular yoke, will feed political discourse but not achieve their eradication.

Evolution of the Law and Practices

The Single Party State

The 1976 Constitution provided that the Algerian institutional system was based on the principle of the single party. The National Liberation Front (FLN) was the only party in the country. Since 1962 the policy of the FLN against women was both aggressive and lax. When I say aggressive, I am referring to the campaign undertaken by the FLN in 1979 to encourage women to run for municipal elections. The UNFA sections, mass organization of women linked to FLN, traveled around the country and visited domestic firms to encourage women to stand as candidates in municipal elections held in 1979. We thought it would persist over time, but this was not the case.

Although the FLN has more activists, very few of them have emerged. The number of candidates elected to parliament fluctuated but has not exceeded ten: ten women in 1963, ten in 1977, only four in 1982, and eventually ten in 1986.

The Multiparty State

The 1989 Constitution declared a multiparty state by not introducing the term party, but rather “political association.” It is clear that this formulation could cover only political parties. This marked the end of the one-party state, as the FLN disappears from the Constitution. Later, the 89.11 law of May 7, 1989 authorizes the creation of political associations. Article 5 of the law states, among other things, that these

associations cannot be based exclusively on gender. Article 14 clarifies that the number of founders and leaders should not be less than 15. No reference is made to the presence of women in political parties.

Sixty parties were created, one of which was chaired by a woman. Due to the overly hectic and violent political activity, the parliament was then dissolved, to be replaced by the National Transitional Council in which 12 women would sit.

The 1996 Constitution put to referendum used the “political parties” formulation, and was followed by Order 97 / 09 of March 6, 1997 on Political Parties, in accordance with Articles 42, 123, 179 of the Constitution. Article 5 specifies again that no political party can base its formulation on gender or violence. The text makes no reference to women; it is simply written that Algerian women who have reached the voting age can join any political party.

In 1997, only 13 women from different political parties were elected to parliament. In the same year, out of over 1281 candidates, 78 women were elected to the People’s Communal Assemblies. Yet if political parties have made no attempt to promote the representation of women, female voters could make a difference. Women constitute about half of the electorate. Of the 15,817,306 voters in 1997, 7,368,605 were women. The exercise of suffrage could theoretically make them acquire a fundamental political influence, but this did not happen.

In 2002, out of 3679 candidates, 147 women were elected to municipalities, and 113 of the 2,684 candidates were elected to the *wilaya* assemblies. For the legislative elections in May 2002, 27 women were elected out of 694 candidates. For the 2007 legislative elections, the former single party FLN lost 10 seats, while in 2002 there were 20 seats, the National Democratic Rally (RND) and the Democratic Cultural Rally (RCD) had only one woman elected.

The political will of the parties being in flux, the law will gradually evolve to finally pave the way for construction of a temporary mechanism likely to address female underrepresentation.

The Quota

The debate on the representation of women in politics was reintroduced by civil society, which in 2002 began to ask the question of why

so few women were emerging in politics. Women are out in force in all sectors, health, education, public service, except in politics and decision-making positions. The parties are the vectors of the representation of women but also their visibility, therefore solutions must be found to correct the imbalance noted in the representation, and to encourage political parties to promote the emergence of women. In 2005, the public authorities were sensitive to this issue, and began the ratification of international conventions, particularly those relating to women's political rights. This allowed legislators in 2008 to amend the constitution by introducing Article 31(a), asserting the political rights of women. Article 31(a) provides that the "state works to promote the political rights of women by increasing their chances to have access to representation in elected assemblies. The rules shall be determined by an organic law."

The president of the republic said that "the constitutional reform will encourage more women to enter politics." It will be a giant step towards ending discrimination, surely opening the field to a large number of women who aspire to enter politics."

Organic Law No. 12-04 of January 12, 2012 on Political Parties¹ has been more proactive in introducing the reference to women. Hence the role and tasks of the party will be to train and prepare elites able to assume public responsibilities, to work dedicated to democratic action and alternation of power, and promotion of political rights of women, according to Article 11.

It is the obligation of the founding members of the party to bring among them a representative proportion of women, by Article 17. At the meeting of the constitutive congress including at least 400 to 500 delegates, a representative quorum of women must be included so that the latter will be valid.

A question arises about how to calculate the representative proportion of women. In fact, it must be at least 30 percent, if not 50 percent, women.

¹*Official Journal of the Algerian Republic*, January 15, 2012.

Today it is difficult to get the exact number of activists of the existing political parties. Moreover, these provisions seem rather to address the new political formations that have emerged recently.

The legislative measures contributing to women's representation end with difficulty through the adoption of the Organic Law No. 12-03 of January 12, 2012 "setting the modalities to increase the chances of access of women to the representation in the elected assemblies."

The number of women on the lists of candidates, whether independent or presented by one or more political parties, shall not be less than a proportion of the number of seats; this varies from 20 percent to 50 percent, going through 30 percent, 35 percent, and 40 percent depending on seats to be provided. It is therefore an obligation on parties to mention on the electoral lists women under penalty of rejection thereof, by Article 5.

Some parties in parliament resisted the adoption of this law. The designated government representative, the Minister of Justice, had to go himself within the walls of the lower chamber to defend the bill.

The law setting the modalities to increase the chances of access of women to representation in elected assemblies has enabled the introduction of 147 female parliamentarians among 462 MPs in the legislative elections that took place on May 10, 2012. Political parties, according to law, benefit from specific financial aid from the state depending on the number of candidates elected to people's municipal assemblies, *wilayas* and to parliament. The arrival of 147 women upset many parties, if we refer to the reactions of some of them.

After the vote and the implementation of the law in March 2013 Aboudjerra Soltani from the Social Movement for Peace (MSP) advocated "the removal of Article 31(a) in the next constitutional amendment," stating that "this article has actually imposed a number at the expense of quality. Mediocrity has thus been favored, as can be noted in the assembly." He calls upon to get back to Article 29 of the constitution and remove quotas to return to equality.

The FLN won the elections by improving its performance from 136 to 220 seats, including 68 women. RND won six additional seats including 23 women. Islamist parties grouped in a coalition suffered a major setback by finishing third.

FLN now holds 47.81 percent of the seats of the People's National Assembly (221 of 462) while winning only 14.18 percent of the votes cast, that is to say, only 6 percent of registered voters. It owes this success, among other things, to the legalization of 17 parties on the eve of parliamentary elections. This fragmentation of the opposition electorate and a majority vote in two rounds led to this kind of representation.

At the municipal elections, two FLN female candidates were elected. They are the only ones to have been elected from 1521 municipalities. One of them (the elected mayor of El Mouradia) said, "Some political parties have presented women not out of conviction but to complete lists."²

Measures to Strengthen the Role of Women in Politics

Law and political will have forced political parties to use the mechanism put in place to increase the chances of representation of women in politics. However slowly, and with the impetus of female activists, political parties will get more familiar with the law. The rejection of the list that does not contain the proportions required by the organic law will lead them to implement organizational, educational or logistical measures. These measures will encourage the participation of women in politics and public life. Certainly within their national structure, women are co-opted, but at the lowest political level; parties have established women's sections to do this.

Women's Sections

All Algerian senior parties have a women's section: FLN, RND, MSP, RCD, FFS. A National Women's Council has been launched to contribute to a better representation and promotion of women.

It is difficult to assess the impact of women's sections due to the highly variable importance given to these sections in different parties. There is no direct relationship between the existence of these sections and an increase in the number of women, either candidates or elected. However, this organizational approach is often the only measure taken

²Personal interview.

to help women in politics. Female activists operating in these sections should develop training activities.

The educational aspect is translated by courses especially designed to prepare women for the role of activists, candidates or elected. Conferences and seminars are organized by parties, but is this aimed at encouraging women to stand for election?

Female activists themselves should draw up a work plan for the elections. This would avoid co-optation or the contested choice of non-party candidates. Many women activists have complained that the candidates chosen are not representative or have never been active within the party.

The currently existing women's sections must be revitalized and create work plans to encourage women's applications, which will allow them to go beyond mere figuration or controlled use or even direct support to men. These women's sections should not be used to transmit the policy of the party officials to women. Women's sections must serve women and not be just an additional structure in a party.

Women's sections enable women activists to impose their views and encourage the participation of women in political life through training. They could even create enthusiasm for women to join the party. But we must admit that this is not so easy, because the parties will be reluctant to the educational aspect that would encourage the female participation in political life through training. Many political parties do not wish to see women go beyond mere organization.

Sharing Power: Give Women Their Rightful Place In All Parties

Open Making Decision Positions for Women in Parties

The reluctance of political parties lies in the fact that if there are more women, if women are equally represented or even comprise a third, then men's "overrepresentation" is reduced. This requires that some elected officials leave their positions, which can lead to conflict and explanations why this equal representation should be applied. It is actually the sharing of political power that is behind the difficulty of achieving either equality or the one-third measure in the representa-

tion of men and women in politics. The issue of monopoly of political power in the hands of a majority of men is often evaded, if not forgotten. We are talking about under-representation of women without referring to the fact that it arises from the presence of a majority of men. That is why it is important to note that the organic law on political parties in 2012 introduced the requirement that “among the founding members of a party there must be a representative number of women.” This is where the political work begins; this is where we engage women as equal to trace a common political program.

The sociologist Nacer Djabi said the political party is not the ideal location for the woman; she is present as a member but not in decision-making structures.³ And when she is present in this structure, it is to look after the office. This is shown through the duties assigned to women members of party political offices.

A woman in the Politburo of the FLN deals with social work, women and children; of the two women in the MSP, one of them runs the secretariat to the family; there are three women in the secretariat of the RCD and eight women in the TEJ's, and almost all of them deal with social matters, women, children, and/or human rights.

Adapt Logistics

Djabi goes on: “Women are very few in these organs, as the meetings of these bodies are held either in the evening or the weekend.”⁴ This requires that political meeting schedules be arranged according to family responsibilities. Can we hope—as is done by the Austrian People's Party—that parties would fund or make nurseries available? Members of the women's sections should think about it. In any event, meeting schedules must be changed to allow women to assume family responsibilities.

Offering training and childcare for children and changing meeting times to allow women to assume family responsibilities are explicit measures that face the existing social and political culture whose primary beneficiaries are women, not both genders. This is why parties

³Personal interview via telephone with Nacer Djabi.

⁴Personal interview, Djabi.

are so reluctant to adopt organizational and educational measures for women. The new law on political parties in Article 11 obliges parties to train elites able to assume public responsibilities and to promote women's political rights.

Review the Internal Selection Process of Parties

Some parties have established criteria for selection of electoral candidates without having to give any conclusive results in terms of female representation. Seniority, volunteer political work, skills, and long-term political training are criteria that normally give equal opportunities to women to be selected. But the 2007 legislative election results surprised more than one party, made aware of the quota mechanism by civil society and called upon by the recommendations of the meeting held in Parliament in March 22, 2007 to use the quota. Parties considered that "it was not a gender issue that arose before the participation of women, but of skill." The Labor Party, led by a woman, stated, "The Algerian electoral system, by proportional rates, guarantees diversity of representation while reserving seats for women among the five or three first places."⁵ Equality of opportunity is a criterion used by the Labor Party. Other conservative or liberal parties who used the skill criterion put women on electoral lists in ineligible places. The RND and MSP confessed they had left the choice of candidates to *wilaya* committees, and at this level men are frequently misogynistic.

During the 2012 elections, some selected candidates were challenged for having never been active in the party that put them forward to be elected. Selection criteria should be reviewed to reduce gender discrimination. Women's sections of political parties should consider what is beneficial to them and to their party.

Recognize and Strengthen the Activities of Associations

Associations help encourage women to take part in elections. Some have specialized in the training of candidates as well as capacity building of newly elected women. Since 2006, many candidates have been trained and some of them elected. The work of these associations is to

⁵Louiza Hanoune in *Horizon*, March 22, 2007.

Table 1. 2012 Algerian Parliamentary Elections

National Summary of Votes and Seats (Number of Women Elected in Parentheses)

Registered Voters: 21,645,841

Votes Cast: 9,339,026

Invalid Votes: 1,704,047

Valid Votes: 7,634,979

Party	Votes	Percent	Seats
Green Algeria Alliance (AAV)	475,049	6.2	47 (15)
National Republican Alliance (ANR)	109,331	1.4	3 (1)
Future Front (FA)	174,708	2.3	2 (0)
Front for Change (FC)	173,981	2.4	4 (1)
Front for Justice and Development (FJD)	232,676	3.1	7 (1)
Algerian National Front (FNA)	198,544	2.6	9 (3)
National Front for Social Justice (FNJS)	140,223	1.8	3 (0)
Front of Socialist Forces (FFS)	188,275	2.5	21 (7)
Front for National Liberation (FLN)	1,324,363	17.4	221 (68)
Generation of 1954 (G54)	120,201	1.6	3 (0)
List of Independents (LI)	671,190	8.8	19 (5)
Movement of Free Citizens (MCL)	115,631	1.5	2 (1)
National Movement of Hope (MNE)	119,253	1.6	2 (0)
Algerian Popular Movement (MPA)	165,600	2.2	6 (2)
New Dawn (NA)	132,492	1.7	5 (0)
Algerian Party of Light (PAL)	48,943	0.6	2 (1)
Party of Dignity (PD)	129,427	1.7	2 (1)
Party of Youth (PJ)	102,663	1.3	2 (1)
National Party for Solidarity (PNS)	114,372	1.5	4 (1)
Workers' Party (PT)	283,585	3.7	17 (10)
Algerian Rally (RA)	117,549	1.5	2 (1)
National Rally for Democracy (RND)	524,057	6.9	70 (23)
Patriotic Republican Rally (RPR)	114,651	1.5	2 (1)
Union of Democratic and Social Forces (UFDS)	114,481	01.5	3 (2)
Others	1,743,734	22.8	4 (2)
Total	7,634,979		462 (147)

Adapted from Adam Carr's Election Archive, <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/countries/a/algeria/algeria2012.txt>.

educate candidates to the concept of gender equality and to think on the development and egalitarian content of the bills. Associations raise awareness among them so they will be visible at the forefront to gain political gravitas, not to provide an electoral argument that would

ensure the woman's co-optation and promotion, often at the cost of her agency.

Conclusion

Saying things, putting oneself forward, and claiming seats do not mean that women will put men in the shadows. Politics should not be a hostile environment for women—they must be recognized as an equal partner.

Politics is a constant battle for women, if they have no desire to fight for their place and defend their ideas, they will soon be relegated to subordinate positions. They must therefore be aware of the role they will play by engaging in politics and win in the political field.

Three new parties are headed by women; the presidents of these parties must use equal opportunities and alternation on electoral lists to further reduce the gap between the males elected and the females elected. Women should be visible and make themselves known by citizens.