



Averroes Policy Forum

Advancing Policy Dialogue



Women Political

Representation in Morocco

Major Leaps, Challenges and
Pitfalls

Civil Society Series

Averroes Policy Forum Papers discuss timely policy topics impacting the MENA region featuring insights from active civil society leaders. The papers are also used to create an active engagement with decision makers amid more inclusive policy dialogue.

Author; Kathya K. Berrada

Senior Program Manager at the Arab Center for Research, Morocco.

At glance

Significant Leap triggered by the adoption of women quota:

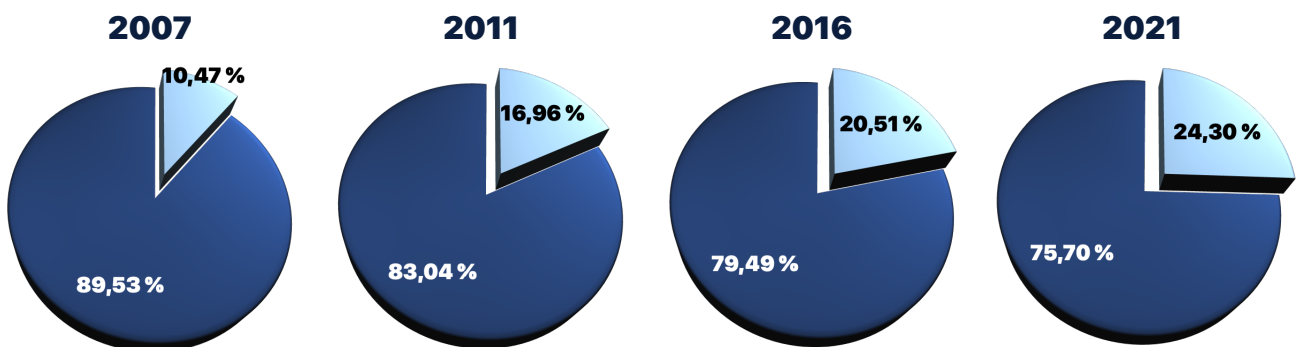
- Appointment of seven women ministers in portfolios of significant importance.
- A quantum leap when it comes to women representation in the house of representatives from previous election.
- Election of three women as mayors of Major Moroccan cities.

Pitfalls and challenges:

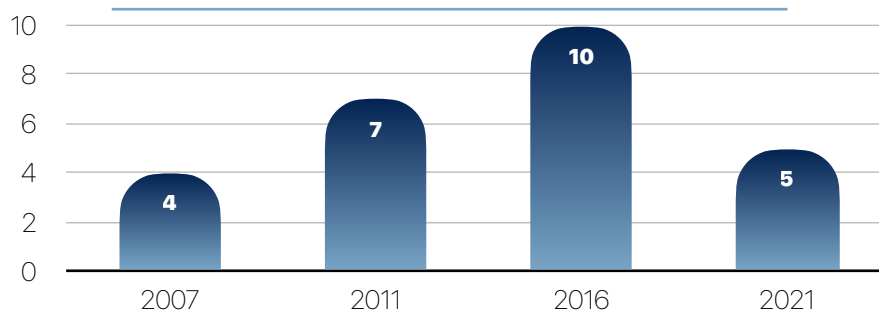
- Kinship and patronage still dominate the women nomination process in the national list.
- Women continue to be largely excluded from key leadership positions within internal structures of political parties.
- Morocco has difficulties keeping pace with the dynamics witnessed in women political representation around the world.

In numbers:

Women overall political representation in the parliament



Women parliamentarians elected via open lists



Morocco ranking in the Inter Parliamentary Union (December 2022)

Overall Ranking	97/186
Arab Ranking	6
African Ranking	22

Unprecedented number of women in the current Moroccan government in ministries of significant importance contrasting with previous experiences where they led more stereotypical portfolios

The percentage of successful women parliamentarians through local lists witnessed a decline

Women Political Representation: A significant leap

Following the general election of September 2021, seven women were appointed as ministers in the Akhannouch government, an unprecedented number in the history of Moroccan politics. More significantly, the appointed women occupy ministries which have never been led by females from which the ministry of finance, tourism and digital transformation. In previous executive experiences, women in the government were appointed to more stereotypical portfolios such as the ministry of solidarity, family and social development. Following the same election, three women were likewise elected as mayors of major Moroccan cities including Casablanca, Rabat and Marrakesh.

At the legislative level, women obtained 96 seats at the House of Representatives, 90 of which were quota seats, and the rest were obtained at local level. In absolute terms, the percentage of women's representation in the first chamber saw a considerable leap of 24.30%. Yet, the percentage of successful women parliamentarians through local lists witnessed a decline.

To put those results in perspective, it should be noted that the 2021 elections took place under a reviewed underlining electoral framework. The reviewed electoral law provided for the enlargement of the women quota from 60 to 90 seats after abandoning the youth list. Adding to this increase, the reviewed law also integrated the regional dimension by transitioning from the national constituency to regional constituencies according to the demographic weight of each region. This newest shift was put in place to counter the previously noted centralization when it comes to women nomination in the national list hampering the emergence of women political elites in more peripheral parts of the country. In addition to an improved representation in the House of Representatives, women were similarly able to secure positions within the House of representative's structures contrasting with past experiences. As such, three females were elected as vice-presidents and two women are chairing the Foreign Affairs and Control of Public Finances committees.

The women quota system in Morocco: A history of Evolution

Moroccan civil society actors started advocating for gender quotas in the 1990s following Morocco's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The civil society activism in favor of women quota system incited some political parties to adopt quotas for women in their own national political bodies in the late 1990s.

Although no formal quota system was adopted at that time, the 2002 national elections were designed in a way that reserves 30 seats in the 325-seat House of Representatives to women through a national list. This arrangement was made possible by political parties voluntarily agreeing to reserve these 30 seats for women. More formal Quota system emerged at the local level in 2009 when the Communal Charter provided a 12% quota through additional election constituencies reserved exclusively for women.

The 2011 Constitution emphasized the state's endeavor to achieve equality between men and women under Article 19, with provisions to facilitate women's equal access to elected positions under Article 30. Consequently, in 2011, the national list of seats reserved for women doubled from 30 to 60 seats, ensuring women would comprise at least 15% of the House of Representatives. An additional 30 seats were reserved for youth under 40. The latest modifications made to the electoral law at the eve of the 2021 election abolished the quota for youth providing for more women seats (90 seats) in the national list.

Despite significant improvements when it comes to women political representation at both the executive and legislative levels, serious challenges still hamper greater women political integration. The improvement triggered mainly by the establishment of the quota system and permanent amendments to the electoral law did not result in improved women representation via direct local list; of the 96 seats at the House of Representatives, 90 came from the national list while only six were elected directly via local lists. This observation

The quota system obliges political parties to include women in their national list while they are often excluding from the open ones

Strengthening of internal democratic processes within political parties themselves is crucial for a long-lasting women political representation

extends beyond the latest election and appear to be a trend since the inception of the quota system in 2002. Indeed, it appears that the rise in the quota seats is negatively correlated to a decline in women local seats. The quota system has created a satiation in which political parties are obliged to include women in national list while often excluding them from the open ones. Such narrow approach creates a real challenge slowing down women natural long term political representation through competitive frameworks.

The nomination process into the national list raises major concerns when it comes to alleged kinship and clientelism. Preliminary journalist investigations on the 2021 elections indicate that about one-fifth of female parliamentarians have siblingship, filiation, or marital relations with the leaders of their parties. Conversely, women activists within the political parties rarely find sufficient support in favor of their nomination to the national list. Such patronage can only be addressed through the strengthening of internal democratic processes within political parties themselves.

Furthermore, the quota system did not prove to be efficient in helping female parliamentarian capitalize on their experience to either be re-elected to Parliament or assume representative positions in communal and regional councils. In principle, the quota system should help women use their representative tasks to build networks and resources amid their long-term political integration through the local list. In practice, this only took place in rather isolated cases mainly due to underlying socio-political factors. Larger electoral base, local entrenchment and financial means are still in the advantage of male candidates in local constituencies.

At the political party level, women are largely excluded from key leadership roles which jeopardies their abilities to build alliances and nominate candidates in local lists. This under representation of women signals that gender equality in parliamentary representation also requires paradigm shift with the political parties' internal structures.

At the international level, the data shows that Morocco has not yet reached the 30% women representation rate set by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). When taking a comparative approach, it seems that Morocco is having difficulties keeping pace with the dynamic witnessed in other parliaments around the world. As such, Morocco only occupies the 9th position when it comes to women representation in parliament across the Arab world and the 25th in Africa.

Morocco only occupies the 9th position when it comes to women representation in parliament across the Arab

References

- Darhour, H., & Dahlerup, D. (2013). Sustainable representation of women through gender quotas: A decade's experience in Morocco. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 41, 132–142. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.04.008>
- Ennaji, M. (2010). Multiculturalism, Gender and Political Participation in Morocco. *Diogenes*, 57(1), 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192110374247>
- Ennaji, M. (2016). Women, Gender, and Politics in Morocco. *Social Sciences*, 5(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci5040075>
- Liddell, J. (2009). Gender Quotas in Clientelist Systems: The Case of Morocco's National List. *Al-Raida Journal*, 79–86. <https://doi.org/10.32380/alrj.v0i0.84>
- Skalli, L. H. (2011). Constructing Arab Female Leadership Lessons from the Moroccan Media. *Gender & Society*, 25(4), 473–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211411051>
- Souad, S. & Belghiti, K. (2017). *Participation of Moroccan Women in Politics Gains and Challenges*. [PowerPoint Slides]. Excerpt from: <https://gestproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Souad-Slaoui-and-Karima-Belghiti.pdf>