

Algerian Women in Politics

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Abstract :

This article aims to clarify the place and position of Algerian women in politics since it is considered by the majority of the society as men's affairs, as it requires some specific qualifications and special potentiality. However, this situation has slightly changed after the political will, which imposes a better women representation in local and national assemblies and public life, striving for ameliorating what was seen as an unacceptable intervention and even a kind of violation of men's territory.

Keywords: political rights, women's rights, politics, women empowerment. political participation.

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INTRODUCTION

Generally, many people in Algeria think that politics is not a women's affair. It needs intelligence, hard work, devoting oneself, commitment, and determination, issues that can rarely be related to a woman's capacities. Like they believe that women are better in some specific jobs, as education, nursing...etc, where women are more skillful, but, politics or leading and ruling a state is too much difficult to be one of the favorite business done by the Algerian females because ruling a state requests courage, innovation and lot of cunning and woman do not have all these characteristics.

However, and to oppose these retrograde ideas and way of thinking, Algerian women strive to prove that they are capable of being in a very high level of state authority, and show that politics is not just males game because it concerns the whole society; it needs both males and females to plan, organize, forecast, control, simply rule the entire state.

Algerian women are determined to be an important player in state's affairs, especially after the opening doors and the accessibility of the opportunities for them with the constitutional reforms of 2008 and the promulgation of laws favoring women. Hence, they are more present in both chambers of the Algerian parliament and popular territorial assemblies.

In this paper, we try to clarify the position and role played by the Algerian women in politics and to assess their experience in this field by the attempt of answering the core question concerning: what are the most important features of motivation or barriers that strive or stop Algerian women from being an essential actor in political sphere.? Why is there such resistance against women's integration in politics? What are the factors hindering women's breakthrough in politics? How to remedy this situation? These are some of the questions that this paper e will try to answer.

2. Algerian Women's Political participation: a historical Overview:

Algeria's history is full of events and actions conducted by women in the political domain; the example of "Tharwat Fathma N'soumer" is very enlightening as it reflects the path of a female figurehead, who participated in all popular uprisings, and who led a men's army to hold the French Army in check for seven years¹Nevertheless, During the Algerian War of independence, Algerian women fought as equals alongside men. And they fulfilled many different functions at that time. Women participated actively as combatants, spies, fundraisers, as well as nurses, launderers, and cooks; women assisted the male fighting forces in areas like transportation, communication, and administration the range of involvement by a woman could include both combatant and non-combatant roles. More than this, rural women in maquis [rural areas] support networks contained the overwhelming majority of those who participated ².

The majority of Muslim women who became active participants did so on the National Liberation Front (FLN) side. The French included some Muslim and French women in their war effort, but they were not as fully integrated, nor were they charged with the same breadth of tasks as their Algerian sisters. The total number of women involved in the conflict is numbered at 11,000, but there is a high possibility of inexactitude of this number due to underreporting³.

But what was really remarkable was that Algerian women were almost absent from political spheres once independence was recognized, even though most Algerian legislation favors women.

3.Mechanisms to promote and protect women's political rights :

Earlier, and just directly after Algeria's independence in 1962, women gained suffrage rights, which shows the advancement of this country in human rights in general and particularly women's rights. These rights are guaranteed in all constitutions and laws relating to the electoral system, ensuring women's right to vote and run for elected office. Eligibility requirements for voting and running for office are the same for men and women. If we precise the Algerian Constitution recently amended in Mars 2016, apparently it highlights the

fundamental principle of equality before the Law of all citizens with no discrimination based on birth, race, sex, opinion, or any other personal or social condition and addresses several provisions to fundamental rights and freedoms:

Art.31 – Citizens are equal before the Law, with no discrimination for reasons related to birth, race, sex, opinion, or for any other condition based on personal or social circumstance.

Art. 63 – Equal access to functions or jobs within the state is a guarantee for all citizens, with no condition other than those fixed by the Law.

Article 34: "Institutions exist to ensure the equality of rights and duties of all citizens, male and female alike, by eliminating the obstacles which hamper the development of the human person and prevent the effective participation of every individual in political, economic, social and cultural life."

Article 40 guarantees the inviolability of the human person and prohibits all forms of physical or moral violence. This provision is complemented by article 35, which condemns the violation of human rights and freedoms and physical or moral attacks on the integrity of the human person.

Article 153: states that justice is founded on the principles of legality and equality. It is equal for all, accessible to all, and is expressed by respect for the law.

Article 35: State shall work for the promotion of political rights of women by increasing their chances of access to representation in elected assemblies⁴ which was amended in 2008 stresses the ability of the state in promoting women's political rights by expanding their chances of representation inside the elected assembly

In January 2012, the implementing arrangements for this article were laid down by an institutional act introducing quotas system justified by the necessity to make such adjustments (at least at the initial/transitional stage) in a traditionally male-dominated society like Algeria. So that women can show that they are as capable as men in politics. In addition, this move can significantly empower women in society and establish new female role models for future generations. Thus, this article was implied especially after the promulgation of the organic law N 03-12 of 2012, especially in article 2, which explains the modality of

increasing woman political representation by relating women number to the number of seats of parliamentary election:

20% when seats are equal to 4

30% when seats are equal or more than 5

35% when seats are equal or more than 14

40% when seats are equal or more than 32

50 % for the Algerian immigrants⁵.

4. Quotas System a mechanism to promote women's Political Rights:

The establishment of the Quotas system in Algeria was not as easy as we think, especially it provoked a large debate either in the public or private sphere. However, in the course of numerous debates which preceded its passing, it was amended to such an extent that its substance was somewhat diluted, but nonetheless, there has, as a result, been a significant increase in the number of elected women. For example, women's representation rose from 7.7% to 32% in the People's National Assembly, from 6.6% to 29.7% in the People's Assemblies of the Wilayas (provinces), and from 9% to 16.5% in the municipal people's assemblies. None of these women have become president of the assembly to which they have been elected. With regard to the executive branch, there are nine women in the 33 ministerial posts in the Algerian government, seven of whom were appointed on 7 May 2014. Women judges comprise 45% of the judiciary – a high rate that has not recently changed significantly. Algeria's efforts to move towards parity at the institutional level should not be ignored⁶.

Starting from these constitutional principles, Algerian law ensures that in no area of life is any distinction made between men and women, who enjoy complete equality in their rights and duties. So, there is no legislative or regulatory provision that restricts participation by women in the country's political life. The Constitution and the Elections Code guarantee women the right to vote and to be elected on the same basis as men. This Equality that is enounced in the Constitution is also stated in other law texts, such as the Penal Code, the

Nationality Code, the Labor Code, the Family Code, and the Electoral Code. It should be noted that even if in their original version, these texts do not explicitly state the notion of equality. Juridical reforms progressively introduced over the last decade call for more equality and less discrimination, in compliance with Algeria's adherence to CEDAW and other conventions related to women's rights⁷.

In additions to these constitutional guaranties, many institutional mechanisms have been placed to enforce and protect women's positions in society in general and in the political sphere as:

- Since 2002, the Creation of a Delegate Ministry in charge of Family and Women Conditions;
- Creation in 2006 of a National Council for Women and the Family;
- Incentives to associations and participatory action. There are more than 70,000 associations, 900 of which are present at the national level. As well as, Algeria ratified all conventions related to the protection of human rights and women's Rights, of which we cite:
 - The 1966 international chart on civil and political rights;
 - The 1966 international chart of economic, social and cultural rights;
 - The 1979 Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
 - The 1952 convention related to women's political rights;
 - The 1949 convention relating to the elimination of human trafficking and prostitution.

If we look at The number of women working for the public administration, we can assure its steadily increasing, where they are present in "feminized" sectors, i.e., education and healthcare, where they represent more than 60% of medical and paramedical staff and hold nearly 50% of all position with the education sector⁸. Moreover, at the higher education level, women are also more present: Women are University Deans.

We notice a slight breakthrough of women into senior positions; nevertheless, while this number is not proportional with the number of Algerian women graduating from prominent universities and others, it is anyhow remarkable the opening of such positions for a long time exclusively male-

oriented, as this represents a good omen for a better future for women in terms of decision-making positions, a greater consideration for gender issues by national sector-based policies, and a better presence of women in political spheres.

5. Women's Representation in the Algerian Political sphere:

A. Women in the Algerian Government:

In Algeria, the presence of women in the government is limited, as is the case in Arab and Maghreb countries. Very few women have access to the highest spheres of political decision-making. No woman was a member of the first 9 Algerian Governments. It was only in 1984 that Algeria saw for the first time the appointment of a woman minister.

There is no constancy in the progressive progression in the number of women in the government. We noted between 1987 and 2002 the emergence of one, sometimes two women, in governments, but contemporarily their disappearing from executive governments. We had to wait for the 26th Government in June 2002 to see five women appointed government members. Only one was Minister, and all other four were delegated Ministers (Vice-Ministers). This number even dropped again in April 2006, as only three women were members of the government, including one Minister and two Minister Delegates. Actually, the government contains 3 Women. The number of women in the cabinet:

1962-1983: 00 women minister(s).

1984-1987: just one woman minister.

1987-2002: 02 women minister(s).

2002: 05 women minister(s), but 04 of them were a delegate.

2012: 03 women minister(s).

2014: and for the first time in Algerian history, 07 women minister(s) have been appointed in the before last Salal government, where women gained:

The ministry of education,

The ministry territory and environment,

The ministry of culture,

The ministry of National solidarity, of family and Woman condition,

The ministry of post and ICT,

The ministry of tourism and Artisanal, and delegate Ministry of Tourism and Artisanal charged of Artisanal.

However, this member did not stay without change within different ministerial formulations but remained relatively few because it did not overcome 4 to 5 women ministers. In Algeria, as in most Arab countries, women are appointed in Cabinets at positions with no major or limited responsibility or technical expertise and are excluded from strategic or sovereignty departments⁹. They are usually in charge of the Family, Women's conditions, immigration, culture, literacy ... and more often are they appointed Minister Delegates.

B. Women in the Parliament:

In Algeria, women had access to the constitutive assembly in 1962: 10 women were elected out of 194 deputies, hence a women's representation rate of 5%, which was then considered a fair rate with regard to the recent independence. However, we immediately later noted a regression. From 1967 to 1997, women's representativeness in the parliament was up and down. It's only in 1997 that the number of elected women started to slightly increase, with 11 women at the National Popular Assembly against 10 in the 1962 Constitutive Assembly (one more woman). However, this increase in number was reflected by a decrease in rate (2.90% in 1997 against 5% in 1962).

If we exclude the two legislative bodies of 1991 and 1997, where the number of women was respectively 6 and 12, the only real increase concerns the present National Popular Assembly elected in 2007, which includes 26 women on a total of 389 deputies, hence a rate of 6.20%.

Similarly, we note that the Council of Nation, the Parliament's second House created after the 1996 constitutional revision, sees a regression in the number of women senators. This House includes today four women only, all appointed by the President of the Republic, while the first 1997 legislature included eight women, 5 of whom were appointed by the Republic's President.

As is the case for the number of elected women at the Parliaments, the number of women sitting in Chambers' and Commissions' Boards have been very limited in all various legislators. Women's under representativeness within legislative bodies can mainly be explained by their poor presence on political parties' electoral lists. However, this situation has changed after the last parliamentary elections in 2012 and the implication of quotas system, where women gained about 32% of parliamentary seats and arrive to occupy the post of vice president of the popular assembly. However, till now, we are still far from

speaking about parity and total equality between men and women in this domain. Despite plenty of barriers.

Women candidates to the Algerian legislative elections (1977-2012)

Year	Total Of Candidatures	All Candidates	Women Candidates	%
1977	783	744	39	4,98
1982	840	801	39	4,64
1987	885	822	63	7,11
1997	7.749	7.427	322	4.15
2002	10.052	9.358	694	6,90
2007	5.726.087			
2012	9.339.026			31

Source: from WWW. APN-DZ. ORG

However, this number has declined in the election of 2017 to 25.8%, with only 119 women MP from 462 seats which left Algeria in 65TH place in the world¹⁰. Although not having easy access to political parties as candidates to legislative elections, women play an important role as an electoral body, representing nearly 50% of this body. For indication, at the 2002 local elections, women represented 46.14% of the electoral body (8 349 770 out of 18 094 555 voters)¹¹.

But the representation of women in the Nation assembly as a high chamber in the Algerian parliament is still weak, as it contains only ten women from 144 senators men, which represents 14,4 %. They are all appointed by the present. This situation seems the same in 2017, with t only 09 women among 132 seats representing about 9%.

If we try to compare this women representation in Algeria and other Maghreb Arab countries, we can remark the advancement of the Algerian case. For instance, the Tunisian constituent Assembly of October 2011 contains 63 women MPs from 217 I,e 29%¹². Still, actually, the Tunisian Popular representative assembly contains 67 women from 217 MPs I,e 30,88¹³.

However, Morocco is in the last position with only 67 from 395 MPs which represents only 17%.

Country	Lower or single House			
	Elections	Seats	Women	%
Tunisia	2004	189	43	22.8%
Morocco	2007	325	34	10.5%
Algeria	2007	389	30	7.7%
Tunisia	2014	217	68	31%
Morocco	2011	395	67	16
Algeria	2012	462	145	31,48
Upper House or senate				
Morocco	2006	270	3	1.1%
Algeria	2014	188	10	14,4%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-f/world.htm>).

However, the number of Arab women participating in politics, in general, remains the lowest in the world. Over the past few decades, considerable efforts have been made to enhance women's range of opportunities in politics. However, decision-making and priority-setting powers continue to rest largely in the hands of men.

Women's representation in different world Regions

Percentage women representation by regional			
	Unique chamber	Senate (upper House)	All chambers
Northern countries	41,1%	-	-
Americas	27,3%	26,9%	27,2%
European countries	25,6%	24,7%	25,4%
Sub-Saharan Africa	23,3%	21,9%	23,1%
Asia	19,1%	15,3%	18,8%
Arab Countries	18,4%	11,7%	17,5
pacific	13,2	36,0%	15,8%

Source : <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-f/world.htm>

The fact that women represent nearly one-third of the Algerian parliament is truly impressive, given that the global average is only 20 percent. In the Arab world as a whole, the rate is even lower (about 14 percent). In comparative terms, Algerian women MPs hold more political power than their Arab counterparts. In the context of the Muslim world, Algeria is only second to Senegal (about 40 percent), with the highest ratio of women MPs¹⁴.

C. Women in Local Assemblies:

The representation of women rested for a long time, and till 2012 local elections insignificant within local assemblies. In 1997, 1 281 women were candidates in communal elections; 75 of them were elected. Five years later, in 2002, 3 679 were candidates in communal elections, and 147 only were actually elected. While the number of women candidates in the 2002 communal elections tripled compared to that of 1997, and the number of elected women almost doubled, the numbers of women candidates and elected representatives are still insignificant with regard to the overall number of candidates and elected people. The same observation applies to elections at the level of Wilayas. In the elections held on October 23, 1997, 62 women were elected to Wilayas' Popular

Assemblies out of a total number of 305 candidatures. In 2002, 113 women were elected of 2684 women candidates¹⁵.

Second social roles are assigned to women at the level of local councils: three women are elected presidents of councils in Algeria. They are exceptionally invited to chair commissions. When they are chosen, they are usually in charge of social structures and missions (healthcare, childhood, solidarity, etc.). Women's representation in local political institutions remains limited and slow even after the local assemblies elections of 2012, where the number of elected women has remarkably increased to 4715¹⁶.

In local executive structures, we note that women even when they have access to elective positions within local assemblies, they do not accede with the same proportions to political and decision-making positions at the local level. The nomination of women as Walis, Secretaries General of Wilayas, or community/Daira leaders is still rare. While the number of women appointed wilayas' secretaries-general or Daira leaders has increased, there are only 6 women Walis In the third Salal's Government¹⁷.

D. Women in political parties:

Algerian women play an important role in political parties, and they are in the almost quasi totality of parties in inferior positions as well as in the civil society organizations .generally even if they have a crucial role in the organization, mobilization, and secretary, however, they are rare in the leadership¹⁸, they are only 04 president of the political party like they hesitate a lot to be even candidate in such posts especially in what is called big parties due to man selfish attitudes and their social domination and patriarchal nature of the Algerian society. Thus, this logic is the same in local assemblies where men dominate most important and leading posts and women are in secondary positions. Here I will emphasize women's representativeness in the major Political parties:

In FLN

IN RND

In Islamic parties.

If we take the 2007 parliamentary election, we can remark the weak presence of women in comparison with men in all political parties.

Women's representativeness in political Parties:

The Party	Number of elected deputy	Number of elected women
FLN	137	12
RND	62	01
MSP	52	00
PT	26	11
FNA	13	00
Renaissance Movement	05	00
RCD	19	01
National Esperance Movement	02	01
Total	389	31

However in the legislative election of 2012 the number of women MPs has remarkably increased to 31% of the total number:

The Party	Number of elected deputy	Number of elected women
FLN	220	68
RND	68	23
Algerian green collision	48	15
FFS	21	07
PT	19	10
Liberals	9	3
Total	462	145

Source: www.APN.dz

However, the legislative elections of 2017 have witnessed a slight decline of women's number inside the parliament, from 462 Mps there are only 120 women representing 26%¹⁹, a situation that lets us wondering about the future of this kind of representativity and the real causes of such change. Personally, I am not comfortable with such results thinking that the patriarchal Algerian society limits any promotional tentative with its archaic traditions and retrograde ideas.

6. Women participation in politics and decision-making process :

*** obstacles and perspectives:**

despite women's participation in the struggle for independence in my country, and then in the struggle for development, despite their presence in the social and economic domains, their participation in national and local politics as well as in decision making remains for a long time under their expectations. Indicators concerning the participation of women in decision-making spheres show that inequality is more evident at the managerial level than at the level of employees. It is even clearer in power spheres (parliament - government and local councils). Many and multiple reasons account for women's under-representativeness at the level of decision-making positions. We can cite:

- The recent opening of the political domain in Algeria;
- The little presence of women in parties as activists, due to the difficulty of reconciling public and family lives;
- Women's suspicion with regard to political parties, due to lack of political training,
- An unfavorable electoral system is based especially on unmoral competition and the interference of political money.

-The existent gap between lived life and laws, and if there is equality in the quasi totality of the Algerian legislation, is not implemented in the reality

Other obstacles prevent women from having access to the highest spheres of the State and Companies: constraints related to senior functions, mainly availability and mobility. They are often bound to make choices: either they give up career perspectives and exclude themselves from decision making positions, or they sacrifice their family lives, or accumulate charges and work double; the conservatism of society, political parties, and the administration; women's access to decision making spheres means at the same time an important renewal of the leading staff and new approaches in the definition of policies and political practices; the absence of co-option system adapted for women. They are often excluded from informal networks, which are real co-option areas.

Cultural Barriers are, in my eyes, the most influential, especially that strengthening women's presence in all societal positions needs a social transformation because it does not depend on laws and political leaders' willingness. It requires changing the stereotype picture that society has drawn for women²⁰. As well as, the implementation of the organic law No 12-02 concerning

the enlargement of women participation in elected assemblies has known a lot of difficulties: according to some writers, it generated mediocrity and inefficiency because the majority of elected women are not ready to be involved in the legislative process and they lacked experiences and political skills which are needed in this case. But for me, I think this mediocrity is the characteristic of many elected men in the Algerian popular assemblies which let the opportunity the government took the major initiative in project of laws' proposals. As well as, this political presence became a winner card used by some political parties which proudly announced the inclusion of women in their lists, but in the reality these parties are obliged to be conform to the Electoral and Political parties codes by respecting Quota system maintained by the state in 2008. As a result Women account for about 30 percent of the parliamentary seats in the Algerian government the highest such ratio in Arab world²¹.

Yet even though politically active women are optimistic in light of these developments, some activists remain skeptical, as they criticized the new law on women's representation as a "legislative trap," given "that the legislation referred to the representation of women on the candidate lists and not the qualification of each candidate whether he is men or woman.

Nevertheless, today, many key players from organizations that defend women's rights support these newly elected deputies. For instance, scientists interested in this field and feminist activists designed a training program for women in politics, including local and national government officials, activists and organizational leaders. The program's objective is to give female politicians the necessary tools to support a party's agenda or propose new laws in the assembly. Female civil society activists should continue²² to make their expertise available to the new members of parliament so that these new MPs can take advantage of it.

Like men also have a role to play in improving women's representation in the public sphere. So that "feminisation" of the popular assembly will hopefully push men to evaluate their positions on women's issues. Indeed, men working alongside so many female MPs could improve how men view women's issues and help them take laws pertaining to women more seriously.

7. Sociology of Women's political participation:

To make an empirical study to show the society's view concerning the position of women in politics, so, I have asked students of political sciences at the University of Constantine concerning their opinion about Algerian women politicians, giving them some probable answers or alternatives to classifying their responses according to their importance for them. The result was :

1. They are ambitious Women: 50%
2. They get their position by merit:30%
3. They deserve respect and encouragement:15%
4. They neglect their role as housewives :3%
5. They get their positions through the help of men: because of friendship, family or other relationship 1.4%.
6. They have succeeded to represent the Algerian women's intelligence and capacity:0.6%
7. They are too many feminists:00%
8. They are unreligious women:00%
9. They have succeeded to represent society's needs and grievance: 00%

This result does not reflect the opinion of the whole society because the sample chosen in this study belongs in its majority to the intellectual class (university students). Moreover, most of them are females (around 70%), giving us just a general view of public opinion about women's position and their place in what is called public affairs or politics. But at least it can clarify the point of view of a part of this society supposed to be very concerned by politics as it represents the elite.

8. CONCLUSION:

Despite their strong presence and high participation in the country's daily life, Algerian women remain and for a long time relatively absent from political life because of many factors that limit them and let them marginalized .however, this situations would not stay for a long time, especially with the visible growth of Women's organizations and their efforts that have, over time, contributed to growing support for the idea that Algerian women should play a more public role

in their society. Nonetheless, efforts done have not been able to put an end to the long-standing discrimination against women that excludes them from the public sphere, in part because family code and social norms tamper the level of protection of these women's rights and their political representation and ability to participate in decision making .in fact till now Algeria faces some critics concerning women situation such as In a 2012 report, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women called on Algeria to take action to "promote gender equality, eliminate patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted discriminatory stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society. It asked Algeria specifically to promote equal opportunity in the workplace, eliminate sexual stereotypes from school curricula, in the media, and among the judiciary, and pass legislation on violence against women.

Nonetheless, Algerian women continue to fight, struggle and investing more in the public sphere, slowly but surely, although not without experiencing social isolation and ill-treatment. Who can then blame them for negotiating with any part of the regime or society which could provide women with the space to exert full citizenship? The 30% recently won is only one part of these negotiations and can be seen as a politics of "positive discrimination" to achieve parity and a good place in such men dominant society. Indeed, there is a fundamental link between democracy and a genuine partnership between men and women in the management of public affairs. The equal participation of women in parliamentary processes is an essential element to promote democracy²³.

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