

# **Tunisians Women and Elections**

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# Introduction

Since the ancient Greek city which established an utopic democracy via its philosophers Aristotle and Plato through the Roman Empire and its famous senate, men wanted to establish a political democracy and social justice.

However, it is only at the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with philosophers such as Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Montesquieu and Rousseau that the quest had been achieved.

A struggle for equality which was restrained in the abolition of the privileges of the clergymen and nobility. In fact, that political equality was only granted to **adult** and **male** citizens, for a century, women were ignored, marginalized and excluded. Does the equality not mean equality in treatment? Between men and women?

And to reach a real and full equality, man should not listen to his half and give her the right to choose, to express herself and vote?

This retrograde view of women, some will try, at any price, to make it change.

They are so convinced that the improvement of the living conditions of women through voting.

The "Suffragettes" the struggle of these women: British, French or Arab women themselves as Houda Charraoui (egyptian suffragette)

in universal suffrage.

# What about Tunisians women ?

What about Tunisian women and elections?

Were they able to assert themselves through the elections and change their conditions?

Did they defend their rights? Did they set up fair social justice where men and women enjoy real and effective equality?

- What kind of election that fosters an effective representation of tunisian woman?
- Is it the majority or proportional elections elections?
- And the fairest parity is the vertical parity or horizontal parity? Or both?

- Moreover, did the elected Tunisian women stick to our cause or were they just the echo of their political parties?
- Did they not even support and suggest anti-women laws?
- Eventually, did Tunisian women really have an impact upon the Tunisian elections?

# I-Tunisian women and presidential election: a real right or just one more vote to legitimize a dictatorship?



Admittedly, the Tunisian women had the right to vote in 1957 by President Bourguiba already in Article 21 of the constitution that founded real equality between man and woman: " citizens men and citizens women are equal in rights and duties.

They are equal before the law without discrimination. The State guarantees citizens the freedoms and individual and collective rights. It provides them the conditions for a decent life. "

And it is Article 34 "The election rights, Voting and candidacy rights are guaranteed in accordance with the law. The State shall ensure the representation of women in elected assemblies. "

# Tunisians women and electoral monopoly

But Tunisian women who fought for independence, found themselves in a regime that claims and tries with all his power, using any kind of propaganda to appear on front the rest of the world as a liberator of women,

Tunisian woman from 1956 until 2011 during all presidential elections (Bourguiba –Ben Ali) when she exercises that right is to **elect men** or more accurately **one man**,

Bourguiba and his party New tour, then Ben Ali and his party the RCD , she suffered from electoral monopoly.

Indeed, Bourguiba dominated the four elections

he still had the majority then, he was proclaimed president for life by the Chamber of Deputies on 18 March 1975 .

Thus, the Tunisian woman was not able to be represented in these presidential elections. She was once again a voice to legitimize the victories.



It was only in 2014 that Ms Kalthoum Kannou broke this electoral monopoly by presenting herself as an independent candidate in the presidential elections.

However, the Tunisian were not ready yet, partly because of the political context



# Political contexte

## Assassination of Chokri Belaid : 6 february 2013



was a Tunisain lawyer and politician who was an opposition leader with the left-secular Democratic Patriotic Mouvement

Belaïd was a vocal critic of the Ben Ali regime prior to the 2011 Tunisian Revolution and of the then Islamist-led Tunisian Government.

On 6 February 2013, he was fatally shot outside his house, close to the Tunisian capital, As a result of his assassination, Tunisian Prime Minister **Hamadi Jbali** announced his plan to dissolve the existing national government and to form a temporary "national unity" government.

# Assassination of Mohamed Brahemi:

## 25 JULY 2013



- With a brazen hail of bullets, gunmen assassinated **Mohamed Brahemi** on Thursday as his **family watched**, inciting nationwide outrage and exposing a deepening political divide in Tunisia
- The assassination of the opposition leader, Mohamed Brahmi, was **the second time** in five months that a leading liberal politician was fatally shot. Many suspected that Islamist extremists were responsible and warned that they threatened the kind of pluralistic democracy envisioned in Tunisia's 2011 uprising, which inspired the Arab Spring revolutions.
- Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in front of the Interior Ministry building, blaming the ruling Islamist party and its followers for Mr. Brahmi's killing and shouting for the government to go.

# Tunisians martyrs

8 Tunisians military killed in holy month **29 July 2013**

Eight Tunisian soldiers were killed when gunmen ambushed an army unit near the border with Algeria, The attack took place on Jebel Chaambi, a suspected hideout of al Qaeda-linked militants.



# Tunisia marks day of mourning

Socrate cahrney and his colleagues  
killed in en embauch **23 octber 2013**

## Tunisians martyrs

- National Guard were killed in clashes on 23 October 2013.
- a year after this tragic event and **a few days before the parliamentary elections on October 26**, a National Guard agent was killed and others wounded in a firefight at Oued Ellil. Two soldiers were also injured during an exchange of fire that took place today in Ain El Karma in Sakiet Sidi Youssef.
- In addition, five soldiers were wounded following the explosion of a mine in Sidi Rabeh at Sakiet Sidi Yous



# Political context and election

The assassinations of **Chokri Belaid, Mohamed Brahmi, Socrate Cherni** and the assault of the **young Tunisian soldiers** in Ramadan, pushed the Tunisian to sacrifice their thirst for social justice for stability and security by choosing an old school politician using a type of smart vote  
(VOTE UTILE)

# What about Tunisian woman and legislative election ?

- Before the problematic, it might be wiser to ask the following questions: which election type realizes a better women representation?
- Should elections be proportional or majority based?

## 1. Rather majority or proportional?

The election is considered the most democratic way to designate the rulers. However, the notion of election is a relatively quite vague concept. It contains a number of technical,

Each has advantages and its drawbacks.

The majority based election draws on the principle that whosoever has the majority wins the elections.

This simple principle opens up two different choices i.e. the simple majority or the absolute majority. Thus, there are two majority based types of election: one round and two round elections.

In the one round election, **the simple majority is enough to be elected.** Elected is that who has an impact on the political sphere due to the majority of votes. This is the simplest way of election. If there are too many candidates, **the election is easily predictable, and this is its drawback.** The chosen has to get the absolute majority, 50 % of votes plus at least one voice. If no candidate gets this result nobody is elected in this circumscription or in this country. A second round is then staged. Only those who participated in the first round with at least one voice can be presented to the second round. In the later, there is no need for the absolute majority.

However, the proportional representation is always a listed election. Voters choose at least two persons. The electoral code fixes the mode of election be it a “fixed list”, or with “amalgamation”, or with “preferential vote”. **The “fixed list” means that every voter has to choose from lists without modification.**



# Advantages and disadvantages

This majority based mode of election is **not representative** of the people determination or will, where the candidate who receives the majority in a circumscription just wins, and the **other voices are useless**.

If results were expressed in function of the rates granted to every party the physiognomy of the National Assembly would be totally different.

This phenomenon **may incite people to boycott elections**. Knowing that their votes will be useless, many of them think long before participating.

**In other circumscriptions, there are those who vote strategically. They support the person who has the opportunity to beat a candidate they do not appreciate, instead of voting out of convictions.**

This **mode excludes some categories** of persons and does not allow setting up measures to increase the participation rate.

In this mode, **women representation** and the equitable representation of ethno cultural diversity depends on changing **political will**.

**The National Assembly** is the institution responsible for representing **all The Tunisians**, and promotes our ideas and preoccupations and takes decisions which concern every women or men citizen. **Everybody** must feel at home there, **men and women** in the Assembly **should be equal**.

Thus the proportional mode is the **key criterion for women to access the parliament**, even before the other socio economic variables such as education or income. According to some studies, **the proportional election with lists provides women with the best opportunity to be in the parliament** (Lovenduski and Norris 1993; Regle 1987). In western democracies, there is a rise in women participation rates; and it is with proportional election that this rise is there (Norris, 1996).

# II -Tunisian women and legislative elections

## ➤ **Proportional Versus Majority voting system**

The representation of Tunisian women in the majority electoral system:

If we observe the elections under Bourguiba we note that from November 4, 1979 Only two women are elected, that number increased to seven in 1981.

Thus, the performance was weak with Bourguiba, but Is the woman under Ben Ali was able to increase its quota?

Already April 2, 1989, six women are elected.

- March 20th 1994, following the new electoral code, six parties from the opposition were there against “le Rassemblement constitutionnel démocratique (RCD)” and there were 152 elected men and 11 women.
- October 24th 1999, change touched the number of representatives (up to 182) and the number of seats reserved to the lists did not get the required majority (became 34). Participation was up to 92%. 161 men and 21 elected women.
- October 24th 2004, seven parties with 300 candidates raced for the 189 seats. 146 men and 43 women.
- October 24th 2009, with the adoption of gender parity, women represented 14.89% of the government members, 27.57% (59/214) of the elected representatives.
- Things improved from the previous elections.

# Tunisian revolution and women



After the revolution, Tunisia adopted **the proportional mode**.

the Jasmine Tunisia knew 3 elections: the elections of the National Constituent Assembly in 2011 and the legislative elections in 2014, the presidential elections(2 rounds)

the new constitution, ratified on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2014, created a semi-presidential system.

In October 2013, eight organizations from the civic society presented recommendations so that NCA consider them when declaring the electoral law (Tunisian association for constitutional law, Tunisian women voters league, ATIDE, I watch, Chahed...)

- Tunisian women remained under-represented in public and political life. The power remained with the men belonging to the hegemonic party.
- Regulation of May 2011 concerning the election of the National Constituent Assembly (**Art. 16**) establishes parity between **men** and **women** apply, with **alternating** man and **woman** candidates on **electoral lists**.
- The October 2011 ANC election was **the first democratic** elections, **free** and **fair** in Tunisia, **59 women** have been elected to the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia. They represent **27%** of the 217 elected.

# Horizontal or vertical parity?

- Parity is now a constitutional principle provided in the Article 46 which stipulated that “the state endeavors to achieve parity between men and women in the elected councils”. To implement this constitutional disposition, a 2014 law stipulates that this disposition may be criticized because it only focuses on the vertical parity which sets the parity at the level of elected councils as a goal.

However, **Article 24** of this law simply devoted the vertical parity within lists and did not consider the horizontal parity. It resulted in a series of reactions within the democratic coalition who wanted to cancel this article for nonconformity to the Constitution.

The Temporary Instance for the constitutional control refused to admit the **unconstitutionality of Article 24**.

As a result, no parity at the level of the top of the lists because it only depends on the candidates and the political parties.

Elections showed that the number of women elected in the legislative elections in 2014 was **only 12% of list tops (+5% comparing to 2011)**.

That was why the **electoral law had been modified to include horizontal parity to insure the constitutional objective of parity** in every elected instance.



Did the elected women defend our cause or were they just the echo of their political parties? Did they not even support and suggest anti-women laws?

They are certainly **present at the level of parties**, but they are often **rejected after being exploited at elections time**.

The same mechanism is there within parties.

Most elected women, no matter whether they are liberal feminists or conservatives, since the days of Bourguiba, **reflect their parties**: Neo Destour, RCD, Nahda, CPR, Nidaa, except some women such as **Radhia Haddad**, a feminist militant who actively participated in the national movement against the French protectorate, she was one of the first parliamentary women in Africa and in the Arab world.

# The importance and the impact of the vote of the Tunisian woman? A stake for the Tunisian society

**"The ballot is stronger than the bullet"**

**Abraham Lincoln**

Nobody can deny the importance of voting. Nor can we deny the importance and **impact of Tunisian women's voting.**

Actually, during the second round of the presidential elections, the Tunisian women had decided to massively vote for **Caid Essebsi** due to his "**election speech**" in which the status of the Tunisian woman had been a dominant concern.

He claimed the Tunisian model of women emancipation and refused any sort of regression.

The ISIE announced the final results although anticipating the fixed date. The candidate of the party Nidaa Tounes, the liberal party with majority, Beji Caid Essebsi, won the presidential election with 1.731.529 votes (**55, 68 %**); his opponent Moncef Marzouki had 1.378.513 votes (44, 32 %).

The Tunisian women votes were crucial to these results as about one million women voted for Beji Caïd Essebsi versus **about 300.000** for his rival.

The Tunisian electoral process of 2014 was an undoubtedly **women success story**. In fact, women shaped the results of the elections.

# Difficulties and shortcomings of women during the electoral process

## ➤ Women in the electoral administration ISIE:

ISIE consists in 9 independent and impartial members 3 women and 6 men. Within its departments women nearly reach 50%, including a woman at the head of the legal department and one responsible of training.

64 women agents and 102 male agents. Parity is achieved at the level of registration agents, for there were 1422 women out of 2618. Within the local instances, women were not equally well represented; there were only 13 women out of 90. Local coordinators were mainly men. According to ISIE figures, there were only 5 women coordinators out of 27.

### ➤ Voters registration

The crucial stage had faced many problems which was a shortcoming for the process. First, the new administration did not review 2011 the electoral directory. Then, the ISIE decision to extend the initial registration deadline and to provide extra time for registration resulted in confusion particularly that many electors who had voted in 2011 with an automatic registration thought they could do the same thing.

The number of the newly registered for the 2014 elections was 993.696 with 50.5% of them as women. The total number of registered citizens for both presidential and legislative elections was 5.285.136 with 359.530 abroad. **Nearly 300.000 women short of identity cards were deprived from their rights to vote,**

**even though 5000** of them were able to get an identity card before the deadline and were able to vote thanks to the efforts of the ISIE and the secretary of state responsible for women and family issues.

Female participation in rural areas, just like the 2011 elections, was not satisfactory. In these zones, women suffered from economic hardships. **The illiterate voters had once asked for family member assistance and that was totally illegal.**

**ISIE made many handbooks and launched programs of education that targeted women voters. Even though these materials did not really respect neutrality, various videos and posters were made to enhance women participation in elections.**

➤ **women candidates:**

considering that the vertical parity was not maintained, there were not many women at the top of lists as only 148 women were heads of lists out of the 1.326 lists i.e. 12%.

This represents a small progress comparing to 7% in 2011, but not quite enough to get an equal male and female representation. The People Representatives Assembly would be dominated by men.

In 33 circumscriptions, parties presented only 3-5 women as head of lists.

➤ **Electoral campaign:** during the 2014 electoral campaign, just like in 2011, women candidates were marginalized by media. They were rarely supported or supervised by their parties. This also happened even to women who were heads of lists. Moreover, these women were sometimes victims of physical violence or on social media.

This threatened their reputation and their security.

- **Election Day supervision:** according to a gender perspective, observation showed the enthusiasm and devotion of Tunisian citizens and particularly women. During the presidential elections, particularly in the second round, there were not long queues and they were mixed.
- **Observation during voting days:** concerning the supervision of the three elections, there was a mobilization of all the feminine forces engaging in the civil society.

Women supervisors were 44% of the national observers. In some circumscriptions, the majority of supervisors were women. In the south and in internal regions there were a significant number of female supervisors: in Tozeur, 54% were women, in Kasserine 52%. In other regions, rates were near parity: Ben Arous 47%, Tunis 1 and Tunis 2, 46%. Out of 2394 supervisors, there were 1332 women.

- **Election days:** the 2014 witnessed a massive female participation. For instance, the national female participation rate in the first presidential round was up to 50.5% versus 47% in the 2011 elections.
- **Voting centers:** The Tunisian women were also active as members of voting offices who worked hard to manage all the technical and logistics operations in those centers.
- **women observers' attendance:** there was a strong mobilization of Tunisian women for the 2014 elections. as an observers they were everywhere. The 46 observing operations carried by civil society components such as ATIDE, Mourakiboun, LET and others were dominated by women.

The presence of foreign observers was much more important in bigger cities.



# Analysis of results :

Women were determined to exercise their rights to vote. Those who had encountered registration issues had argued with the responsible over the absence of their names and claimed their rights.

The definitive results of the legislative election had been officially announced by ISIE after solving electoral disputes. ISIE revealed the composition of the new Tunisian People Representatives Assembly on November 21<sup>st</sup>.

Out of 217, there were 68 women and 149 men. Women representation was up to 31.3%. This representation is slightly inferior to the third of the new elected Chamber.

ISIE's final decision concerning the proclamation of the elections' final results lists women representation:

- 1- 35 women from Nidaa Tounès ;
- 2- 27 women from Ennahdha ;
- 3- 2 women from l'Union Patriotique Libre (UPL) ;
- 4- 2 women from le Front Populaire ;
- 5- 1 woman from le Courant de l'Amour ;
- 6- 1 woman from le Courant Démocratique

Women representation **had risen since 2011**. This representation was strengthened by the constitution of the new government.

Thus, 8 representatives were assigned positions in the government and allowed for other 6 women to access the parliament.

The number of women representatives was 68. 12 among them were list heads. The other 56 were elected due to the vertical parity principle imposed by the electoral law. These 56 women belonged to 2 parties (Nidaa Tounès and Ennahdha who collected enough votes to elect their 2<sup>nd</sup> or even their 4<sup>th</sup> candidates on the list in many circumscriptions).

Thus, more than 12 candidates were top listed, 32 women were elected from the Nidaa Tounès lists and 24 from those of Ennahdha. Afek Tounes, the party that earned 8 seats had no elected women. In 2011, among the 4 elected from Afek Tounes, 2 were women such as Rim Mahjoub who left her seat for Yassine Brahim the head of the party.

The remainder of the parties who won seats (CPR, Mouvement du Peuple, Al Moubadara) and those with sole representative (Al Joumhour and l'Alliance Démocratique) did not have women among them.

The real configuration of the People Representatives Assembly shows that the number of women is slightly superior to those elected in 2011. In October 2011, 58 women were there out of 217 seats. This number rose to 67 (resignation, appointment in the government..). In 2014, there were 68+6 women who replaced the appointed ministers.

**Ms Kannou** collected only 18.287 votes (0.56%). This small rate is accounted for by the fact that Ms Kannou had been an independent candidate who never benefited from the structure of a political party or its propaganda. Nonetheless, her candidature was **symbolically significant** as she had been the first female candidate to presidency in Tunisia ever since the independence and this resulted in a good impact upon the Tunisian society.

# Criticism

- Media should ensure equal opportunities between tunisians men and women candidates.
- The staff at electoral centers must improve their attitudes towards some voters' categories particularly the illiterate women. Set up resources for people with special needs and particularly those who cannot attend (hospitals, students...)
- Provide a free hotline to the candidates so that they have an access to information and make informal complaints and receive advice.
- Make more efforts, particularly towards young women voters.
- More campaigns and a tight supervision of women participation in rural areas.
- Stereotyped representations of women mediated during campaigns reinforce the decision making roles of men. Women ought to be represented as equal to men in all different fields.

- More collaboration between civil society associations working on women's rights and their participation in the political sphere, and the electoral authorities to design civic education actions and organizing and optimizing the results of those actions.
- Train more and more women trainers for the civic education of voters.
- Simplify voting procedures is necessary for rural and illiterate women.
- Registration of rural women remains a shortcoming for ISIE. New ways should be explored.
- Inspection and auditing of electoral lists should be done in order to have an efficient electoral directory for future elections.

# conclusion

The vote is the act of citizenship, it is the way to run the democracy, and to protect our liberties, it is the way to change, to establish a social justice, the Tunisian women have a potential to be exploited, they can make the difference and, make things happen, knowing that we (the Tunisian women) have specific interests of expectations and rights to protect .

Really, Tunisians women gain their theirs struggle to establish vertical and horizontal parity , And in April 2018 in municipal elections, she can vote to elect lists which respect this parity and women will be present in local collectivity to manage it to achieve real and effective justice, no more marginalization for rural women ,no more exclusion for analphabetic Tunisians women , a lot of hope in this election that's why Tunisians women should take this opportunity to make the dream come true.