



## Summary

This Fact Sheet discusses women's access to political finance in Tunisia. It outlines the challenges women face within political parties and at the national level, provides examples of gendered legislative measures from around the world and recommends a series of measures to address the gender gap in Tunisia.

It is based on a joint report produced by International IDEA and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) as part of the Women's Political Rights Programme.

## About International IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with a mission to support sustainable democracy worldwide.

[www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

## About NIMD

The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) is a democracy assistance organization established by political parties in the Netherlands to support political parties in young democracies.

[www.nimd.org](http://www.nimd.org)

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# Women's access to political finance in Tunisia

## Background

In 2001, in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, Tunisia held its first elections since its independence in 1956. Both the elections to the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011 and those to the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP) in October 2014 used a closed-list proportional representation electoral system. For the 2011 NCA elections, the Electoral Law contained no provisions linking political finance and gender, but did include a progressive requirement for candidate lists to alternate between women and men. Women won just 27 per cent of the seats, however, as a male headed the list in 90 per cent of cases and only the head of the list was elected in the majority of cases.

Tunisia's 2014 Constitution enshrines the principle of equality and guarantees equal opportunity for women and men to access positions of responsibility (Ohman 2016: 21). It aims to achieve parity between women and men in elected councils. Attempts were made in 2014 parliamentary debates to go beyond the vertical parity introduced to candidate lists in 2011 by including provisions on horizontal parity. This would have meant that a female candidate would have to head half of the lists presented by each party. These attempts, however, were unsuccessful.

The 2014 Electoral Law sets out the main campaign finance regulations. Lists can self-finance their election campaigns, be financed by donations from individuals, capped at 20 times the guaranteed minimum wage in non-agricultural sectors, and receive money from the state. Anonymous donations and donations from legal entities are prohibited.

The law limits the amount a candidate can spend during the campaign, set at five times the amount of public funding provided to each list in a given constituency, but only during the campaign period—the three weeks before election day. The law also prohibits certain types of expense, such as paid political advertising. In 2014, lists had to submit a financial report to the Court of Accounts, the oversight body entitled to impose financial, electoral and criminal penalties, within 45 days of the proclamation of the final results.

Although it has been shown that gender-neutral provisions can have an impact on women's participation by limiting the natural advantage male candidates have through their access to networks of wealthy individuals (Ohman 2016: 22), such regulations would not have significantly affected the proportion of women standing for election in 2014 due to the existence of the quota system.

# About the Women's Political Rights Programme

This Fact Sheet is part of a broader effort by International IDEA and NIMD to understand the impact of political finance on women. It has been produced under the Respect for Women's Political Rights Programme (WPR Programme) developed by International IDEA, NIMD and other partners. The four-year programme (2014–17) aims to strengthen the political leadership of women in three countries—Colombia, Kenya and Tunisia—by improving the political environment for equal participation and leadership of women and men in political parties. The programme works directly with political parties in the above-mentioned countries to:

- assess, reform and transform both formal and informal barriers that impede and discourage progress on gender equality and women's political rights;
- enhance the capacity of women candidates, as well as men and women politicians in general to be more effective fundraisers, campaigners, and leaders; and
- build political parties' institutional capacities on gender-sensitive policymaking and legislation.

## Challenges for political parties and the national assemblies

The issue of campaign finance was one of the major themes of the 2011 and 2014 elections. After 45 years of one-party rule in Tunisia, enhancing political pluralism was at the centre of the debate. However, there were no provisions tying the level of direct public funding to gender equality among candidates. Decree-Law 2011-87 on Organizing Political Parties provides for public funding to political parties but does not contain any gender-related provisions. Many countries have adopted reforms that directly target gender equality by tying public funding to gender equality or earmarking funds for its promotion. Tunisia, however, is one of numerous countries with no such provisions in place and which therefore experiences gender inequality in its elected bodies.

### The candidate selection process

For several reasons, money may have played a less significant role in the candidate selection process in Tunisia than elsewhere. First, the gender quota system meant that the number of women candidates was determined at least partly by legal requirements.

Second, the allocation of public funding during the campaign period tended to level the playing field by allowing all lists to rely on this source of financing.

Third, the length of the campaign (three weeks) may have reduced the importance of access to funds for women. Tunisia remains a patriarchal society and there was a general feeling that nominating a woman at the head of a candidate list might not be acceptable to voters, especially in rural areas (Ohman 2016: 24). Some women, perhaps influenced by the prevailing mentality, did not wish to be nominated at the top of a list.

As noted above, although legislation required all electoral lists to alternate between female and male candidates, it did not mandate horizontal parity. As a result, only 12 per cent of lists had a woman at the top. There were some signs that money was still important in the 2014 parliamentary elections. A significant number of businessmen stood as candidates, even in areas with little or no economic development. Most political parties' nomination processes seemed to favour candidates with sufficient financial resources to self-finance their campaign, which in most cases was detrimental to women.

The candidates to head the lists were mostly selected and nominated by political parties' regional offices. Political parties usually nominated a woman to top the list in constituencies where they knew there was little chance of winning (Ohman 2016: 30). This also affected the funding women received for their campaigns.

### Media exposure

Media exposure is critical to winning a campaign. Women often face challenges making their platforms and messages known to the electorate because of their limited access to the media. The reluctance of media outlets to devote attention to female candidates was raised as a general concern in the aftermath of the 2014 elections. For example, the European Union Election Observation Mission to Tunisia reported that media coverage of women candidates was low, especially in public broadcast media.

## Examples of gendered legislative measures

Countries around the world have started to adopt political finance reforms to level the playing field for women and alleviate the financial burden that campaigns can represent. In parallel with legislation, electoral stakeholders—such as political parties or civil society organizations (CSOs)—can use training, capacity building projects and fundraising support to help reduce the gender gap. Examples of gendered legislative measures include the following:

- In Chile, for the next four electoral cycles (starting in 2017), the reformed electoral law will establish a higher compensatory amount for women candidates for every vote won, designed to help reimburse campaign expenses—irrespective of whether a women candidate won or lost the election. In addition, there will be an increased amount of public funding to parties for each female candidate elected. The reformed electoral law requires parties to nominate not less than 40 per cent or no more than 60 per cent of women and men on their candidate lists.
- In 1999, France adopted a law tying public funding to respect for the gender quota. Under the law, if the gender gap between male and female candidates is larger than 2 per cent, the public funding is reduced by three-quarters of the difference.
- In Burkina Faso, political parties that do not meet the requirement to place at least 30 per cent of either sex on their candidate lists are deprived of 50 per cent of their public funding.
- In Ethiopia, state financial support is allocated according to the number of female candidates nominated by a party.
- In Togo, 20 per cent of the financial assistance from the state is allocated to parties or groupings of parties in proportion to the number of women elected at the previous election.
- In Canada, the cost of childcare incurred in the course of the election campaign can be claimed as expenses. It must be reported in the campaign account and is eligible for reimbursement.
- In Romania, the state funding allocated to eligible political parties is increased in proportion to the number of seats obtained by women candidates.
- In Mexico, each party must devote 2 per cent of its annual regular public funding to the training, promotion and development of female leaders.
- In Morocco, the government has created a support fund to encourage women's representation, which finances projects that strengthen women's capacities.
- Subsidized media coverage or additional media coverage is an important means of enabling women to run a more cost-effective campaign. In Brazil, a 2009

reform provided 10 per cent additional media time to political parties, to be used by women candidates. In Timor Leste, additional television advertising time was given to women candidates and parties that placed women in 'winnable' positions on their lists during the 2001 elections.

- In Costa Rica, the Citizens' Action Party has created an Office for Gender Equality, under the internal election board, which works to implement all the requirements on gender equality set out in the party's statutes, especially regarding horizontal parity in the party lists they present for elections.

## Actions to address the gender gap in Tunisia

### For political parties

Political parties play a crucial role in the candidate selection and nomination process, and in the administration of political funds, including public funding for political activities.

It is therefore critical to establish measures to ensure that women and men in political parties have equal and equitable access to the essential resource of political finance. Actions could include the following:

- Organize training for male members of political parties to make them familiar with the issue of gender equality and the importance of women's participation in politics.
- Introduce a gender equity policy to national parties' statutes to ensure that female candidates are placed in competitive and winnable positions and can benefit from an equitable distribution of campaign financing and other resources.
- Organize training for female candidates with a focus on the main campaign finance regulations and candidates' duties and responsibilities.

### For the Tunisian Parliament

Actions could include the following:

- Introduce gendered criteria for the allocation of public funding. Decree-law 87 should be reviewed in respect of the methods for the calculation and allocation of public funding. For example, the amount of public grant should be linked to the percentage of women candidates elected to office.
- Promote horizontal parity through the adoption of financial incentives for political parties: a predetermined percentage or a specific additional amount of money should be allocated as assistance for electoral

campaign funding to those parties that appoint a minimum of 25 per cent women to head their lists.

## For other relevant actors

Civil society initiatives can also have an impact on gender equality in political finance and reducing the gender gap. They can help women candidates run successful campaigns. Actions could include the following:

- Conduct a civic education campaign on the importance of women's participation and representation in politics;
- Monitor parties' accountability mechanisms on campaign expenditure and internal budgets to compare men's and women's fundraising and spending, and verify that funds allocated within the party are equitably distributed between male and female candidates.

## Further reading

### Political finance and the equal participation of women in Tunisia: a situation analysis

Magnus Ohman

The proportion of women in the Tunisian Parliament is impressive, but is not matched by gender equality in other areas (e.g. in the cabinet or the leadership of parliamentary committees). Creating opportunities for further advances in gender equality requires work on many fronts, such as addressing social attitudes to women and men, improved education and training for women and legal protection with regard to violence against women.

This joint International IDEA–NIMD report makes recommendations on how reforms related to the role of money in politics could help women participate and continue to be engaged in politics. These include providing increased public funding to lists headed by women; and providing ongoing public funding to political parties, with specific funds earmarked for activities related to gender equality.

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