



## Summary

Throughout the world, the number of women elected to office remains significantly lower than the number of men. Different factors contribute to the existence of gender inequality in politics. An increased understanding of the issues surrounding political finance has demonstrated a link between political finance and women's participation in politics. Lack of access to financial resources is regularly identified as a key barrier to the participation of women in politics.

This Fact Sheet provides an overview of women's access to political finance in Kenya, Tunisia and Colombia. It summarizes the key issues and obstacles regarding women's access to political finance, and presents a series of measures to address the gender gap.

## 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.

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# Women's access to political finance: insights from Colombia, Kenya and Tunisia

## 1. Overview

Structural barriers resulting from patriarchal social systems form the major impediments to women's participation in all three countries. The weakness of legal provisions pertaining to political finance and the lack of internal party measures geared towards women's empowerment are striking features, but there are notable differences, such as the nature of the electoral system. While in Kenya (Ohman and Lintari 2015, p.19) and Colombia (Casas-Zamora and Falguera, p.36), the majoritarian electoral system perpetuates advantage for men, the introduction of a gender quota under a system of proportional representation in Tunisia has also reduced the role played by money in elections (Ohman 2016, p.8).

## Colombia

Structural barriers to women's participation persist in Colombia and the role of money in preventing the emergence of female candidates and political leaders constitutes the tip of the iceberg of more profound social, cultural and economic factors that disadvantage women. Colombian political parties remain influenced by the society's strong patriarchy. Colombian political life is dominated by influential political clans that benefit from easy access to wealthy networks and perpetuate the advantage of incumbency. Outsiders unsupported by political machines, most notably female candidates, face significant financial hurdles to entering politics.

Colombia uses an unusual proportional electoral system in which political parties or independent candidates can choose whether to use closed or open lists or a mix of the two. Open lists are the most common choice and as a result, individual access to money, media and networks is fundamental to electoral success.

Colombia legislated for candidate quotas in 2011. At least 30 per cent of candidates of each gender must be included on any list submitted for elections to five seats or more. It also adopted provisions to allocate eligible political parties a certain percentage of their annual public grant according to their number of female parliamentarians. Political parties are also obliged to earmark funds to promote the inclusion of women, young people and ethnic minorities. The amounts involved are rather limited: USD 1.5 million in 2014 (approximately 20 per cent of the public funding budget for the election period). Despite the existence of clear provisions geared to enhancing women's political participation, there is no effective monitoring of the effective use of the earmarked public resources and a limited willingness by most political parties to promote or adopt internal gender quotas.

# 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.

## Kenya

Kenya uses single-member districts and the first-past-the-post electoral system. The introduction of the women county representative (WCR) system under the 2010 Constitution led to a significant increase in the representation of women in parliament, but also resulted in a decrease in the proportion of women holding constituency seats, which were now perceived as men's seats. The lack of political party support in terms of financial resources and access to political networks remains a tremendous obstacle to women entering politics.

The hindrance represented by the candidate-selection process in place in most political parties is also a pivotal factor. Candidates have to pay fees to participate in the party-nomination process and this phase constitutes a huge obstacle to women due to the importance of early money in winning the party nomination. In the 2013 campaign, candidates in some constituencies had to spend more money during the primary campaign than in the general election, and the lack of financial resources ruled out many women who were unable to get past the party primary barrier.

Political parties with more than two-thirds of their national office holders (i.e. internal party leaders) of the same gender are ineligible for public funding. Although this provision represents an incentive to parties to comply, it can in practice be circumvented by the creation of deputy positions for women that lack genuine power.

## Tunisia

Money may have played a less significant role in the candidate selection process in Tunisia than elsewhere, most notably because the gender quota means that the number of women candidates is determined at least in part by legal requirements and political parties have no say in setting the quota. However, some reported that many businessmen were candidates during the 2014 parliamentary elections, often in

areas with little economic development. Political parties seem to favour candidates with sufficient resources to self-finance their campaigns. In most cases this is detrimental to women.

Tunisia's 2014 Constitution enshrined the principle of equality of opportunity for women and men in all areas and of achieving parity between women and men in elected councils. Tunisia uses a closed-list system of proportional representation and a gender quota that legally requires political parties to alternate women and men on each candidate list. Nevertheless, there was no requirement that half of the candidates at the top of the lists are women.

## 2. Key issues and obstacles regarding women's access to political finance

The variety of international declarations, conventions and resolutions that set the normative framework for women's participation make little mention of financial resources and women's campaigns. The three countries illustrate the wider issues and financial constraints women face.

### Patriarchy and gender roles

Political, historical, economic and social factors affect the willingness and ability of women to stand in elections. Patriarchal systems in which men are seen as breadwinners and women traditionally relegated to the private sphere as caregivers leave women fearing the consequences of a campaign for family life and resources. Political life often means the organization of political activities at times that are incompatible with family life, which impedes women's political activism. Moreover, the cost of campaigns can be high, especially where there are party primaries in order to win the nomination, as is the case in Kenya. Candidates must finance themselves during the primaries and then the campaign,

and this involves time-consuming fundraising. Where candidates are expected to fund their own campaigns, women are put at a significant disadvantage. They are likely to have less access to moneyed networks, receive less financial support from their parties and have fewer economic assets of their own.

## Political finance regulation

Political finance regulation is often seen as a tool for levelling the playing field by reducing election costs, cutting corruption and increasing oversight. Legislation on political finance can contain gender-targeted measures that explicitly promote women's participation using public funding and/or gender-neutral regulations that do not directly seek to reduce the gender gap but help to do so in practice. In Tunisia, the legal framework provides for comprehensive and clear campaign finance regulations aimed at ensuring a level playing field and curbing the undue influence of money on the electoral process. The reluctance of media outlets to devote attention to female candidates, however, was raised as a general concern in the aftermath of the 2014 elections.

## The role of political parties

Political parties play a crucial role in the candidate selection and nomination process as well as the administration of political funds, including public funding for political activities. Although the introduction of gender quotas for public elections is a step forward, they do not serve any purpose if the order of the candidates on a candidate lists is not regulated, or reserved seats discourage female candidates from running for other seats, as in Kenya. While gender quotas change the prevailing male-dominated dynamic in the political arena, they serve little purpose if not accompanied by the adoption and implementation of internal quotas within party structures. All three countries illustrate the problems related to internal party behaviour, especially regarding the allocation of party funds to candidates during campaigns. The discretionary power bestowed on party authorities has a definite bearing on women's access to funding and their ability to fundraise independently.

## 3. Actions to address the gender gap

The high cost of contesting elections is acknowledged as one of the many barriers to the increased participation of women in politics. To have a positive impact on legislation, policy and practice inside and outside political parties, a number of concrete actions should be taken:

### For policymakers

- Introduce gendered criteria for the allocation of public funding, linked to the percentage of female candidates put forward by each party or elected to parliament, or the percentage of women at the top of candidate lists.
- Implement all recently adopted campaign finance regulations and reform those that do not work in practice; all regulations should also apply during the nominations period.
- Monitor the use of earmarked funds to ensure they are used effectively to train and educate female leaders and support female candidates during the campaign.

### For political parties

- Develop and strengthen political parties' internal rules on the candidate-nomination process in order to conduct free, fair and peaceful primaries. Political parties should reduce or waive the payment of nomination fees to encourage more women to run for office; use intra-party fundraising mechanisms and grassroots political networks to support female candidates at the pre-nomination stage; and provide them with seed money should they be adopted.
- Organize training for female candidates with a focus on the main campaign finance regulations and candidates' duties and responsibilities.
- Organize training for male members of political parties on the issue of gender equality and the importance of women's participation in politics.
- Introduce a gender equity policy in 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. Where gender representation quotas exist, it would seem natural to introduce internal quotas for all party organs. Moreover, the disbursement of public funding should be made conditional on the implementation of gender quotas within parties.
- Establish special 'earmarked funds' for female candidates that can be used to help organize electoral campaigns; ensure women benefit from a more equitable distribution of campaign financing and other resources.

### For civil society

- Conduct a civic education campaign on the importance of women's participation and representation in politics.
- Organize tailor-made training and capacity development for women candidates on effective strategies for raising both direct and indirect resources, as well as effective ways to use those resources.
- Sensitize media professionals to the importance of gender equality in media coverage and to the importance of profiling women as capable leaders.
- Monitor parties' accountability mechanisms on campaign expenditure and internal budgets.

## References and further reading

Casas-Zamora, K. and Falguera, E., 'Political finance and the equal participation of women in Colombia: a situation analysis' (Stockholm/Den Haag: International IDEA/Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2016), <<http://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/political-finance-and-equal-participation-women-colombia-situation-analysis>>, accessed 30 November 2016



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