


Women in Moroccan local elected councils. When the law does not change society

Abderrahmane Haddad

Moulay Ismail University of Meknes, Morocco ✉ 

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Abstract : Morocco has adopted several legislative measures to strengthen the representation of women within elected local councils. Consequently, the number of women elected increased considerably. The legislature seems forcing the social change. However, the main results of this paper is that these measures failed to establish a local gender equality. Women remain under-represented compared to men on local elected councils. In addition to underrepresentation, women are generally excluded from senior positions within local council offices. The presidency of the councils suffers from a male monopoly. To analyze these findings, this paper uses a theoretical approach which examines the Moroccan case in the light of pioneering studies in the matter, and an empirical approach which refers to the results of both observation and official statistics.

Keywords: Morocco; gender; local councils; parity; positive discrimination; underrepresentation.

ENG Las mujeres en los consejos locales electos marroquíes. Cuando la ley no cambia la sociedad

Resumen: Marruecos ha adoptado varias medidas legislativas para aumentar la representación de las mujeres en los comités electorales. Como resultado, el número de mujeres electas aumentó significativamente. Parece que la legislatura está forzando un cambio social. Sin embargo, la principal conclusión de este artículo es que estas medidas no han logrado la igualdad de género regional. Todavía hay menos mujeres que hombres en la Comisión Electoral Nacional. Además de estar subrepresentadas, las mujeres generalmente están excluidas de puestos de liderazgo en el gobierno local. La presidencia de los consejos sufre un monopolio masculino. Para analizar estos resultados, el artículo utiliza un enfoque teórico, examinando el caso de Marruecos en el contexto de investigaciones pioneras sobre el tema, y un enfoque empírico que remite a los resultados tanto de la observación como de las estadísticas oficiales.

Palabras clave: Marruecos; género; consejos locales; paridad; discriminación positiva; infrarrepresentación.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Literature review. 3. Methodology. 4. The public policy for parity in the political local level. 5. The modest outcomes of the reform mechanisms. 6. Discussion of the results: we do not change society by decree. 7. Conclusion. 8. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

On September 8, 2021, local elections were held in Morocco to elect the members of 1.503 municipalities and 12 regions by direct universal vote. These elections are the eleventh in the history of territorial decentralization in Morocco, but just the second since the adoption of the last constitution, that of 2011, and new legislation relating to the management of these communities later in 2015. To properly situate this electoral moment and place it in the general political process of the country, it is appropriate to remind that the 2011 constitution and the laws which were adopted in its wake are the fruit of what is commonly called the Arab Spring. Morocco has experienced, like many countries in its region, the turmoil of the uprisings that broke

since 2010. Young people and women took to the streets to demand a regime that enshrines democracy, freedom, social equity and puts an end to corruption. The response of the State was not long in coming and the King announced the holding of a constitutional revision.

We can say that the new constitution and the laws adopted later aim to democratize the political process and rebalance social relations in the country. The subsequent reforms of territorial decentralization, adopted by the organic laws of 2015, are in line with this spirit. More than ever, the decentralization process has constituted an essential step in the project of liberalization and democratization of the political system (Houdret and Harnisch, 2017). The main objective of this vision exceeds the simple expansion of the powers of elected municipal councils. It also aims to make local authorities a legitimizing factor of the political regime and the public choices of the central State. This requires a strong adherence to the territorial project via a strong and broad electoral participation.

It is from this undeclared perspective that the question of women political representation at the territorial level surfaced. Beyond the vote itself, a right which was recognized for Moroccan women since the first electoral experience of May 29, 1960, it was rather a question of strengthening the chances of women eligibility and allowing the greatest number of women to conquer seats in elected local assemblies.

But faced with the hostility of political life towards women, the Moroccan State has taken a series of measures aimed at rebalancing the political scene in terms of gender and boosting women's access to local political positions. In addition to the quota system in the lists of candidates, the legislator imposed a minimum number of seats exclusively for the benefit of women in local councils. Additionally, financial incentives were provided to political parties to encourage women candidates.

The adoption of these measures, which we will explain in detail below, was also prompted by two key factors, one external, the other internal. The external factor is linked to Morocco's obligation to honor its international commitments to improve the conditions of women, in accordance with the provisions of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) which the country ratified in 1993. While the internal factor is due to the pressure and advocacy of Moroccan civil society, and the feminist movement in particular, to establish women representation and to prepare an effective parity in the future.

But has the adoption of these various measures allowed women to be effectively and consistently represented within elected local councils?

To explore this hypothesis, this paper is organized as follows: in the first part we will present a review of the literature which constitutes the conceptual framework of the analysis. The purpose of this part is to provide us with the tools for theoretical analysis. The second part is related to the various mechanisms implemented in order to strengthen the representation of women in local councils. Subsequently, and in a third part, we highlight the mixed results of these mechanisms in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Finally, a fourth part will be devoted to the discussion of these results and some explanatory factors.

2. Literature review

The interest of academic studies in the issue of women representation within local governments is not ancient. Pitkin (1967) noted that studies of political representation focused much more on the process of representation than on the identity of the representatives. But now it is becoming a serious concern that marks the process of democratization throughout the world. The inclusion of women and minorities within elected bodies becomes an indicator of transitional and consolidating democracies. Some studies have considered that it would be more judicious to focus on the local level because it is politically the most accessible to women. Chin (2004) consider that local politics, such as childcare, environment or education, are more relevant to women. Gidengil (1997) argues that local political life best corresponds to the social condition of women because it is short and the election does not require large financial resources. But a good part of these studies remained attached to the details relating to particular experiments. One of the pioneering studies which had the merit of proposing a model for explaining the low political representation of women is that proposed by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) which is known as the supply and demand model of candidate selection explained in their study "Political Recruitment: Gender, Race, and Class in the British Parliament".

These authors used market concepts to study the question of representativeness, supply and demand. Thus, supply factors determine who will run for office, while demand factors serve to select among candidates those who will be accepted by the political elite. Norris and Lovenduski determine two supply factors: resources and motivation. Resources include not only money, but also time and experience. On these points, the level of local government is not very demanding. It requires fewer resources and less expertise, as well as less competition, than the parliamentary level. However, in terms of motivation, women appear to be less motivated than men to run for office. This analysis was supported by surveys which concluded that women are less politically ambitious than men (Lawless and Fox, 2005). Access to electoral positions also depends on demand factors. These factors refer to the criteria that allow parties to select candidates and support them. The choice does not only take into account the abilities of the candidates but also the possible reactions of the electorate, which eliminates number of candidates. Norris and Lovenduski's model emphasizes the elements to be taken into consideration in any analysis and any strategy for improving the political representation of women. In the context of demand factors, Norris and Lovenduski (1993) also edited a collective work on gender and political parties. The work focuses on the underrepresentation of women in political institutions and explores the responsibility of political parties in this regard.

In her *Feminist reflections on representative democracy*, Lovenduski (2019) analyzed the link between democratization and female representation within of elected councils and wonder if democracy enhances

gender equality. She noticed that the degree of democracy has no direct political effect on women because of the institutions which resist and delay progress. She concluded that »in terms of political representation, democracy does not seem to deliver for women» (Lovenduski, 24). This resistance prevents women from forming a critical mass capable of forcing change and opening the way to equality. The critical mass theory was defended by Dahlerup (1988) and Bystydzienski (1992) who argue that if women can move from the status of a dominated group to the one of more balanced representation, they could change the institutional culture and transform the political agenda. However, Norris and Lovenduski cast doubt on this hypothesis. They consider that critical mass could only have an effect when women manage to establish a culture and political practice different from those of men. However, since this is not yet the case, the political exercise continues according to the same rules (Norris and Lovenduski, 2001).

In Morocco, it is mainly civil society organizations that have developed papers on gender parity in political life. These papers mainly had a protest and militant concern, which testifies to the shortage of academic studies. One of the most interesting papers in this sense and which reports the blatant under-representation of women in politics is the one developed by Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (2001), *Mutilated Democracy. Women and politics in Morocco*.

3. Methodology

Based on the concepts discussed in the previous section, we intend to analyze the question of the presence of women in Moroccan elected local councils. This paper starts from the following hypothesis: The various mechanisms favorable to better women representation at the level of local councils have made it possible to increase the number of elected women, but they have kept them on the margins of local decision-making power. In other words, women local representation has experienced a quantitative leap but also a qualitative failure.

To verify the outcomes, we used official figures published regularly by the Ministry of the Interior the day after the holding of local elections and the final composition of local councils. Other statistics are also published by central authorities following the formation of the offices of the country's various local councils. We also used data posted online by some local councils on their websites. This data mainly concerns the composition of these councils and can be used to verify the degree of female representation.

In addition to these preliminary sources, we also turned to secondary data sources such as reports published by Moroccan civil society organizations. These reports, prepared with the aim of advocating the cause of women in society, have the advantage of being analyzed from a critical point of view and under the prism of the gender approach and gender equality. The use of these figures allows a quantitative approach of the paper concern by taking into account the gender variable.

4. The public policy for parity in the political local level

Since 2011, the pace of efforts towards better political representation of women in general, and at the territorial level in particular, has increased considerably in Morocco. Before exposing these different efforts, it would be appropriate to focus on the reasons that underpinned them. There are actually three types of reasons. The first one is linked to the contributions of the 2011 constitution, the framework of the reform movement in relation to our subject refers to two essential provisions. On the one hand, the article 1 of the constitution which now recognizes the democratic principle as one of the four unifying constants of the nation, alongside Islam, national unity and the monarchy. On the other hand, the article 19, which had always been devoted to the monarchy in successive Moroccan constitutions since 1962, is now a founding article of parity between men and women. It places the responsibility on public authorities to work to establish this parity (Barnett and Shalaby, 2021).

The second reason is linked to Morocco's international commitments in the protection and promotion of women's rights. These commitments linked to the ratification of the CEDAW convention condition to a large extent the image that Morocco wants to give of itself as being a modern State carrying a political and social modernity project. The recognition of the two previous reasons cannot, however, eclipse a third one, no less fundamental reason, namely the pressure exerted by Moroccan civil society and in particular by the feminist movement before the adoption of the constitution and the ratification of CEDAW.

The legislator was well aware that Moroccan political practice was not very sensitive to women representation and that the electoral behavior of citizens was primarily male behavior. Such an observation is not exclusive to local councils, but it also applies in the same way to the political representation of women at the parliamentary level. The gender inequality is a constant in political bodies in Morocco (Dao-Sabah, 2020). Thus, and faced with the immovable nature of the status of women in local political life, the legislator attempted a change from above by imposing positive discrimination mechanisms.

The Moroccan efforts aimed to immediately and substantially improve women representation within municipal councils by increasing the number of seats reserved for women. The last paragraph of article 127 of the organic law n° 59-11 (adopted in 2011) relating to the election of local councils 'members stipulates the allocation of seats for women on local councils, while the article 128 bis of the same law determines the number of these seats according to the nature of the groups concerned, taking into account the population and the nature of the applied voting pattern. Morocco uses two electoral methods for the choice of municipal councils 'members. The first is the single-member majority ballot for municipalities whose number of inhabitants is less than 50.000 inhabitants, and the list ballot for municipalities whose number of inhabitants is equal to or greater than this last figure. For cities councils whose members are elected by individual vote, the seats affected to women have been increased from 4 to 5 seats. For the cities whose councils emerge from the list voting pattern, a distinction must be made between the ones that are not divided into districts

and those that are divided into districts which are the country six largest cities. Regarding the first category, a third of the Council's seats are allocated to women while in the second category women have one-third of the seats from each district's quota in the seats that must be filled at the local council level, with a minimum number, which must not be less than three seats. Furthermore, one-third of the districts councils' seats are also reserved for women. In all cases, women could also run for office outside the quota specified for them by law.

To achieve these objectives, it was necessary to overhaul the electoral candidacy system itself. The second and third paragraphs of article 134 of organic law n° 59-11 specify the nature of declarations of candidacy. For the local councils concerned with the method of list voting, the nomination list must include two parts. The first includes the number of seats allocated to the municipalities or district, excluding the number allocated to women. The second part includes the names of women candidates according to the number allocated to the concerned district or the municipality.

Moreover, the woman candidate who is ranked first on the second part of the list is also considered an agent of the list and has the same privileges related to this status, including running for the presidency of the local council according to the conditions stipulated in chapter one of organic law 113-14 and which conditions the implementation of this candidacy for presidency by obtaining the accreditation of the political party to which the candidate belongs.

As for the municipalities whose councils emerge from individual suffrage, the declaration of candidacy in the electoral districts concerned with the attached women's seat must necessarily include the name of the man or woman candidate in addition to the name of the women candidate for the attached seat.

To protect women's representation, the legislator included two additional provisions. The first appears in the article 134 mentioned above, which stipulates that the "original" candidate's withdrawal of his candidacy does not affect the position of the candidate for the attached seat, as her candidacy can only be withdrawn by the concerned candidate herself. As for the second requirement, it was stated in the article 153 of the same organic law, which stipulates that canceling the election of a member in an electoral district to which a seat reserved for women is attached does not result in canceling the seat of the winning candidate for the woman attached seat.

The legislator also worked to raise the level of women's political representation not only by ensuring minimum of women elected to the councils, but also by ensuring that a number of these women reach decision-making positions within the elected local councils. The presence of women in the governing bodies of territorial communities is one of the fundamental concerns of the laws regulating municipal governance in Morocco.

We have previously indicated that the legislator granted the woman candidate ranked first in the second part of the nomination lists, at all territorial levels, the status of list agent, which is the status that entitles her to run for the presidency of the Council in the event that she obtains the accreditation of the party in whose name she ran, if she belongs to one of the political parties. However, if she runs as an independent candidate not affiliated with any political party, she does not need this accreditation. Although practice has proven difficult to implement this analysis in view of the scarcity of territorial councils headed by women, and perhaps the legislator was fully aware of this, the latter showed a kind of realism and, in return, tried to establish women's position within the executive bodies by ensuring their representation as at least as vice presidents. However, if the legislator did not go so far as to directly stipulate that a number of vice-presidential positions must be feminized, he, on the other hand, required that the nomination regulations for vice-presidential positions must include women representation.

In this regard, Article 17 of organic law 113-14 relating to municipalities stipulates that the list of vice-presidential nominations must include a number of women candidates for not less than a third of the deputy positions.

To guarantee the implementation of these mechanisms, the State had to use its checkbook. Thus, in August 2016, the government adopted a decree (n° 2-16-666) relating to the financing of electoral campaigns by political parties. In order to improve women representation and encourage parties to boost women's candidacies, it was decided that "For each seat to be filled, open to men and women candidates on an equal footing, if a woman is elected, the amount of the allocation will be multiplied by five".

Did all of these measures have a positive impact and were they able to resolve the gender issue within the elected local councils? In fact, given the results of the 2021 local elections, it can be said that the effects were rather modest.

5. The modest outcomes of the reform mechanisms

Despite the various legal and financial efforts mentioned above, the status of women within municipal councils remains unsatisfactory. Our study can emphasize two types of results which confirm this observation.

- On the one hand, the number of elected women has certainly increased compared to the past. The numbers will prove it. However, women still suffer from under-representation compared to men.
- On the other hand, we have noticed, according to official statistics, that even the lucky elected women are marginalized. Access to positions of responsibility is almost closed to them.

5.1. Women are more and more elected but still underrepresented

If we follow the statistical data related to all Moroccan local elections, we will easily note down a successive increase in the percentage of women candidates. We can explain this matter through the development of the percentage and number of women candidates in local elections since 1976, that is, the year a new and important law of municipalities was adopted and also changed the image of territorial decentralization in Morocco. This is what the following table shows, the data of which we collected from the official statistics announced by the Ministry of Interior before and after each local election.

Table 1: Women candidates in local elections

Election date	Women's candidates	%
November 12, 1976	76	٪ 0,17
June 10, 1983	306	٪ 1
October 16, 1993	1086	٪ 1,18
June 13, 1997	1651	٪ 1,62
September 12, 2003	6024	٪ 5
June 12, 2009	20.458	٪ 15,7
September 4, 2015	28.725	٪ 21,94
September 8, 2021	47.060	٪ 30

Source: Author's elaboration

Between 1976 and 2021, the rate of women applicants increased from less than 1% to 30%. The 2009 elections marked a turning point in this rate which exceeded the 10 percent mark for the first time. This turning point coincides with the start of the implementation of electoral quota mechanisms for the benefit of women. It should be remembered that during the first local elections in 1960, the number of women candidates was 14 women only, none of whom were elected.

This successive increase in the percentage of women nominations cannot be attributed solely to the legal amendments that affected the territorial management system in its various fields and aspects from the 1976 law until the organic laws of 2015, passing through the specific stipulations of the Constitution of 2011 in this regard. But the matter is also related to the political breakthrough that Morocco experienced during this historical period, its involvement in the international dynamic related to issues of gender and equality, and the creation in 2013 of a special fund to encourage the political participation of women, in addition to the advocacy of civil society organizations for this purpose (Barnett and Shalaby, 2021).

The continuous the number of women nominations, in addition to the political transformations that Morocco witnessed during this period, was reflected in the high percentage of women elected to local councils. This is indicated by the following numbers for municipalities, which we obtained by compiling official statistics that were published the day after the organization of the various local elections held between 1976 and 2021.

Table 2: Women elected in local elections

Elections	Elected Women	%
November 12, 1976	9	٪ 0,02
June 10, 1983	34	٪ 0,27
October 16, 1993	75	٪ 0,33
June 13, 1997	83	٪ 0,34
September 12, 2003	128	٪ 0,56
June 12, 2009	3424	٪ 12,34
September 4, 2015	6673	٪ 18,21
September 8, 2021	More than 8000	٪ 26,64

Source: Author's elaboration

It was only in 1976 that women first gained access to local councils in Morocco. Their representation was remarkably limited at 0.02 percent of the total seats, with a net men dominance of 99.98 percent. But according to the data in the table, the rate of feminization of municipal councils experienced a remarkable increase between 2003 and 2009. From less than 1 percent, it rose to 12 percent. This increase is mainly due to the implementation of positive discrimination mechanisms (Association Joussour, 2017) but also to financial incentives from the State and pressure from the feminist movement for political parity. This rate increased between 2009 and 2015 by 168 percent, and by 233 percent between 2009 and 2021. Certainly these advances are laudable. However, the results are not satisfactory for at least two reasons:

- The first is that women remain clearly under-represented compared to men within elected local councils. The 26.64 percent of the last elections remain below the expectations of legislative reforms and the demands of civil society.
- The second reason is that the seats won by women are mainly those seats attached to the main seats in the individual voting mode or the seats for which the second part of the nomination lists is allocated to women only in the list voting mode. Women find it very difficult to win seats outside of those guaranteed by positive discrimination mechanisms. This observation is not exclusive to Morocco, since everywhere else it is the States which have implemented positive discrimination measures which have succeeded in bringing more women back to elected councils (Khosla and Barth, 2008). Which means that women political representativeness is much more imposed, manufactured than spontaneously resulting from a process of positive social and cultural change.

5.2. Women are more and more represented but still marginalized

Women's representation in elected local councils has not risen to the point of creating local women leadership, as positions of chairing and responsibility within these councils remain almost impossible to feminize. The progress has stopped at the level of increasing the number of elected women without allowing them to take local decision-making power. We can examine this observation at two levels: the presidency of the councils and that of the presence rate in the offices of these councils.

The level where the failure is big is certainly the one related to the presidency of elected local councils. When it comes to chairing deliberative councils, men are privileged. Despite the progress achieved in the presence of women within these councils, the issue of a woman assuming the presidency is a differed subject in territorial affairs. The numbers that emerged from the last local elections confirm this situation, noting that these elections are the strongest in terms of women's representation within the territorial councils in the history of territorial decentralization in Morocco. Only 11 women were able to reach the position of council president, which represents only 0.73% of the total number of 1.503 municipality councils. It is a shameful percentage if we bring it up in the context of chapter 19 of the Constitution, which relies on parity, and the context of the legislative amendments that tried to strengthen women's presence at the local level, without ignoring the advocacy of civil society organizations for this same goal. Moreover, the number of women presidents has decreased compared to the results of the 2015 elections when their number was 22.

Faced with the impermeable aspect of the institution of the presidency which remains fundamentally patriarchal, women have tried to conquer positions within the offices of local councils. In Morocco, the local council office is made up of the president and vice-presidents, the number of which varies from one municipality to another depending on the total number of members of the concerned council. This strategy turned out to be simple since the law expressly reserved a quota for women within these offices. But some councils did not respect this legal stipulation. By analyzing the statistical data related to the composition of local council offices, two basic conclusions can be presented:

The first conclusion relates to some elected council offices that did not respect the quota allocated to women in their composition, as they considered that the legal stipulation of women's presence in offices was not a matter of requirement, but only a matter of recommendation. The legislator also did not provide any legal and injunctive penalty for not respecting this quota. Following the jurisdictional appeals made by some elected officials at the administrative judiciary in Morocco, the latter could have contributed to consolidating the gender approach in local administration. However, the positions of some courts were characterized by a lot of negativity, and showed that a number of judges had not yet understood the spirit of change that characterizes the 2011 Constitution and the 2015 organic laws. It is easy to notice that the position of the administrative judiciary in this regard fluctuates.

In 2015, just after the first local electoral experience under the new territorial laws, the Rabat Administrative Court issued two judgements that constitute a reference on the issue of protecting women's representation when forming the executive bodies of local councils. These are the two judgements that nullified the process of forming the offices of two territorial councils because they did not respect the women's quota in the nominations of vice presidents. The matter relates to Judgment No. 4295 issued on October 1, 2015, which invalidated the formation of the office of the Rabat municipality Council, and the judgement n° 4193 of September 29, 2015 invalidating the formation of Aoulad Ali Mansour local council's office. In the first case, the list of representatives proposed by the President, which was accepted by the majority of Council members, included eight men and two women, which does not fulfill the one-third requirement, given that the number of representatives in this Council is limited to ten. In the second case, the list of candidates for vice-presidential positions did not include any women. With these two judgements, the Rabat Administrative Court has put things back in order and stated that the issue of respecting the women's quota, in the presence of women candidates who are not prevented by any objective obstacle from running for office, is a requirement that is binding and enforceable.

But the Rabat Appeal Administrative Court, which is higher than the first court, had another opinion and another interpretation that contradicted the legal requirements adopted by the first-instance courts, as it ruled to cancel the ruling of the Rabat Administrative Court mentioned above, and affirm the legitimacy of forming the city's collective council. This is the appeal issued on October 22, 2015. The Casablanca Administrative Court also took the same approach in judgement No. 2513 issued on October 7, 2015, when it considered that the women representativeness requirements came as a result of the gradual implementation of the parity principle, and that the issue of candidacy remains an optional matter that cannot acquire the status of obligation. The defendant councils often present declarations of withdrawal signed by the women members of the boards attesting that they waive their right to sit in the office.

Through these examples, it is clear that the position of the administrative judiciary fluctuates in interpreting the requirements related to parity between the immediate obligation and the gradual or flexible implementation of these requirements. Indeed, the latter position is not linked to a misunderstanding of the texts, but it often constitutes a realistic measure when there is absence of women nominations for positions of responsibility within local councils as stipulated. Establishing mandatory requirements related to women's representation requires, in addition to the openness of political practice, judicial support that remembers, when necessary, the need to fully meet the legal conditions for the process of forming territorial council offices. However, what happened in this regard revealed that some courts were not in keeping with the spirit of legal reforms and did not contribute to protecting them.

In addition to this quantitative marginalization of women within the offices of elected councils, they are also victims of another form of marginalization, even harsher, which excludes them from the first lines of responsibility. When we take into account the data relating to the composition of the council offices of the largest Moroccan cities, it emerges that women are far from being among the top leaders. The top vice-presidential positions are often monopolized by men. This is what we can notice from the data in the table that we have realized by comparing the composition of the offices of a certain number of city councils:

Table 3: Women vice-presidents on local councils in major Moroccan cities by 2024

City	Number of vice-presidents	Number of women vice-presidents	Rank of women in the hierarchy of vice-presidents
Rabat	10	2	7 and 8
Marrakech	10	3	5, 6 and 10
Fez	10	3	7, 8 and 10
Tangier	10	3	6, 7 and 10
Casablanca	11	5	1, 4, 7, 9 and 11
Agadir	10	3	5, 9 and 10
Meknes	10	4	7, 8, 9 and 10

Source: Author's elaboration

It is clear that in 5 of the 7 largest cities in Morocco, the number of women vice-presidents does not respect the condition of the one-third quota. But what concerns us most is the place of these women vice-presidents in the hierarchy of positions of responsibility within the offices of the elected councils covered by the table above. According to the latter's data, women are often in the bottom ranks. With the exception of the metropolis of Casablanca where the position of first vice-president was assigned to a woman, in the other large cities women are referred to the second part of the list of vice-presidents. Which means that fundamental responsibilities, such as town planning, major works or profitable services are delegated in their management to men and not women. It can be said that the simple presence of women on local councils is enough for the moment to give these councils gender legitimacy.

How can we explain these different results and this lower status of women in elected local councils?

6. Discussion of the results: we do not change society by decree

Indeed, this situation of women inferiority within local councils can be explained by a series of direct and indirect causes. We can directly cite three causes: the reluctance of political parties, the nature of the electoral system and the behavior of the elected women themselves.

Some studies have linked the political ranking women to the party's ideology (Murray *et al.*, 2012). Generally, it has been established that left-wing parties encourage women representation while conservative parties marginalize this representation (Reynolds, 1999). However, this result must be taken with great vigilance in the case of Morocco because the ideological profile of Moroccan parties is far from being clear and often the speeches and programs of Moroccan political parties are similar to each other. If we refer to the results of the 2015 local elections as an example, we can see that a party described as Islamist was able to elect 1,058 women, while another party, of socialist persuasion, was only able to elect 574 women (Barnett and Shalaby, 2021). Indeed, all political parties, from both "right" and "left", say they are in favor of electoral parity between men and women. Practice has shown that political parties prefer to present candidates likely to mobilize the most votes and therefore who offer more guarantees of winning electoral seats and could mobilize funds to finance a significant part of the expenses of the electoral campaign. According to this vision, women are far from being favorites. If we exclude the seats which are expressly reserved by the electoral law for women, thanks to the quota system, and which political parties are obliged to respect, the latter are very reluctant to grant accreditations to women.

The Moroccan electoral system requires candidates for elections to obtain in advance the accreditation of their parties. The accreditations phase is therefore naturally a crucial phase in determining the rate of women political representation (Bauer, 2012; Thames, 2014). The parties have in their hands the possibility of increasing or decreasing this rate from the pre-electoral phase (Bayraktar, 2017). But partisan practice continues to be discriminatory against women in this selection phase where the woman is far from representing a promising candidate (Dahlerup, 2018; Tremblay and Pelletier, 2001).

This accreditation is also mandatory to be a candidate for president of the elected council. Political parties' accreditations granted to women for this objective remain rare, as evidenced by the very limited number of women presidents. Even in the list voting method where the woman who appears at the top of the second part reserved exclusively for women has the status of head of the list, and therefore could theoretically run for president, this possibility is blocked because the parties prefer to entrust their accreditation to the male candidate leading the list of the first part.

The predominance of men in matters of electoral accreditations can also be explained by their predominance at the level of the decision-making bodies of all Moroccan political parties (Oulghazi, 2024). Almost all of the general secretaries of Moroccan political parties are men. For political offices or decision-making bodies of political parties, the proportion of women is between 11% and 33% (Hattabi and Belhoussine, 2021).

While investigating the causes of discrimination against women in partisan elites, Niven (1998) had noted the male predominance within those elites and concluded that this predominance would prevent any substantial improvement in women's political representation.

The electoral system is also a factor that works against a better women political representation. Norris (2006) had raised the impact of the electoral system on female political representation. She confirmed that women were more elected in party list proportional system than in majoritarian system based on single member districts. Other studies have confirmed this observation (Reynolds, 1999; Siaroff, 2000; Moser, 2001). In Morocco, the election of members of local councils is done according to the list system or according to the single-member majority system. The first concerns municipalities which have more than 50,000 inhabitants while the second applies to municipalities which have fewer inhabitants. According to these scales, the list system applies in only 81 municipalities, while the single-member system applies in the remaining 1,422 municipalities. This predominance of the second mode is not in favor of the women representativeness. The women face the men who, in the eyes of the electorate, are capable service providers (Barnett and Shalaby, 2021). When we know that the majority of municipalities concerned by the single-member majority vote are rural in nature, and that these are dominated by notables and clientelism relationships, it is easy to conclude the difficulty that a woman would have to succeed in her electoral adventure.

Finally, women are also responsible for their marginalization. It was noted that many of them agree to sign declarations of withdrawal, giving up their right to sit in the elected in accordance with the rule of the quota of one third of the members of these offices. A question arises then about the right of women who win seats in local councils not to run for the position of president, nor for the positions of his deputies, where women should be at least a third of them. If this matter is theoretically possible, and even legally acceptable, given that no member can be forced to run for a position without his full will, then in our view it is not politically correct. This possibility may make us stop at a kind of political schizophrenia, as how can a woman accept a seat within the framework of the attached seats or within the framework of the second part of the regulations reserved exclusively for women, which are the requirements that were adopted and implemented to increase women's representation, and then refuse after that to run for office? In other words, is it a matter of desire and free personal choice, or is it a societal project under formation it is mandatory for both elected men and women to contribute in its implementation and strengthening? This question remains legitimate, especially if we know that the theoretical scenario has become true in a number of cases.

To explain this behavior, it is helpful to return to the results of the World Values Survey to understand the general political attitudes of Moroccan women. Figures from wave 6 of this survey show a disinterest in politics among women. Of the 604 women interviewed in 2011, only 4.8% considered politics "very important," compared to 56.3% who stated that it was "not at all important" (Inglehart *et al.*, 2014). Wave 7 of the survey recorded a significant improvement in the percentage of women interested in politics in 2021, which rose to 14.5%. However, the attitude of disinterest remained much stronger, with 18% considering politics "not at all important" and 31% "not very important" (Haerpfer *et al.*, 2022). In terms of political leadership, 45.5% of the women interviewed responded that men are better political leaders than women, compared to only 33.1% who rejected this idea (Inglehart *et al.*, 2014).

In addition to these direct causes which determine the inferiority of the political status of women in elected local councils, other rather indirect causes contribute to establishing this inferiority and are above all of a cultural and sociological order. Issues relating to women in Morocco, and despite undeniable legislative progress, are conflicting issues. Society is still divided on this subject. Morocco is still an overpowering patriarchal society. This explains the fact that the under-representation and political marginalization of women are not the exclusive mark of local councils or a "territorial evil". The same situation is also noticed in legislative bodies, within the government team and in the ranks of the senior civil service, areas largely dominated by men (Maguire, 2018).

7. Conclusion

At the end of this study, we can note that the case of Morocco can be explained by Norris and Lovenduski's model, and in particular by the part of the demand factors. Women struggle to be selected within the political elite and to carve out a place for themselves within local decision-making bodies. But even if Morocco recognized women's right to vote from the all beginning of its local democratic experiment in 1960, the results still remain highly questionable. Certainly on a qualitative level, a giant step has been taken. The number of women elected to local councils has increased substantially. However, qualitatively, the electoral result of local councils reflects neither the place of women in the electorate, nor the spirit of constitutional and legislative reforms nor even less the aspirations of civil society. We can say that we are witnessing a schizophrenia in local political life. While the legislation purports to be liberal, the practice remains deeply conservative. The local democracy is a "mutilated" one (Democratic Association of Women in Morocco, 2001).

The qualitative and quantitative levels are related to each other. Indeed, if women fail to achieve a critical mass of representativeness, their marginalization and exclusion from positions of local responsibility will remain the rule. This critical mass is considered as a serious condition for making a difference (Dahlerup, 1988; Bjørnå, 2021). However, the effect of the critical mass will remain relative, or even insignificant, if the increase in the number of women elected is not accompanied by a change in political culture and practice. the quantitative leap without cultural change is just an empty shell (Norris and Lovenduski, 2001).

One of the immediate guarantees to make this mass effective is to ensure the effectiveness of the legal rules which establish a minimum level of women representativeness. Otherwise, we will be making

inconsistent laws (Dao-Sabah, 2020). This is where the role of justice is crucial. Establishing mandatory requirements related to women's representation requires a firm judicial support that remembers, when necessary, the need to fully meet the legal conditions for the process of forming territorial council offices.

Certainly, sometimes the law is impotent in cases of women withdrawal, voluntary or forced, which in fact constitute maneuvers of the male oligarchy which dominates the councils. In order to strengthen the position of justice, this matter requires amending the articles pertaining to the elected bylaws in order to restrict the liberty of elected women regarding whether or not to run for the positions authorized to them under the laws in force. This amendment is compliant with the constitutional spirit and with the legislator's desire to establish a territorial experience that truly respects the principles of equality and the gender approach. But legal action is not the only guarantee for better women representation. We do not change society by decree. The change is mainly of a cultural and societal nature. In the meantime, we must proceed with the economic and political empowerment of women themselves so that they can be the agents of change.

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