

Gender Quotas in Clientelist Systems:

The Case of Morocco's National List

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The use of parliamentary quotas to increase women's political participation has gained a lot of traction in women's empowerment discourse. Women's movements worldwide have been working hard to make progress in ensuring a more equal representation of women in parties and parliament alike. So far during this decade, Morocco has emerged as one of the leading models for increasing women's rights in the Arab world. In 2002, an informal agreement among political parties to establish a gender quota for women in parliament quickly gave Morocco one of the highest levels of women's representation in the Arab region. Just two years later, women's groups celebrated one of their greatest victories with the reform of the family code, *moudawana*, in 2004. Both of these events coincided with an increase in the number of women in positions of power.

Despite the increased profile of Moroccan women in public life, the seven year experience of Morocco's national list raises more questions than the answers it provides: Does the quota system encourage women to play a greater role in public service or to simply "occupy a seat?" What are the criteria used for selecting women to be on the national list? How have party leaders manipulated the quota system for their own purposes? How does the candidate selection process reproduce and strengthen clientelist practices? Once in parliament, do women MPs focus on the concerns of other women or are they constrained by many of the same informal rules and partisan loyalties as male MPs? Who do they represent?

Parliamentary quotas have been effective tools for empowering women through politics in many disparate corners of the world. However, as with any development initiative, context matters. Since every parliament has its own power dynamics, any benefits to be gained by increasing the presence of women in politics are largely dependent on the nature of how such political institutions function in a local setting. My argument is that increasing the representation of women in institutions which are not popularly viewed as representative is not empowering. Rather, it acts as a surface reform taking pressure off male elites to genuinely empower women in decision-making positions.

The Moroccan Parliament, like many other parliaments around the world, functions not as a representational system but as a clientelist one. By using the frame of a clientelist system in which political competition is contained within clearly defined boundaries, and largely separated from the concerns of average citizens, it becomes more difficult to imagine that gender quotas can act as genuine levers of empowerment. By

examining the case of Morocco, the goal of this article is to encourage a deeper look into the fundamental assumptions behind women's empowerment initiatives relying on gender quotas.

Contradictory Messages

The literature on gender quotas for women in parliament varies according to different countries' experiences and patterns of political development. In many ways, though, quotas come off as a sure bet for raising the representation of women in political institutions. For women's groups and international institutions alike, the notion that increasing women's political participation is a necessary step in order to overcome inequality in political institutions almost goes without saying. The extent to which such increases in participation lead to genuine empowerment, however, is not as clear.

The Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) (2005), invoking the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), is vocal in its support for quota systems to overcome "historic" barriers facing women (pp. 184-185). But, shortly thereafter, the authors of the AHDR go on to state that such measures "fall short if there is no true democratic representation of citizens as a whole" (p. 213), and should only be an "interim step" (p. 205). Such a qualified and cautious assessment would be reassuring if the authors of the report didn't go on to contradict themselves in their conclusions.

In the beginning of the report, the AHDR warns of a "democratic façade" (p. 22) in which authoritarian Arab rulers implement new initiatives aimed at women in order to create a veneer of empowerment that would stave off pressure from Western governments. Yet, later on, the authors readily use the number of women in Arab parliaments as an indicator for the empowerment of women within their respective legislatures. From their discussion of parliamentary quotas, the authors paint them simultaneously as a necessary step and part of the problem.

The writings of Moroccan women's activists responsible for advocating for greater political inclusion also reflect this duality – unequivocal support for gender quotas combined with the acknowledgement of major obstacles to true empowerment. Khadijah Errebah, whose organization Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) has led the fight for quotas, is the most optimistic, stating that a quota system has the potential to "break the vicious circle produced by inequality and create new political relations based on true fairness and democracy" (2003, p. 57).

Rachida Tahri (2003), also of the ADFM, lays out the historic and successful steps taken by a coalition of women's groups over ten years in order to secure greater representation for women in politics. At the same time, though, she admits that "most of the political parties believe that they do not need to include female candidates on the local lists [since women have the national list quota system]" (p. 2). Tahri (2003) describes the progress made as both "fragile" and "reversible", lamenting that women are still "absent from decision-making bodies in the legislature" (p. 5).

In her study on women's movements and political discourse, researcher and co-founder of ADFM, Rabéa Naciri (1998), lays out a much more comprehensive story behind the

origins and subsequent successes of women's activism in Morocco. By rightly crediting the movement for past battles won, Naciri (1998) makes a key point: "the capacity of the new civil society organizations to present social and political alternatives... depends on their...ability to remain independent from political institutions" (p. 6). Although remaining autonomous from political parties has been a necessary condition for the women's movement in order to preserve its independence in the past, Naciri (1998) argues that "politics is still seen as the sphere relating to power and the official political institutions, the rest being perceived as fringe activities" (p. 22). From this viewpoint, then, the women's movement has made increasing women's political participation in elected bodies part of its mission to "challenge an established social order and its norms and values in order to change them" (p. 22).

A publication by IDEA titled *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* features several studies that focus on the benefits of increased participation of women in parliament and even provide strategies to maximize their presence in elected bodies (Sabbagh, 2005; Karam and Lovenduski, 2005). Ultimately, however, the studies stress the importance of the political environment in determining the actual opportunities available to women. Likewise, despite coming out in favor of gender quotas, the scholar Drude Dahlerup (2006) emphasizes that "the political empowerment of women in political institutions cannot be discussed in isolation from the importance of these institutions themselves" (p. 15).

Many Arab countries, such as Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan, have parliaments which function as patronage machines – mechanisms of elite circulation and regime support – lacking significant opposition and comprised of a mixture of rural notables, tribal leaders, and urban elites and businessmen loyal to the regime. While such a political equation is certainly not unique to the Arab world, it is a common feature of many Arab states. Situating the Moroccan Parliament and political institutions within the framework of a clientelist system is necessary to provide a more accurate assessment of the potential gains available to women through increased political participation at the national level.

The Case of Morocco

Political Institutions

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy in name, but one in which the king maintains far reaching powers. The king's authority is also bolstered by his role as the "Commander of the Faithful". As both the political and religious leader, the king enjoys widespread legitimacy and authority. The historical role of the monarchy as both arbiter and bearer of patronage has worked as an effective tool for securing the loyalty of elites as well as co-opting opponents.

Despite Morocco's historically multi-party system, most political parties today function primarily as extensive patron-client networks in which people become members based on self-interest and the benefits accrued through group belonging, rather than ideology or a desire for public service. Decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a very small male elite who share an increasing insecurity about ceding power to women and youth. As an extension of the parties that make it up, the parliament is dominated by competing alliance groups traditionally maneuvering

for proximity to the palace and access to government ministries. Historic bouts of confrontation between the leftist opposition and the palace have been severely tempered by co-optation and the parameters of acceptable criticism are laid out very clearly for the remaining opposition, composed primarily of Islamists. Leaders have a keen interest in maintaining this established system of privileges, and incentive structures strongly favor self-interest over initiative. Members of parliament stand little to gain by outshining their party leadership, and upsetting the power balance of alliance groupings without consensus comes with strong repercussions. Although constitutional amendments in 1992 and 1996 have granted the parliament greater powers – oral questioning of ministers and the ability to carry out fact-finding missions – the institution is still popularly viewed as a theater. Many parliamentarians do not even bother to show up most of the time, even during votes on major bills.

Given the perceived self-interest and detachment of political elites, as well as the monopoly of major decision-making in the hands of the palace, it should come as no surprise that Moroccan citizens have expressed a high level of distrust for the political system. During the last legislative elections in 2007, only 37 percent of registered voters came out to vote, of which 20 percent turned in a spoiled ballot. Due to greater transparency in elections, the scission between the political system and the Moroccan people was made public to all. As one Moroccan professor recently exclaimed, “Moroccan people don’t have confidence in elections in general, in local elections, in national elections, because we’ve discovered progressively that the struggle between political parties is not a struggle to make Morocco better” (German, 2009). While Morocco’s historical opposition and current Islamist opposition do enjoy an ideologically charged constituency, most citizens view the parliament and parties as largely irrelevant to their daily lives. Given these circumstances, what, then, are the opportunities for empowerment available to women by increasing their participation and representation in parliament?

The National List Parliamentary Quota System

The parliamentary quota system adopted for women in 2002 was the culmination of a long, concerted advocacy campaign carried out by a coalition of women’s organizations. A National Committee comprised of 20 women branches of political parties and women’s rights and human rights organizations lobbied party leaders, cabinet ministries, and the public to raise support for political and legal proposals granting women greater political participation. Their efforts helped reach a “gentlemen’s agreement” by party leaders in which 30 of the 325 seats in the Chamber of Representatives would be reserved for women elected in one “national constituency” through a national list (Abou-Zeid, 2006; Errebah, 2003; Tahri, 2003).

So far, the implementation of a national list has already led to several notable advances for Moroccan women. First and foremost, the quota system has “jumpstarted women’s integration into the political process” (Abou-Zeid, 2006, p. 191), increasing their visibility and representation in major institutions. As Karam and Lovenduski (2005) maintain, “the very presence of women in a traditional male environment creates gender awareness and alters expectations” (p. 207). By promoting equal representation of women in political institutions, women are

directly challenging patriarchal rejectionists who claim that they are somehow unqualified or do not belong in politics.

In addition to sparking a greater interest of some women to get more involved in politics and run as a candidate, the quota system – along with the family law reform – has also inspired a wave of other initiatives aimed at giving women a greater role in public life. As a result of King Mohammed's belief in women's empowerment and the presence of a socialist-oriented government with close ties to major women's organizations, women have been appointed in greater numbers to senior positions in justice and government. The king took his first female royal advisor and in 2002 appointed 3 female ministers, followed by a record 7 in 2007 (Abou-Zeid, 2006).

Taken together, these accomplishments are certainly indicative of a positive trend of greater women's representation in political institutions and public service. Moreover, the commitment and activism of women's organizations that fought for many of these initiatives is also a testament to the determination of the Moroccan women's movement. When considering the effect of reserved seats in parliament on women's position in national politics, however, a greater interrogation of the implementation of the quota system is necessary before drawing any final conclusions.

To begin with, because most political parties lack internal democracy, candidate selection is often opaque and frequently favors the well-connected and wealthiest, not the most qualified. Through this system, many of the women who gain seats – just like men – owe them to their family connections, personal wealth, or the strength of their alliance groupings.¹ If the strength of patron-client networks (and not necessarily merit) increases the likelihood of "empowerment", then why wouldn't women parliamentarians be primarily concerned with preserving those same networks which brought them to power instead of pursuing other causes, such as women's rights? As one participant stated in a survey on women's political participation done by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2008), "they [women] were not democratically selected, but instead chosen by friends. In parliament, they are not in a position to disagree with men, which just weakens women" (p. 41).

Implicit in the arguments supporting gender quotas at the parliamentary level is the idea that once women enter parliament, they will be more receptive to the concerns of the women's movement. This assumption is flawed for two reasons: first, it assumes that issues held dear by Morocco's most organized (leftist, secular-oriented and urban) women's organizations are the concerns of all women. As the protests over reforming the *moudawana* have made clear, consensus on women's rights issues in Morocco cannot be taken for granted.

Second, it assumes that once in parliament, women will fight for women's issues. To begin with, even proposing an agenda not shared by party leadership – or going against the "rules of the game" (Naciri, 1998, p. 19) – has the potential to jeopardize women MPs' relationships with the men to whom they owe their seats. Criticizing projects emanating from the palace is also off limits. So far, women MPs have

1. Since the quota's introduction in 2002, only two major parties (Istiqlal and the Party for Justice and Development) have adopted selection criteria to decide spots on their respective national lists. These developments, however, do not eliminate clientelism from the selection process.

not used their position to strengthen the government's erratic implementation of *moudawana* reform or the judiciary's severe deficiencies in upholding changes to the family law.

Partisan loyalties also have the potential to hamper cooperation or mobilization on women's issues. Naciri (1998) has described how, when it came to competing to run as candidates in the 1993 legislative elections, the women's movement "fragmented, espousing the quarrels of political cliques" (p. 22). Although ideology now plays an even weaker role in Moroccan politics, partisan squabbling and competition among political clans and alliance groupings certainly does not exclude women MPs. The Moroccan Women's Parliamentary Forum set up in 2005 remained largely ineffective – unable to take unified action on certain issues due to clashing of egos and mutually held suspicions of partisan agendas.

In addition to the common features of a clientelist system predicated on patron-client relations, the rules of the national list itself encourage its conception by male party leaders as a tool for rewarding women clientele. Parties are allowed to name up to 30 women on their national lists. Yet, it is extremely unlikely that more than 10 women from any given party would ever gain seats during elections. This feature (which results in 20-25 superfluous seats per party) enables male party leaders to give women the honorable recognition of being named to a national list, even when there is no chance of gaining a seat. Competition for placement on national lists is fierce and frequently guided by the logic of clientelism. Sometimes, women with long records of party loyalty and service are passed over in favor of more influential and notable profiles, or the wives of men who fit such profiles. For example, the socialist-oriented parties who made up Morocco's historical opposition – Party for Progress and Socialism (PPS) and Socialist Union for Popular Forces (USFP) – have recently opted for notable candidates with little or no party affiliation.

Another feature of the national list which confounds the role of women in the institution of parliament is that it deprives women of an actual constituency. Because they are chosen at the national level, MPs who get elected through the national list do not actually represent any specific group of people. As Drude Dahlerup (2006) argues, electoral systems where women MPs lack constituencies because "their seats are 'added'" are more likely to produce "token" MPs who lack a "power base" rendering them unable to fulfill their proper role as representatives (p. 14).

Surface Reform or Real Empowerment?

The introduction of the national list has coincided with such landmark reforms as the *moudawana* – granting women greater rights to marriage and divorce – as well as the promotion of a record number of women as government ministers. The implementation of the gender quota system itself, however, has resulted in little substantive increase of women in decision-making positions either within their party or the parliament itself. Despite the greater involvement of women in politics, many women politicians lament feelings of "tokenism" and a patriarchal political culture that shows no signs of changing. According to one participant from the NDI (2008) study, "Women are active in politics, but currently no parties are convinced of the [importance of] gender issues; they just use women as pawns and objects. This is

because of machismo and because women are now seen as competition for men” (p. 37).

The implementation of a system by which male party leaders determine which women are eligible to gain access to parliament without any clearly defined criteria has not weakened men’s control over decision-making within parties. When one female party leader inquired about being allowed to run as a local candidate in a contested seat she was told, “Why are you worried when you’re on the national list? See, now you have women in office, you should be happy” (NDI, 2008, p. 38). More and more, it appears that the national list quota system is just the type of surface reform that the authors of the AHDR warned against – a smokescreen used to feign empowerment in order to mitigate outside pressure calling for improving the status of women in Arab countries.

To be sure, changes in the status of women since the ascendance of King Mohammed VI to the throne in 1999 are both laudable and widely supported. The announcement in 2007 that the current government would contain seven ministers was emblematic of the palace’s vision of seeing qualified women in real positions of power. However, only two of the seven women – Yasmina Baddou and Nouzha Skalli – had strong partisan connections, and of those, only the latter had entered parliament through the national list (in 2002). Because many ministers are either directly or indirectly chosen by the palace, gaining access to parliament does not necessarily increase one’s likelihood of entering government.

Conclusion

As this paper has attempted to show, Morocco’s parliamentary gender quota system, so far, has had very limited success as a mechanism for promoting women to decision-making positions within parties or the parliament. Despite an increase in the representation of women in parliament, the implementation of the national list has not come close to fundamentally changing the patriarchal power dynamics in parliament or parties themselves. It is true that gender quotas have been effective means for empowering women in other societies around the world. Looking at the local context in which political institutions function, though, informs assumptions about empowerment and gender quotas with local power dynamics, political culture, and institutional behavior.

Given the constraints inherent in a clientelist system, the impact of a quota system will depend on whether parties become more internally democratic and set clear criteria for selecting women to be on the national list. To the extent that the quota system could serve as a mechanism for cultivating a future group of women leaders, there should be a one-term limit. That is, women should be encouraged to run on local candidate lists after serving a five-year term on the national list. The recommendation of women’s groups for greater party funding for women candidates would go a long way in making this possible as women frequently lack the wealth and personal resources needed to successfully contest a local seat.

Finally, with the recent implementation of a local 12 percent quota for women during the June ’09 municipal elections, more research is needed to see if the

increased participation and interest of women in local politics translates into greater responsibilities within political parties. The experiences of women in municipal politics do offer more possibilities – due to the greater level of proximity – for women’s involvement and may be able to inform the larger question of increasing women’s political participation in Morocco. Ultimately, however, without longitudinal changes in political culture, a wide-scale renewal of elites, and constitutional changes granting more powers to representational institutions, there is only so much room for maneuvering and empowerment within politics.

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