

WOMEN'S DEMOCRACY NETWORK



SheVotes: Tunisia

**UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO
WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

SheVotes: Tunisia
Understanding Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Copyright © 2020 International Republican Institute. All rights reserved.

Permission Statement: No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the International Republican Institute.

Requests for permission should include the following information:

- The title of the document for which permission to copy material is desired.
- A description of the material for which permission to copy is desired.
- The purpose for which the copied material will be used and the manner in which it will be used.
- Your name, title, company or organization name, telephone number, fax number, e-mail address and mailing address.

Please send all requests for permission to:
Attention: Communications Department
International Republican Institute
1225 Eye Street NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
info@iri.org

About the International Republican Institute

Since 1983, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has helped spread democracy by offering workshops on strengthening multi-party political systems, democratic governance, women's empowerment, civil society, youth leadership and electoral processes. IRI encourages democracy in places where it is absent, helps democracy become more effective where it is in danger and shares best practices where democracy is flourishing. For more than 30 years, IRI has been committed to the idea that freedom is the inalienable and universal right of all human beings and has helped men and women working to build strong, lasting democracies.

IRI's Women's Democracy Network

Since 1983, the International Republican Institute (IRI) has helped spread democracy by offering workshops on strengthening multi-party political systems, democratic governance, women's empowerment, civil society, youth leadership and electoral processes. IRI encourages democracy in places where it is absent, helps democracy become more effective where it is in danger and shares best practices where democracy is flourishing. For more than 30 years, IRI has been committed to the idea that freedom is the inalienable and universal right of all human beings and has helped men and women working to build strong, lasting democracies.

IRI in Tunisia

Since the January 2011 revolution that ended decades of one-party rule in Tunisia, IRI has been working to help promote Tunisia's democratic transition by strengthening political parties' outreach and policy development skills; enhancing the institutional capacity of civil society organization to advocate on behalf of Tunisians; identifying and addresses local drivers of violence extremism; and equipping local government officials with the tools they need to govern effectively and inclusively.

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible with the generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The effort was led by Keri Zolman, Ashley Bruggemann, Elizabeth O’Bagy and Sierra Smith of the International Republican Institute.

Disclaimer

None of the people portrayed in photographs used throughout this report are affiliated with IRI, nor were they participants in the focus groups or interviews described in this report.

The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the International Republican Institute, including the Women’s Democracy Network.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approach

In February 2019, at the request of the Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) at the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Tunis-based research firm BJKA Consulting conducted a qualitative study on women's political participation in Tunisia. This report is based on 14 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and six focus group discussions (FGDs) with more than 60 women in Tunis, Monastir and Gafsa. The findings of this report provide insights into women's political participation in Tunisia and their views of politics and the electoral process.

Research Questions

- What are the barriers to women's political participation?
- How has this changed from the 2014 and 2018 elections to today?

Key Findings

Finding 1: Rigid gender roles and social expectations present the most pervasive barrier to women's political participation.

Politics is seen as the domain of men, and involvement in politics is considered haram, or forbidden, for women in some communities, particularly in the interior. Women are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities. Women who do participate in politics are subjected to negative comments.

Finding 2: Women in politics are seen as being mainly from the urbanized coast and as having financial resources, an education and/or support from men. Rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged women are seen as less likely to have the time, energy, support or other resources needed to be involved in political activities.

Finding 3: Women are increasingly wary of democracy and less motivated to participate in political processes. Women see political parties as vehicles for self-interest, citing parties' empty election promises, vote buying, harassment and use of women candidates as tokens. Poor electoral management and weak accountability measures further undermine women's trust in the political system.

Finding 4: Political violence targeting women acts as a profound barrier to women's political participation. The traditional mentality that men are the decision-makers and violence against women is normal remains pervasive. As a result, men have the cultural coverage to act as gatekeepers for women's political activity through the use of undue influence to outright violence. Women are not inclined to report violent incidents because they fear drawing attention to themselves and are ashamed and/or distrust the system.



Finding 5: The media reinforces society's traditional views of women. Women are rarely portrayed in the media in positions of power or discussing political issues. On an individual level, this decreases women's

interest and motivation to be politically aware; on a macro level, it contributes to lowering women's political participation.

Finding 6: Awareness campaigns around recent elections are seen as being ineffective at engaging women. Past campaigns have been too general, and have not focused on the needs of women, especially those in rural areas and young women, and did not take additional steps to reach them. In recent years, fewer resources have been devoted to targeted campaigns to reach women. Women trust civil society organizations the most when it comes to delivering awareness campaigns and emphasize that women are best positioned to reach out to other women.

OVERVIEW

APPROACH

In February 2019, at the request of the Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR) at the International Republican Institute (IRI), the Tunis-based research firm BJKA Consulting conducted a qualitative study on women's political participation in Tunisia. This report is based on six focus group discussions (FGDs) and 14 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with women in Tunis, Monastir and Gafsa. The findings of this report provide insights into women's political participation in Tunisia and their views of politics and the electoral process.

METHODOLOGY

This report presents the results of FGD discussions and in-depth interviews from February 11 to 22, 2019. In total, six FGDs and 14 IDIs were conducted with one FGD and three IDIs in Gafsa; one FGD and two IDIs in Monastir; and four FGDs and 9 IDIs in Tunis. Focus groups in Gafsa and Monastir were conducted with a diverse cross-section of women. In Tunis, focus groups were conducted for women over 30 years old, young women 30 years old and under, women from the district with the lowest voter turnout, and with individuals (both male and female) who represent civil society organizations working in elections. In total, more than 60 participants took part in these discussions.

The main objective of the study was to assess barriers to women's political participation in Tunisia. The study sought to address the following research questions:

- **What are the barriers to women's political participation?**
- **How has this changed from the 2014 and 2018 elections to today?**

The research included six focus groups, with eight to 12 participants per session. Recruitment of participants was conducted according to the criteria below. Recruitment criteria were designed to understand women's experiences in the lead up to and during elections in Tunisia and to facilitate open discussions among peers. Focus group participants were selected via street recruitment using a recruitment screening questionnaire. The duration of each session was around 120 minutes.

As common with qualitative research, findings from this study do not necessarily represent the views of Tunisian women in general.

RECRUITMENT CRITERIA

FOCUS GROUPS

GROUP NUMBER	LOCATION	GENDER	RECRUITMENT CRITERIA
1	Tunis	Women	Over 30 years old
2	Tunis	Women	Youth (30 years old and under)
3	Tunis	Women	Tunis 1 district
4	Tunis	Women and Men	Election-related associations and civil society
5	Gafsa	Women	Random sample
6	Monastir	Women	Random sample

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH KEY INFORMANTS

INTERVIEW NUMBER	LOCATION	AFFILIATION
1	Monastir	Ennahda Party member
2	Monastir	Nidaa Party member
3	Gafsa	Gafsa Municipality council member
4	Gafsa	TuMed female ambassadors
5	Gafsa	<i>La Jeune Chambre Internationale Gafsa</i> (International Chamber of Youth)
6	Tunis	Former member, Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE)
7	Tunis	Independent High Authority for Elections
8	Tunis	National government official
9	Tunis	Aswat Nisaa Association (Voices of Women Association)
10	Tunis	Chahed Observatory
11	Tunis	Mourakiboun (The Observers)
12	Tunis	Mourakiboun (The Observers)
13	Tunis	<i>Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes</i> (National Federation of Tunisian Cities)
14	Tunis	Tunisia Association for Persons with Disabilities (TAWPD)

CONTEXT

Women's Social Status

In Tunisia, state feminism and the women's movement have yielded major reforms in the country's legal and institutional framework over the last 50 years. However, social norms in Tunisia remain relatively conservative and discrimination against women also remains embedded in many current laws.¹ By law, men are still considered the "head of the household," which gives them advantages in disputes over household management and other familial issues.² At present, the equal inheritance law has also not yet been passed.³ Despite high literacy and secondary school enrollment rates compared to the rest of the region, Tunisian women have a low labor force participation rate (25.5 percent), compared to the worldwide average of 53 percent,⁴ and employment of women in rural areas is even lower (20 percent).⁵ Women in rural areas also have lower physical mobility than women in urban population centers due to both social barriers and a lack of transit infrastructure.

In August 2017, lawmakers approved the landmark Organic Law #2017-58, which went into effect in February 2018. The law's goal

is to eliminate all forms of violence against women. This includes political violence, which the law defines as "any act or practice based on gender discrimination aimed ... to deprive the woman or prevent her from exercising any political, partisan, associative activity or any right or fundamental freedom."⁶ However, the legislation has been criticized for vague wording, numerous loopholes and weak enforcement.⁷ The law has some glaring gaps. For example, marital rape is not criminalized, and funding for support services for survivors of violence is not guaranteed. Although the legislation outlaws the practice of rapists marrying their victims to avoid punishment, the law is weakly enforced due to social acceptance of this practice.⁸ Furthermore, social acceptance of domestic violence remains widespread in Tunisia, and many survivors do not report or seek help due to social pressure, shame and/or fear.⁹

Women's Political Rights

The 2014 Tunisian Constitution enshrines women's political rights and equal representation. Article 34 mandates equal representation of women in elected

¹"Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Tunisia." Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 27th Session, *United Nations*, 3-21 June 2002, un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw25years/content/english/CONCLUDING_COMMENTS/Tunisia/Tunisia-CO-4.pdf.

²"Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Tunisia." *Human Rights Watch*, 5 July 2019, www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/05/submission-human-rights-watch-committee-rights-child-tunisia.

³Ibid.

⁴Mouelhi, Rim Ben Ayed, and Mohamed Goaid. "Women in the Tunisian Labor Market." *Economic Research Forum*, Nov. 2017, erf.org.eg/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/1160.pdf.

⁵Mouelhi and Goaid. "Women in the Tunisian Labor Market."

⁶Article 3 of Organic Law No. 2017-58, Tunisia's Violence against Women Law, 11 Aug. 2017.

⁷Rayman, Paula M., et al. *UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa: Women and Security*. United States Institute of Peace, May 2016, peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/USIP%20Report-UNSCR-1325-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa-Women-and-Security.pdf.

⁸Rayman, et al. "UNSCR 1325 in the Middle East and North Africa: Women and Security."

⁹Ibid.



assemblies. Article 46 further stipulates equality of access among men and women to all levels of responsibility and in all fields. Pursuant to these articles, new measures were included in the Organic Law #2017-07, passed on February 14, 2017, to strengthen the representation of women. Vertical and horizontal parity at the level of heads of candidate lists was mandated. The law mandates that candidates on party lists must alternate between men and women, and each party must have an equal number of male and female heads of lists and includes legal sanctions for failure to comply. As a result, these reforms have been successfully implemented with vertical and horizontal parity nearly accomplished during the 2018 municipal elections. However, female

candidates in the municipal elections had much lower levels of previous political and leadership experience than male candidates. Only a small minority of female candidates had political experience or had previously worked in an administrative capacity. This experience gap is one of the major barriers that many Tunisian women face in securing executive and leadership positions in politics. For example, despite all the parity requirements, women still only represent 29 percent of municipal council heads¹⁰ and only 16 percent of governors.¹¹

Registration and Voting Process

Citizens are eligible to vote at the age of 18 and are only required to register once for all elections, at both the national and local

¹⁰ "Tunisia's Local Elections: How to Build Trust in Politics?" *Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy*, 16 Oct. 2018, nimd.org/tunisia-local-elections-how-to-build-trust-in-politics/.

¹¹ @MedDhiaH. *Twitter*, 26 June 2018, <https://twitter.com/MedDhiaH/status/1011698369931239425>.

levels. Once registered, no re-registration is required to participate in subsequent elections. Citizens can register to vote at a registration office, including mobile offices, where they have to present proof of their residence, age and nationality. In principle, registration is done in person, but the electoral law also authorized registration by proxy, including spouses and relatives. Although the law is not gender-specific, men primarily exercise this authority on behalf of women. By allowing spouses and male relatives to register on behalf of female family members, the registration process for women is vulnerable to abuse, as male relatives then have more leverage and control over women exercising their right to vote.

Citizens can learn which polling station they are assigned to by dialing *195*. After entering their ID number, they receive a text message with the address and number of their polling station. In case they cannot read, write or do not have a mobile phone, they can call the ISIE call center at 1814. On election day, the voter must go to the polling station to which s/he is assigned and present his/her national identity card or passport. The voters' lists are posted in the voting centers or polling stations to help voters identify the correct polling station where they are registered. In front of each polling station, an election official is responsible for managing the queue. Priority access is given to persons with disabilities, the elderly and

pregnant women. When the voter enters the polling station, a poll worker verifies the voter's identity and the national ID number or passport number and ascertains the presence of the voter's name on the list. The voter must sign the voters' list and ink his or her left-hand index finger, before another polling official hands him or her the ballot. The voter marks the ballot in a voting booth to guarantee the secrecy of the vote. Before leaving the booth, the voter must fold the ballot in four so that the choice is not disclosed to others. Finally, the voter puts the marked ballot paper in the ballot box under the scrutiny of those present in the polling station, including election observers, representatives of candidate lists and polling station agents. The voter must then immediately leave the polling station.

Women's Representation as Candidates

Political participation among women as candidates in Tunisia is aided by a parity law. However, the law is inadequately implemented. On the positive side, in the 2011¹² and 2014 parliamentary elections, 47 percent of candidates were female.¹³ However, a majority of the party lists were headed by men with a mere 7 percent of the party lists headed by women in 2011 and only 11 percent in 2014.¹⁴ Parliament today consists of 31 percent female parliamentarians, and only 23 percent of ministerial level positions are held by women.¹⁵

¹² Dahlerup, Drude. "Gender Equality Policy in Tunisia." Directorate-General for Internal Policies, *European Parliament*, Oct. 2012, [europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2012/462502/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2012\)462502_EN.pdf](http://europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2012/462502/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2012)462502_EN.pdf).

¹³ "Tunisia: Majlis Nawwab ash-Sha'ab." *Inter-Parliamentary Union*, 2016, archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2392_B.htm. Accessed 17 July 2019.

¹⁴ "Gender Quotas Database: Tunisia." International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 28 Feb. 2019, idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/284/35. Accessed 17 July 2019.

¹⁵ "Gender Data Portal: Tunisia." *World Bank*, datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/tunisia. Accessed 17 July 2019.

Following electoral changes in 2017 that mandated vertical and horizontal parity for municipal elections, 2018 saw a significant spike in female political participation.¹⁶ Nearly 27,000 women ran in the 2018 municipal elections.¹⁷ Women-led lists comprised 30 percent of the total going into the election.¹⁸ Many of these women candidates ran as independents, as women only compose 23 percent of party membership.¹⁹ The elections were a major step forward for women's political representation: 47 percent of the winners were female.²⁰ However, those who ran as independents faced special challenges once in power: Without party support, many of the newly elected female councilors have struggled to gain access to political support and resources needed to realize their full potential and achieve tangible results in office.

Overall, while the quotas have succeeded in electing more female officials, more needs to be done to empower women once in office. This new generation of female elected officials, who are overwhelmingly young, are at a disadvantage in terms of



political experience, resources, and standing compared to their male counterparts. The mean age for female candidates was 36, compared to 45 for men,²¹ and only a small minority of female candidates had previous political or governing experience.²² Once in office, women continue to experience high levels of discrimination within the political establishment and receive more pushback from members of the public than their male counterparts. As Souad Abderrahim, the first female mayor of Tunis, told *Equal Times*, "Changing the masculine mentality of the people is our biggest issue. The negative reactions to my election are proof of this."²³

¹⁶ "Tunisia Adopts Amended Legal Framework for Local Elections." *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*, 12 Sept. 2017, ifes.org/news/tunisia-adopts-amended-legal-framework-local-elections. Accessed 17 July 2019.

¹⁷ Litfi, Mohamed Ali. "Tunisian Women Win at Polls but Long Road Remains." *Al-Monitor*, 23 May 2018, al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/05/tunisia-municipal-elections-women-role-politics.html.

¹⁸ "Historic Leap in Tunisia: Women Make up 47 Percent of Local Government." *UN Women*, 27 Aug. 2018, unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/8/feature-tunisian-women-in-local-elections. Accessed 17 July 2019.

¹⁹ "Tunisia: Women Win at Polls but Long Road Remains." *Al-Shahid*, 25 May 2018, alshahidwitness.com/tunisia-women-polls/.

²⁰ "Historic Leap in Tunisia: Women Make up 47 Percent of Local Government." *UN Women*.

²¹ Blackman, Alexandra, et al. "Introducing the Tunisian Local Election Candidate Survey (LECS)." *Democracy International*, July 2018, democracyinternational.com/media/lecs_brief_survey_final.pdf.

²² Meeting between IRI and ISIE, 26 Mar. 2019.

²³ Yerkes, Sarah, and Shannon McKeown. "What Tunisia Can Teach the United States about Women's Equality." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 30 Nov. 2018, carnegiendowment.org/2018/11/30/what-tunisia-can-teach-united-states-about-women-s-equality-pub-77850. Accessed 17 July 2019.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Finding 1:

Rigid gender roles and social expectations present the most pervasive barrier to women's political participation.

- Many Tunisians perceive politics as a male domain. These views are widely held by both men and women across the country, especially in rural areas. These perceptions negatively affect women's political participation, from voting in elections to running for office or holding government positions.
 - Many men do not view politics as an appropriate venue for women. They justify this worldview through stereotypes about women as uninterested in politics and/or incapable of governing.
 - Many women also do not see politics as a space for them. Rather than vote, some women depend on their husbands or other male family members to vote to represent their interests. When women do vote, women sometimes choose male candidates over female ones because of internalized negative stereotypes about women in power or because they see the odds are stacked against women to be effective leaders.
 - Women who participate in politics must wade into arenas that are culturally male and, as a result, often face social backlash.
- Even highly skilled and motivated women face barriers to join a political party, run for office or engage in other political activity. Women are judged more harshly as candidates than their male peers and continue to face barriers when in positions of power. This undermines their ability to effect change, which in turn feeds negative preconceptions about women, undercutting their confidence and willingness to participate in politics.
 - Even in two-income households, women are expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over political activity whereas men are relatively unfettered by domestic responsibilities and are expected to be politically engaged.
 - Women's status in society vis-à-vis men means that they are generally less financially independent and do not have as many options for culturally appropriate and/or safe modes of transportation.

1.1 POLITICS AS A MALE DOMAIN

In Tunisia, politics is seen as the dominion of men. This traditional view of gender roles is common throughout the country and is particularly pronounced in rural areas. As one former ISIE member put it, "In the interior regions, men dominate the society. They lead everything in those communities."²⁴ At the same time, many participants, including current member of ISIE, noted that the attitude that "men dominate the world" is common across the country and among both

²⁴ Quotes cited in this report have been minimally treated to ensure clarity. The original voice — including any mistakes in word choice, grammar or syntax — has been preserved to the maximum degree possible.



The hard work is for women; the high positions are for men.

- Former Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) member, Tunis

women and men. The former ISIE member commented, "We [Tunisians] don't believe women can lead us in government, politics or institutions," demonstrating a widely held belief among participants that men are responsible for political leadership exclusively. In Monastir, a Nidaa party member noted, for example, how men do not want to choose a female deputy or member of parliament and will opt for a less qualified man with tenuous ties to the community rather than a local female candidate.

In turn, many women do not believe they have a place in politics. Because politics is seen as a male domain, some women are even reluctant to vote or rely on their husbands or male relatives to tell them how to vote. As a Tunis-based key informant from Chahed Observatory, an election monitoring group, put it, some women feel that "It doesn't concern us, my husband will vote." Of those who do vote, "there are women who believe it's not good to vote for [other] women," said a former ISIE member. As a result of this environment, the key informant from the Chahed Observatory went on to say that women begin to believe that they "are not competent enough to compete with men" and that women cannot effect change.

Yet many participants also readily noted how these preconceptions often diverge from reality. "Women are so efficient when they participate in politics, but here we have the culture that men are the leaders," said a participant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old. One former ISIE member noted that "a high percentage of candidates for local level are women, while at the national level, men are more present. The hard work is for women; the high positions are for men." According to a key informant from the ISIE, "In public institutions, women give more and are more productive than men, men are paid more" and have more opportunities and advantages. This in turn can undercut women's confidence and their political aspirations. For example, one FGD participant noted that while some women put themselves forth to be included as candidates on a party list, they ask to not be listed very high on it.

1.2 POLITICS IS SEEN AS FORBIDDEN FOR WOMEN

Across all interviews and discussions, it was noted that politics is generally seen in a negative light by both men and women. As one key informant, currently at the ISIE said, people have “the mentality that being a part of a party is a bad thing.” These perceptions are additionally pronounced when it comes to women’s political participation. A representative of Chahed Observatory noted that campaign posters and other signage of female candidates are more likely to be damaged with drawings on them or ripped than that of their male counterparts. Rigid and restrictive gender norms can mean women are reticent to participate in the public sphere, communities discourage or actively prevent their participation and/or “some parties do not want to involve women in their political effort,” said the former ISIE member.

Some research participants, including a member from the ISIE and the youth focus group discussants from Tunis, noted that women’s political participation is seen as haram, or forbidden, particularly in the more conservative regions of the country. One youth focus group discussant stated that some cite the *Hadith* (a collection of the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) to argue that “society will not be good if it is presided over by a woman” as an excuse to exclude women. A key informant from Mourakiboun, a nongovernmental organization focused on election monitoring, discussed the prevalence of these beliefs, stating they are

held among “educated people as well as [those who are] not educated.” Culturally speaking, said a former ISIE member, “it’s not good for a woman [in particular] to show her face on the list.” Additionally, there is the view, said a participant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old, “that politicians are bad and that they are using politics to access and harass women. That is why husbands would be against their wives being involved.” A key informant from Mourakiboun shared that she “heard about a girl who wanted to be a candidate, but her brother wouldn’t allow that because she would be going to a hotel, [and would] be in public meetings.” Such attitudes can place nearly insurmountable barriers for women’s political participation and work to reinforce the status quo.

1.3 NEGATIVE COMMENTS AND RUMORS

Women involved in politics “deal with rumors from men, [and with] others asking, ‘why are you doing this? You’re smart. You have a good job,’” said a key informant from the *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes*. Political participation, particularly as candidates, requires women to enter spaces that are typically considered male. It is especially challenging for women to attend political meetings and other events that take place in the evening, when women are expected to be at home with their families, in geographically distant venues, and/or where women are not well represented. For women who challenge these taboos, according to a key informant from Mourakiboun, “they say she is a ‘masculine woman.’” As a second representative Mourakiboun noted, in political parties, women are in



It's not comfortable for women to participate in political life. People will talk, and these barriers will wear them down."

- Former Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) member, Tunis

overwhelmingly male environments and are meeting late in the day with men, which can prompt rumors and hurt these women's reputations. Especially in the south and other regions that are more conservative, "it's not comfortable for women to participate in political life. People will talk, and these barriers will wear them down," said the former ISIE member.

A participant in the youth focus group discussion from Tunis noted that even if a husband or other male member of the family does not actively prevent a woman's participation in politics, he will indirectly discourage her involvement through criticism

of her time commitments. A key informant from Chahed Observatory noted how parties do not think women can govern and will try to wear women down because of a "traditional mentality [that] the man is the leader" permeating the party culture, leading women "to believe this too, that they are not competent enough to compete with men." In the face of such social pressure, said the former ISIE member, "after a while, [women] will be tired and decide to quit." As a result, the traditional view that a woman's place is at home, not in politics, is reinforced, and women are discouraged from becoming politically engaged.

1.4 DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES

"Politics is not a job, it's something more. It's total involvement, your life will be all about it," said a participant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old. In nearly every interview and focus group discussion, participants stated that a woman's actual or perceived responsibilities within the home and to her family acted as a barrier to her political participation. As the former ISIE member characterized it, "it's an obligation or duty that takes precedence," and there is the societal belief that if a woman takes time away from household commitments, then "the family will fall down." For Tunisia's female politicians, reconciling the demanding time commitments of both family and politics can seem impossible.

The former ISIE member noted that it is difficult for women to participate in voter outreach and other political activities during an election period because they take place

“

Men are more available, especially [when political] meetings or trainings are on the weekend and [if] they have to travel to other regions.”

- Mourakiboun representative, Tunis

“

On election day, just men go to vote during the day. In the evening, women finish their duties [and then] go to vote.”

- Former Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) member, Tunis

during the day when women have cooking, cleaning and childrearing commitments. “Men are more available, especially [when political] meetings or trainings are on the weekend and [if] they have to travel to other regions,” said a Mourakiboun representative. Household responsibilities also mean that many women have a more limited window of when they are able to vote on election day compared to men. “On election day, just men go to vote during the day. In the evening, women finish their duties [and then] go to vote,” said the former ISIE member. A Nidaa party member stated that “in Monastir, for example, women did not show up in the morning to vote, they went to the elections in the afternoon. They had to take care of their kids, cook [whereas] men went first thing in the morning, so they can be free afterwards.” A youth focus group participant noted how voting on the weekend, when school is out, posed its own challenges, noting how her friend was not able to vote on a Sunday because she had to take care of her children.

1.5 TRANSPORTATION

Lack of access to affordable, reliable and safe transportation was also cited as a barrier to women’s participation in politics. As a civil society representative relayed, “I didn’t find the time, I was going back home late, missing transportation.” Facing these logistical hurdles, she ultimately opted to become more involved in civil society work rather than political activity. On election day, while men can walk or use different kinds of public transportation to arrive at polling stations to cast their vote, women do not necessarily have these options because

of safety concerns, including robbery and sexual harassment. As a result, according to a member of the ISIE, men vote at much higher rates than women in regions where polling stations are more distant. Another key informant from the Nidaa Party in Monastir agreed, noting that this is a particular obstacle for female students who often do not live where they study and therefore should register to vote where the polls are closest on election day.

Finding 2:

Women in politics are seen as being from the urbanized coast and as having financial resources, an education and/or support from men.

- *Narrow preconceptions of who belongs in politics can lead to women self-selecting out of political participation. Women, especially in rural areas, do not see how politics connects to their lives. Expectations that women are motivated not by self-interest but by the greater good of the family or society can further put them at odds with party politics, which is seen as a vehicle for self-interest.*
- *Practical barriers prevent women from being active in politics. Rural and socioeconomically disadvantaged women are less likely to have the time, energy or other resources needed to be involved in political activities.*
- *Women cited male support in their personal and professional lives as being a crucial facilitator to involvement in political activities. This a reminder that men retain control over women's access to and ascension within politics.*

When asked if there is a specific profile of women involved in political life, participants outlined a narrow set of attributes incongruent with the average Tunisian woman's background. Having financial resources, an education and being from the urbanized coast all weighed in one's favor. Support from family and male party members was also highlighted. Finally, participants mentioned the importance of competence — though they conceded that in some places that meant women have to be twice as competent as men to be taken seriously.

2.1 MOTIVATIONS

Many participants mentioned that women involved in the public sphere are primarily motivated by a call to better their



I didn't find the time, I was going back home late, missing transportation."

- Focus group participant, Tunis

communities. One woman from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old said that she served as an election monitor because she “wanted to feel that feeling of being a good citizen.” Many women cited altruism as being in women’s nature, whereas “men don’t want to change for change’s sake, they have their own interest,” as described by the key informant from the *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes*. Because politicians are seen as self-interested, this puts many women at odds with political participation. “It’s not that [men] are more interested in political life [per se]. They are interested in it because of self-interest, [because they will] get paid or something out of it directly,” said the ISIE member. A participant in the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old noted how a male party member tried to convince her to vote for his party because she would “get lots of advantages that [would lead her to] get a job [or to] open a business because that’s what happened for him.”

A female Ennahda party member in Monastir disputed this gendered characterization, arguing that women can have similar motivations as men to join politics: “Besides wanting positions, [women] want to have the power to do things, e.g., secure a place for her son to have a shop” while there are “others who just want a job.” A key informant from Mourakiboun described it not necessarily as a divergence of interests but one of time and access: “The motivational and demotivational factors [are] the same for men and women [to participate in politics],” but there are additional, more practical “challenges women face with household duties.”

2.2 REGIONAL AND CLASS DIFFERENCES

Participants and interviewees noted regional and class differences as impacting women’s political participation. Commenting on the stark reality for many women, a participant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old noted that “In big cities, women have greater opportunities than women in rural areas. In Kasserine [an interior town on the border with Algeria], if a woman wants to play a role in political life, her husband can punish her for that.” Another participant from Mourakiboun emphasized the economic tradeoff women in interior communities weigh when deciding to participate in politics: “In rural areas, it could be pricey for her [a woman] to waste one day of work to go to the elections.” Rather than opting to vote, “[a woman] will say, ‘for me, one day off from working in the field is better than going to the elections,’” the interviewee added. Another key informant from the ISIE also noted that women working in agriculture do not have time to worry about politics: “They wake up early and don’t finish [working] until 8 p.m., so they don’t have time to vote.” Emphasizing that class differences span the rural-urban divide, one FGD participant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old said there needs to be a “focus on the poor woman [as she] cannot vote if she cannot eat.”

2.3 FAMILY SUPPORT AND MALE ALLIES

Youth in Tunis highlighted that a woman has to come from a certain type of family in order to have the necessary level of awareness, interest and support to take on political



In big cities, women have greater opportunities than women in rural areas. In Kasserine [an interior town on the border with Algeria], if a woman wants to play a role in political life, her husband can punish her for that.

- Focus group participant, Tunis

involvement, particularly running for office. A female Nidaa Party member described how her family name, familial support and male allies were integral to her attaining political leadership, as her husband encouraged her to first get involved in politics and the union recommended her because she came from a "very known family." When she was first elected to office, she said she did not know anything about the work involved. Her husband helped her prepare speeches, and her mother helped with childcare. Such family support throughout her tenure in office allowed her to more fully participate in council activities in comparison to other female colleagues. As she put it, there are women

who "always want to go home early because their husbands or families don't agree with them being out for so long."

The significant role male party members have in supporting women was a recurring theme. "Women candidates never started as candidates on their own. They aligned with others for cultural coverage and then once they won [others'] trust [and gained] experience, [they were] able to run on their own," said a civil society organization (CSO) representative during a CSO focus group discussion in Tunis. This sentiment was echoed by the Nidaa party member in Monastir who said, "For the female heads of lists who did succeed, they only succeeded because they were supported by men."

Finding 3:

Women are increasingly wary of democracy and less motivated to participate in political processes.

- *In the wake of several democratic elections, women blame worsening economic, security and justice conditions and the persistence of government corruption on dysfunctional democratic institutions. Vote buying, illegal campaigning and harassment are seen as widespread. Poor management of polling stations and weak accountability measures further erode trust in democratic processes and hinder women's political participation.*
- *Women do not have trust in political parties because they view as driven*

by self-interest and believe parties are pandering to them to get their votes. This is partly due to most parties not building and communicating issue-based platforms. Women, in particular, are underinformed on the issues and see weak if any connection between politics and their daily lives.

- *Parties are not committed to the meaningful inclusion of women. Political parties do not take women's views and needs seriously and, as such, they are not reflected in their party platforms. Women are often shut out of leadership positions and are used to meet the requirements of the parity law.*

Despite several democratic elections between 2011 and 2019, nearly all interviewees and focus group participants described a steady erosion of Tunisians' confidence in democratic institutions. "We saw a lot of things happening [in politics] but then nothing changed. This is something that women noticed more than men," said one key informant from the government. This is reflected in IRI's January-February 2019 Tunisia polling as only 24 percent of women compared to 33 percent of men are "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way democracy is developing in Tunisia. Further, 33 percent of women, compared to 40 percent of men, "probably" or "definitely" believe election results reflect the will of the people.²⁵ The biggest challenge for the next elections, said a Mourakiboun representative, is that 2018 voters say they will not vote in 2019. According to IRI polling in Tunisia from January-February 2019, only 26 percent of



More women in power would mean more trust."

- Focus group participant, Monastir

women report that they are "very likely" to vote in the upcoming 2019 national elections, 10 percentage points less than men. A young woman from Tunis put it during the youth focus group discussion: "Whoever lied to me once will lie to me again." Another said, "There is no trust, we are fed up." A focus group discussant in Monastir suggested that the situation would be different if there was greater gender parity in politics: "More women in power would mean more trust."

3.1 DEMOCRACY

In 2011, in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, citizens saw elections as a vehicle to effect change and were eager to exercise their new rights through voting, a Mourakiboun representative and discussant from the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old explained. In 2014, this enthusiasm continued. The ISIE was managing its first elections, and civil society put forth a large voter awareness effort. Women were especially motivated to vote because, as

²⁵ "Data: Tunisians Pessimistic about Electoral Process." *International Republican Institute*, 28 Mar. 2019, www.iri.org/resource/data-tunisians-pessimistic-about-electoral-process.

a former ISIE member pointed out, they wanted to “protect their rights.” Like men, women wanted to safeguard the state by electing Beji Caid Essebsi, the country’s first democratically elected president, in 2014. According to discussants in the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old, many saw Essebsi as “the new [Habib] Bourguiba.”²⁶ As one youth focus group discussant noted, however, “they elected him, but they didn’t know his platform.” By 2018, popular opinion was that “people’s situations did not change” or even worsened according to a key informant from Mourakiboun.

Enthusiasm about the democratic process, as a result, has since waned. In focus group discussions with a cross-section of women in Monastir and women 30 years and older in Tunis, participants commented on how infrastructure and healthcare are now very weak, the government, including the justice system, continues to be corrupt, and economic development is uneven across the regions. A woman in the Monastir FGD noted that “security officials are under pressure to deal with crime, and the criminals are not afraid of the government anymore.” A woman in the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old said, “All this corruption, regionalism is due to deficient government administration in Tunisia.” Another participant from the same group added, “if [the government] was strong, then it could solve all these issues.”

Women’s discouraged attitudes toward elections and the democratic process could

have a large impact on the elections. IRI’s Tunisia polling data from January-February 2019 shows that only 27 percent of women surveyed registered to vote in the May 2018 municipal elections, compared to 42 percent of Tunisian men. For the upcoming 2019 national elections, the voter registration campaign conducted by ISIE from April to June 2019 has resulted in 1,467,963 citizens registering to vote, of which more than half (779,283) are women.²⁷ This is an encouraging result, likely positively influenced by the ISIE specifically targeting women in its registration drive. Nonetheless, although registration numbers for women are strong, it remains to be seen if this will result in high voter turnout. For the upcoming 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections, only 26 percent of women surveyed indicated that they are very likely to vote, compared to 36 percent of men saying the same.²⁸

3.2 POLITICAL PARTIES

Citizens broadly do not trust political parties.²⁹ As described by the former ISIE member, women view them as “manipulative institutions” that are, according to the key informant from the *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes*, seen more as hindrances rather than vehicles for change. In focus group discussions, many cited this lack of trust as the reason why they did not vote in any of the previous elections.

²⁶ Habib Bourguiba led Tunisia’s independence from France and served as the country’s first president. Bourguiba was known as “the father of the modern nation” because of his accomplishments shaping Tunisian public institutions and enacting reforms for women’s rights.

²⁷ “Statistiques.” *Tunisia Independent High Authority for Elections*, June 2019, isie.tn/statistiques/.

²⁸ “Data: Tunisians Pessimistic about Electoral Process.” *International Republican Institute*, 28 Mar. 2019, iri.org/resource/data-tunisians-pessimistic-about-electoral-process.

²⁹ According to IRI polling, only 4 percent of Tunisians say they trust political parties. See “Data: Tunisians Pessimistic about

3.2.1 PERCEPTIONS OF SELF-INTEREST

Political parties and individual politicians were both negatively viewed as only interested in personal gain, rather than the betterment of the country. In the election period, discussants also spoke of witnessing or hearing of bribes being exchanged for votes or support. In Monastir, women in a focus group specifically said that during the pre-election period, parties campaigned but did not explain their platforms and only made promises. One focus group participant said, "I just felt that they're trying to attract me and persuade me" rather than engage in a substantive discussion. During a focus group discussion with women from Tunis 1, the district in the capital with the lowest voter turnout in the previous elections (2018 municipal elections), women were particularly demotivated from future political participation. Said one, "there is not a person that you can vote for and count on him to make things better."

3.2.2 PARTY CULTURE

Within political parties, there is a culture that deters women's inclusion and participation. Many cited how the use of "aggressive speech" by political parties and infighting among party members dissuade women from engaging in party politics, according to a Mourakiboun representative interviewed and the former ISIE member. This fosters negative perceptions of political culture that makes it more difficult socially for women, who are seen as caretakers and socially minded, to engage in politics than men, who are seen as squarely within their domain.



"There is not a person that you can vote for and count on him to make things better."

- Focus group participant, Tunis

For those who do join a party, women are confronted by a boys' club mentality that can undercut meaningful engagement and opportunity for leadership. For example, interviewees noted that parties generally complied with the letter but not the spirit of the Organic Law #2017-07 on gender parity. As one representative from Chahed Observatory characterized, "the law forced gender equity, so parties brought any woman they could find onto the list." Without this legal measure, many asserted that parties would not include women. Because they are required to, and enforcement mechanisms are effective, interviewees stated that women candidates are added to party lists at the last minute and without strategy. One national government official recalled how an acquaintance was informed that she would be a candidate after the party had already added her to an electoral list.

3.2.3 TOKENISM

There is the sense that parties include women candidates only to comply with the law, oftentimes nominating female party members who are uninterested in running for office, unqualified and/or seen as pliable by the older, male party leadership. Aggravating this was an earlier date for submission of electoral lists ahead of the 2018 elections, which meant that many parties were especially unprepared to field female candidates that year. Said a Chahed Observatory representative, "They [parties] didn't have the quantity or quality [of female candidates] to fill those positions," as men are more likely to be actively engaged in party activities and have the opportunity to build key relationships, get votes and be put up for leadership as a result. This meant that many of the women who were included on electoral lists had not been previously

engaged in political party work and were thus less prepared to run effective campaigns and faced more challenges governing once elected compared to their male colleagues.

Many participants and interviewees noted how women's representation is also used for branding purposes by political parties. A Chahed Observatory representative, for example, described it as an attempt by the parties to paint "a nice picture." As one key informant from the Nidaa Party in Monastir said, "Because they have to, they decorate the [party] committee with women." Another key informant stated that "political parties use women to protect their image," describing an instance of a conservative party nominating a woman because of her more modern (less traditional) look and "the preconceptions that people would read into her image" in order to gain votes, according to a key informant from the *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes*.

Stated commitments to women's representation are further undermined by party actions after the elections. "They [political parties] don't have genuine interest because they don't appoint women to leadership positions when they have the opportunity," said a key informant from Mourakiboun. Another key informant, the former ISIE member, noted that she "spent much of her time working on these [gender parity] issues and got negative comments or dismissive attitudes" from party leadership. When women reach positions of power, they are often seen as proxies for male leadership, a CSO focus group discussant shared. According to one key informant from the



"The law forced gender equity, so parties brought any woman they could find onto the list."

- Chahed Observatory representative, Tunis

ISIE, some women on municipal councils do not even participate in council meetings. A Nidaa party member in Monastir noted how there are “some instances of men who don’t want to vote for women, unless she is part of a union, where the [male] central leadership makes the decision.”

3.3 ELECTION MANAGEMENT

According to IRI’s February 2019 national survey, women are less likely to vote in the upcoming 2019 national elections than men (52 percent compared to 57 percent for men) and indicated less confidence in the ISIE’s ability to organize and supervise elections (53 percent compared to 59 percent for men). IRI polling also found that of those who voted in the 2018 municipal elections, women cited the following shortcomings: continuous postponement of election dates; poor organization; the purchasing of votes; and far distances to the nearest polling center. Many interviewees in this study similarly cited displeasure with the way elections have been managed, with one FGD participant in Monastir calling them “not transparent.” Referring to the polling stations as disorganized, interviewees cited problems such as voter intimidation, bribes and political influence at the polls, voting lines segregated by gender in some parts of the country, poorly trained staff and weak mechanisms to manage complaints.

In both 2014 and 2018, “the whole country was in a hurry to organize the elections, so the ISIE was in a hurry [and] they didn’t train the polling offices,” said a Mourakiboun representative. Although the law forbids

“

“They [parties] didn’t have the quantity of quality [of female candidates] to fill those positions.”

– Chahed Observatory representative, Tunis

“

Because they have to, they decorate the [party] committee with women.”

– Nidaa Party member, Monastir

campaigning in front of polling stations, interviewees noted that political party representatives in some cases did so freely, targeting women in particular. On election day, “they think they can change [women’s] minds at the last minute. We saw a lot of pressure from men [party representatives] trying to force [women] to vote for their candidates,” said a Chahed Observatory representative.

Although citizens generally felt empowered to make complaints, interviewees reported that it was often unclear how or to whom.



They [political parties] don’t have genuine interest because they don’t appoint women to leadership positions when they have the opportunity.”

– Mourakiboun representative, Tunis

Another issue brought to light in interviews was that those handling complaints at polling stations had little incentive to address issues. “What we [Chahed Observatory] noticed was that the head of the offices [those who would manage these complaints] don’t want to make problems, because it’s a one-day job.” This meant avoiding potential friction with “neighbors” [meaning members from the same community with whom they would potentially interact with outside of the electoral process] as well as with the big parties that have a link to the government and are viewed as protected. That said, a key informant from the Monastir Nidaa party noted how “even when voters reported problems to ISIE about vote buying, they didn’t do anything. They even witnessed it but didn’t do anything.”

Finding 4:

Political violence targeting women acts as a profound barrier to women’s political participation.

- *Political violence against women is pervasive and can be perpetrated by family members, male community leaders, as well as political parties.*
- *Men are traditionally viewed as decision-makers, giving them cultural coverage to apply undue influence on women (such as telling women how to vote or confiscating their identity cards to prevent them from voting) from within their families and their communities. Weak enforcement of the law on violence against women means that men, particularly within family units, can operate with impunity.*



We saw a lot of pressure form men [party representatives] trying to force [women] to vote for their candidates.”

– Chahed Observatory representative, Tunis

- *Women as voters are not likely to report instances of political violence in lead-up to elections or at polling stations due to interpersonal and cultural dynamics as well as distrust in reporting mechanisms. Community dynamics also prevent poll workers from effectively reporting incidents.*
- *In all types of political activity – from voting to running for office – women are more likely than men to be targeted for harassment and other political violence, which hinders women’s free choice at the polls and puts their safety specifically at risk.*

In addition to finding women less confident in the electoral process than men, IRI’s 2019 poll also highlighted gendered concerns about election-based violence and the ISIE’s ability to address it. Alarming, IRI’s

January-February 2019 poll in Tunisia found that 74 percent of female respondents are not more engaged in politics because they fear violence.³⁰ This was echoed in interviews with those who had experience working with election implementation. “In the law on violence against women, there’s a clause about political violence, and it defined this political violence as any sort of block on women’s participation.³¹ We are not implementing this law,” said the former ISIE member. Numerous key informants and focus group discussants mentioned various types and instances of political violence women face in lead up to the election and at the polls.

4.1 MEN AS GATEKEEPERS

Interviewees and focus group discussants consistently cited the gatekeeping role men play vis-à-vis women’s access to political participation. Numerous interviewees noted that many women in the country, particularly older women or women in the interior, either do not have identity cards or do not have control over them, which limits women freely exercising their right to vote. Electoral laws that allow for proxy registration make women particularly susceptible to control and coercion. “There are men who don’t have ID cards, but for women it’s more of an issue [because even if the woman gets an ID card,] the husband will hold the ID card of the woman. And sometimes you find men with a grocery bag of ID cards [that he collected from] the women in the neighborhood,” said a key informant from Mourakiboun. During the focus group discussion in Gafsa, a woman spoke of experiences on the outskirts of the town, noting how “even if [women] do have

Electoral Process.” *International Republican Institute*.

³⁰ “Data: Tunisians Pessimistic About Electoral Process.” *International Republican Institute*, 28 Mar. 2019, iri.org/resource/data-tunisians-pessimistic-about-electoral-process.

³¹ Article 3 of Organic Law No. 2017-58, Tunisia’s Violence against Women Law, 11 Aug. 2017.

an ID card, the mayor and the *Sheikh*³² would collect those ID cards and would vote on their behalf.”

According to focus group participants over 30 years old from Tunis and a key informant from the ISIE, when husbands and fathers do not want women to participate — whether because they view it as a waste of time or object to their wives and daughters going to coffeeshops and public spaces to talk to men — they actively prevent them from doing so. At minimum, this means male figures may simply not give permission for the women’s participation. Though this is particularly common in rural regions, a key informant from the ISIE emphasized that this behavior is also “found in some urban regions.” A key informant from the *Fédération Nationale des Villes Tunisiennes* noted that many women end up not participating in politics because they are faced with the decision to either obey their husbands or get divorced, which they see as harming the family. In this sense, the key informant noted how a woman’s choice to participate in politics can become a much larger consideration or “family matter.” Another key informant, the former ISIE member, echoed these views, noting that some women “will get divorced in order to participate [in politics].”

4.2 UNDUE INFLUENCE, INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT

Participants noted that men generally view women as naiver and easier to manipulate than men, particularly in terms of voting. Interviewees, key informants and focus group participants — including a former ISIE member, a national government official, and

Monastir FGD and Youth FGD participants — noted that political parties, particularly in marginalized communities, attempt to influence women’s votes by giving them groceries or money and then engage in a continued campaign of harassment to ensure that women vote for a particular party and/or candidate. “You’d see someone on the street saying, ‘don’t forget what you agreed to,’” said a participant from the Tunis-based CSO FGD. While it’s more typical for this to happen in rural areas, “even in the capital, there are areas where this can happen,” said a Mourakiboun representative.

Said the key informant from the ISIE, “Sometimes [a woman’s] son or brother obliges her to vote, but she doesn’t know how to vote, so they use her to vote for a certain party.” Such male influence is also known to extend outside of the family unit, noting instances of the *Sheikh* asking women to vote for specific parties in some regions,



Even if [women] do have an ID card, the mayor and the Sheikh would collect those ID cards and would vote on their behalf.”

– Focus group participant, Gafsa

³² Traditional community religious leader.

though “it’s not as prevalent” as before, said the ISIE member. As was noted by a former ISIE member interviewed for this study, some women in these instances will vote however they want given that voting is done by secret ballot. Others, however, said that some women do not know that their ballot is secret or lack confidence in it staying secret and may thus feel additional pressure to vote according to their male relatives’ wishes.

In Jendouba, a city near the Tunisia-Algeria border, for example, “the men would take the identity card of the woman and force her to vote a certain way, and if she doesn’t vote a certain way, then they wouldn’t give the ID card back,” according to a Chahed Observatory representative. Even though the men would not be in the voting booth, they would be physically present nearby as the women voted, the same representative added. “The boxes of the elections [ballot boxes] are so close you can see what the other people vote,” one participant in the Tunis FGD of women over 30 years old noted. Altogether, this not only undermines the secrecy of the ballot and the credibility of the elections overall, it also increases the potential to put women directly in harm’s way.

Several focus group discussants from the Tunis 1 district said that they simply do not feel safe anymore. Women avoid being out in public late in the evening, mainly due to the fear of robbery. “Before, we used to go out with family by 8 p.m., but now, this is not possible anymore,” said one of the women. They also mentioned the sexual and other harassment they face taking public transportation. These concerns combined

“

You’d see someone on the street saying, ‘don’t forget what you agreed to.’”

– Focus group participant, Tunis

with cultural restrictions that prevent women from being away from the home at night contribute to women not taking part in political processes.

4.3 REPORTING ISSUES

Although women are specifically targeted for electoral violence, they are not likely to report it. For one, intimidation and harassment, including sexual harassment, is common to the point that it has been normalized, causing some women to opt out of politics completely. Other women are blocked by male family members from participating (yet another form of violence), feeding a vicious cycle of violence against women. When women face harassment, many view it as “not worth reporting,” said the CSO FGD participant. Said another CSO FGD participant, “They don’t want to report it [harassment] because then it will bring more attention to it and bring shame on them.” When women did report such cases, said



Sometimes [a woman's] son or brother obliges her to vote, but she doesn't know how to vote, so they use her to vote for a certain party."

- Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) member, Tunis

the former ISIE key informant, they opted to report them to entities they trusted, namely civil society organizations, rather than public institutions like the ISIE.

Finding 5:

The media reinforces society's traditional views of women.

- *The media does not treat women and men equitably. Women are rarely portrayed in the media in positions of*

power or discussing politics. Women candidates and public officials do not receive the same amount of airtime and are not asked the substantive questions that their male counterparts are asked. This decreases women's interest and motivation to be politically aware and lowers women's political participation.

- *The media can play an important role in changing perceptions of women in politics.*

The media plays a role in reinforcing stereotypes about women and thus discouraging women's political participation. As one interviewee from ISIE stated, the rhetoric in media still valorizes men while downgrading women. News stories featuring women are relegated to the topics of beauty, children and the household. Although female and male candidates are supposed to receive the same amount of airtime on television, numerous interviewees noted that women are culturally constrained from garnering attention in the same way as men. Men, for example, are able to be more outspoken and use stronger language than women in debates and, as a result, bring shows more attention and higher ratings. As a result, television producers target male candidates and other politicians as guests. Another, the former ISIE member, noted how "men are more present than women in electoral campaigns," and the media simply reflects this gap in representation, rather than strive for balance.

Even when women candidates receive media coverage, interviewees noted that they are asked mundane questions, rather than questioned about their platforms. This both

exacerbates women's disillusionment with politics and reinforces the cultural view that politics is men's domain. As a key informant from ISIE noted, "When women watch TV, they get this perspective that women are just for entertainment and not politics." To counteract this trend, a Chahed Observatory representative suggested that "if women see other women talking on TV, putting them in high importance positions, that will expose them to that idea [of women as political leaders] in a tangible way and show that they could also do it."



They don't want to report it [harassment] because then it will bring more attention to it and bring shame on them."

- Focus group participant, Tunis

Finding 6:

Awareness campaigns around recent elections are seen as being ineffective at engaging women.

- *Past government-led campaigns have been too general, and have not focused on the needs of women, especially those in rural areas and young women, and did not take additional steps to reach them.*
- *In recent years, fewer resources have been devoted to targeted campaigns to reach women.*
- *Women trust civil society organizations the most when it comes to delivering awareness campaigns and emphasize that women are best positions to reach out to other women.*

6.1 VOTER REGISTRATION AND AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Voter registration and voter mobilization campaigns have faced several implementation problems. There was criticism that past awareness campaigns were too general and did not focus specifically on women — a lost opportunity to encourage more women to vote. "Women have more power to influence other women," a member of the municipal council in Monastir, pointed out. Interviewees repeatedly voiced that organizations need to go to where women and young girls are, hear their needs and perspectives directly from them, then make sure they are responding to those expressed needs. There has been some attention given to this concern as the country prepares for the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections. From April



to June 2019, ISIE conducted a registration drive, working with civil society organizations to target women and specific geographic regions. ISIE reported that it registered 1,467,963 citizens — 56 percent (or 779,283) of them women.³³ Many interviewees also noted that some people were confused about where to vote and did not know that the location that one registers in is where one needs to go to vote. One criticism that was heard is that campaigns in past elections

were too short, which led to confusion caused by too much information trying to be transmitted in a short period of time.

Civil society organizations are important partners in educating women of all ages about their rights and providing women with opportunities to hone their political skills. These organizations are especially effective because they exist outside of political parties, which have low levels of trust. Civil society organizations are able to cast a wider net in promoting participation and inclusion and are essential for communicating unbiased information.

Awareness campaigns have been carried out by ISIE and civil society in advance of previous elections, but there have been implementation problems that hindered their effectiveness. Interviewees were familiar with some awareness-raising programs

“

When women watch TV, they get this perceptive that women are just for entertainment and not politics.”

- Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) member, Tunis

³³ “Statistiques.” *Tunisia Independent High Authority for Elections*, June 2019, isie.tn/statistiques/.

held by Mourakiboun and other civil society organizations in past election cycles but felt that these efforts were stronger in 2014 compared to 2018. In previous election cycles, the media played a role in bringing attention to and promoting these awareness campaigns. “[In]2018, radio and TV, there were political debates, but no information given to people,” a Mourakiboun representative said. “In 2014, I remember they would invite the ISIE or CSO activists, they would have a chance to explain. In 2018, it didn’t happen,” the Mourakiboun representative added.

Another difference between the 2014 and the 2018 elections was the heightened levels of confusion in 2018 regarding the nature of the elections and the electoral process. Citizens had never voted at the municipal level before and municipal councils did not exist prior to the 2018 elections, increasing the need for intensive voter education campaigns. However, awareness campaigns did not sufficiently educate women voters about voter registration deadlines, the date of the election or who was running. In the focus group held with representatives of civil society, participants specifically pointed out that one cause of this was that the budget for awareness campaigns conducted by the ISIE was reduced in 2018, as compared to previous years, and the government only implemented these projects at the last minute. Another focus group in Monastir revealed that there was confusion specifically in the 2018 municipal elections because there were so many candidates running. It was easier to conduct educational campaigns in 2014, as it only involved presidential elections rather than parliamentary or municipal, and citizens were familiar with the presidential elections process.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome barriers to women's political participation, IRI has developed recommendations for political parties, the Tunisian government, civil society and the media.

POLITICAL PARTIES

- In light of the erosion of women's confidence in political parties, it is crucial that political parties work to build and maintain trust between themselves and women, including by developing substantive platforms that directly address the everyday concerns of women. Parties must effectively communicate their platforms to female voters.
- Once elected, it is imperative for parties and candidates to implement policies on which they campaigned.
- Parties should commit to gender parity across candidate lists and throughout party structures. Parties should actively cultivate the skills and leadership of female members in order to advance women's political leadership.
- Political parties should leverage female members to drive engagement with other women, for example by undertaking female-led door-to-door campaigns to access and educate other women about party platforms.

GOVERNMENT

- The government should ensure there are adequate resources devoted to awareness campaigns. Awareness campaigns should be coordinated with civil society and tailored to reach and resonate with traditionally marginalized communities, including women, youth and rural communities. Awareness campaigns should include voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote campaigns and campaigns regarding identifying and reporting electoral issues. Of particular importance is the development of specific programs to ensure that women, especially rural women, know how to obtain and replace identification cards.
- The government should strengthen reporting mechanisms to document and address cases of political violence against women. The government should take into account the influence of personal relationships and community dynamics on poll workers and look to address these conflicts of interest in the management of the polls. Poll workers and election officials should likewise be trained on how to properly respond to reports of political violence and harassment against women.
- The government and ISIE should hold accountable those individuals and groups that commit electoral infractions

and other violations of the law around elections.

- The government should strengthen transportation infrastructure and access to transportation so that women have a safe way of getting to polling stations.

CIVIL SOCIETY

- Civil society should conduct awareness campaigns that raise awareness about women's political rights; confront harmful stereotypes about women in politics and highlight positive and varied examples of women's political leadership; and the importance for women to exercise their right to vote, paying particular attention to the connection between voting and women's everyday lives. TV advertising spots should run on both political and more entertainment-focused channels. Civil society organizations should also spread their message through community events at locations where women are more likely to be, such as schools and markets.
- Civil society organizations should coordinate with the government to develop specific programs to ensure that women, especially rural women, have identification cards.
- Civil society organizations should train journalists and other media stakeholders on gender bias and cover men and women equally.

MEDIA

- The media should cover issues that touch women's everyday lives. The media should also engage women – both everyday citizens and those in politics – on political matters in a serious manner equal to that of men.
- On political shows, the media should reserve spots for female politicians, candidates and other representatives from the political sphere and ensure that airtime is distributed equally among male and female guests.
- The media should support get-out-the vote efforts, including by publicizing relevant phone numbers to receive voter registration and other information.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE	
<p><i>Suggested informed consent statement: Thank you for participating in this group discussion. The information collected during this discussion will be used to understand the challenges and opportunities women in Tunisia face in participating in elections. This research will be published, but all your answers to the following questions will be anonymous. Your name and contact information will not be shared outside of this room. Finally, you have no obligation to answer these questions and can refuse to answer at any point during the discussion. Please be aware that we will be audio recording the discussion so we can capture everything that you want to say. Once the discussion begins, please also keep in mind that:</i></p> <p><i>“I want you to do the talking, and I would like everyone to participate.”</i></p> <p><i>“There are no right or wrong answers.”</i></p> <p><i>“Respect everyone’s opinion.”</i></p> <p><i>“Please turn off your mobile phones. If you need to step out, that’s okay.”</i></p> <p><i>“We will be recording the discussion so we can capture everything that you want to say.”</i></p>	
Activity/Questions	Duration/ Facilitator Notes
<p>Ice Breaker <i>(Depending on the composition of the group, this may or may not be necessary.)</i></p>	<p>15 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Introduce moderator(s) ✓ Explain research objectives and confidentiality ✓ Discuss “ground rules” ✓ Ask participants to introduce themselves and conduct short ice breaker activity
Women issues in General and Political Issues	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, what are main issues for You as a woman in (location)? Why? Write on the board, then classify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If not spontaneous</i>, what about political situation/elections? • Ok, let’s talk about political situation, what are current issues for you as a woman in (location)? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If not spontaneous</i>, what about elections? 	<p>15 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up question ✓ Prepare then to the next step: political involvement
General Opinion/Accessibility of Electoral Processes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, what do you think about women in politics in Tunisia? Do you think women are motivated to participate (as voters? as candidates?)? Why or why not? • Is there any profile that is motivated more than the others? why? what are these profiles (age, education, job, etc.?)? 	<p>20 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up question

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about your ability to participate in electoral processes in Tunisia? Why? • How did you feel about your ability to participate — specifically — in the 2018 municipal elections? <i>This could include voting, running for office or anything else related to elections in Tunisia.</i> Why do you feel that way? • Do you feel that your ability to participate in electoral processes in Tunisia has changed in recent years? Why or why not? • <i>If yes</i>, how has it changed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage all participants to share and answer questions
<p>Accessibility/Types of Participation</p>	
<p>What are some ways that you have participated in electoral processes or that you have seen other women in Tunisia participate in electoral processes? <i>Again, this could be participation via voting, running for elected office, serving as a poll worker or anything else related to the electoral system.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you provide specific examples of positive or negative experiences related to your participation in the 2018 municipal elections? • What do you think caused the experience to become positive or negative? 	<p>20 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure that all participants understand and know the question. If not, explain briefly. ✓ State that positive and negative experience does not have to be participants' own. ✓ Clarify that last follow-up question requires participants to provide detailed information.
<p>Barriers to Participation</p>	
<p>Thinking back to the positive or negative experiences of participation we just discussed, what could have been done differently to make the experience better? Even if it was a positive one, what would have made it even better?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you share specific examples of this? 	<p>10-15 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlight specific experiences mentioned by participants, when asking question.
<p>Support to Participate</p>	
<p>In your opinion, what, if anything, do government institutions, political parties and civil society organizations in Tunisia support and encourage women to participate in the elections?</p> <p>Write on the board, then classify</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think these efforts are sufficient? Why or why not? • What else could be done by these stakeholders to encourage and promote the participation of women in the electoral process? • Imagine you are now the president of Tunisia, what can you do to encourage and promote the participation of women in the electoral process 	<p>20 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Clarify that stakeholders could include but are not limited to government, electoral management bodies, political parties, civil society and the media.

Motivation to Participate	
<p>Why do you think women choose to participate, or not, in the electoral processes in Tunisia? What are main barriers for their participation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think those reasons different from men? Why or why not? 	<p>10-15 mins</p> <p>✓ Summary</p>
Conclusion	
<p>Is there anything else that you'd like me to know about women's political participation in the electoral process?</p> <p>End Focus Group Discussion</p>	<p>5 mins</p> <p>✓ Thank participants for their time</p> <p>✓ Reiterate research objectives and confidentiality</p>

APPENDIX B: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

BARRIER IDENTIFICATION EXPERT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	
	Interviewer's Name: _____ Interview Number: _____ Interview Date: _____
<p>Hi, I'm _____ and I'm from ORGANIZATION. We are working on a project about women's electoral participation in Tunisia. We are interested in talking with you about your opinions and ideas related to women's electoral participation in your country, specifically as it relates to the electoral process. We are trying to get a better sense of this across the country. We will use this information to write a report that will be published on our website.</p> <p>We'd like to ask you some questions about your thoughts and opinions regarding women in the electoral process. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers. We are only interested in your honest thoughts and opinions. Also, if there is a question that you don't feel comfortable answering, that's ok. You do not have to answer it.</p> <p>I will be taking notes to help me remember your responses. I will be asking for your name but no names will be included in the report. You will not be identified in the report. Knowing all of this, are you willing to participate in this discussion?</p> <p><i>(Assuming the prospective interviewee says, yes): Great, thank you!</i></p>	
<p>I. Representation</p> <p>I'd like to ask you some questions about <u>women's political participation in Tunisia</u>.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not motivated, 3 being somewhat motivated and 5 being very motivated, how motivated in general do you believe women are to vote? On the same scale, how motivated do you believe men are to vote? 2. What do you think motivates women in Tunisia to vote, in general? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do you think these are the same motives that men have? Why or why not? b. In your opinion, what are some reasons that women do NOT vote? c. Do you think these are the same reasons that men do NOT vote? Why or why not? 3. In your opinion, do election campaigns address issues that are important to women? Here I'm thinking about candidate messages, political party platforms, and that sort of thing. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why or why not? b. Do political campaigns make specific efforts to target/turn out women voters? Why or why not? What did this look like in 2018? 4. Do you think that parties make specific efforts to include women in their voter outreach plans? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why or why not? b. If they do, what did these efforts look like? c. If different, what did these efforts look like in advance of the 2018 elections in comparison to previous elections? 	

5. What about women that are subjected to other types of marginalization (ethnicity, geography, disability, etc.)? How do you think their situation affects their decisions to participate, or not, in the upcoming elections?
 - a. As voters?
 - b. As candidates?
 - c. As members of political parties?
 - d. As part of the electoral management/implementation team?
 - e. How do you think electoral stakeholders (parties, election commission, candidates) engage women that are also subjected to other types of marginalization?
6. What type of voter education did women receive in advance of the 2018 municipal elections?
 - a. From the electoral commission?
 - b. From civil society organizations?
7. Did women feel well-informed in advance of the 2018 municipal elections? This could pertain to voting procedures, including where to vote and how to vote, the candidates on the ballot or the issues.

II. Society and Media

Thank for you those insights. Next, I'd like you to ask you some questions about how women's electoral participation is perceived in Tunisia in society and the media.

1. Generally speaking, what opportunities are there for women to participate in the political process? For example, how easy or difficult is it for women to ...
 - a. Register to vote
 - b. Vote on election day
 - c. Volunteer for a political or advocacy campaign
 - d. Run for office
 - e. Join a political party

With respect to these forms of participation, were there any differences between the 2014 and 2018 elections?
2. What challenges or barriers do you think women face in participating in the political process?
 - a. What sorts of challenges or barriers do they face when voting?
 - b. What sorts of challenges or barriers do they face when participating in a political or advocacy campaign?
3. How does electoral fraud affect women as voters? How did it affect women in the 2018 elections?
4. Did you experience, witness or hear of any voter intimidation or harassment leading up to and on Election Day in 2018?
 - a. Did this intimidation seem specifically focused on women?
 - b. Do you think voter intimidation will affect women's participation in the 2019 elections?
5. How does gender-based violence affect women's participation in electoral processes?

<p>6. Generally, how does women’s participation in electoral processes compare to men’s participation?</p> <p>7. In general, how does the media cover women who participate in the political process (as voters, candidates, party members, government officials)? Could you describe what you mean by that or give an example?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Do women get the same amount of media coverage as men involved in the electoral process? b. Does media coverage of one gender tend to be more negative or more positive? <p>8. Have you come across any media coverage of issues of particular concern to women? If yes, can you give me an example? Is there sufficient media coverage of such issues, and is it of good quality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why or why not?
<p>III. Election Administration and Legal Framework</p> <p>That’s very helpful, thank you. Finally, I’d like to ask you some questions about how <u>laws and regulations affect women’s electoral participation</u> in Tunisia.</p> <p>1. Based on your knowledge, do the constitution and/or election laws promote an inclusive electoral process? In other words, do relevant laws specify equal access for men and for women to participate in the electoral process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Why do you say that? <p>2. Based on your experience, are these legal provisions understood and/or enforced by relevant stakeholders?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) In your opinion, does this understanding or enforcement differ by region, institution or other demographic? How so? <p>3. Do you know if there are laws or regulations about women’s representation in the administration of elections (roles on Election Day, with the election management bodies, etc.)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) How is the composition of the election commission determined? Does this vary at the national level vs. the local levels? b) What about the staffing of polling stations? How are the staff for polling stations selected?
<p>IV. Wrap-up</p> <p>Thank you very much for those responses. Is there anything else that you’d like me to know about women’s political participation in the electoral process?</p>

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA/SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE



Dear Recruiter,
 You are recruiting for focus groups with regular Tunisian citizens, who belong to marginalized groups (women, youth, persons with disabilities). The aim of the research is to understand women’s experience in the 2014 national elections and 2018 municipal elections in order to improve pre-election activities in advance of the 2019 national elections. **(This is for your own information only — do not disclose the aim of the research to potential participants.)**

Focus group composition and location:

Group Number	Location	Demographics
1	Tunis	Over 30 years old
2	Tunis	Youth (30 years old and under)
3	Tunis	Tunis I neighborhood
4	Tunis	Election-related associations
5	Gafsa	Random sample
6	Monastir	Random sample

Each focus group must have a minimum of 8 participants, but it is advisable that you recruit several back-ups for each session.

To the extent possible, participants in the same focus group session may not know one another. Therefore, if you use snowball recruiting, avoid putting direct referrals into the same group as the referring person.

To introduce this project to a potential candidate, please feel free to use your own words, but make sure you cover the following points:

- Your name and employer
- You are recruiting for a voluntary social science study
- Participants will get together and discuss a specific topic for about 90 minutes
- The discussion will be recorded and later on a researcher will write a report summarizing everyone’s opinion
- Participant’s name will NOT be used in the report — as per research ethics we will guarantee the confidentiality of your identity
- The research institute will provide a small gift as a thank you for participating in the study
- Transportation to the meeting place will be provided and/or costs will be reimbursed

We are looking for people who have a specific profile. To find out if you qualify, I need to ask you a few questions. May I begin?

1.) Language of recruitment screening:

Tunisian Arabic	Ensure that recruited participants are fluent in the language of the focus groups discussion.
-----------------	---

2.) City:

Tunis	Keep for FGDs 1-2
Gafsa	Keep for FGD 3
Monastir	Keep for FGD 4

Sub-locality (e.g. city, village), WRITE DOWN: _____ (ensure to recruitment from mix of different sub-localities within each county)

3.) Have you participated in a focus group study in the past 12 months?

Yes	Terminate
No	Continue

4.) Gender (DO NOT ASK, CODE BY OBSERVATION)

Female	Keep for all
Male	Keep for FGDs 3-4

5.) How old are you? WRITE DOWN EXACT AGE: _____

Under 18	Terminate
18-31	Keep for all except group 2
32-65	Keep for all except group 1
Over 65	Terminate

6.) What is your occupation? WRITE DOWN: _____

7.) Please select the statement that best describes your current economic situation

I have trouble feeding myself and my family and buying even the most essential things for survival
I have enough means for survival, but I do not have enough money for extra things
I can afford things like new clothes and eating at restaurants but not often
I can afford things like new clothes and eating out and also support other members of my family who are not able to do these things

8.) What is the highest level of education you have attained?

No formal
Some primary
Completed primary
Completed secondary
Post-secondary

9.) Did you vote in the 2014 elections, the 2018 elections, neither or both?

2014	<i>Ensure that groups 1-4 contain a mix of voting history</i>
2018	
Neither	
Both	

10.) Do you have a disability?

Disability	<i>Ensure that groups 1-4 have representation of persons with disabilities</i>
No disability	

10a. IF DISABLED: Type of disability

Physical, specify: _____
Mental, specify: _____

Conclusion: Thank you very much for answering my questions. I would now like to collect your name and contact information. If you are a match for our research project, we will get in touch with you. In case you qualify, we anticipate that the discussion will be held on [DATE/TIME]. Would you be available then?

WOMEN'S DEMOCRACY NETWORK

WWW.WDN.ORG

@WDN

P: (202) 408-9450

E: WDNINFO@IRI.ORG

