

Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly

Gender Assessment



NATIONAL
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Gender Assessment of Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly



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ABOUT NDI

Founded in 1983, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies. The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

NDI believes that equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials. Democracy cannot truly deliver for all of its citizens if half of the population remains underrepresented in the political arena. NDI helps women acquire the tools necessary to participate successfully in all aspects of the political process. Our programs engage women in legislatures, political parties and civil society as leaders, activists and informed citizens. These programs create an environment where women can advocate on matters of policy, run for political office, be elected, govern effectively and participate meaningfully in every facet of civic and political life.

Since establishing its office in Tunis in January 2011, NDI has remained committed to supporting women's effective participation in the political transition. The Institute works with women in political parties to enhance their confidence and communication skills to take on new leadership roles within their parties, including serving as ambassadors in multi-party venues. To better appreciate women's views and perceptions of them in society, NDI also conducts regular qualitative research – the findings of which are presented to political and civic leadership in Tunisia.

For more information, please visit www.ndi.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Women participated in large numbers in the October 2011 National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections as candidates and campaigners, encouraged by the country’s new electoral law requiring gender parity on political party candidate lists. Since the revolution, women have also played active roles in civil society and in political parties in the hope of contributing to the emerging political transition. Yet Tunisian women have also voiced concerns that conventional gender relations and stereotypes are reemerging despite the solidarity among women and men during the revolution.¹ The gender parity provision for the NCA elections, for example, did not guarantee equal representation of elected women because most political parties did not nominate women as heads of candidate lists. As a result, women won 24 percent of NCA seats but comprised 50 percent of candidates.

While it is important to celebrate the gains made by Tunisian women, the real demonstration of democratic engagement is the continued meaningful participation of women as political representatives. Tunisia’s next parliamentary elections present both a challenge and an opportunity for furthering women’s political participation.

“Society is very masculine in Tunisia and that is also reflected in parliament.”

- Tunisian women MP

In order to systematically collect perspectives on women’s experiences as elected representatives in Tunisia’s first democratically elected legislature, NDI carried out an assessment of opportunities and barriers facing women members of the NCA, also referred to herein as deputies or members of parliament (MPs). The assessment, consisting of in-depth interviews based on three questionnaires, helped NDI collect basic information from women deputies, their male counterparts, and members of the Assembly administrative staff.

This report includes findings from the in-depth interviews and recommendations to enhance the participation of women in future parliaments. Based on these interviews and its global experience implementing women’s and governance programming, NDI offers a series of recommendations to women MPs, their male counterparts in parliament and political parties, and parliamentary administration.

NDI wishes to thank all those who participated and supported this assessment and to offer deputies sincere wishes for continued courage and perseverance in their work.

¹ *Women’s Political Participation in Tunisia After the Revolution*. National Democratic Institute (published May 2012).

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PROGRAM RATIONALE

The Importance of Women's Political Participation

As a broader range of citizens take part in the political process, institutions become more responsive to the needs of all citizens. Expanding women's political participation leads to tangible gains for democratic governance. Women's full and active participation in politics results in positive dividends including policy development that is more responsive to citizens' needs,² increased cooperation across party lines,³ and more sustainable peace.⁴ When women are empowered as political leaders, countries often experience higher standards of living and positive developments in education, infrastructure, and health.⁵ Expanding political participation to include women can improve the functioning of governments, legislatures, and political parties, and can help government provide more tangible benefits for citizens. Yet women remain underrepresented in politics worldwide.

Backed by increasing popular support for women in politics, NDI has organized innovative and targeted programs across the globe to help a greater number of women become more effective politicians. In countries as diverse as Albania, Indonesia, and Morocco, the Institute works to help women run for elected office, govern effectively, and participate meaningfully in political life. NDI has helped women deputies collaborate across party lines to advance legislation in Macedonia, Mexico, Nepal, and elsewhere through formal women's parliamentary groups and informal networks. On a global level, NDI has led initiatives to help politically active women exchange experiences with their counterparts worldwide.

The Importance of a Strong and Effective Parliament

While all democracies share certain core principles, NDI believes that there is no one correct model for democratic governance. Nevertheless, capable and effective national legislatures serve as foundational pillars of democratic governments around the world. Legislators can champion citizens' causes and help to craft solutions to the challenges they face, but to do so effectively they must understand their roles and the mechanics of the legislative process.

In many countries around the world, NDI works with legislators, legislative staff, civic associations, and others to build the capacity of representative institutions to communicate with citizens and respond to their concerns. Programs that specifically promote women's participation in each of these areas of governance enable legislatures to better respond to citizen needs and narrow the gap that exists in all societies between women and men in access to resources, decision-making authority,

² A. Cammisa, and B. Reingold, "Women in State Legislatures and State Legislative Research: Beyond Sameness and Difference," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* Vol. 4, No.2 (2004): 181-210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40421515>.

³ C.S. Rosenthal, "Gender Styles in Legislative Committees" *Women & Politics* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2001): 21-46, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J014v21n02_02.

⁴ C. Chinkin, "Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring the Participation of Women" *United Nations: Division for the Advancement of Women* (2003), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/peace2003/reports/bpchinkin.PDF>.

⁵ L. Beaman et al, "Women Politicians, Gender Bias, and Policy-making in Rural India," *Background Paper for UNICEF's The State of the World's Children Report 2007*, 11, 15-16, http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/beaman_duflo_pande_topalova.pdf.

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and political power. NDI endeavors to support women as part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the functioning of legislatures.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Assessment Objectives

NDI organized a gender assessment of Tunisia’s NCA to contribute to a fuller understanding of the following critical factors:

- The capacity of women deputies to perform their legislative and representative functions;
- The functions and role of the NCA, and the ways in which it supports deputies in performing their work, building their capacity, and accessing outside expertise;
- The extent to which principles and practices associated with gender equality are mainstreamed in the work of the assembly, and;
- Women deputies’ ongoing interactions with their communities (both male and female), with their political parties, with Tunisian civic associations, and with international partners.

The information collected through this mission will guide NDI and its partners in creating a roadmap for assistance to women in the NCA and in the future parliament, which is expected to be elected by the end of 2014. The report’s findings—which have been shared with the NCA leadership, women deputies, and other stakeholders—are also intended to serve as a baseline to gauge progress in future parliaments.

Assessment Team

NDI’s assessment team was comprised of two Tunis-based staff whose work focuses on women’s political participation. Anne-Marie DeLorey, Senior Program Manager, has more than 10 years of experience supporting women’s organizing and candidacy in Canada’s National Democratic Party. Chiraz Arbi, Program Assistant, coordinates the Institute’s work with the NCA. The team collaborated on the development of a written questionnaire, which was used as the foundation for in-person interviews with MPs—both men and women—and with parliamentary leaders and advisors. Caroline Hubbard, Senior Program Officer on NDI’s Women’s Political Participation team, provided invaluable support and assistance to the team.

Questions drawn from NDI’s global resources, particularly similar questionnaires carried out by the Institute in Algeria and Libya in the past year, served as a foundation and were adjusted based on the objectives of the program and of the assessment and on the particularities of the Tunisian political and social contexts.

Questionnaires

Through questionnaires targeting each of the three stakeholder groups for this assessment, the team sought to collect basic quantitative and qualitative data on topics such as: the trajectory of

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respondents' political careers to date, their work in the NCA through parliamentary groups and committees, their communications with citizens, their relations with fellow deputies, challenges they face in their work as deputies, the resources at their disposal, and potential training topics that interest them.

NDI interviewed 18 female and 4 male deputies at the Assembly and eight parliamentary staff, both men and women. MPs identified themselves as from 10 different parties, both in the ruling troika—comprised of Congress for the Republic (CPR), Ennahda, and Ettakatol—and in the opposition. Interviewees' ages range from 25 to 67 years, representing all regions of the country as well as Tunisians abroad, and a mix of rural, urban, and semi-urban constituencies. Three-quarters of interviewees are married, most with children. Most have some university education and, before their election in 2011, worked or studied in cultural or social service programming, business, medicine, child care, law, and education. While the questionnaire's results are by no means statistically representative of the entire parliament, they offer useful insights and help to confirm or elucidate information gathered through the discussions.

These conversations allowed the assessment team to explore in detail the themes raised in the questionnaire, including women deputies' strengths and weaknesses as first-time legislators, the institutional and social challenges they face in conducting their work, and attitudes that they and others hold about women's role in politics.

Initial interviews were conducted from July 11 to July 24. The assassination of NCA member Mohamed Brahmi on July 25 and the ensuing political upheaval resulted in delays of the assessment, which was continued throughout the fall of 2013 and completed in December of the same year.

Analysis

Following the completion of interviews, members of the assessment team analyzed completed questionnaires and discussion notes to identify trends and key findings. The information gathered yielded important insights that will help the Institute and its partners develop a targeted program to address the challenges women NCA members face and to expand opportunities for learning and exchange with a future parliament.

The political engagement of Tunisian women has demonstrated the real influence women have on the forward movement of Tunisia's democratic transition. Preparations for subsequent elections and the next parliament have already started. Securing genuine political roles for Tunisian women will require addressing the negative gender stereotypes they have identified. Respondents' ideas and recommendations outlined here will initiate that process, which will require men and women to build working relationships across gender lines, parties to nominate women to strong leadership roles, and NCA and partner organizations to provide training and capacity-building for women in politics.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Profile of Women at the Assembly

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In the 2011 elections for the NCA, Tunisians elected women in over 26 percent of constituencies, largely due to the implementation of a parity clause mandating that women represent 50 percent of candidates on party lists and that candidate names on party lists alternate by gender. While more than 4,000 women competed for the 217 seats in the Assembly, only 49 seats went to women candidates. The Ennahda party secured 42 of those 49 seats. While the quota did not result in an equal representation of women and men in the Assembly, it did garner the largest representation of women in any parliament in the Arab world at the time,⁶ securing an important role for women during the constitution-drafting process.

Despite the obvious restrictions to freedoms and rights under dictatorship, Tunisian women experienced a truncated form of constitutional equality in the Bourguiba and Ben Ali eras. Women enjoyed high labor force participation, literacy, and standards of education. Currently, there is also strong civil society organizational support for the political participation of women.

In spite of Tunisia's relatively progressive women's rights protections, most women speak about the difficulties in being politically active before the revolution. Nevertheless, some were members and activists in political parties. Half of the women MP respondents were active before the election in community associations, student organizations, and civil society organizations. One women MP reports being jailed, interrogated, and tortured for political activity under the previous regime, while many others speak about the restrictions on doing any political work during this period. One MP reports previously trying to run for parliament only to see her request denied.

Women were active participants in the revolution and continue to engage in Tunisian society in various ways. As a result of women's visibility as revolutionaries and activists, there is strong societal support for their political participation. All of these early gains provide a unique opportunity—rare for countries emerging from dictatorship—to engage Tunisian women in the political leadership of their country.

While all are serving for the first time in office, several respondents had held different leadership positions in their parties at the local or national level. Some women respondents even took on leadership roles in the Assembly. The vice-president of the Assembly, for instance, is a woman from Ennahda and chairs many of the plenary sessions. Three out of seven Assessors⁷ to the President are women, and one of the three Assessors responsible for Assembly management and budget oversight is a woman. Women are well represented on the constitutional committees but less so in regular committees: women chair four of 21 committees, but seven committees have no women among their leadership (president, vice president, rapporteur). There are also no women chairing parliamentary groups.

Views on Gender Roles

⁶ See analysis at http://www.makeeverywomancount.org/index.php?option=com_content&id=1982:tunisia-elections-2011&Itemid=170. See also article by Isobel Coleman and discussion at *Women's Electoral Quotas: Filled but Empty Seats?* <http://fikraforum.org/?p=2676>.

⁷ Women Assessors to the President of the National Constituent Assembly: Samira Merai, Assessor in charge of Legislative Affairs, Relations with the Government and Relations with the Presidency of the Republic, Karima Souid; Assessor in Charge of Information, Communication and Media Relations; and Hela Hammi, Assessor in charge of Management and Budgetary Surveillance.

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While deputies describe their relationships as generally respectful, both female and male MPs report negative stereotyping and comments, verbal harassment, and aggressive behavior toward women deputies. In addition, women MPs of all political backgrounds report that their clothing choices or style of dress are openly disparaged. Other members have commented that media have posted doctored photos of them and published other criticisms. Many women MPs state that the barriers to women’s advancement in parliament flow from systemic historical discrimination against women in Tunisian society and thereby in political parties and in parliament. Respondents note that there are various barriers to women’s political leadership: lack of political experience, lack of family approval, a “boys club” mentality in parliamentary decision-making, discrimination in political parties, and conflict with family responsibilities.

“We must continue to confront male domination in our society. We must increase the participation of, and demonstrate the competence of women.” – Woman MP

Women MPs report that these realities, both inside and outside the Assembly, have a chilling effect on their legislative activities and restrict their ability to fully participate in plenary debate. A woman MP notes, “I have heard when women are speaking in the plenary, men say oh that is what the quotas bring us; this is why we refused the quotas.” Most MPs note that these views within the Assembly are representative of negative attitudes about women within Tunisian society as a whole.⁸

Respondents report that when plenary discussion becomes heated, it is dominated by male MPs. Women MPs say it is difficult to interject, as it would require them to be just as aggressive, which would be seen as inappropriate behavior for Tunisian women. As one woman states, “When debates in the plenary were too heated for my liking, I would leave.”

While gender stereotyping and discrimination in the NCA constitute real barriers to women MPs fulfilling their role, there are also some positive foundations on which to build. Women members report that, for the most part, they were assigned to the committees that they had requested (with the exception of some Ennahda MPs who were appointed to their second choice, due to the higher number of seats the party won in 2011 elections) and were pleased with the opportunities available to them to participate in the Assembly’s work. Many respondents note that women make strong contributions on those committees; some have even been appointed as chair, vice-chair, rapporteur, and second rapporteur. However there was not a strong demonstration of solidarity between women from opposing parties in committee work – instead women MPs prioritized their party affiliations.

“We decided to loosen the rules around decorum and conduct in the Assembly, thinking that was more appropriate for a post-revolution Assembly. However, many deputies are poorly behaved, and rules should be stronger. I think this reflects badly on the deputies and the Assembly. The public see this bad behavior on Television and have a bad opinion of the deputies and the Assembly.” – Male MP

Women and Policy-Making

⁸ *Women’s Political Participation in Tunisia After the Revolution*. National Democratic Institute (published May 2012).

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Women deputies in the NCA are very proud of their participation in the writing of the Tunisian constitution.⁹ They often speak about their personal sacrifices and their endurance in working towards consensus on something so fundamental for their country. As one women MP notes, “Despite the combative nature of the debate on the women’s equality provision, I am proud of the work I did on this, in concert with other women, to preserve the freedom of Tunisian women.” Another women MP notes, “My greatest accomplishment is working on the constitution and being focused, despite the intense combative debates.”

All respondents—both MPs who worked in committees and spoke in the Assembly and staff who supported MP or committee work—discuss women MPs’ participation in constitutional debates on equal rights for women. Respondents are not aware, however, of any gender analysis of other sections of the constitution or of other anticipated legislation. One female MP did indicate that the women’s caucus discussed the gender composition of the election body, the Independent High Authority for the Elections (French acronym ISIE), and the election list quotas.

Some women report being satisfied with their ability to influence policy from within their parties and one male MP notes that there were strong women leaders in his party. Other women MPs speak about the difficulty in proposing an idea that is of no interest to the leader of a party or a bloc. Women MPs who split with parties reference the difficulty in influencing party policy.

Several women respondents note that party and bloc leadership is male dominated and comment on the difficulty of setting the agenda when women do not head a party or bloc. Most women MPs, however, are adamant about their ability to influence the legislative agenda, as one describes, “Decisions on laws and policies are first made at the commission level and women have a strong input there. Then decisions go to the plenary and women have a strong attendance there.”

“Women have the most consistent attendance to the commission meetings and the Plenary.” – Woman MP

Consistent presence does not necessarily translate into substantive contributions, however. One male MP notes that women’s priority issues are not heard on the national stage due to historical barriers limiting women’s participation in public life—but that it is vitally important that they receive more attention. As one woman MP notes: “In order to make better policies and law, it is important to include women’s perspective as they have access to and an understanding of some different problems than men.” Several women MPs note that there would be more discussion of women’s issues if there were more women in parliament. Others suggest that placing more women in

⁹ Respondents often speak about the difference between this parliament and ones formed under future elections. While many respondents saw their roles as purely to negotiate and write the constitution, many others viewed their job as constitutional combined with the typical role of a deputy in a representative and legislative parliament. As a male MP describes the problem:

The three functions of government—legislative, running the administration, and the constitutional drafting—leaves little room for dealing with constituent problems. This needs to be addressed. We need to have time to talk with our constituents. We also need time to work with civil society. We also need to be able to balance our work time with our family time. The next parliament must accommodate this.

The MPs’ views of themselves, their role, and their experience were often influenced by their constituency base and the demands of their constituents. Many expressed concern about their ability to successfully meet all of those demands.

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government, business, or diplomatic positions would increase women's influence. Findings of global studies support this view.¹⁰ They indicate that where women are thoroughly engaged as full participants and leaders in their country's economic, political, and social growth, countries see increased peace-making and consensus-building, greater emphasis on equitable resource distribution, including focus on alleviating poverty, and substantial public investment in education and health care.

When engaging their constituents, assessment respondents note that constituents have diverse concerns. Deputies report that the three main concerns of their female constituents are freedom, health care, and the economy. Freedom and employment are the leading issues for male constituents. For both men and women, prioritizing the economy reflects concern over employment, unemployment, under-employment, and basic standards of living. Many members are also focused with the state of rural Tunisian women. In addition to working to address those constituent priorities, women MPs also report working on other issues, including infrastructure, violence against women, transportation, development, education, small business marketing, tax issues, and children's rights. They have advanced these issues by working collaboratively with colleagues and with municipal officials and by lobbying Ministers. Deputies also report limited experiences with effective cross-party work, particularly on a regional basis.

What is clear from these comments and the experience of the women elected in 2011 is that there are many hard-working Tunisian women politicians who will have three years of experience as legislators when a new parliament replaces the NCA. Unfortunately, the more difficult it is for a woman to engage in healthy political debate, to be judged purely on her character and competence, and to be respected for the opinions she brings to the political arena, the more likely it is she will take her skills and experience elsewhere. In order to ensure talent and skills are retained and women increase in leadership numbers instead of decrease—the environment must be more hospitable.

Serving in Office

Tunisia's parliament at Bardo Palais, which serves as the residence of the NCA, is well-staffed and has a relatively organized operational structure. The physical premise accommodates plenary sessions, committee meeting, and hearings, as well as a permanent administration. Of the 392 permanent Assembly staff, 179 are women, and there is a good gender balance from administrative to director-level employees. Given their seniority and experience, several women at the director-level are poised to move upwards. Despite good gender balance, general administration is predominantly staffed by women and financial administration predominantly staffed by men.

Shortcomings in the Assembly organization and administration, while also affecting male deputies, especially impact women. While physical and human resources exist, first-time political leaders tasked with drafting rules of procedure and overseeing the administration have struggled to manage competing priorities. In August 2013, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral

¹⁰ *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Men and Women in Parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, 2008 and *Women as the Agents of Change: Having Voice in Society and Influencing Policy*, Susan Markham, National Democratic Institute, Washington, 2013.

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Assistance (International IDEA) released a study of the Assembly bylaws,¹¹ noting in many cases that Assembly operations were conducted without clear rules of procedure or codes of conduct. Proctor and Ben Moussa, the study authors, found that the Tunisia Assembly by-laws and codes leave much to interpretation, and the rules that do exist are poorly implemented or enforced.

Both deputies and staff note the need for a more formalized structure and organization of the Assembly, including agendas and schedules of the committees and the plenary session issued sufficiently in advance. Women deputies frequently mention that plenary sessions are often delayed, sometimes by as much as six hours, and then run late into the evening. This causes security difficulties for women, because, as one deputy comments, "It is dangerous for us to be leaving the Assembly at that time and trying to find a taxi."

Concerted planning to address human resource needs at the legislative body is also necessary. Many deputies speak about the need for more and better-trained staff whose skills match the work required in the Assembly. Respondents, both staff and deputies, speak about the lack of administrative structure, human resource structure and policy, and clear job descriptions and assignments. Respondents report that staff skillsets do not align with the needs of a more democratic, open Assembly.

There is no NCA sexual harassment policy, code of conduct, or code of ethics for elected members of the administration of the Assembly. There is no maternity or paternity leave policy for MPs. Some respondents assume that the government-wide maternity leave policy would apply to MPs, but this is not confirmed. Some respondents suggest the general government staffing policies regarding harassment or maternity leave might apply to MPs, but others are uncertain, underscoring the impact of no orientation for MPs in the Assembly.

Deputies are paid an annual salary but receive no funds toward administrative, office, or constituency support. With the exception of MPs who head committees or hold Assembly-wide positions (media or civil society relations, for example) deputies do not have offices, computers, or phones provided by the Assembly. Each member receives an airline travel card, a local travel card, and travel and accommodation allowances. Assembly leadership has shown some flexibility in accommodating Member and family needs, but has not set consistent policies.

Both male and female MPs express concern about their inability to properly represent their constituents due to the demanding schedule of plenary and committee work in the Assembly. MPs also report difficulty in communicating with constituents, as MPs do not have an office or a phone and their constituents may not have access to email or Facebook. Women in particular have expressed a need for travel allowances to visit their constituencies.

Deputies indicate that long and erratic sitting schedules preclude travel back to their homes for both constituency work and family visits. President Ben Jaafar initially implemented a policy that allowed MPs to return to their constituency for one week per month, but as the pace of constitutional debate heated up in the spring of 2013, this was no longer observed. While some deputies have small

¹¹ *The Tunisian Constituent Assembly's By-laws: A Brief Analysis*, Bill Proctor and Ikbal Ben Moussa, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2012, released August 2013

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children or babies, there is no child care facility nearby, nor are there family visiting rooms or rooms for private care of babies.

“I worry about my children and their education, have I neglected them? Am I helping the country at the detriment of my children?” – Woman MP

Respondents note, however, that there is little flexibility in travel or accommodation allowances to allow families to spend more time with MPs in Tunis when the Assembly is sitting for long periods. Some MPs assume financial responsibility to have their families live in Tunis with them. According to

one woman MP, “I would never see [my family] except my husband moved here to be with me. My husband is very supportive.”

Building Networks

During their tenure in the NCA, women MPs have worked to build relationships with each other, with constituents, and with the media, with varying degrees of success. Women MPs unanimously agree that they lost an opportunity to establish a women's caucus in the Assembly. In addition to discussing constitutional issues, they see a women's caucus as a place for discussion of a breadth of issues relevant to their constituents, including jobs, services for single mothers, girls' education, access to healthcare, violence and security, the needs of rural women, and combating discrimination.

Some respondents report that there were a handful of attempts to convene a women's caucus in early 2012. A woman MP relates, “We started a women's caucus but we did not continue due to a polarization of ideas and tensions”.

Despite their differences, women MPs speak about the important of creating this caucus:

“Women across all parties should meet on issues of mutual concern. We can achieve a lot if we address those issues we have in common cause.”

“It should be the same for all activists, whether they wear a hijab or not. We must show a good example to Tunisia by working together but that is not happening”.

“I know that there is a lot of conflict and difficulties but women can work across parties on common points.”

“Although not all women participated, I found it very helpful to work with other women MPs on the equality section of the constitution.”

Most MPs – men and women – express concern about their inability to properly engage with their party cohorts and represent their constituents due to the demanding and erratic schedule of constitution plenary and committee work in the Assembly. Some respondents did not view their role as representative in the regular parliamentary sense. One women MP notes, “I need to be reelected to work on the issues important to my constituents.”

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“My constituents come to Tunis to see what I am doing for them when I have to stay in Tunis for a plenary. They are not interested in the Constitution. They want me to solve the other problems such as unemployment.”
- Woman MP

Many women MPs speak about the difficulty in working with the media—including the stereotype propagated by the media that women MPs are incompetent and simply filling a place due to the gender quota—and request training on the subject. One women MP comments, “The media is provoking tensions, there are not good portrayals

of women in the media.” One male MP suggests more media training for women and men alike, noting, “Media can be very confrontation and disrespectful.” One woman MP suggests there be a special media strategy about the work of women Deputies.

Looking Ahead

Members of parliament, women and men, come from all walks of life, many different backgrounds, and bring many skills and extensive experience to their jobs as politicians. MPs note they received no training in advance of their election, no orientation upon election, and very limited training since. It is important to ensure deputies are provided the support needed to do the best job possible. While direct training of individuals builds their skills, general capacity-building for the institution will ensure that deputies’ skills and experience are strengthened and used proficiently. All members should be encouraged and given opportunities to learn and expand in their roles on committees and in the plenary.

Both men and women Members indicate interest in Assembly orientation and training on their roles and responsibilities. Women indicate a strong interest in specific training on budgeting and finance, media outreach and message development, public speaking and communications skills, and strategic and operations planning. Many women also ask for training in candidate and campaign skills to prepare for the next election.

Respondents generally support the 2011 election quota for women and attribute the election of such a high percentage of women to the Assembly to that quota. One woman MP states, “Until women are leaders equal to men there needs to be positive discrimination.” Several women respondents speak about confronting the machismo nature of Tunisian society. One respondent states, “We need the quota to see women in parliament and to build a culture of acceptance, of women in political parties, so we need quotas until culture has changed.” One male respondent states, “51 percent of the electorate are women so they should be represented.”

Another male MP, however, offers the opposite view: “I think women should be elected based on competence. I think the quota is to blame for incompetent women being elected.” One staff respondent takes the pragmatic, widely-held position: “For women in parliament the gender quota assisted them in getting elected, however, over time, I hope the quotas will not be necessary.”

Respondents generally support maintaining the quota for the next election; many women even speak of changing the quota to require horizontal and vertical alternation of men and women in the lists—i.e., men and women would alternate on party lists and women would head half the lists—to see

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even more women elected. Some respondents indicate that agreement was reached in the Assembly women's caucus to support both horizontal and vertical quotas.

Women MPs are divided on whether they will run again, speaking about difficulties in making political headway within their parties, challenges overcoming stereotypes about women's abilities to be legislators and leaders, and difficulties in balancing Assembly work, constituency work, and their family responsibilities. They describe the demands of constitution-drafting and the stress of the ongoing negotiations as greatly affecting their ability to look forward to a next election. Women also discuss the difficulties in managing constituency expectations with party expectations. Some chose to become independent MPs rather than struggle within their parties and are assessing their options to run independently or with another party.

Most women are interested in a future in politics but are weighing all of their experiences while waiting for an election to be announced. Several respondents speak about the importance of re-electing experienced deputies.

Respondents are generally supportive of women's political participation, and there is agreement on women's capacity to be politicians and to be political and parliamentary leaders. While many respondents see that there was much work to be done to ensure women's full political participation, most are optimistic about women's future in politics.

Due to their experience in the Assembly, women MPs have valuable insight into the needs of and opportunities for future Tunisian politicians. Looking forward to the next election and to the next parliament, women have asked for many changes to allow them to make their rightful contribution to the Tunisia of their future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on findings outlined above, NDI offers the following recommendations to Tunisia's next parliament as a means to better support women and men MPs, and contribute to a more effective democratic legislative body.

Parliamentary Operations

Assembly Operations

The strongest recommendation from respondents is to regularize the Assembly calendar so that all MPs' commitments are clearly scheduled in advance. It is further recommended that hearings, meetings, and plenary sessions follow the published schedule as closely as possible. This recommendation would also help address the significant concerns raised by MPs about the difficulties in fulfilling constituency responsibilities and balancing work and family.

In addition to regularizing the parliamentary schedule, a handbook for MPs that outlines their rights and responsibilities including issues such as Assembly and constituent responsibilities, resources, allowances, travel, attendance at committees and plenary, Assembly rules of procedure, codes of conduct (including sexual harassment and anti-discrimination), and other applicable policies, including a formal grievance process. This handbook's policies should be widely communicated to

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all MPs and Assembly staff. Creation of a gender equality policy is also recommended to outline concrete steps parliament will take to address gender equality within a particular timeframe.

Institutional Resources for Legislators

Going forward, the Assembly should prioritize the assignment of office and meeting space with telephone and computer access. MPs’ offices would ideally be located on the parliamentary grounds, or close to the Bardo Palais, so MPs can easily attend votes and plenaries as they are called.

The Assembly should develop a comprehensive orientation for all incoming MPs, covering responsibilities and rights of an MP, Assembly protocols, and administrative operations, including the role of Assembly staff as stated in the handbook. The orientation should include a review of all policies applicable to an MP and a clear overview of administrative resources available to elected officials and include a session on the importance of gender equality and the benefits of a gender sensitive parliament. For Tunisia’s next parliament, such an orientation should be made available to all MPs, even those who may have served in the NCA, to ensure broader understanding.

Beyond an initial orientation, the Assembly’s Administration should make efforts to organize—possibly in coordination with international or Tunisian organizations—additional training sessions for MPs on topics of interest to them. Topics may include constituent relations and outreach; public speaking for plenary and committee sessions and in the media; and legislative research and drafting.

The Assembly should set clear rules of procedure and a gender aware code of conduct or code of ethics for all Members for plenary, committee meetings, and any other parliamentary business, either in the plenary or in committees. These rules should require all parliamentarians to be respectful and include enforceable penalties.

Assembly Staffing

Women in director-level positions should be encouraged to apply for any future leadership positions in the Assembly staff. The Assembly governance body should consider implementing measures to encourage hiring women in the finance department. A full review of the administrative operations of the Assembly—including implementing an administrative structure with human resources policies, job descriptions, and a fair and transparent hiring process—is also recommended.

Networking and Outreach

Women Deputies’ Caucus

While not fully formed during the NCA period, there is strong support for a women’s caucus open to all elected women. Global experiences with women’s caucuses show that a special remit for gender equality concerns working on a common agenda is beneficial for increasing women’s influence in parliamentary affairs. In order to function properly, the women’s caucus must be supported with physical resources—a meeting room or assigned office, along with administrative staff and resources.

Working with Male Colleagues

Women and men MPs report positive relationships in working within their parties across gender. We encourage women to continue to seek the support of their male colleagues, either in their party

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or in their coalition. Women also report cordial relationships with male colleagues in other parties and coalitions. NDI encourages women to work with male colleagues across the floor, particularly where the interests of their constituencies coincide.

Continuing Work with Civil Society

Both male and female MPs report working with civil society organizations both for constituency-based work and constitutional work. Female MPs are encouraged to continue relationships with supportive CSOs and to build new relationships with other CSOs, particularly those founded around issues in their constituencies.

Additionally, if a women's caucus is established, it is recommended that the caucus work with CSOs in an effort to form a stronger advocacy bloc and better represent the needs of female constituents.

Outreach to Women Constituents

Male and women MPs should continue consultation and relationship-building with women constituents to gain greater understanding of their particular needs. Likewise, MPs should also continue to build relationships with CSOs who represent the various interests of women in their constituencies.

Party Leadership Engagement

Promoting Women's Leadership and Decision-making

Parties should implement a comprehensive gender strategy, including supporting the advancement of women leaders in their parties by nominating them for high level leadership and decision-making positions in their parties and in the legislature. As a number of respondents suggest, parties should give women leaders the support they need to ensure their ultimate success in these roles.

Promoting Skill Building and Capacity Development for Women MPs

Party leadership should support skill building and capacity development for women MPs to ensure that they are prepared to be strong candidates and have the resources they need to carry out their responsibilities in the Assembly and in their constituencies. Parties can achieve this objective through arranging training or supporting such training through the Assembly structure.

Recommendations for Gender Assessment and Strategy

Parties should continue to assess their achievements in political engagement and inclusion of women in all facets of their party. Parties should develop a strategy to increase the political engagement and participation of women in their party through means, including setting quotas for internal elections / appointments and ensuring gender mainstreaming in policy development.