



MONASH
University

MONASH
GENDER,
PEACE &
SECURITY

TUNISIA: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

JULY 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	3
Background to the Conflict	4
Women's Participation in the Peace Process	4
Women's Political Participation Before, During and After Conflict	6
Women's Economic Participation Before, During and After Conflict	6
Key References	7

SUMMARY

The Tunisian transition was the first of the Arab Spring protest movements and resulted in a change in government through democratic elections. Women played active roles in all stages of the transition, as protestors, but also as members of the transitional governance process and were active inside and outside negotiation spaces when the new constitution was drawn up. This resulted in agreements and documents that ensured women's equality as well as their representation in elected bodies. The transition has not quelled the economic needs of much of the population, which was a key demand of many protestors. This highlights a class-based inequality that will shape the opportunities women have for participation in Tunisia's political and economic spaces. There is now also a wider space for Islamist factions to vocalise their vision of Tunisia, often at odds with feminist groups as well as historic gains the women's movement has made. This tension is echoed in many post-Arab Spring states.

STRENGTH OF GENDER PROVISIONS

Constitution of Tunisia 2014

	0 None	1 Weakest	2	3	4	5 Strongest
Human Rights		✓				
Development		✓				
Post-Conflict Issues		✓				
Violence Against Women			✓			
Participation			✓			
General	✓					

Honorary charter Political Parties, Coalitions and Independent Candidates for the elections and referendums of the Tunisian Republic 2014

	0 None	1 Weakest	2	3	4	5 Strongest
Human Rights	✓					
Development	✓					
Post-Conflict Issues	✓					
Violence Against Women	✓					
Participation		✓				
General	✓					

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: KEY CONSTRAINTS AND ENABLERS

CONSTRAINTS

1. Social and cultural conservatism
2. Economic inequality and gaps between rural and urban women
3. Poor formal employment opportunities

ENABLERS

1. Women were active in both protest movements and formal political discussions
2. Changes to electoral laws demanding gender parity on party lists
3. A strong history of women's activism
4. Strong women's civil society



BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The transition in Tunisia began as a civil resistance movement, often referred to as the 'Jasmine Revolution'. Tunisia was the first to experience the 'Arab Spring' revolutions and what occurred there was the catalyst for the protests in other Arab and, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) states. It is also seen as the most successful of the Arab Spring revolutions.

The protests were sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in late 2010, who did so after ongoing harassment by local authorities due to his work as a street vendor. The protests which followed drew on Bouazizi's vocalised frustrations at corruption, unemployment and other socio-economic issues, as well as a lack of political freedoms in the country. Eventually, the unrest led to the exile of the Tunisian President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, in January 2011.

What followed was a short-lived interim government, and in October of 2011, the election of the new Constituent Assembly to oversee the transition and redrafting of the Tunisian Constitution. Al Nahda, a moderate Islamist Party previously outlawed under the Ben Ali regime, won a large share of the seats in the elections for the Constituent Assembly. Subsequently, there was a constant political struggle between different factions, both within the transitional government as well as outside of it. A number of key figures (particularly on the secular left) were also assassinated, which triggered more protests and threatened to derail the transition process. A new constitution was adopted in early 2014, elections (both parliamentary and presidential) were held, and a new government was formed in 2015.

The debate relating to the new government and the impact this would have on women had many factors at play, including concerns around whether liberal legislation and personal status codes that were implemented from the 1950s onwards would be challenged by newly empowered voices that demanded a different (and often Islamic) legal framework to govern gender relations and social structures more broadly. Implicit in this debate is the understanding that progressive Personal Status Laws (PSL) were understood to be 'top down' which draws

parallels to Iraq and other MENA countries – often used to bolster the role of the state and women's loyalty to it – where women's status was an important tool in the statebuilding that occurred after Tunisia gained independence. This tension and new spaces to voice it echoes similar debates in other post-transition MENA states.

The dialogues and agreements that followed the Tunisian revolution are widely seen as successful at the international level. Indeed, the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet, the four organisations central in the democratisation effort in Tunisia that followed the revolution (the Tunisian General Labour Union; Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts; Human Rights League; and Order of Lawyers), were awarded the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize. Following the revolution, civil society organisations have mushroomed, with estimates of an increase by 50 per cent in the number of organisations active. Religious welfare organisations have also been growing, in part to address service and welfare needs caused by poverty in urban contexts (see World Bank 2016 Report).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Tunisian women engaged in the protests as well as other actions in the Tunisian revolution across 2010 and 2011. Their participation as protesters is documented in media accounts of the demonstrations across the country (Khalil 2014). Female lawyers took part in strikes alongside their male colleagues. Female bloggers also played an important role in disseminating information about the protests movements, as well as documenting them (Khalil 2014). There is a suggestion that women mobilised during the revolution due to specific gendered experiences and needs. In an interview with researchers, President of Democratic Association of Tunisian Women (ATFD) Ahlem Belhaj stated that her organisation's research had uncovered that many women who were involved in the protests in Tunisia had previously experienced violence (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui 2012).

Research based on interviews with women who were active in the Tunisian transition done by Andrea Khalil (2014) highlights gender-based key demands as:

1. Preservation of the Personal Status Code
2. Freedom in dress and religion
3. Increase in women's participation

Khalil also explains that despite the division between secular and Islamist women's voices, these key concerns overlapped significantly (Khalil 2014: 198). Women's groups also organised in direct response to this division. For example, secular women's rights organisations arranged protests on the eve of the return

Women were heavily involved in the 2011 elections of the Constituent Assembly, as both candidates and campaigners.

of an exiled leader from the Al-Nahda (Islamist) party, and continued their protests along these lines as the transition process progressed (Moghadam 2013; 2014).

A new electoral law in Tunisia that demands gender parity on party lists bolstered the role of women. This law was in action for the 2011 elections of the Constituent Assembly, ensuring that women were part of the transitional governance process. As such, women were heavily involved in the 2011 elections of the Constituent Assembly, as both candidates and campaigners. It also meant that women were active members of the body which passed the Constitution, making up 24 per cent. It should be noted that Tunisia had higher than average numbers of women in parliamentary seats prior to the revolution (in 2010 women's share of the parliament was 28 per cent).

Nevertheless it is important to question which women take up these seats and which women are excluded. Khalil suggests that poorer, rural women were excluded historically from the opportunities in electoral politics, and that this exclusion continued after 2010 (Khalil 2014). This shows that the division in the women's movement echoes a marked difference in the lived experiences of women, often experienced along class lines that also reflects a rural-urban divide (Khalil 2014).

The site where the women's movement showed its strength is in debates around an article in the draft constitution that placed women as 'complementary' to men in (Article 28 in the draft constitution) (Charrad & Zarrugh 2014; Daniele 2014; Shalaby 2016). There are reports of 6000 women attending a demonstration in Tunis to protest this wording (Charrad & Zarrugh 2014). The fact that this language was amended and not included in the final version of the constitution shows the persistence of women's civil society actors who protested its wording (Daniele 2014), as well as their emphasis on constitutional language that asserted equal rather than complementary citizenship.

The two agreements coded for this project do not have strong gender provisions in the sense that there is not a strong road map for implementation, however they do enshrine gender equality in Tunisian law and make commitments to support and strengthen women's rights to work, eradication of violence against women, and access to representation in electoral processes (including the right to hold the office of President). Most notably, Article 34 guarantees women's representation in elected bodies (and in 2011, this was done through a quota for party lists). Article 46 also makes specific commitments to protect women's 'accrued rights' (referring to previously won rights), and also commits the state to working to strengthen those rights, to 'attain parity between women and men in elected assemblies' as well as 'take... measures to eradicate violence against women'.

Further, policies surrounding the transition strengthen the provisions – for example, a quota demanding gender parity in party lists for the 2011 election of the Constituent

Historically, Tunisia has led the Arab world in terms of progress on women's rights.

Assembly meant that there was a huge increase in women's presence in formal political spaces. This undoubtedly had an impact on the gender provisions in the Constitution that was enshrined in 2014. The fact that a number of rights enshrined in law prior to the revolution were not withdrawn or amended is also notable, as this is a concern in other post-Arab Spring states, particularly where there has been a rise in the presence and power of Islamist groups and parties (see mention of Article 46 above as relating to this).

Tunisia is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and in 2014, removed all reservations to CEDAW, though there is still the stipulation that international conventions should not be in conflict with Chapter 1 of the Tunisian Constitution (which states that Islam is the official religion of the country). Prior to this however, Tunisia's reservations were linked to its identity as a Muslim state (Egypt cites similar reasons for reservations also) (Brandt & Kaplan 1995).

Historically, Tunisia has led the Arab world in terms of progress on women's rights. In particular, much of the reporting and literature on women's rights outline the key gains that were made in the post-independence period (starting in 1956 when Tunisia was declared independent from France). What followed independence was a long period of 'state-feminism' (Murphy 2003), which involved laws and state infrastructure that were progressive when it came to women's rights and their roles in society (see ODI 2014). This included the creation of a secular justice system, equality before the law in the 1959 Constitution, access to education and abortion, as well as equal rights to employment.

Tunisia has a documented history of women's movements and women's involvement in independence and anti-colonial organising. The first women's organisation was created in 1936 and in 1950, a political party agitating for independence founded its first women's section (Grami 2008; Salem 2010). By the 1950s, discourse around the importance of participation of both men and women in Tunisia after independence was prevalent (Salem 2010). Women's movements in Tunisia really began to flourish and grow in the 1970s and 1980s, and so the period following in the 1980s-1990s, is when there is a marked increase in the political consciousness of some women. It is in this moment that we can see clear articulations of women's interests in political spaces (ODI 2014: 5). These included demands for more reforms or amendments relating to PSLs. In part, this development of a women's voice

There is a gap in rhetoric on women's rights and roles, and the reality.

was thanks to state-feminism policies which pushed for greater access to education in Tunisia, and later translated into a more independent women's movement (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui 2012).

Feminist advocacy and organising that was rooted in more conservative or religious ideology also began to develop, embodied in the debate in Tunisia around the veil and other symbols of religiosity. Tunisia passed a law in 1981 which banned the hijab in public offices, and in 1985 in educational settings. This was part of an effort by the government at the time to control religious fundamentalism and the presence of its symbols (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui 2012). These policies have been contested and in 2006 these laws were challenged successfully by a human rights lawyer in court on behalf of a school teacher (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui 2012: 221). This highlights a tension in the women's movement itself, as different women understand the role of religion and the state differently. As such, they also have divergent visions of women's rights in Tunisia, as well as a different reading of Islamist intentions in Tunisian politics today (Tchaïcha & Arfaoui 2012).

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Women's political participation is shaped by a variety of factors in Tunisia that include cultural norms, security and historical frameworks around the women's movement. The ODI (2014) report on women's political empowerment lists three key barriers to women's participation and interests in Tunisia:

1. Social and cultural conservatism which still shapes social norms and traditional gender roles in Tunisian society
2. Local/national perceptions of the women's movement (often the women's movement is either seen as fragmented or not having significant influence)
3. Constraints to broader political participation and the larger framework in which politics (and rights) in Tunisia operates is restrictive more broadly

Despite this, Tunisian women continue to play active roles in a variety of formal and informal political bodies, parties and organisations. In terms of formal political participation, the 2014 elections saw women become 31% of Tunisia's parliamentarians (a vast increase from the late 1980s, during which only 4 per cent of parliamentarians were women). In the women's movement, women have engaged political parties and infrastructure to push for gender-parity and better rights, including efforts during the transitional government to remove reservations that Tunisia had under CEDAW (see USIP Special Report 2016). There is also ongoing work between the Ministry of Women's Affairs and international organisations to create opportunities for discussions about women's rights, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Tunisia, and other gender issues.

A common thread that emerges in analysis on Tunisia, but also other MENA states, is that there is a gap in rhetoric on women's rights and roles, and the reality. Often, there might be a common assumption that women's rights rhetoric is used by political elites as virtue signalling to other progressives in a national setting, or at the international level, without a translation of those rights at a community level where women might be more vulnerable.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

Since gaining independence, Tunisia has experienced rapid changes in its socio-economic makeup, which has in turn impacted on social and political spaces and women's roles within them. In fact the legacy of Tunisia's state-feminist policies are largely economic in outcome (designed to remove barriers to women's economic access and production through changes to family laws, labour laws and the birth rate through public health policies) (Murphy 2003). Inequality and a lack of employment opportunities was a key issue that shaped the revolution in Tunisia as well as its economic outlook, including the "lop-sided" development that occurred under Ben Ali which has gone on to shape inequalities in Tunisia's socio-economic make-up (Khalil 2014; Preysing 2015).

Today, the key industries in Tunisia include agriculture, industry (such as petroleum and mining), tourism and the textile industry. Women within these industries seem to be concentrated in agricultural, industrial and textile work, as well as engaging in the service industry, educational and bureaucratic work (Murphy 2003). Remittances are also an important part of the economy, arriving largely from workers in Europe. It is important to note that the protests, unrest and transition adversely

affected the Tunisian economy due to a number of factors. For example, tourism suffered considerably post-2011 due to unrest and the threat of terrorism, in particular following terrorist attacks which killed mostly tourists (Aliaga & O'Farrell 2017).

World Bank reporting on youth and employment in Tunisia highlights the particular gaps in access that young women face. Only 1 in 5 young women in rural settings and 2 in 5 in urban settings in Tunisia have jobs (World Bank 2014). The same report states that Tunisia has made strides in increasing women's access to education and health (and related outcomes) but that this had not translated into access to paid employment (World Bank 2014: 46).

Some factors to consider include family's concerns both for security and social propriety that can limit women's participation in the labour market. However, families' economic demands and the need for income can mitigate the above concerns. In the interior/southern regions, many women work in factories away from their home towns.

An important factor that is shaping the environment in which Tunisia's agreements are being implemented is terrorism since the revolution. Following the terror attacks in 2015, the government has been operating under a 'War on Terror' banner. Organisations within and outside Tunisia analysing the country's counter-terror measures have expressed concerns about the balance between security and respect for human rights (see Aliaga & O'Farrell 2017). Protests in the face of austerity measures and other economic concerns have also continued in 2018, some of which have been met with violence.

KEY REFERENCES

Aliaga, L., & O'Farrell, K. T. (2017) Counter-Terror in Tunisia: A Road Paved with Good Intentions?, London: Saferworld, Retrieved from <https://saferworld-indepth.squarespace.com/counter-terror-in-tunisia-a-road-paved-with-good-intentions/>.

Amroussia, N., Goicolea, I., & Hernandez, A. (2016). Reproductive Health Policy in Tunisia: Women's Right to Reproductive Health and Gender Empowerment. *Health and Human Rights*, 18(2), 183-194.

Brandt, M., & Kaplan, J. A. (1995). The Tension between Women's Rights and Religious Rights: Reservations to Cedaw by Egypt, Bangladesh and Tunisia. *Journal of Law and Religion*, 12(1), 105-142.

Charrad, M. M., & Zarrugh, A. (2014). Equal or complementary? Women in the new Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(2), 230-243.

Daniele, G. (2014). Tunisian women's activism after the January 14 revolution: looking within and towards the other side of the Mediterranean. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 15, 16-32.

Grami, Amel. (2008) Gender Equality in Tunisia, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(3), 349-361.

Khalil, A. (2014). Tunisia's women: partners in revolution. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(2), 186-199.

Moghadam, V. M. (2013). *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Third Edition ed.). Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Moghadam, V. M. (2014). Modernising women and democratisation after the Arab Spring. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19(2), 137-142.

Mughrabi, M. (2015). Assaulted and Accused: Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Tunisia. Report published for Amnesty International. Retrieved from <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5665a7ef17cf.html>

Murphy, E. C. (2003). Women in Tunisia: Between State Feminism and Economic Reform. In E. A. Doumato & M. P. Posusney (Eds.), *Women and Globalization in the Arab Middle East: Gender, Economy and Society* (pp. 169-194). Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

ODI. (2014) Building Momentum: Women's Empowerment in Tunisia. Retrieved from: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9286.pdf>

Preysing, D. (2015). *Transitional Justice in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia (2011-2013): How the Past Shapes the Future*. Berlin: Springer VS.

Salem, L. B. (2010). Tunisia. In S. Kelly & J. Breslin (Eds.), *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance* (pp. 487-515). New York: Freedom House.

Shalaby, M. (2016). Challenges Facing Women's Political Participation Post Arab Spring: The Cases of Egypt and Tunisia. In M. Shalaby & V. M. Moghadam (Eds.), *Empowering Women after the Arab Spring* (pp. 171-191). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Tchaicha, J. D., & Arfaoui, K. (2012). Tunisian women in the twenty-first century: past achievements and present uncertainties in the wake of the Jasmine Revolution. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 17(2), 215-238.

USIP. (2016) UNSCR1325 in the Middle East and North Africa: Women and Security. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9286.pdf>

This situational analysis supports the Australian Research Council Linkage Project “Towards Inclusive Peace: Mapping Gender Provisions in Peace Agreements, 2000-2016” (LP1048808). The project is hosted by Monash GPS and partnered with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Government or Australian Research Council.

Monash Gender, Peace & Security is a group of policy and community engaged scholars whose research is focused in the field of gender, peace and security. We seek to use our research to inform scholarly debate, policy development and implementation, public understanding about the gendered politics of armed conflict and the search for peace.

www.monashgps.org |   #MonashGPS | MonashGPS@monash.edu



MONASH
University

MONASH
GENDER,
PEACE &
SECURITY