



# Women's Political Participation in Algeria and Morocco: A Comparison

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Islam is often cited as the unique source of the disadvantaged position that women occupy in the political realm in Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. Indeed, when faced with images of veiled women kept at home, restricted from the public sphere in general and from the political sphere in particular, it is tempting to think that these social circumstances have been culturally determined. This is not the case. While women's political participation in the region has varied over time and across national borders, the predominance of Islam has not. Cultural arguments in general do very little to explain variations in the short to medium term, as changes in culture occur over much longer periods of time. The changes in attitudes and laws affecting such participation are better explained by political and economic variables which, coupled with the backlash against Western culture imported during the greater imperial project, have led to these varying outcomes.

This paper will demonstrate its thesis through an analysis of the political and economic developments in Algeria and Morocco since decolonization, and their relationship to women's participation in the political sphere. The paper's analysis will begin with a discussion of the cultural and historical similarities between the two countries to establish the background against which their divergent paths can be observed. I will then give a working definition of political participation in the public sphere, followed by a discussion of the socio-historical context in which the evolution of women's political participation in Algeria and Morocco occurred. Lastly, I will compare and contrast the political and economic developments in Morocco and Algeria that have influenced the differing levels of women's political participation that exist in these two countries today.

The two countries examined in this paper not only share similar religious backgrounds, but also many cultural and historical similarities. Both Morocco and Algeria are Muslim countries and former French colonies; though colonialism was experienced in different forms in the two countries, important commonalities exist in their respective fights for independence from French imperial power, and the subsequent reconstruction of an Islamic national identity. Despite these

similarities, their outcomes in terms of women's participation in the political sphere have diverged over the past few decades. Clearly Islam alone cannot account for these differences. While it is true that the post-colonial period has been characterized by a general rejection of Western values and the resurgence of Islamic identity as a central feature of political life, the manner in which this identity then affected the political role of women has varied between Morocco and Algeria.

While both domestic and international pressures have impacted upon women's political participation, domestic factors can be seen to have most strongly influenced the outcomes. Given the central role of Islam in post-colonial identity construction in both Algeria and Morocco, leaders in both countries sought to gain the public's approval by portraying themselves as pious rulers in order to legitimize their power. While the Moroccan monarch had a secure source of Islamic legitimacy - his claim to being a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad - the revolutionary government in Algeria had to actively bolster its religious credentials. This difference has fundamentally affected each government's response to economic crises: while in Morocco the king could implement the difficult policies necessary to carry the population through a crisis with minimal domestic opposition, the Algerian government was forced to cater to Islamic groups in an attempt to legitimize its power. This distinction is crucial, as the demands of women's groups - including equal opportunities to participate in public life - were equated with the values of the European powers to which 'traditional' Islamic society had been subjugated.<sup>1</sup> As such, the abolition of women from the public sphere became symbolic of the reversal of these imported values and a return to Islamic tradition. The more a state had to appeal to Islamic groups to legitimate its power, the more strictly women were relegated to the private sphere.

It is important to note that outside of public forms of political participation, women in MENA countries exercise important powers within the domestic sphere - much more so than their Western counterparts.<sup>2</sup> This notwithstanding, women's participation in the traditionally male-dominated public sphere has been bitterly contested in recent decades. While there is significant disagreement over the appropriate division of powers and responsibilities between men and women in modern Muslim societies, such matters are beyond the scope of this analysis. One major factor that has fostered women's increased interest in political participation is education. In both Algeria and Morocco, state-sponsored education of women gave

rise to a generation of women who demanded access to the political sphere directly, rather than through their traditional sources of influence in the domestic sphere.<sup>3</sup>

Lisa Taraki provides a framework of the different modes of women's political participation;<sup>4</sup> it is based on her framework that this paper will assess the relative levels of political participation achieved by women in Morocco and Algeria. Women's participation falls into two broad categories: direct representation in government, parties or revolutionary movements, and participation in civil society through women's organizations established independently or by state or party actors. Although political parties "straddle civil society and the state if they are represented in parliament",<sup>5</sup> party participation will be considered as a form of official participation, since it implies acceptance into the patriarchal political sphere.

While it is difficult to obtain information regarding the formal participation of women, because "most of the relevant data are held by decision-making institutions that do not normally compile and collate the information and are not formally required to report it",<sup>6</sup> the descriptions in this paper give a rough idea of women's political standing in these countries today. Within these two categories, Taraki cites seven specific modes of women's political participation: national liberation and revolutionary movements, women's front organizations (established by parties or movements), political parties, 'establishment' women's organizations (created by the state), independent women's organizations, women in the electoral process and government, and Islamist women's activism. Of these, the first form was realized during both countries' liberation movements, and represents another commonality in Algeria and Morocco's history. This congruence is a handy point of departure from which the divergent developments in women's demands for participation in the decades following independence will be assessed.

In Algeria, the resistance movement that fought for independence from 1954 to 1962 was composed of the Front de la Libération National (FLN), which advocated a secular state, and their military wing, the Armée de la Libération National (ALN). During the eight-year war, thousands of women participated, many as combatants.<sup>7</sup> Among these women, known as the *moudjahids*, many emerged as heroes. Algerian women would look to these fighters for inspiration for years to come: "women's contribution to the war [... became] the voice of conscience of legislators and the battle cry of women in their struggle for gender equality".<sup>8</sup> Despite initial promises to enshrine gender equality in the 1962 constitution,

however, the FLN was to recant its secular, egalitarian positions after achieving independence.

Like their Algerian counterparts, women actively participated in Morocco's wars of independence during the 20th century. Records dating back to the war of independence from Spanish colonial powers – fought from 1921 to 1926 – show active female participation, not only in support activities, but also in armed battle. The leader of the resistance, Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi, played a central role in engaging women in this political struggle. He created a female security force, and considering them to be less likely to generate suspicion than men, employed many women as spies.<sup>9</sup> Towards the end of the struggle, women began to be treated as expendable. As food ran out, Abd al-Karim sent all those deemed 'unnecessary' to the Spanish side – including all the women who had fought in his resistance movement.<sup>10</sup> Women were only granted power when they were needed, and were expected to assume their traditional roles once the conflict was over. This example demonstrates the first instance of a theme that was to recur throughout the history of both Morocco and Algeria: women's political participation is encouraged when it furthers the pragmatic interests of the national leadership, and suppressed when the converse obtains.

Women were once again called upon to actively participate in the Moroccan War of Independence in 1956. As in 1926, they were expected to withdraw back to their traditional positions in the private sphere as soon as the conflict was over.<sup>11</sup> The experiences of both Algerian and Moroccan women in their respective wars for independence demonstrate that both countries have a history of some form of participation according to Taraki's model. Nevertheless, this participation is conditional – based on temporary privilege rather than enduring right – and is suppressed when it is politically expedient. For women in Morocco and Algeria, the opportunity to participate in the political sphere is often the result of broader political calculations made by the ruling elite.

While women's participation in national liberation movements was not effective in creating permanent space for them in the political sphere, independent women's civil society organizations have played an important role in creating this space. The education of women in both Morocco and Algeria, mostly of middle and upper class origin, created the conditions that enabled the emergence of such independent women's organizations – the fifth mode of participation according to Taraki's framework.<sup>12</sup> Though studies have found little correlation between levels of

women's education and their status in government,<sup>13</sup> this factor clearly has had an impact on the women's civil movement. In both Algeria and Morocco, education has given women the knowledge and self-confidence necessary to articulate their demands, as well as the skills to provide services when state or economic crises limited the state's ability to do so.

In Algeria, while women continued to be underrepresented in official political positions and in the labour force throughout the 1970s, state-sponsored education programs inspired a generation of women who would become a restive force for progressive social change. This new generation of educated women would go on to organize into a new women's movement.<sup>14</sup> Most of these educated women who participated in Algeria's independent women's organizations are urban, middle class, and espouse left-wing ideologies.<sup>15</sup> As Imane Hayef noted in her analysis of women's political participation in Algeria in the 1990s, "women with the best education [...] were most often involved in political activities".<sup>16</sup> They are often the loudest critics of Algeria's authoritarian government, and constitute one of the most important social movements in the country.

Morocco's women's education program goes back to the pre-independence period, when reformist elites argued for the encouragement of women's education, which they justified as necessary because women would be the educators of the next generation of Muslim men. Situated within a traditional Islamic context, this reform movement was successful; during the 1950s and 1960s, middle and upper class women were encouraged to go to school. The education they received placed them in a position to fight for greater political participation in the decades to come.<sup>17</sup>

While this movement demanding greater participation has had some great successes in furthering their cause with the state, formidable barriers to greater successes remain. Due to their privileged position, access to education, and higher level of educational achievement, Morocco's upper-class women have naturally played a leading role in the conception and creation of women's organizations; indeed, the Union National des Femmes Marocaines – one of the first of these organizations, and a division of the Party of Progress and Socialism – was presided over by a princess. However, with an elite membership and abstract goals, these organizations have often been criticized for failing to reflect the opinions and priorities of the majority of women; their demands are deemed 'extravagant' by poorer women whose needs are more basic.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted, however, that the

composition of Morocco's women's organizations reflects a broader national trend: Moroccan politics are generally the preserve of the elite.

While women's education has laid the groundwork for the rise of women's civil society groups in both Algeria and Morocco, their class origins in both countries<sup>19</sup> present a significant challenge to their success in enlisting the support of the female population at large for their demands: the abolition of the Family Law, equal citizenship for women, laws guaranteeing equality of the sexes with respect to employment and marriage, abolition of polygamy and unilateral male divorce, and equal division of marital property.<sup>20</sup> The full realization of these goals is partially dependent on their ability to gain the support of the majority of women in their respective countries. Furthermore, not all women active in civil society are working to promote women's political participation. Left-leaning women's organizations, such as the Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines, perceive "inequalities linked to class [...] as more unacceptable than those related to gender inequalities," and criticize their liberal counterparts as selfish.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the difficulties these organizations face in encouraging political participation amongst women in general, factors arising from the political environments in both Morocco and Algeria hinder their success. As Kandiyoti and Marshall have noted, authoritarian regimes in Islamic societies are generally repressive to civil society.<sup>22</sup> Marshall notes that authoritarian leaders can and do make ideologically motivated decisions to increase women's formal participation in the political system. However, the effects of any such revisionist policies are in practice mitigated by these leaders' reliance on Islam to legitimize their leadership and policies in the eyes of the public. Weak or unstable regimes – whether authoritarian or democratic – tend to place a high priority on maintaining the legitimacy necessary to remain in power. Faced with rising Islamist pressures that swept across MENA throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the political leaders of Morocco and Algeria sought to bolster their authority by brushing up their 'Islamic purity' credentials. Since the colonial experience led to the association of women's equality with 'Western' secular state building, women's socio-political issues became an easy target.

Kandiyoti proposes three components of the relationship between Islam, the state and gender politics: the links between Islam and cultural nationalism, the processes of state consolidation, and international pressures that influence priorities and policies.<sup>23</sup> In both Morocco and Algeria, reverence for Islam is the foundation

upon which national cultural identity and political legitimacy are built.<sup>24</sup> Differences in the derivation of this legitimacy have had a strong impact on the status of women's rights in general, and the political participation of women in particular.

Following independence, the secular authoritarian revolutionary government in Algeria presided over the creation of the country's first women's organizations. Unchallenged in the years immediately following the revolution, they could simultaneously declare Islam the official state religion while upholding their secular egalitarian ideology through commitments to gender equality and women's right to vote, as guaranteed in the 1962 constitution.<sup>25</sup> Clearly this was not seen as contradictory at the time. In addition to these constitutional guarantees of equality, the revolutionary regime took concrete steps to increase women's participation in the political sphere: that same year, ten women were elected as deputies of the National Assembly. This post-independence period also saw the creation of the Union National des Femmes Algériennes (UNFA), the first women's organization, as "part of a larger scheme that aimed to mobilize various segments of society in support of the state official ideology, 'Algerian Socialism'".<sup>26</sup>

As a women's auxiliary - a 'front organization', according to Taraki's framework - this organization's activities were pro-socialist, and not concerned with women's political participation *per se*. However, its existence demonstrates that under a secure, secular regime, women enjoyed a degree of access to the political realm. During this period, it was politically expedient for the regime to encourage women to participate in implementing its socialist programs. In the ensuing years, economic hardship and the emergence of an immensely popular Islamist movement would change this situation. In the face of destabilizing accusations of impiety and incompetence, Algeria's authoritarian regime attempted to cultivate public support by replacing its secular-socialist programs with more Islamically 'correct' ones.

The insecurity of Algeria's authoritarian regime, due in large part to its weak Islamic legitimacy, forced the state to cater first to the Muslim clerical establishment and later to the rising Islamist activist movement. In both cases, the approval of a source of Islamic authority was sought in order to legitimate the regime's rule. Soon after independence, President Ben Bella's rhetoric reflected this new approach, which flew in the face of the egalitarian rhetoric of the FLN during the revolution: "The way of life of European women is incompatible with our traditions and our culture [...] we can only live by the Islamic morality".<sup>27</sup> Following his accession to power in 1965, Colonel Houari Boumedienne's government

continued the trend by banning birth control, citing a large population as necessary for national power. Despite earlier advancements in women's human development, by 1967 the situation of women was as it had been before: 10% of girls were married by age 15, 73% by age 20, and the fertility rate was at 6.5 children per woman.<sup>28</sup>

The government's efforts to pander to both the clergy and the Islamist groups were directly related to the level of political participation, or lack thereof, granted to women. The Islamists' rhetoric - including statements declaring that women's role in society was that of 'producing' Muslims, and nothing more<sup>29</sup> - was matched by the government: increasingly conservative legislation, evidenced by the growing severity of the Family Laws enacted between 1980 and 1984, was introduced. While the 1984 Code "satisfied the established clergy, [it] proved insufficient to pacify the [Islamists], who, in fact *were emboldened by it*" (emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> Dissatisfied with the FLN's policies, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) pressed for further, more radical changes.

In a tentative flirtation with democracy, elections were held in Algeria in 1991. These elections led to increased power for the FIS. This Islamist party has consistently opposed the advancement of women's equality in the political realm, amongst others. Caught in the middle of a growing conflict between an increasingly oppressive government and a strengthening Islamist movement - both of which they bitterly opposed - women's organizations were forced from national politics and into hiding. This violent conflict between the government and the Islamist opposition escalated, culminating in a bloody civil war in which women were targeted by both sides; thus, "women's hard-won civil rights [were sacrificed] on the altar of a politics of identity that prioritize[d] control of women".<sup>31</sup> The FIS engaged in a wave of killings of women, often assassinating them in the street simply for not wearing a veil, since this was viewed as an act in defiance of their calls for a return to a more 'traditional' Islamic society.<sup>32</sup> The government consistently failed to protect these women. In 1995, General Liamine Zeroual's government took power, and promptly committed to ending the civil war by promoting dialogue with the Islamist opposition. Throughout Algeria's protracted civil war, women's role in national politics was significantly curtailed. Algerian women's representation in parliament dropped from a stable 6% to 3% in 1999,<sup>33</sup> and many outspoken women's groups and individual feminists were forced underground.

Despite initial similarities with the Algerian experience, outcomes at the nexus of Islam, the state and gender politics in Morocco post-colonialism were

markedly different. The monarchical authoritarian regime installed after independence was more secure, with Islam as a strong source of legitimacy due to the king's claim to being a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. Indeed, one of the titles attached to the Moroccan throne is 'Commander of the Faithful', a testament to this powerful historical claim.<sup>34</sup> As such, women's political participation became more contingent on the king's own preferences or ideology. Coloured by strategic considerations, particularly Morocco's relationship with the West, these preferences formed the basis for an expansion of the political space available to women.

The most important consequence of the strength of the Moroccan monarchy's position was that the king could afford to defy Islamist demands if they were incompatible with his other interests. We can observe this refusal to bow to pressure from this group on several occasions during the reigns of several kings. In 1992, the Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF) launched a campaign to change the Personal Status Code, a piece of legislation that had placed "the woman under male tutelage throughout her life [...] and [institutionalized] the strict division of gender roles".<sup>35</sup> To the outrage of Islamists, the UAF submitted a petition of over one million signatures to Parliament requesting changes to the law.<sup>36</sup> King Hassan II played a major role in the way this conflict played out. Drawing on his religious prestige as 'Commander of the Faithful', Hassan created a commission of *ulamas* and judges to review the proposed changes and suggest recommendations.<sup>37</sup>

By engaging with the petition rather than dismissing it out of hand, Hassan substantiated women as political agents in the public sphere, placing them in competition for influence with the Islamist groups that sought their exclusion. Indeed, the king openly praised women as "ramparts against Islamic fundamentalism".<sup>38</sup> This competition would continue into 1999, when Mohamed Said Saadi presented the *Plan d'Intégration des Femmes dans le Développement* - also known as 'the Plan' - which responded to women's groups' demands by proposing a ban on polygamy among other things. Though the Plan failed due to fierce opposition from Islamist groups, women had made a symbolic gain. Women's civil society organizations had demonstrated that they were capable of influencing government behaviour, and the government had clearly demonstrated its willingness to act on women's demands in defiance of Islamist outrage.

The accession to power of King Mohamed VI in July of that year was a further boon for women's political participation. In a speech on August 20, merely

one month after taking power, the king made his sympathies clear: “How can society achieve progress, while women, who represent half the nation, see their rights violated and suffer as a result of injustice, violence, and marginalization, notwithstanding the dignity and justice granted them by our glorious nation?”<sup>39</sup> He quickly followed word with deed, appointing women to a number of high-profile government positions, including Royal Counselor, Head of National Office of Oil Research and Exploration, and Head of National Office of Tourism; furthermore, he made the first female ministerial appointment.<sup>40</sup> Following these bold moves by the king, the Socialist Party approved a proposal to set aside 30 seats for women in the 2002 elections. Islamist groups’ participation in public life was further marginalized on May 16, 2003 when suicide bombers perpetrated terrorist attacks in Casablanca, the country’s largest city.<sup>41</sup> Lacking credibility, these groups were unable to effectively oppose Family Law reforms in 2004. This controversial legislation went further than the previously defeated Plan by explicitly institutionalizing equality of the sexes. A striking jump in women’s parliamentary representation from 1% in 1995 and 1999 to 11% in 2004 and 2006 is a testament to the dramatic effects of these changes.

Though Morocco and Algeria were both ruled by authoritarian regimes, varying degrees of legitimacy and political control led to different outcomes. A strong authoritarian regime in Morocco with a stable source of Islamic legitimacy was able to marginalize the political impact of Islamism and mitigate its traditionalizing influence on social interaction. Thus King Mohamed IV was able to introduce programs that significantly advanced women’s ability to participate in the public sphere with little serious resistance. In contrast, Algeria’s weak, secular authoritarian regime was forced to pander to the clergy and eventually to the rising Islamist movement in an attempt to relieve pressure on the regime. Women’s rights suffered as a result. Increased tensions between the FIS and the FLN following the 1991 elections made matters worse. The resultant civil war had a profoundly destructive effect on women’s human development in general, political participation included.

In addition to the pressures of domestic Islamist movements, pressure from the international community has had an important effect on women’s participation outcomes in Algeria and Morocco. International pressure pushed both countries to concede some ground to women demanding greater participation in the political sphere. In Morocco, where King Mohamed IV has had more freedom to design policies independent of, and in contradiction to, Islamists’ demands, this

effect has been more pronounced. As evidenced by the above quotation from the king, the advancement of women in the public sphere is clearly one of the development goals that the monarchy has independently pursued. Nevertheless, it has also pacified human rights critics in the international community, laying the moral foundations for a closer relationship with the West and all the economic prerequisites that this entails. In Algeria, international pressure could only come to bear once the eruption of civil war had rendered the possibility of receiving political support from the Islamists a moot point. Weak and beleaguered, the FLN's only hope for maintaining power was to readmit women into public life and thereby to attract Western economic support.<sup>42</sup>

As the nature of women's participation in Morocco's civil society changes over time, international pressure has increased these groups' leverage with the government. Though a number of front organizations are still in existence, the vast majority of women's organizations active in civil society are independent. They generally focus on women's issues such as equality of civil rights, combating violence against women and sexual harassment.<sup>43</sup> These groups have used the tactic of exploiting "the contradictions between the progressive claims of the state and its need to ensure the loyalties of the old patriarchal structures".<sup>44</sup> Insofar as these progressive claims have been made in response to international criticism, external political pressure has provided real ammunition for independent women's organizations. While actual participation in the political machinery of the Moroccan state remains relatively low, the vibrancy of women's participation in civil society may prove the harbinger of future change.

The same unfavourable economic environment that forced the Algerian and Moroccan governments to look for outside sources of aid also created an environment favourable to Islamist groups, whose negative impact on women's opportunities for participation in politics has already been discussed. Marshall offers the following observations that help elucidate the importance of Islamic credentials in the turbulent economic environment of late-developing countries like Morocco and Algeria. Whereas the economic development of the West was largely driven by entrepreneurship, late-developing economies generally follow a more state-centric model.<sup>45</sup> Responsible for the ups and downs of development, late-developing governments need to provide some sort of continuity and hope for its people in order to survive. According to Marshall, "the revival of tradition often [serves] this function, by providing a symbol of continuity which [can] sustain the masses during the social upheavals attendant with industrialization".<sup>46</sup> To complicate matters,

foreign aid is often dependent on the implementation of neoliberal reforms that seek to shrink bureaucracies and diminish government control of the economy. These reforms often exacerbate poverty in the short term and remove important tools of political patronage from the government's hands, undermining regime stability.<sup>47</sup> Under these conditions of social and economic disruption, Islamist criticisms of the government more easily gain currency with the population.<sup>48</sup> These groups blame the government's impious departure from (their interpretation of) traditional Islamic norms for the woes of the nation, and frequently paint women's participation in the public sphere as an important symbol of the profanity of the times.

At the same time as economic hardships of these late-developing countries strengthen Islamist organizations that seek to lower women's political participation, the shrinking of the state associated with neoliberal economic reform makes room for women's groups to flourish and develop their support base among the population. These organizations begin to take over the provision of services nominally provided by the government, gradually integrating themselves into the public sphere. These economic factors therefore interact with the political, which in part determines which of the two rising forces gains more influence.

The case of Algeria confirms Marshall's theory: state-centric economic development followed by a floundering economy in the 1980s eroded the state's legitimacy.<sup>49</sup> In response, the state sought to use Islam to provide continuity in times of hardship. But because it lacked inherent Islamic credentials, the regime began catering to the increasingly influential Islamist groups within the country. As externally imposed economic reforms shrank the state bureaucracy, new spaces emerged for civil society organizations.<sup>50</sup> In this case, because the state needed support from Islamist groups to bolster its hold on power, they were better able to capitalize on the weakening of the state than were women's associations.

It is important to note that Algeria's secular rulers did not immediately look to the Islamists as potential allies in their attempt to enhance their domestic legitimacy. Both the Boumedienne and Benjedid regimes attempted to co-opt the clergy as a buffer against what they saw as an Islamist threat to their power. However, by signifying the regime's weakness and confirming the continuing importance of Islam, this move only served to embolden Islamist groups such as the FIS, which ratcheted up pressure on the increasingly insecure government. Eventually, Algeria's leaders had no choice but to give in to some of these demands,

an example of this being the first of a series of conservative Family Laws imposed in 1980. These developments prompted women to demonstrate in the streets, and ultimately the government was forced to repeal these declarations. Having taken matters into their own hands, these protesters began to realize how useless the UNFA was in defending their rights and formed the first independent women's collective. This episode of economic turmoil strengthened those who sought retrenchments in women's access to politics – and public life in general – triggering the organization of new and more effective groups to fight for women's rights.

Though Algeria's nascent women's rights civil society movements managed to force the government to repeal this, as well as a subsequent 1981 Family Law that was seen as "institutionalizing second-class citizenship for women",<sup>51</sup> the pressures that an ailing economy placed on the FLN did not relent. In 1984, the regime proposed and quickly passed new and even more conservative Family Law legislation before women's groups could protest. This law clearly contradicted the country's constitution, as well as international conventions to which Algeria was a signatory. In response, many new independent women's groups that had been able to organize in the wake of the shrinking Algerian state emerged in protest. Despite the increasing limitations of their legislated rights, a consideration of the various other dimensions of participation cited in Taraki's framework, such as civil society organizations, suggests a net increase in women's political activity at this time.

Persistent economic problems in the 1980s led to riots against the FLN government in 1988, and the FIS gained popularity. Their rhetoric was radically conservative: "the woman is the reproducer of men. She does not produce material goods, but this essential thing that is a Muslim".<sup>52</sup> Women who opposed the FIS were cast by the group as "the avant-garde of colonialism and cultural aggression".<sup>53</sup> Another development at this time was the advent of pro-Islamist women's groups – another mode of participation according to Taraki's framework. This "spawned a network of anti-fundamentalist feminist groups".<sup>54</sup>

The first independent women's associations came together to oppose the Family Law introduced in 1984,<sup>55</sup> a year of deep economic crisis. From 1989 to 1994, there was a significant rise in the number of independent women's movements; roughly 40 exist today.<sup>56</sup> Thus the power of the Islamist and the feminist movements demanding increased women's political participation in Algeria was augmented at this time as a result of economic trouble, though the former gained greater influence.

As in Algeria, economic crisis in Morocco created new political spaces for both women and Islamists. State-driven economic development stagnated in the 1980s, posing a challenge to regime legitimacy and a shrinking of the state.<sup>57</sup> Unlike the Algerian leadership, the king had a stronger source of Islamic legitimacy and could more easily marshal Islamic tradition to provide the stabilizing sense of continuity that Marshall describes without having to cater to the Islamist movement.<sup>58</sup> Since it was not necessary to form alliances with the Islamist movement to bolster the regime's credibility, the Moroccan monarchy was able to attempt to undermine its influence. Conversely, women's associations flourished, as they not only posed no threat to the king's leadership, but also conducted activities that helped reinforce the Moroccan social structure in the wake of a shrinking state. Their activity was in line with the king's West-leaning ideology, and their participation in politics and civil society lent vital human rights credibility to the Moroccan regime, thus improving relations with the West and favouring increases in economic assistance.

It would be untrue to say that Islamist activity had no effect on women's participation in Morocco. With the introduction of the Plan in 1999, Islamist groups mobilized fierce opposition that culminated in demonstrations in Casablanca.<sup>59</sup> Terrorist bombings in 2003 in Casablanca were a painful reminder of the continued resistance to the monarchy's progressive reforms. However, these moves only served to further marginalize the radical groups that perpetrated them. This was clearly a boon to women's organizations seeking greater participation in the political sphere. Coupled with the 1980s' economic liberalization and structural adjustment programs, this marginalization made room for women's groups to insert themselves into the public sphere. This period also saw the proliferation and diversification of women's associations that were independent of political parties and trade unions.

The evolution of women's political participation in Algeria and Morocco has been a complex process influenced by many overlapping forces. While Islam has in many ways influenced the shape and accessibility of the political sphere, one can hardly attribute such diverse outcomes across time and borders to its mere presence in society. Morocco and Algeria demonstrate the complexity of the issue, which has been shown to involve the mode of development, the legacy of colonialism, the political structure and economic stability. Authoritarian regimes that assumed responsibility for economic development were invariably faced with crisis during the recessions of the 1980s. While the hardships of this decade proved too

much for the Algerian government to handle without seeking to gain Islamist support, the Moroccan government had the power to stand up to these groups. As he could claim to be a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, the Moroccan king was able to invoke Islam in enhancing social and political stability without making concessions to Islamist groups that sought, amongst other things, the abolition of women's participation in the domestic sphere.

The preceding analysis of the forces affecting women's political participation in MENA countries brings to light a troubling feature of the conditions of this participation. In both Morocco and Algeria, while women's demands for access to the public sphere in the post-colonial era have been relatively constant, their success has been contingent upon calculations of political expediency by male autocrats. Although strong authoritarian regimes can be conducive to women's political participation, the process is too easily reversed and therefore provides no guarantee of lasting change. Such change can only occur over the long term, through the work of brave women who continue to risk their lives in order to further the cause. These women are the true source of change; as David Waines notes: "where rights and freedoms have been won, [...] the psychological cost of freedom has made many of the present generation of emancipated Muslim women sacrificial victims to a future freer generation of women and men alike."<sup>60</sup>