



# **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA**

Professor Yasmina Chouakri, MA Political Science, Gender Expert  
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## **PROJECT MANAGERS**

Marie-Eve Bilodeau, Resident Director, NDI Tunisia

Caroline Hubbard, Senior Gender Advisor, NDI, Washington, DC

Khaled Mnassri, Senior Program Assistant, NDI Tunisia

Amanda Domingues, Senior Program Assistant, NDI, Washington, DC

Julia Canney, Senior Program Assistant, NDI, Washington, DC

Editor: Ana Canning

Translation: Gabriel Vegh-Gaynor, Project Assistant, NDI, Washington, DC

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# Table of Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1. Surveys	<b>9</b>
1.2. In-depth interviews	<b>10</b>
1.3. Focus groups	<b>10</b>
1.4. Method of analysis	<b>11</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1. Political rights and political participation of Tunisian women	<b>13</b>
2.2. Conceptual framework of violence against women in political parties	<b>14</b>
2.3. Violence against women in Tunisian politics	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT ANALYSIS</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1. Objectives of the assessment	<b>18</b>
3.2. Challenges to women’s participation in political party leadership positions	<b>18</b>
3.3. Guidelines against violent behaviors among party members	<b>19</b>
3.4. Responsibility for preventing violence against women	<b>19</b>
3.5. Experience of violence against women in political parties	<b>20</b>
3.6. The impact of and reporting of incidents of violence against women in political parties	<b>21</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>24</b>
5.1. Recommendations to political parties	<b>24</b>
5.2. Recommendations to the state and public institutions	<b>24</b>
5.3. Recommendations to civil society and women’s organizations	<b>25</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>26</b>



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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA

# Executive Summary

Violence against women in politics remains one of the biggest barriers to women's political participation. Women across the globe are routinely threatened, harassed, denied resources, assaulted, and killed just for exercising their right to participate in the political process. It is widespread, goes unrecognized or underreported, and threatens democracy at its core.

To address this phenomenon, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign in 2016 to stop violence against women in politics. In 2017 it released the No Party to Violence: Political Party Assessment that includes survey, focus group and in-depth interview tools to be used with women and men party leaders and members, in order to develop action plans to root out the violence targeting women within their own political party. Over the last year, NDI piloted this new approach in several countries including Tunisia.

Tunisia is considered a leader on women's rights in the Arab world – its commitment to

equality enshrined in the articles of the Tunisian Constitution. Yet a 2015 survey revealed that 53.5% of women suffered some form of violence in the public space.<sup>1</sup>

The true nature and breadth of violence against women in political parties is not well-documented or understood. To address this lack of knowledge, NDI partnered with nine political parties<sup>2</sup> in Tunisia to identify the manifestations and practices of violence against women in politics and to provide parties with recommendations on how to prevent violence and strengthen women's participation in political life.

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<sup>1</sup> Centre de Recherches, d'Etudes de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme. "Gender-based violence in the public space in Tunisia." <http://www.credif.org.tn/index.php/les-publications/2011-2016/la-violence-fondee-sur-le-genre-dans-l-espace-public-en-tunisie> (2016).

<sup>2</sup> A l Jomhori, Al Massar, Al Qotb, Ennahda, Ettakatol, Harak Tounes-Al Irada, Machrou3 Tounes, Nidaa Tounes, and the Worker's Party.

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## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA**

The assessment revealed that political parties in Tunisia struggle with a “normalization” of the behavior of political violence as part of political practice and the contest for power. The assessment revealed several key findings:

- Know the perception of women’s political participation;
- Violence against women in politics is “normalized.” It is part of political practice and the contest for power.
- While the women interviewed were hesitant to admit it at first, most have experienced or witnessed psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence, or threats of violence.
- A lack of mechanisms that protect women against violence within political parties and a poorly enforced law against gender-based violence perpetuate the problem. When women do report an incident, they face repercussions while perpetrators do not.
- Traditional patriarchy and beliefs that women are ill-equipped to serve in leadership positions emboldens perpetrators of violence.

Study participants also believe that political party leadership, parliamentarians, women’s organizations, and the state all have a shared responsibility of addressing violence against women in political parties. This report issues several priority actions that each responsible party can undertake to address this type of violence including: implementing the law against gender-based violence; developing and enforcing party mechanisms to prevent violence; and increasing the number of women in leadership positions.

NDI hopes that “Violence Against Women in Political Parties: Analysis of the Situation in Tunisia” will put violence against women at the center of democratic concerns of political parties and Tunisian society.

## **LIST OF TABLES AND GRAPHICS**

Table 1: Political party participants

Table 2: Individual interview participants

Table 3: Focus group participants



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## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA

# Introduction

Political parties are the cornerstone of democracies. They are mechanisms for civic engagement, providing citizens with an avenue for participating in the democratic process and exercising their fundamental rights to shape the decisions and direction of their country. They are also the doorway to elected office. It is political parties that provide the “training ground” for young or new politicians, and that recruit, select and support candidates for elections.

As such, political parties can be a gateway to political participation for groups who have historically been excluded from the process, including women. However, because of history, tradition and gender norms, political parties can also be ‘protected’<sup>3</sup> public spaces, allowing and enabling violence against women within their ranks to take place.

As NDI’s #NotTheCost<sup>4</sup> campaign reports, this type of violence is not limited to physical threats or assaults. It encompasses a range of policies, communications and acts committed in person – and increasingly online - that prevent, limit, or control women’s full and active political participation. It is deeply rooted in women’s unequal status relative to men within virtually all

societies. Violence against women in politics is one of the most serious barriers facing politically active women. And its various manifestations impact the vast majority of women who are active in politics.

In political parties, perpetrators and victims of such violence are often members of the same party who are linked to each other by bonds of loyalty, identity and a sense of common cause. This complex internal dynamic must be understood in order to enable and protect the full and equal participation of women in the political process. For this purpose, NDI has undertaken comprehensive in-country studies and analyses of this violence in Côte d’Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania, and Tunisia.

In Tunisia, hundreds of political parties emerged following the 2011 revolution, as activists and citizens engaged in the process of building a democratic country. Yet, as laws that would affect citizens for years to come were being adopted, the fundamental participation of women as law makers and cabinet members was, and continues to be, absent<sup>5</sup>. Currently, only 31.34% of seats in parliament are held by women, ranking Tunisia 42nd in the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s world

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<sup>3</sup> Protected Public Spaces are political institutions—such as political parties and associations, and parliaments—that in a democratic society should be transparent and accountable to the public. However, because of their traditionally elite male power structure and women’s lower status within them (which can in some cases be compounded by the fact that they are deemed to be private associations or have certain privileges attached to them which exempt them from laws and scrutiny faced by other public institutions in the same national jurisdictions), such spaces often allow and enable violence against women within their memberships to take place. Perpetrators and victims of such violence are often members of the same institution. For example, female members of political parties will be victims of violence perpetrated against them by leaders or members of their own party.

<sup>4</sup> National Democratic Institute. “#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics.” <http://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost> (March 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. “Tunisia: Domestic violence, including legislation, state protection, and support services (2012–November 2015).” <http://www.refworld.org/docid/56a783044.html> (January 2016).

## INTRODUCTION

classification of the percentage of women in parliaments<sup>6</sup>.

While Tunisia is considered the leader of the Arab world in terms of women's rights, men still dominate the political scene and hold key political positions in the parties and government. Women who attempt to organize politically face various challenges, including the risk of being exposed to violence. This thwarts their ability to attain leadership positions and influence policy decisions.

NDI conducted this research to better understand the nature, breadth and root causes of violence against politically active women in Tunisia, and to develop an action plan to eradicate this practice so that more women can participate in the political process without fear.

This report includes a description of the methodology NDI used to conduct the assessment; provides general background on violence against women in politics and country-specific information on women's political participation in Tunisia; details the research results; and provides a series of recommendations on how political parties, public institutions and civil society can mitigate violence against politically active women.

Violence against women in politics is a serious problem that constitutes a fundamental violation of human dignity. It discourages women from participating in political processes and undermines democracy and egalitarian governance.

This report is intended to elevate the issue of violence against women in Tunisian politics and raise awareness of its impact on the political process. It is the first step in an effort to build a new political culture – one that does not accept violence against women in politics as the norm.

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<sup>1</sup> "#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics." National Democratic Institute. March. 2016. Web. <<http://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>>

## CHAPTER 1

# Methodology

NDI assessed the signs and practices of violence against women in political parties in Tunisia using the methodology and tools developed as part of its Win with Women: Global Action Plan and No Party to Violence: Analyzing Violence Against Women in Political Parties global initiatives.

Forty-five members from nine political parties representing politicians who serve in both the government and the opposition volunteered to be part of this study. The nine participating parties include:

- **Al Jomhori**
- **Al Massar**
- **Al Qotb**
- **Ennahda**
- **Ettakatol**
- **Harak Tounes – Al Irada**
- **Machrou3 Tounes**
- **Nidaa Tounes**
- **The Worker’s Party**

The study began in March 2017 and lasted approximately eight months. Study components included: a survey of men and women party members, in-depth interviews with women and men party leaders, and focus groups with women party members. NDI analyzed the findings and prepared individual assessment reports and plans of action for each participating party. The Institute aggregated the responses and pulled out key themes for the purposes of this report, which is a publicly disclosed document. More details about each study component are below.

## 1.1 Surveys

NDI designed a 13-question survey for women and a nine-question survey for men that gauged party member perceptions of the:

- Challenges related to the advancement of women within the political party;
- Vulnerability of women in various positions within the party; and
- Experience, recognition and acceptance of political violence against women.

The surveys also gauged men’s explicit or implicit desire to maintain control through violence.

NDI administered surveys both in-person<sup>7</sup> and online to 42 (23 women and 19 men) party members from the eight political parties represented in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP).

NDI administered surveys both in-person<sup>7</sup> and online to 42 (23 women and 19 men) party members from the eight political parties represented in the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP).

<sup>7</sup> NDI's extensive experience indicates that in-person surveys result in a higher response rate. When possible, the Institute utilizes a mix of online and in-person surveys to reach the largest number of participants, and to allow participants to speak with facilitators in-person.

POLITICAL PARTY	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
Ettakatol	6	10	16
Machrou3 Tounes	5	5	10
Nidaa Tounes	2	3	5
Al Jomhori	2	3	5
Ennahda	2	0	2
Al Qotb	1	1	2
Harak Tounes	0	1	1
Al Massar	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>42</b>

## 1.2 In-depth Interviews

NDI conducted confidential, 45-minute, semi-structured, one-on-one<sup>8</sup> interviews with women leaders (president or secretary general) from six political parties to better understand party positions on violence against women in politics. The conversations also raised awareness about the issue and the study.

POLITICAL PARTY	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
Al Jomhori	1	0	1
Ennahda	1	0	1
Ettakatol	2	0	2
Machrou3 Tounes	1	0	1
Nidaa Tounes	1	0	1
The Worker's Party	1	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>7</b>

NDI conducted one-on-one interviews with all the party leaders except one, who was accompanied by a woman party member.

### 1.3 Focus Groups

Finally, NDI conducted two, two-hour focus groups with a total of 15 women party members to collect qualitative data and anecdotes about personal experiences of violence within the parties. Each group was comprised of women with extensive experience working within the parties and holding elected positions at the municipal and parliamentary levels. NDI grouped women from the same party or from parties that are ideologically aligned to create a safe environment in which women could speak openly about their experiences.

<b>POLITICAL PARTY</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Focus Group 1	9	9
Focus Group 2	6	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

### 1.4 Method of Analysis

NDI aggregated responses from the surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews, pulled out key themes and developed individual reports and plans of action of each participating political party. The plans of action include a detailed analysis reflecting the results of the research and recommendations on how each party can strengthen its position toward women. NDI will collaborate with each party to implement the recommendations.

This report aggregates responses across all parties and serves as a public document which elevates the issue of violence against women in political parties and its impact on equality. NDI did not attribute any of the quotes used in the party action plans or this document.

The assessment focuses on the three root causes of violence against women in politics:

**Institutional causes** including a lack of institutional mechanisms, laws or policies that prevent discrimination or limit women's participation in public life. They also include the absence of laws or policies that defend victims of such violence, and norms or structures that address violence against women in political institutions or that promote women's leadership/participation. Other institutional causes that are not directly linked to preventing violence, but can contribute to its emergence include the level of transparency and democracy with which party and leadership nomination procedures are organized. Institutional causes also include an imbalanced distribution of resources like offices, computers, telephones within the party.

**Sociocultural causes** come from discriminatory gender norms, including those that relegate women to the private sphere and privilege men as politicians by nature. Although outlawed, Tunisian society has high levels of violence in the private sphere, rooted in socially accepted norms regarding men’s use of violence to “control” female family members or to sanction them for overstepping their socially-accepted role by speaking up or contradicting a strong-man political leader.<sup>9</sup> These gender norms enable male behavior aimed at excluding women from the political arena or controlling their participation once they enter politics.

**Individual causes** including the ability to understand an act as a form of violence when it is being perpetrated by or against someone. Men and women may lack education and awareness of what constitutes violence against women in political parties, and many women lack a connection to the resources and power necessary to confront or stand up to this violence. Male party leaders have access to power and resources, which enables their ability to perpetrate violence against women. When a male party member is in a powerful position, which is almost universally the case, they have leverage and control that can be used to blackmail, harass, restrict or control female party members. Similarly, men have access to resources, including offices and campaign funds, which as an individual provides them with the leverage necessary to perpetrate violence against female members of the same political party. For example, male party members will threaten to take away or offer resources in exchange for sexual favors.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

<sup>10</sup> National Democratic Institute. “No Party to Violence: Analyzing Violence Against Women in Political Parties.” [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI\\_No\\_Party\\_to\\_Violence\\_ReportFinal.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_No_Party_to_Violence_ReportFinal.pdf) (2018).

## CHAPTER 2

# Contextual Analysis

## 2.1 Political rights and political participation of Tunisian women<sup>11</sup>

Considered a leader of women's rights in the Arab world, Tunisia has made many strides toward increasing the equality and position of women in Tunisian society. This commitment to equality has become enshrined in the articles of the Tunisian Constitution of 2014, which was passed following the 2011 revolution and is considered one of the most progressive in the Arab world.<sup>12</sup> Article 21 declares equality amongst citizens before the law without any discrimination. Article 34 guarantees women's representation in elected assemblies. Article 46 is specifically dedicated to women's rights and grants accrued rights, equal access to all levels of responsibilities, parity in elected bodies, and the eradication of violence against women.

Following the revolution in 2011, only 57 women out of a total of 217 deputies were part of the ARP. While women represented 47% of the candidates in the legislative branch who ran for election, only 12% of candidates at the head of the list were women, according to the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women.

A 2011 gender parity law required every major political party to alternate male and female candidates on their party lists. The law constituted a marked change for Tunisian politicians. It was hailed as an initiative that would help female politicians from more remote areas, including the interior and Southern regions of the country, be more connected to the capital and politics there.

Indeed, women's representation grew within the Tunisian parliament since 2011. In 2014, 31% of the elected officials were women and the first women ran as candidates in the Tunisian presidential elections. In 2015, the ARP had 68 women out of a total of 217 deputies, making its rate the highest percentage of women in the Arab world.<sup>13</sup>

However the efficacy of the 2011 law was stymied by the large number of political parties and low district magnitude, which meant that only candidates at the top of the list were elected. Parties such as Ennahda won a large percentage of seats, which meant that they had a higher percentage of women candidates who were selected from their lists.<sup>14</sup> Despite the introduction of the 2011 law, in practice, the first candidate on a party list is almost always a man. According to the results of a 2014 national survey on women's political participation, women's representation at the head of political parties, unions, and community associations remained weak.<sup>15</sup> The study also revealed that political parties in Tunisia do not keep clear records on the number of women activists or women who occupy management positions within political parties.

In April 2017, the Tunisian parliament passed a bill to increase the representation of women in the country's local elections. The bill -- which passed

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<sup>11</sup> This section provides general context for this research and is not a full assessment of the participation and political representation of Tunisian women.

<sup>12</sup> UN Women. "Tunisia moves closer to achieving gender equality in politics." <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/6/tunisia-moves-closer-to-achieving-gender-equality-in-politics> (June 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. "Tunisia - Assembly of People's Representatives." New Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform (beta) [https://data.ipu.org/content/tunisia?chamber\\_id=13546](https://data.ipu.org/content/tunisia?chamber_id=13546).

<sup>15</sup> CREDIF. "Inégalités et discriminations à l'encontre des femmes et des filles dans la législation tunisienne," Février, 2016

with an overwhelming majority -- requires parties and political blocs to present an equal number of women and men as heads of party lists. This electoral law supports “horizontal and vertical” parity, creating opportunities for women to be elected to office.<sup>16</sup> The law also calls for gender equality in municipal and regional councils, ensuring that the quota law affects women at a sub-national level. The result: women accounted for 47% of those elected in the May 2018 municipal elections across the country.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Conceptual framework of violence against women in political parties

Violence against politically active women is a serious problem that discourages women from participating in political processes; constitutes a fundamental violation of their human dignity; undermines democracy; and is an obstacle to the strengthening of egalitarian and non-discriminatory societies. The problem has been hidden, unknown, unrecognized or ignored. It is considered part of the “normal” practice of politics, the struggle for power or the “price to pay in politics.” Violence against women in politics has three special characteristics:

- It targets women because of their sex;
- In its very form, violence can be gendered, as evidenced by gender-based threats and sexual violence;
- Its impact is the discouragement of women to be or become politically active.

NDI defines violence against women in politics as: *A harmful act perpetrated on a woman in politics against her will. It encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation of women as political actors simply because they are women. These acts, whether addressed to women as political or civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or*

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<sup>16</sup> Horizontal parity requires that municipal election lists across Tunisia have equal number of both men and women, while vertical parity requires that men and women alternate within each list. Both were adopted by the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP), the Tunisian parliament, on 15 June 2016. Out of 134 representatives, 127 agreed to the new measure. UN Women. (June 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. “Country View: Tunisia.” Gender Quotas Database. <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/284/35>.

*appointed officials, are designed to restrict women’s political participation as a group. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics.*

NDI’s research reveals that women in politics around the world report similar experiences, although their nature, intensity and impact differ in different political contexts. There have been notable attacks against politically active women in environments with well-established democratic systems and norms in place to include women in the political process. However, when violence is directed against women with fewer resources or coping mechanisms, it can silence their voices and stymie their participation in the political process. Particularly vulnerable are women who are marginalized, or physically or geographically isolated. In those cases, women are subject to all kinds of abuse and mistreatment.

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<sup>18</sup> National Democratic Institute. #NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics: A Call to Action.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Demonstrations of violence against politically active women take the following forms, all of which have distinctive characteristics when implemented in the field of politics: psychological, physical, sexual and economic. NDI categorizes violence as follows:

### **EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Involves hostile and abusive behavior designed to cause fear and/or emotional harm. In politics, there may be threats of physical violence, coercion, defamation, sexual harassment, social boycotts (increasingly common on social media), and acts aimed at harming social status and the image of women. This type of psychological violence seeks to delegitimize women as political actors, undermining their trustworthiness, competence and visibility in political and public spheres. Its negatively affects the way women are portrayed and therefore, how they are perceived.

### **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**

involves injuries and bodily harm inflicted directly on women or their loved ones, to thwart their political participation. They include killings, kidnappings, beatings and domestic violence.

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Includes sexual acts and attempted sexual acts through coercion, including unwanted sexual comments or insinuations. Examples include sexual harassment (and even rape) to force women to “trade” sexual favors to win an appointment or obtain funding.

### **ECONOMIC VIOLENCE**

Involves coercive behavior to control access to economic resources. For example, women may be systematically denied access to the financial

and economic resources to which they are entitled under the law (whether for political training or campaigning) and which are accessible to their male counterparts. Further, voters may be denied funds to force their vote or to prevent them from voting.

### **THREATS & COERCION**

May be verbal or physical indications of intent to cause harm or to commit acts of violence. Coercion is the act of persuading or forcing someone to do something using threats of violence.

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What is common to all documented experiences is that violence impacts the ability and willingness of women to participate in public life. It affects women at each stage of their political engagement: as activists, candidates, and as elected office holders. While its severity depends on the type of political violence experienced, at the very least, each victim’s personal integrity is harmed, and human rights violated.

Violence against women in politics also negatively impacts women’s ability to fully enjoy and exercise their political rights. It hinders their participation and their political representation, often leading them to give up a political career after holding an elective position. The emotional, psychological and physical toll of participating in politics extinguishes the desire of other women who aspire to participate in political life. It threatens democracy at its core -- as democracy without the equal and active participation of half of the population is impossible.

## 2.3 Violence against women in politics in Tunisia

Violence against women in politics is widespread and alarming. A 2015 survey conducted by the Center of Research, Studies, Documentation, and Information on Women (CREDIF) found that, of Tunisian women interviewed between 2011-2015:

- 53.5% of women suffered a form of violence in the public space; of this 53.5%:
- 78% of women suffered psychological violence in the public space;
- 41.2% of women suffered physical violence in the public space; and
- 75.4% experienced sexual violence in the public space.

Protections against gender-based violence in Tunisia are a relatively new development. In 2017 the Tunisian parliament passed a national law against gender-based violence. This historic law ensures that violence against women is now a public concern and will not be brushed aside as a private or familial issue. It is comprehensive, encompasses all forms of violence (physical, moral, psychological, sexual, economic), and establishes victims' rights to judicial and psychological assistance.

The legislation passed has been accompanied by a series of political party reforms that stipulate individual rights to organize and participate in politics; denounce hateful discourse; and increase transparency around campaign finance and candidate selection. However, none of the laws and party reforms mention violence against politically active women - a point raised by women in the focus groups and interviews.

Despite official provisions in the constitution and the legal code, testimonials captured as part of NDI's study clearly demonstrate that politically active Tunisian women continue to face violence and harassment, notably via social media. Many women were subject to violence or sexual harassment because they hold a position in the

party that is "not theirs" to hold:

*"I experienced violence because of the management position I held [in the party], which was considered to be a man's position. I was attacked on Facebook with harassment and [my] private family details [were shared]."*

### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

The study revealed that violence takes various forms including verbal abuse, threats, and pressure; it occurs at any time and in any place; and it is carried out by members of the party as well as by persons outside the party. The women in the focus groups and interviews reiterated that coming forward about violence has always had consequences for the victims, and none for the perpetrators:

*"The victim is ignored if she files a complaint. Victims [will] still complain [to party leadership] except if it is of a sexual nature... certain victims left their political parties, others went to women's organizations or other types of employment.."*

### A FEMALE PARTICIPANT OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

## CHAPTER 3

# Assessment Analysis

## Introduction

This section details the assessment objectives and findings from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with 45 members from the nine participating political parties. NDI organized its findings around five key, interrelated issues:

1. Challenges of women's participation in leadership positions;
2. Guidelines against violent behaviors among party members;
3. Responsibility for preventing violence against women;
4. Experiences of violence against women in political parties; and
5. Impact of and reporting on violence against women in political parties.

### 3.1 The objectives of the assessment

The nature and breadth of violence against women in politics and political parties in Tunisia is not well-documented or understood. The purpose of this study is to assess violence against women in political parties, and provide parties with recommendations on how to prevent violence and strengthen women's participation in political life. The specific objectives include:

- Gauge the perceptions of women's political participation;
- Understand how women in political parties experience violence including: the

manifestations of violence, who the perpetrators are, common types of violence, and the impact on the victim; and

- Identify the presence or absence of mechanisms that combat violence and promote women's political participation.

### 3.2 Findings of the assessment

NDI's assessment revealed that women face barriers to attaining leadership positions within their political parties. The respondents believe that these barriers stem from prejudices held against women and a perception that women are unqualified or ill-equipped to hold the same leadership roles as men. The respondents shared experiences of being passed over for a leadership role in favor of an unqualified man or needing to show an excessive amount of experience and confidence to be given a leadership role. Many of the women in the focus groups found that they had experienced the same barriers as women in other parties.

*“Women of all parties are in the same boat. A real segregation exists. When parity is respected in the political bureau, [it is only on] the condition that the women [chosen for leadership] are chosen by the men.*

#### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

*“...there are no rewards for women who work even harder than men [within the political parties]. Women are capable but they are not given their chance, or those who are members of the executive bureau must always still prove something.*

#### FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

*“The woman must snatch her spot and the struggle is not balanced. Even if the parity within political parties helps, she is still [viewed as] not sufficient and the challenges are significant for women who wish to occupy a leadership role... stereotypes, the fact that access to posts is favored according to seniority, and women’s need for training.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Additionally, the study revealed that gaining access to leadership positions does not render women less vulnerable to violence. Many of the participants stated that their leadership position did not prevent them from being harassed or experiencing another type of violence.

*“The victims of violence were primarily candidates at the time their incidents took place. For the other victims, one of them occupied an official position within the party, and another was an elected or assigned political authority.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

### **3.3 Guidelines against violent behaviors among party members**

The majority of participants (women and men) indicated that oral and written directives or mechanisms exist to govern internal rules of conduct and behavior among members of political parties. However, they agreed that these directives do not address violence against women and are ineffective in protecting women from violence perpetrated within a political party.

*“These rules forbid violence in general. The political parties made no mention of violence against women. That is what renders [these rules] ineffective...It is the question of mutual respect between party members which is primarily put into place in these directives and then later on, violence in general, physical or verbal forms, and abuses.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Women participants stated that when they attempted to use the mechanisms to report an incident, too often they were the ones who experienced repercussions while the perpetrator experienced none.

*“The victim was removed and there were no consequences for the perpetrator of the violence...there were no consequences for the perpetrators, notably even in the scenario where the perpetrators were deputies.*

**A FEMALE PARTICIPANT OF THE FOCUS GROUPS**

*“The perpetrator admitted his acts and was publically excused. He kept his position within the party and promised that he would be respectful.*

**A FEMALE PARTICIPANT OF THE FOCUS GROUPS**

### 3.4 Responsibility for the fight against violence against women

The women interviewed agreed that political party leadership, parliamentarians, women's organizations, and the state all have a shared responsibility for addressing violence against women in political parties. The focus groups identified several individuals and entities they believe should be involved including: the state or interior minister; the police, who need to be trained on how to handle these cases; women's organizations to accompany victims; the women's minister; the medical body, which needs to be trained in forensics policy; the justice department; and the education department. The women acknowledged that despite verbal commitments indicating that there is political will to combat violence against women, the entrenched patriarchal mentalities of Tunisian politics prevent productive laws from being implemented or enforced.

*“The party’s leadership has the responsibility to prevent or stop harassment, physical or sexual violence, threats, or the pressure that occurs within the party.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“Especially the party leader, the secretary general, the executive bureau and then the members of the state.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“Even if the laws protect women in Tunisia, their application poses problems. There are still older laws (than the recent laws) which remain unapplied. There must be rules within the party better adapted to the needs of women.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

### 3.5 Experience of violence against women in political parties

The majority of women participants experienced or witnessed psychological, economic and sexual threats and violence while carrying out their political party functions. These realizations were slow to come out, as many of the women found that they were unwilling to admit they had been victims of violence. Their experiences included:

- Threats made by male family members;
- Indirect familial violence which prevented them from being politically active;
- Economic violence and the denial of resources;
- Physical violence;
- Denigration;
- Facebook attacks and harassment where their private details were publicly shared;
- Exclusion from the electoral level;
- A culture of segregation within the party which excludes women; and
- Repercussions from parity rules not being respected.

The women also identified instances of psychological violence including defamation, slander, personal attacks, media harassment, hateful discourse and accusations that the participation of women in politics is immoral.

*“There was physical violence, [the victim was] pushed, and verbal insults between two members of the party.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“Following a problem between a very competent [female] regional coordinator and certain [male] deputies, the victim was removed, without respect for the rules or the decisions which must be made by a majority of 2/3 of the political committee.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

Regardless of the whether or not the women held leadership roles, they agreed that they remained susceptible to the same type of violence they faced as regular party members. The circumstances in which the incidents took place varied widely, ranging from victims’ homes, polling stations, and political party locations. The women agreed that there is a normalization of this violence, and that this normalization prevents parties and leaders from being able to prevent the violence.

*“It is a problem of mentality, a way of functioning. [The violence] is a problem of widespread behaviors.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“Certain men are scared of women who engage in politics.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“[The incidents] took place during the elections, stemming from the voters of the president who propose a bid.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“[The incidents] were also coming from a friend or a husband because of [a woman’s involvement] in politics.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

### **3.6 The impact of and reporting on violence against women in political parties**

The accounts reveal that violence against women in a political party can have negative effects on the party itself, particularly on the credibility and image of the party. This in turn could prevent people from joining the party or could lead to a decrease in the party’s power in government.

*“If a political party cannot protect the women within it, how can it do that for Tunisian women?*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“There is a negative impact which can diminish confidence and participation, and tarnish the image of the political party.*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

The participants believed that other women become dissuaded from participating in politics after witnessing women face violence. Further, the women believe it has an impact on the confidence of politically active women, whether or not they remain in politics. The participants expressed that the violence affects the morale of politically active women and prevents young women from engaging in politics in the first place.

*“Either there is a lot of discouragement for certain victims, or other [women] take their place [in politics] despite everything and they do not realize [what will happen].”*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“It is a failure to win, a loss, particularly amongst young women.”*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

All the participants agreed that denouncing the perpetrator or reporting their incident always had negative consequences for the victims including being forced out of leadership positions or the political party altogether. In other instances, women resigned on their own in order to avoid future abuse and harassment.

*“The victim who complains is either removed or she ends up resigning on her own.”*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“A third of the victims left or were removed, and only one kept her position [in the party].”*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

*“Some victims left political parties, others went to women’s organizations or other types of employment.”*

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT**

## CHAPTER 4

# Conclusion

NDI's assessment uncovered several significant findings on violence against women in Tunisian political parties. The testimony given by political party members as part of this process reveals that violence against women in politics occurs despite the presence of laws and policies governing party member conduct and outlawing gender-based violence. Several factors contribute to this ongoing practice and behavior:

- It is “normalized” and deeply rooted in individual, sociocultural and institutional causes.
- The presence of violence against women in political parties is not recognized, acknowledged or understood.
- There are no political party mechanisms that are designed to specifically root out violence and protect women party members.

Violence against women is an enormous problem faced by politically active women when they attempt to enter or stay in politics, with detrimental consequences for women, the parties and Tunisian society.

This assessment affirms a need for party-specific work to end violence against women within political parties in Tunisia. It serves as an inflection point for parties as they work toward becoming more democratic and inclusive, and a first step in ensuring the unbridled and equal participation of women in Tunisian political life.



## CHAPTER 6

# Recommendations

### 6.1 Recommendations to political parties

#### 1. Protect women from violence within political parties

- a. Explicitly mention human rights, equality, and non-discrimination in objectives and principles enshrined in the statutes, regulations or other foundational documents of the parties, to provide the framework for sustaining internal actions for progress towards equality and inclusion
- b. Put in place and respect the laws enacted to fight violence against women
- c. Put in place mechanisms to protect women from all types of violence against them, and penalize the perpetrators
- d. Create an ethics committee and a disciplinary committee to protect women from violence which they can suffer within political parties
- e. Consider and denounce conjugal and familial violence within political parties
- f. Protect women when they file complaints on violence against them

#### 2. Put in place measures adapted to the needs of women within political parties

- a. Establish corrective measures and functioning rules that are democratic, adapted to the needs of women within political parties, and take into account work-life balance
- b. Establish meeting hours and locations that are suitable to women in the Tunisian context
- c. Educate and sensitize advocates and members of political parties on women's needs and violence against women

#### 3. Promote women's participation within political parties, including in leadership roles

- a. Put in place legal and practical measures to enable women to fully express their political rights and participate in the public sphere
- b. Diversify the portfolios which women work on in political parties, and offer more substantive tasks to women within political parties
- c. Publish data on women's leadership in political parties

#### 4. Improve party structure and ensure independence

- a. Provide training on the independence of political parties
- b. Ensure financial independence of political parties by state financing which accounts for women and their needs

- c. Ensure the financial autonomy of women so that they may finance their electoral campaigns and carry out their political party functions responsibilities

## **6.1 Recommendations to state and public institutions**

### **1. Fight violence against women in political parties**

- a. Put in place structures, policies and laws that combat violence against women in all societal institutions
- b. Develop housing and programming to protect women victims of violence
- c. Establish an independent observation body which identifies violence against women and men and regularly reports on the information
- d. Introduce a ban on all violence against candidates into the code of good electoral conduct for political parties

### **2. Promote women's political participation**

- a. Implement the law on parity for candidates
- b. Establish concrete measures to facilitate women's participation in political life such as quotas within political parties
- c. Ensure controlling of political parties' financing is undeclared
- d. Oppose and renounce clientelism which disenfranchises women

## **6.1 Recommendations to civil society and women's organizations**

### **1. Fight against all forms of violence against women**

- a. Ensure that laws against gender-based violence are respected
- b. Educate all relevant actors in society on violence against women
- c. Denounce and hold accountable perpetrators of violence against women
- d. Regularly gather data on violence against women and publish it

### **2. Change the perception of the political process**

- a. Lift prejudices towards politics and change the perception of politics within society

### **3. Promote women's political participation**

- a. Educate women on how to enter politics
- b. Help women develop the self-confidence and skill sets needed to participate in politics including developing campaign and lobbying strategies

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