

Consolidated Response

# Financing Women Candidates in Muslim Countries

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## Introduction

Despite comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to lack access to political leadership opportunities and resources at all levels of government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Governance structures which do not result in the equal participation of men and women, or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are by definition neither inclusive nor democratic.

In 2007, recognizing that over the last century women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, five international organizations came together to make women's political participation their collective priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the organization's efforts to foster gender equality in politics:

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)  
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)  
National Democratic Institute (NDI)  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics ([www.iKNOWPolitics.org](http://www.iKNOWPolitics.org)) is an online network, jointly supported by the five partner organizations, that aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics.

In just three years, iKNOW Politics has become the leading website on women's political participation. Building on a library of over 5300 resources, iKNOW Politics has captured the combined experience and knowledge of its 92 global experts and 10,000 members from over 150 countries. iKNOW Politics has documented and disseminated the lessons and best practices of women as voters, candidates and elected legislators.

The following is a printed version of one of the most frequently-cited iKNOW Politics knowledge products, based on the combined input from experts and members worldwide. Please visit the iKNOW Politics website to pose a question of your own, contribute to the online discussions, browse the resource library or read additional iKNOW Politics consolidated expert responses, E-discussion summaries, interviews with women leaders, or contact iKNOW Politics at [connect@iknowpolitics.org](mailto:connect@iknowpolitics.org) to get in touch with a staff member in your region of the world. iKNOW Politics is available in **English, French, Spanish and Arabic.**

## Consolidated Response on Financing Women Candidates in Muslim Countries

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*This consolidated response is based on research conducted by iKNOW Politics staff and contributions submitted by the following iKNOW Politics experts: Boutheina Gribaa, Project Advisor, and Giorgia Depaoli, Project Coordinator, "Strengthening women's leadership and participation in politics and decision-making in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia" Project implemented by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) in partnership with the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR); Shabnam Mallick, Program Advisor, UNDP/Arab States; and Roula Attar, Resident Country Director, National Democratic Institute (NDI)/Jordan.*

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### Question

Given restrictions in Muslim countries, how do women fundraise for their political campaigns? Are there any strategies or laws that help women candidates gain access to campaign funding? - Asli Mona

### Introduction

In many Muslim countries, women are not financially independent and they have to rely on their husbands or male relatives, such as fathers and brothers, to provide for the family. In some Muslim countries, women are not even allowed to own land or property themselves. Such conditions complicate women's participation in politics and make the funding of political campaigns extremely hard. Speaking to the experiences of women in the Muslim world, Shabnam Mallick, UNDP's Arab States Program Advisor, mentions that most women candidates raise their money not through resources provided by governments or development agencies, but through personal funding networks such as family connections, traditional sources of community wealth, and social standing. (Expert Opinion, 2008) If a woman does not have her family's support, it is very hard for her to cover campaign expenses by raising funds externally. Lack of financial means is cited as a key barrier for women seeking political leadership roles in Indonesia in the assessment of Women's Political Party Programs conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI). The assessment points out the following:

*"Even when a woman has some level of financial strength, she is often impeded by her socially subordinate role that may result in her husband's refusal to support his wife's political aspirations." - (2008. p.48.)*

This consolidated response highlights barriers faced by women in Muslim countries in funding their political campaigns and participating in public life. The consolidated response also discusses the impact of existing legislation, political parties, women's organizations and international institutions on women's participation in politics in these countries and provides strategies to overcome it.

### **Impact of Legal Framework on Financing Political Campaigns**

In many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the legal framework securing public funding for candidates is very weak and non-existent, in some cases. Muslim countries that have laws and regulations on public funding do not specifically target women candidates and create more opportunities for them to raise funds in a culturally restrictive environment. Speaking about Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, Boutheina Gribaa and Giorgia Depaoli from UN-INSTRAW mention that there are no affirmative action measures implemented in these countries to provide women access to financing in presidential, parliamentary, and local elections. Individual candidates do not get any support from the government for their campaigns. Rather, parties receive public funding based on the number of seats they hold in Parliament and the percentage of votes they gather during national elections. For instance, the Party Finance Law of 2006 in Morocco specifies four sources of funding that include membership dues, donations and gifts up to DH 100,000 per year per donor, income generated from social and cultural activities, and the annual government support. The state gives financial support annually to political parties that have obtained at least 5% of the votes cast in general elections. The amount of the government support is based on the number of seats each party holds in Parliament and the number of votes obtained by each party in the general elections. (Expert Opinion, 2008.) Although government support is not the only source of funding, in most cases political parties depend on it. Moreover, the distribution of funds according to parliamentary seats the party holds is usually not beneficial for smaller parties. For instance, in Tanzania after the landslide victory in 2000 election, the leading Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party received \$547,000 in the form of government support, while the combined parliamentary opposition parties draw less than \$50,000 a month. (Bryan, S. and Baer, D. 2005. p.129.)

In describing political and legislative obstacles faced by women candidates in financing their campaigns, Roula Attar, iKNOW Politics Expert and NDI's Resident Country Director in Jordan, points out that most countries in the Middle East and North Africa region do not have campaign finance laws. Therefore, wealthy candidates, who are usually males, have a tremendous advantage over other candidates. To change the situation and promote women

candidates in the region, Ms. Attar recommends that countries adopt proper campaign finance laws and establish independent entities that can openly and legally endorse women candidates and provide financial contributions to their campaigns. (Expert Opinion. 2008.)

### **Role of Political Parties in Financing Women Candidates**

Formation of political parties and party pluralism in some Muslim countries is a relatively new trend. According to International IDEA's reports, party pluralism emerged in Jordan and Yemen only in the early 1990s. Besides party pluralism in Yemen being a very new development, political parties are further weakened by the existing system of single member district elections based on the First Past the Post (FPTP). This system discourages party alliances, leads to splits within parties, and hinders women candidates who have to overcome significant barriers to win a district's single seat. (Mejid, Z. et al. 2005.) Roula Attar mentions that since political parties in the Middle East and North Africa region remain weak, they are unable to adequately contribute to the campaigns of women candidates. (Expert Opinion. 2008.) In its assessment of women's political participation in Morocco, NDI has found the following:

*“Money is one of the greatest barriers to women aspirants. Political parties in Morocco receive no campaign funding from the government and rely largely on individual candidates to finance their own campaigns, thereby putting women at a disadvantage. According to Moroccan political experts, what little money parties do have to fund campaigns is rarely, if ever, provided to women candidates.” - (Assessing Women's Political Party Programs: Best Practices and Recommendations. 2008. p.36.)*

A useful strategy for gaining support of political parties to women candidates would be to ensure public funding for parties that nominate a certain percentage of women candidates in elections, which will be a great incentive for political parties relying on public finance. Another strategy is to adopt punitive legal measures for parties not representing women candidates in their nominations list. For instance, Julie Ballington cites the example of France, where the amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution states that 50% of candidates on election lists must be women, or political parties face financial sanctions. (Ballington, J. 2005. p. 181.) If political parties are forced or incentivized to include women in their party lists, they will have to provide them with at least some financial support to run their

campaigns. A first step toward providing financial incentives to political parties nominating women candidates was made in Morocco in October of 2008, when the Minister of Interior announced that the government will offer financial incentives to the parties that successfully field the most female candidates in the local elections on June 12th, 2009. (Maghreb Times. 2008.) Although this measure has not been implemented yet, it is a critical first step toward promoting more women candidates in politics in Morocco.

Another strategy to secure party's support to women candidates and their campaigns is to sensitize internal party platforms and hold parties accountable to their gender equality commitments. According to the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), developing score cards has been an effective tool, making visible gender differences and identifying politicians that represent gender equity interests. WEDO also highlights that establishing an effective and functional women's caucus empower women candidates and help ensure equal access to the party's resources, guaranteeing that financial management has a gender perspective. (Women Candidates and Campaign Finance. 2007.)

Fundraising through Women's Organizations and Other Civil Society Institutions With the growing costs of political campaigns, fundraising has become an essential part of every campaign planning strategy. Many researchers point out that fundraising is more difficult for women than men due to a number of reasons, including the psychological barriers women experience asking for money and insufficient access of women to moneyed networks. Roula Attar points out that the concept of political fundraising remains culturally alien to constituents in Arab societies; therefore, women candidates shy away from it and hesitate to ask even for in-kind donations. In Bangladesh, where the costs of running an effective campaign are rapidly growing, women are seldom able to raise the large sums required to win an election, particularly if running against a male candidate. In the 2001 election, of the 36 women candidates, just five were elected in constituency seats. (Ballington, J. 2003. p. 164.)

Besides personal connections to candidates, there are no incentives for individuals and organizations to donate money to political campaigns. It is important not only to work with women on enhancing their skills in campaign fundraising, but also to change the culture of public donations in societies that are not accustomed to donating to political or social campaigns. One of the strategies widely used in some western countries is to provide tax incentives for donors. For instance, Karl-Heinz Nassmacher mentions that:

*“Following the introduction of tax incentives in Canada, the share of individual donations has increased considerably and has reduced the potential influence of large contributions in Canada.” (2003. p.39.)*

Furthermore, Roula Attar highlights that women’s organizations in the Middle East and North Africa region are mostly royal groups or semi-governmental entities, the laws of which prevent direct financial contributions to political campaigns. (Expert Opinion, 2008.) In many countries, women’s organizations are considered important vehicles for mobilizing resources for women candidates and rallying behind women’s political campaigns. Restrictions on women’s organizations deprive women from critical sources of campaign financing, which could be critical in mobilizing needed resources. In the countries where the role of civil society organizations is restricted, international organizations have taken a role of bridging the gaps. Some international institutions partnered with local non-profit organizations in helping women to raise funds for successful campaigns. Roula Attar points to the Women Helping Women (WHW) Network as a good example. Women Helping Women is a peer network of women activists dedicated to supporting women candidates in Jordan. The network provides its members training in strategic planning, program oversight, public speaking and media relations for civil society and political activists.

Given the barriers women face in obtaining public financing, some women have employed very creative tools to raise funds for their campaigns. One of the most successful and innovative projects is the Arisan process in Indonesia. Through this process, women create groups that contribute weekly to a pot of money, which each participant wins at some point. According to a respondent of NDI’s assessment, women typically participate in the Arisan process to meet a lot of people, to read the Koran every week together, and to network among each other and other members political parties. The respondent also mentions that this process allows political parties to network and to get more supporters. (Assessing Women’s Political Party Programs: Best Practices and Recommendations. 2008. p.51.)

Given the culture in Muslim countries, fundraising through social networks, such as the Arisan in Indonesia, would be one of the successful tools that women candidates can employ to gain support in public and raise funds necessary for their campaigns. At the same time, women’s organizations can influence the internal policies of political parties by advocating for increases in the numbers of female party members, promoting women to key party positions, nominating women to party lists, and distributing party funds equally among men and women candidates. This can be another way of promoting women in politics

without making women personally fundraise during elections. Unfortunately, not many women's organizations have been successful in working closely with political parties to support their female party members and advocate for their nomination in elections. One of the recommendations made in International IDEA's report on the situation of women in Yemen is that political parties and women's organizations should develop strategies for change and create alliances in order to serve as an example that governments may follow. (Mejid, Z. et al. p. 6. 2005.)

## **Conclusion**

Women in Muslim countries face a range of barriers in participating in politics not the least of which is raising funds for their political campaigns. iKNOW Politics research and experts indicate that besides cultural and social resistance to women's participation in politics, an insufficient legislative framework, weak support from political parties, and inability of women's organizations to contribute to women's campaigns take away the alternative avenues for fundraising from women candidates in Muslim countries. Some of the useful recommendations to overcome these barriers included adopting more comprehensive laws on public financing of political campaigns and providing incentives for political parties nominating women in their party lists. iKNOW Politics experts also suggested widely using civil society institutions, including women's organizations, in providing support to women candidates and their campaigns.

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