

Women and Political Participation: Communal Elections in the Rif

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Abstract

Although Morocco has made great efforts to eradicate patriarchy, inequalities persist. Women in this country gained the right to vote in 1963, immediately after independence. From then on, different parts of Morocco have witnessed the pivotal role women have been playing in politics, actively calling for their rights and more reforms. Notwithstanding this, there are some parts of the country where women are reticent to talk and be involved in politics. Therefore, elections and campaigns are carried out somewhat without women and their voices, which are valuable solely when used by men to achieve their goals. In light of this, it is hypothesized that women who are living in Ait Hazem, a village belonging to the Rif region of Morocco, do not play an effective and pivotal role in politics. These women do not decide on whom to vote because their votes are only exploited by men close to them to attain their pragmatic goals. This emanates from the patriarchal nature of the community, women's lack of education, the absence of women's rights activists, and the deficiency of campaigns that sensitize women to the importance of elections.

1. INTRODUCTION

Friedman (2005) defines citizenship as “an identity; a set of rights, privileges, and duties; an elevated and exclusionary political status; a relationship between individuals and their states; a set of practices that can unify or divide the members of a political community; and an ideal of a political agency” (p. 3). However, throughout history, women of all classes, races, ethnicities, and religions were denied state citizenship, while men enjoyed this identity (Friedman, 2005). Hart (1976) asserts that Riffian¹ women are given harsh roles inside and outside the domestic sphere, but they are excluded from the politics of the community. The collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community constitutes what is referred to as democratic politics (Fick, 1999). Therefore, political citizenship is the cornerstone of democracy (MacDonagh, 2002). In this regard, this article investigates illiterate women's participation in elections held in rural communal areas.

Political participation of women all over the world is different from that of men. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) define political participation as “any activity that has the intent or effect of influencing governmental action, either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies” (p. 38). By using this definition of political participation, participating in politics can mean a variety of activities, such as voting, attending a demonstration, signing a petition, being a candidate in elections, discussing politics, being a member of a political party, and the like (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995). So far as this explanation of political participation is concerned, this research adopts elections as its main area of study.

Political participation is understood as a citizen activity aiming to influence the government and public policy process. Norris, Lovenduski, and Campbell, (2004) claim that political participation can be understood from two approaches: the conventional approach and the contemporary approach. The former refers to the mass level rather than recruitment into elected or appointed office among elites. It is particularly measured by indicators such as voting turnout and party membership. In contrast, modern definitions seek to incorporate informal political activity, including protests, social movements, voluntary activities in pressure groups, civic associations, charities, and other associations (Norris, Lovenduski, & Campbell, 2004). Having this in mind, it is interesting to explore women and elections, women and political parties, and women’s political activism in NGOs in the Moroccan context.

Having this in mind, this research mainly addresses the participation of women in politics, particularly elections, in a village called Ait Hazem in the Rif region of Morocco. Throughout this research, attention will be paid to the hypothesis that these women do not play an effective and pivotal role in politics. Their votes are only exploited by men close to them in order to attain their personal and pragmatic goals. This could be caused by many issues, such as the patriarchal nature of the community, women’s lack of education, the absence of women’s rights activists, and the deficiency of the campaigns that sensitize women to the importance of elections for hoped change. Emphasis is put on women and the way they are considered by men who lead political campaigns and exploit women’s votes.

This article attempts to answer these main research questions: Who are these women? Do local political campaigns address women and their issues? Do they understand the programs presented by political candidates? If not, why? Do women vote according to their own will? What are the reasons that hamper women’s effective role in politics?

Before exploring women’s participation in communal elections, it is of significant importance to highlight the participation of Moroccan women in the political domain. In other words, since this research lends itself to the participation of women in elections, it is worth proffering some background information about women and elections, women and political parties, and women’s political activism. This article also includes the methodology used for conducting the study, the results, and the discussion of findings.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Women and Political Participation in Morocco

Concerning electoral participation, Erradouani (2009) defines it as one of the indicators of political regimes’ democracy. It reveals the openness of a political regime, avoiding the oligarchy of institutions and providing the possibility to alternate the authority. It shows a participatory political culture that helps a political regime avoid a fracture between authority and citizens and between the elite and the masses. This fracture is likely to threaten the stability of a political regime because stability is considered the ground to reinforce democracy. Fick (1999) asserts that elections substantiate a nation’s democratic process, and democratic politics

is the collective and participatory engagement of all citizens, women, and men, in the determination of the affairs of the community.

Notwithstanding this importance, elections in countries where democracy is lacking from the very beginning seem very helpless. It is claimed that Moroccan people do not have confidence in elections because “the struggle between political parties is not a struggle to make Morocco better” (Liddel, 2009, p. 82). Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that Morocco improves step by step in terms of democratization (Storm, 2007; El Hachimi, 2018).

Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, and Meyer (2007) contend that in the MENA region, the majority of the people adhere to Islamic patriarchal precepts. The dearth of democratic values explains the gender gap in women’s political participation in this region. The more religious people are, the less supportive of gender equality they are. In Morocco, many factors intertwine to impede Moroccan women from enjoying this right. These obstacles can be social, cultural, religious, educational, or political. Moreover, in Morocco, participation in elections, either as candidates or voters, differs from one region to another. In the Rif region in Morocco, women do not participate equally with women from other regions due to very strict social restrictions (Chaqir, 2015). However, the Moroccan King Mohammed VI emphasizes in his speeches that being modern and democratic necessitates gender equality and the contribution of women to Moroccan politics (Darhour & Dahlerup, 2013). Similarly, Moroccan women have enjoyed the right to vote and run for office since 1962 (Tahri, 2003).

Political parties are central to representative democracy and the process of democratization. They are “crucial for long-term political development in emerging democracies” (Burnell, 2004). However, the diversity of political parties does not make a country democratic unless they are open to all individuals. McDonagh (2002) states that party competition positively influences women’s political recruitment. This idea can push women to be more active in political parties and show their abilities. However, political parties work in a misogynistic way, considering women as less capable than men. Within these political parties, important positions are held by men, while women are allotted the role of working in libraries and committees for propagating elections (Wafi, 2008). When political parties are not based on gender equality, they do not function well (Burnell, 2004). Darhour and Dahlerup (2013) assume that “Moroccan party leadership is...still a male-dominated field and, therefore, women have difficulties in having their voices heard” (p. 8). It is also contended that this marginalization of women manifests in parties’ creation of women’s sections, which is perceived as a ‘political Harem’ (Wafi, 2008).

The Moroccan Constitution requires political parties to represent all citizens (Gribaa, Depaoli, & Baklouti, 2009). The presence of Moroccan women in political parties and parliament has increased, though they still encounter some problems (Zaanoun, 2022; Gribaa, Depaoli, & Baklouti, 2009; Ballington et al., 2012; Benstead, 2012). In terms of running political parties, in 2006, Zhor Chekkafi became the Chairwoman of the Socialist and Democratic Party (PSD) (Gribaa, Depaoli, & Baklouti, 2009). In addition to this woman, there exists currently a political party run by a woman named Nabila Mounib, who is the second Moroccan woman to preside over a political party (El Fattah, 2022). Moroccan women also struggle in the women’s movement and NGOs, where they play an important role in bringing women’s issues to the forefront of debates (Beckwith, 2010; Gribaa, Depaoli, & Baklouti, 2009). Sisters of Purity was the first Moroccan women’s non-governmental organization, which appeared in 1946. After the appearance of Sisters of Purity, the Moroccan feminist movement flourished due to the pressure it exerted in Morocco’s political arena (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006). The period from 1956 to the end of the 20th century witnessed the heydays of the first feminist movement. During that time, women activists were upset by the Mudawwana of 1957, which deprived women of many of their rights. Moreover, from the 1980s onward,

they were in a clash with the Islamists, who were threatening their concerns. The first Moroccan woman to be involved in a very political ceremony was Malika al-Fassi, who served as a model of emulation and a patron to the subsequent generation of successful female activists (Maddy-Weitzman, 2005). In 2011, the February 20th Movement “brought young women to the forefront of unprecedented change in their country” (Rahman, 2012, p. 330). Though they oppose the changes in the *Mudawwana*, other women from the Islamist parties have also been very active. An example of this is Nadia Yassine, the daughter of the founder of the Charity and Justice Organization Abd al-Salam Yassine (Wuerth, 2005).

3. METHODOLOGY

This research explored the participation of women in elections in a rural village called Ait Hazem, existing in the Rif region of Morocco. The village belongs to the Igzennayen tribe, and it administratively belongs to the Fes-Meknes region. This village is 66 km away from Al Hoceima, 102 km away from Nador, and 94 km away from Taza. Its inhabitants speak Tarifit, an Amazigh variant. The majority of women in this village do not have access to public space, while they are given domestic roles as housewives. A few women in this village carry out some outside roles, such as bringing grass for the pets. Most of the women are illiterate, and many others are dropouts. Because of the existence of a High School and a secondary school in the nearby town, a Multidisciplinary Faculty in Taza, and a Multidisciplinary Faculty in Nador, the number of girls who carry on their education is increasing.

This study focused on whether women and their issues are considered in the elections that are held, whether their participation is effective, or whether they are just exploited by men. The aim behind the focus on this village is attributed to various reasons. Firstly, it is the place where I live, so, as a researcher, I aspire to study the problems with which this village and the Rif region in general are teeming. Secondly, my field of research is Women's and Gender Studies, so it is incumbent upon me to probe the lives of women who are subjugated in this village in all walks of life. Last but not least, I believe that electoral participation plays an important role in the development of communities since those candidates that we vote for should be elected on democratic and reasonable grounds.

In conducting this study, a mixed-methods approach was used. I made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to increase the validity of the data. I opted for triangulation of data collection methods in order to cross-check the findings and ensure the reliability and credibility of data and, thus, the quality of the findings.

I made use of questionnaires, which is a quantitative data collection instrument. In this study it has the strength of eliciting quantitative data related to the factors that intersect to exclude women of Ait Hazem from effective political participation. The questionnaires were translated into the Arabic language; some of them were conducted face to face, and others were distributed through the Internet.

In addition to questionnaires, I made use of interviews, which is a qualitative data collection method used to investigate attitudes, opinions, behaviors, feelings, and motives of the women and men of Ait Hazem concerning the topic under research. This important instrument allowed respondents the time and scope to talk about their opinions on their participation in elections, allowing me to elicit in-depth information. One of the strengths of this instrument is that it helped draw comparisons between different respondents' attitudes and opinions about elections. It is from interviewing that in-depth information was elicited. Therefore, 10 interviewees from the female residents of Ait Hazem were selected, and I interviewed them face to face. In fact, it was very difficult to conduct as many interviews as possible due to reasons that will be explained in the limitations. To make this study more credible, 10 men from residents of the aforementioned village were interviewed. Of the 10 male

interviewees, one was a candidate competing in the 2009 communal elections. Because now he was outside Morocco, I only interviewed him via WhatsApp.

One of the methodological limitations is the fact that questionnaires did not allow me to have access to a large number of respondents. This instrument was chosen particularly to elicit information from educated people who are from the region of Ait Hazem. Thus, 100 questionnaires were distributed, but 50 ones only were successfully received. Another limitation is related to interviews, which did not include a large sample of the population. This is ascribed to the fact that it is difficult to have access to women in Ait Hazem since they are in the domestic sphere. Another problem with this method is the fact that some women did not feel at ease enough to answer the questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Women's Electoral Participation in Ait Hazem

There are many explanations for the rarity of women in the political field. In the Western world, researchers have found some factors, such as gender stereotyping, prejudice towards female leaders, party identification, the sexism of voters, the gender gap in political knowledge, failure to express political attitudes, and the willingness of women to participate in politics and women doubting their leadership abilities (Schoonbeek, 2009). In this research, the findings reveal the reasons that result in the rarity of women in the political domain in Morocco. Morocco is a country where women are still thought of as employing the position of a mother and a housewife, roles which are considered the backbone of the spiritual well-being of the family and maintenance of social order (Schoonbeek, 2009).

Political campaigns that are made by candidates in rural areas, such as Ait Hazem, do not consider women and their issues. The interviews I conducted with some women who live in Ait Hazem reveal this fact. These Hazem are not targeted in political campaigns; the majority of women are not aware of what happens in the political field since they are kept inside their homes. They rarely go out, so they do not attend such occasions as political campaigns. In other words, women are considered only as votes that are used to support male candidates. To clarify this point, it is important to mention what was said by a female interviewee, who is named Fatima. She said that during the elections she participated in, she never heard any news about them [meaning candidates]; she went further to say, "It was only on the day when men from my family would come to take me in a car and bring me back that I recognized that elections were held." Sadly, it is understood that women are kept inside their homes, and the candidates did not, or could not, inform them about their programs.

One can contend that the elections are a matter of men in the village under study. Therefore, candidates do not cater to women and their issues. The seventh interviewee, who is named Karima, stated that news of elections was "the talk of men, and we just heard them when they would discuss them." Women do not actively participate in elections since they are not informed of all that is related to such occasions. It is argued that "one factor does explain the democratic deficit: the subordination of women" (Rizzo, Abdel-Latif, & Meyer, 2007, p. 1153). Put differently, though men may work actively in order to make the elections very successful, their exclusion of women is conducive to their failure.

Fascinatingly, women do not understand what a political program, which is presented by a candidate, means. By explaining it to them clearly, they said that they always encountered papers during the time of elections containing photos of men whom they did not know and scripts that they could not understand. In other words, the posters used for political campaigns are written in Arabic, which is a language that they are unable to understand or read. When female interviewees were asked whether they had heard in the previous elections about any candidate who was clamoring for enhancing women's lives in Ait Hazem, they all stressed that

they did not know anything concerning this. Similarly, the information that was elicited from the interviews that were conducted with male interviewees reveals this, in the sense that they pointed to the fact that women are not listed as a priority for the candidates.

Figure 1 palpably shows that political campaigns do not address women's issues and do not target women. Here, the respondents were asked about the issues that they encountered in the political programs offered by the candidates competing in previous elections, especially in the communal ones.

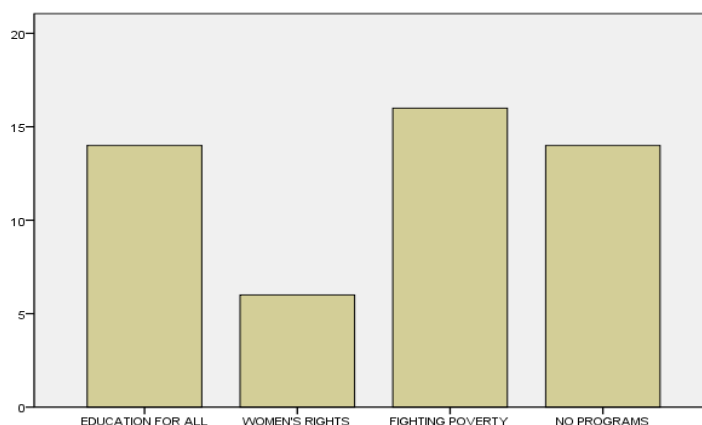


Figure 1: the issues that predominate in the political programs offered by candidates during elections.

Put differently, the candidates who competed in the elections that were held in Ait Hazem did not target women and their issues. This can be explained by the fact that women occupy the domestic sphere and do not participate in the occasions where men operate. It is a village where gender segregation prevails. In other words, the fundamental principle of democracy, being stressed by the Universal Declaration on Democracy, is not maintained in this context. The principle puts a premium on the idea that "The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences" (Johnsson, 1999, p. 3). To sum up, men do not collaborate with women to have successful and fruitful elections.

4.2. Women and Voting

Voting is a right that is enjoyed not only by men but by women as well, for Morocco insists on the participation of all individuals. In fact, women in Ait Hazem vote in nearly all the elections. However, they either do not vote according to their will or they do not vote for the candidate that they may prefer. All the women who were interviewed asserted that they follow what men dictate.

According to the information elicited from the female interviewees, women do not choose to vote for the candidate they want. To illustrate this, the fourth female interviewee made it clear when she said, "Men took me to vote depending on what they would tell me." Moreover, the seventh female interviewee asserted that her father told her for whom to vote. The fifth female interviewee said, "My husband told me for whom to vote; I do not vote willingly." The sixth female interviewee also reiterated this idea. The first interviewee, who is a very old woman, said, "My husband would crack the whip, and I would vote for whomever he chose."

Though some women were not forcibly compelled to vote, they never chose for whom to vote. For example, both the second and third female interviewees claimed that they were never compelled to vote. In other words, they were free to vote if they wanted. However, they put a premium on the point that they voted for the candidates chosen by male guardians.

In addition to this, it is obvious that women are not aware of the essence of elections, particularly in terms of the significance of voting. Figure 2 shows the respondents' opinions, elicited from questionnaires, concerning women's perception of their electoral participation.

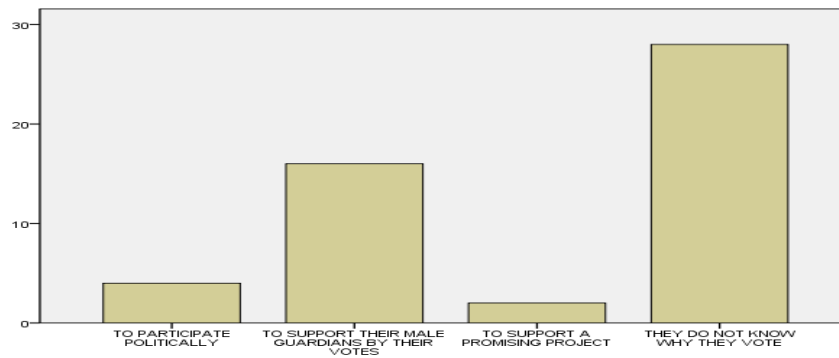


Figure 2: women's perception of elections

As the interviewees asserted, it appears here that women do not have a clear understanding of the meaning of elections. Most prominently, many emphasize the idea that women do not know why they vote. Furthermore, by consolidating the claim that women's votes are not given to the appropriate candidates willingly and convincingly, in the above diagram, the respondents also chose massively the idea that women vote in order to support their male guardians. In brief, no one can deny that the candidates do not endeavor to inform women and make them aware of the essence of elections, as already contended previously. Other reasons explaining this will be illustrated later.

In contrast to women's ignorance of the essence of elections and their passive participation, women's male counterparts vote willingly to support a person they know or a project being presented by a certain candidate. All the males that were interviewed stressed this idea; they all converged in saying that voting is performed willingly rather than coercively. By asking them about women's votes, they revealed that women just follow their fathers, brothers, or husbands blindly.

Having all this in mind, it is found that women's votes are just exploited by men for their own personal purposes; this idea can also be gleaned from the subsequent chart that was got from the question that was included in the questionnaires.

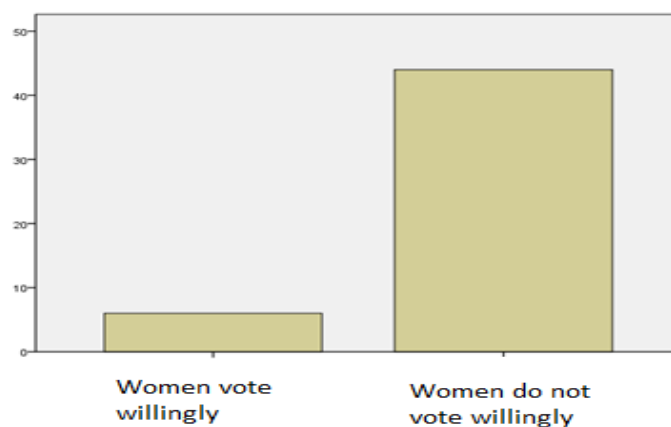


Figure 2: The respondents' opinions about whether women of ait hazem vote according to their will or they do not

The above chart consolidates the idea that men who live in Ait Hazem dominate women in that they compel them to vote for the candidates they prefer or they force them not to vote. Specifically, about 44 of the respondents claimed that women do not vote willingly, while only 6 others said that they vote according to their own will. As a result, the elections lose their credibility, and thus, women are kept remote from the politics of their community. Fick (1999) asserts in this regard that women do not enjoy social and civil rights as benefits of citizenship until they receive the political rights, which are crucial to citizenship. Clearly, women of Ait Hazem are robbed of very basic human rights, such as education and freedom, in its very broad meaning (as palpably elucidated in the subsequent section). Therefore, the establishment of their citizenship as equal to men can bring about their fundamental rights.

4.3. The Factors behind the Exploitation of Women's Votes

According to the study conducted, different reasons were found, and they are all summarized in three main reasons: illiteracy and lack of further education, patriarchy, and the absence of women's rights activists. The subsequent ideas elucidate this by showing and analyzing the information that was gleaned from both interviews and questionnaires so far as those reasons are concerned.

From the interviews that were conducted with both women and men in Ait Hazem, it was found that illiteracy and lack of further education contribute highly to the passive role that women play in political participation. Unfortunately, the inability to read and write is prevailing among women in Ait Hazem. This idea was made clear when the fourth respondent asserted strongly her ignorance of writing and reading, particularly when she said, "I do not know even how to write my name". All the women I interviewed uttered this statement.

Moreover, the inability to read and write makes women in Ait Hazem unable to understand the function of elections. They speak Tarifit, the Amazigh variant, and they have never been taught how to read Arabic. Therefore, to ensure the active participation of all individuals, the mother tongue of the Riffians should be used in campaigns, posters, and advertisements. To substantiate the effects of their inability to understand the language used, all the women who were interviewed averred that they do not know what is the purpose behind holding elections. For the second and the fifth interviewees, all they know about elections is that "somebody is going to succeed." In other words, these women reckon that elections are held in order to give somebody a job, but they are aware of the fact that the elected ones have to take great pains to work for the common good.

On the contrary, men clearly explained the functions of elections because they were not illiterate. For example, the second interviewee stated that elections are held in order for the

people to choose an appropriate person to work on behalf of others for the common good. More importantly, as for the idea that “somebody is going to succeed,” men, interviewees, know what success in elections means; they went further to illustrate the idea that candidates compete to win in elections for their own purposes. All in all, illiteracy is a real obstacle in women’s way to effective political participation.

Another question, which is “How did you hear about the elections you participated in?” confirmed the argument that the prevalence of illiteracy results in women’s faint political participation. According to the first female respondent, in the elections they participated in, she and the other women in her family did not know about the coming of the elections until the days they were held. She added, “We would be taken in cars by men and vote without knowing anything.”

Illiteracy truly stands as a thorny obstacle to the effective political participation of women. This claim manifests apparently during political campaigns when women hardly understand the programs proffered by candidates. The fifth interviewee illustrated this by saying she could neither understand the purpose of distributing papers nor could she understand their content. She meant by papers the posters and fliers used during campaigns.

Equally important, women of Ait Hazem are not even aware of the role that a nominee is assigned. When asked about this, they admitted that they did not have any idea about the role of the nominee, though they knew about the person who won the previous communal elections. Interestingly, the fourth woman used a Riffian proverb to stress her ignorance of the role that is played by the elected person, which is translated as “I do not know whether he goes upward or downward.”

In light of all that is said, it is important to reiterate that illiteracy contributes to women’s faint political participation. In fact, the respondents to whom questionnaires were distributed confirmed this idea. The following chart makes it clear by showing that respondents chose the idea that illiteracy is one of the main factors.

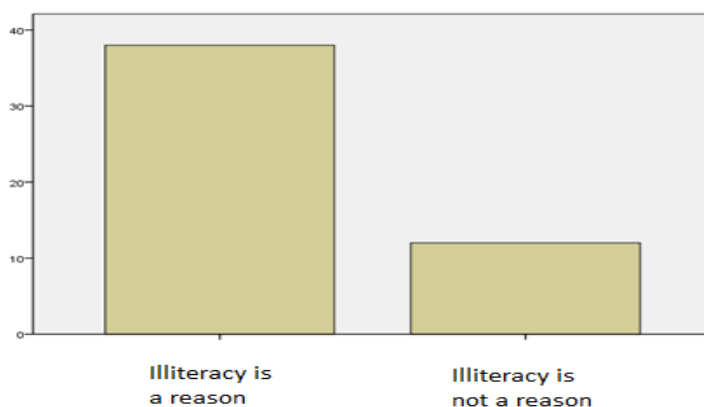


figure 3: Illiteracy as a reason behind the exploitation of women’s votes by men

It is understood from this chart that illiteracy prevails among women of Ait Hazem. The majority of the respondents stress that it is illiteracy that makes women’s votes in that village be exploited by men. In other terms, when a person is illiterate, he/she cannot know why he/she is ordered to vote. Therefore, elections lose their credibility, and thus, individuals do not effectively contribute to the development of their communities. Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam (2003) argue that “educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them” (p. 2). Put differently, because women of Ait Hazem

are illiterate, they are not politically active, and thus, their political rights are exploited by men for their benefit.

The prevalence of illiteracy in the village under study manifests clearly in the findings elicited from the questionnaires. Indeed, the majority of the respondents are males, while females constitute only a small number of the respondents. This graph shows that 41 respondents are males and 9 ones are females. This discrepancy is very telling here. It reveals the fact that girls are not allowed to have an education and to continue their studies, while this is not the case with men.

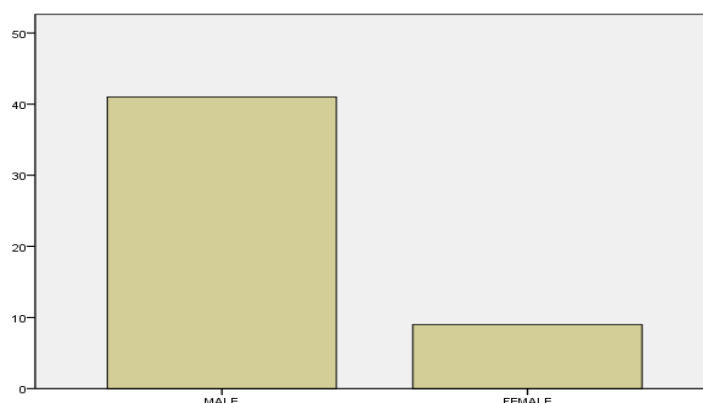


Figure 4: The gender of the respondents.

All in all, it is to be said that Morocco is still far away from equating its citizens. Indeed, Morocco has hitherto failed to apply on the ground the rights that are specified clearly in Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which ensures that women, on equal terms with men, have the right “to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies” (UN Women, 1979, Article 7).

Political participation is an autonomous decision that individuals make. However, in rural areas such as Ait Hazem, women are not free, for they are deprived of the most fundamental human right, which is education. Moreover, being deprived of this fundamental right, men succeed in exploiting women from different walks of life, particularly on occasions such as elections.

Patriarchy in rural areas of Morocco, such as Ait Hazem, manifests in different walks of life. All the women who were interviewed hinted at the fact that men oppress them. By answering the question, “In the previous elections, did you vote according to your will?” the first interviewee said, “My husband used to tell me for whom to vote” she added, “he would crack the whip, and I would vote for whomever he chose.” Equally important, patriarchy is evident during elections; women are not taken into consideration by the candidates; during the day of the election, they are taken, sometimes by force, to vote for the candidate chosen by the male guardian.

Patriarchy is very obvious in Moroccan rural areas, such as Ait Hazem. Specifically, this idea can be noticed clearly in the village in the sense that women rarely go outside their homes. Fick (1999) asserts that “women’s reactions and sometimes even words are considered taboo in the street” (p. 68). Women’s access to the public space can destabilize the male order because their bodies are still considered a site of *fitna* or chaos (Mernissi, 2011). In this respect,

the following chart illustrates the point that the patriarchal nature of Ait Hazem consolidates the exploitation of women's votes by men.



Figure 5: patriarchy as a reason behind the exploitation of women's votes by men.

Interestingly, Figure 5 elucidates that Ait Hazem is a very patriarchal village. A significant majority of respondents (22 out of 30) identified patriarchy as a reason for the exploitation of women's votes by men, compared to only 8 who did not consider it a factor. In this respect, it is important to foreshadow the idea that the Rif region of Morocco is very patriarchal or has been rendered so, compared to other parts of Morocco. Chafiq (2015) argues that electoral behavior is affected by numerous beliefs and social behaviors resulting from common norms. The Rif region is known, particularly in the postcolonial period, for the barriers that restrict women.

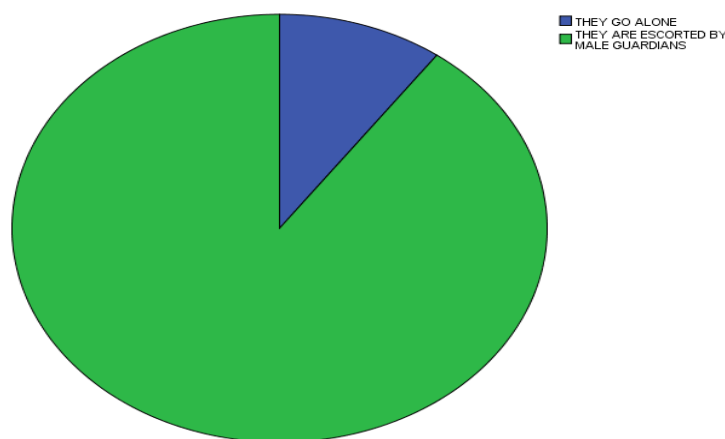


Figure 6: Respondents' opinions about whether women go to vote alone or with male guardians.

To substantiate the idea that patriarchy affects women's political participation negatively, Figure 6 reveals the fact that women in Ait Hazem are still kept under the control of men. The diagram demonstrates that women do not go outside their homes without the company of male guardians. Therefore, even when they go to vote, men escort them. Given this, Sadiqi and Ennaji (2006) reckon that in patriarchal societies, "the public space is seen as a dangerous space where women might meet with men who are not part of the family" (p. 89). In other words, in

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Ait Hazem, the public space is dominated by men, and women are just led to perform some tasks in it temporarily. Their role during the time of elections is very subordinate in comparison to the crucial role played by men. All in all, the idea that men exploit women's votes is consolidated here.

Women's ineffective political participation in Ait Hazem can also be attributed to their lack of awareness of the role of their rights in this regard. Indeed, illiteracy and the absence of women's rights activists contribute to the lack of awareness. These activists can be vital in sensitizing women and men to the importance of voting for appropriate candidates.

The candidates who compete in elections, do not address women. In other words, the candidates in Ait Hazem only address men. Women who were interviewed insisted that, during the bygone elections they participated in, they never heard about any candidate being interested in enhancing women's lives or addressing their issues. Following this, women's importance lies only in their votes, which are exploited by male guardians, who use them for their ends.

In light of talking about women's rights activists, it is very crucial to foreshadow the fact that those activists who attempt to emancipate women do not succeed. An interview was conducted with a man who was a candidate competing in the communal elections of 2009. To give a very short description of this person, he is an educated man having a university degree. I asked him the question whether he included women's rights in his program; he answered that he was very anxious to change the situation of individuals in the village under study, especially women, but he failed to convince the inhabitants for different reasons. When asked about these reasons, he put them as follows: "The inhabitants are still restricted to the tendency to support candidates they know for the sake of personal benefits; the inhabitants are still unaware of the importance of women's rights, and the educated people do not vote." To clarify the point that educated people do not vote in Ait Hazem, the following chart is very clear in this regard:

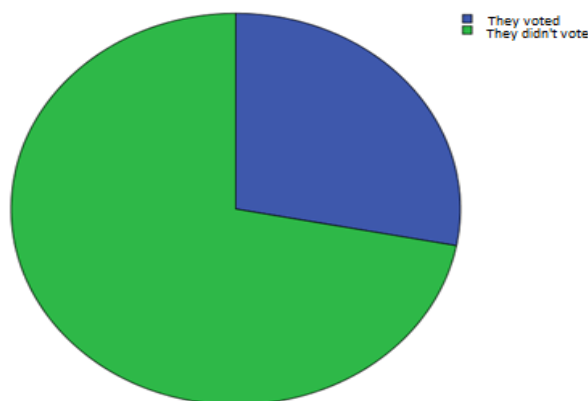


Figure 7: The number of respondents who participated in the last communal elections.

Obviously, women's rights are not supported by the residents of Ait Hazem since most of them are illiterate, and some do not tend to emancipate women due to the patriarchal mindsets that prevail. However, most of the educated people who are alleged to change these mindsets do not vote, in the sense that 36 of the respondents to whom the questionnaires were distributed averred that they did not vote in the last communal elections. Therefore, it is difficult for women's rights activists to change people's behaviors and established beliefs in such an environment, but this needs much work.

In addition to this, the absence of women's rights activists is elucidated more palpably in the subsequent graph:

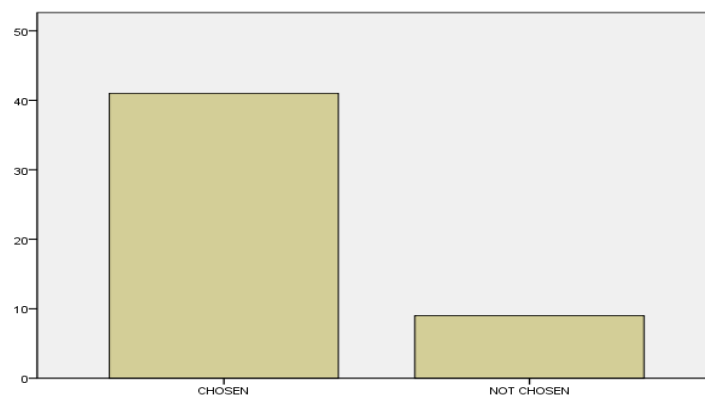


Figure 8: The absence of women's rights activists as the main reason behind the exploitation of women's votes me.

Since the Rif region of Morocco is known for being too conservative and strict in terms of treating women, Ait Hazem does not contain individuals who call for women's rights. As is already shown, the candidates who compete during elections do not proffer programs that focus on enhancing women's situation in the village. Though they focus on other issues, such as education and fighting poverty, they do not target women. As the above statistics make clear, the majority of the respondents chose the absence of women's rights activists as another reason that makes men exploit women's votes.

Fascinatingly, in the interviews that were conducted with women, I asked the following question: Are you aware of any project to empower women in Ait Hazem? All the interviewees said that they had never heard about any project that aimed to do something for women. The same question was asked to men, and they all stated that they had never heard about any person who attempted to provide something for women. The second male interviewee, who showed that he had an interest in politics, claimed that "women are subordinate in our village, and candidates know that it is not necessary to focus on women's issues". In this respect, one can say that the patriarchal nature of the community excludes women's rights.

However, by including the above question in the questionnaires given to educated people, the results were somewhat sparkling. Before embarking on the analysis of this idea, the following chart shows the findings.

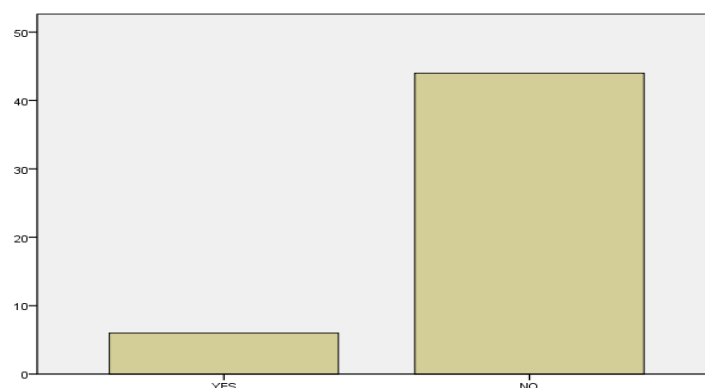


Figure 9: The Number of Respondents Who Know About Any Project to Empower Women in Ait Hazem.

In other words, 6 of the respondents stated that they are aware of a project to empower women in Ait Hazem, while 44 said that they do not have any idea about the question. The six respondents have a university-level education. Pertinently, they all converged at pointing out one project that was aimed to be applied in the village, as in other villages of Morocco. They said that at the beginning of the last decade, there was a program to educate illiterate men and women. Unfortunately, some men started to be involved in that program, but they failed to continue, whereas women were not allowed by men to fight illiteracy.

All in all, the village under study lacks the existence of people who can clamor for women's emancipation. As a consequence of this, women are kept illiterate and thus weakened, a status that allows men to exploit women in every aspect of life, especially their political rights.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the political domain in Moroccan rural areas, such as Ait Hazem, is still male-dominated. Specifically, women are not allowed to operate in this domain for various reasons. These reasons can be social since the nature of the village is patriarchal par excellence. Moreover, patriarchy intersects with other subsequent reasons, such as illiteracy and the absence of women's rights activists.

Equality means that all individuals enjoy all rights and freedoms. Indeed, this is universally stressed if a country endeavors to reach a real democracy. However, this study revealed that Morocco has not succeeded in applying on the ground the slogans that are often proffered to enhance its image to the world as being democratic.

Based on data from the interviews and questionnaires, it is evident that women's political participation does not parallel that of men, particularly in terms of voting. Although women vote in the elections, it does not mean they are politically active. They are politically passive, since they are sometimes compelled to vote without their consent; others have the freedom to vote or not to vote, but they do not choose the candidate for whom to vote. All this emanates from the patriarchal nature of the village under study, from the prevalence of illiteracy among those women, and from the absence of women's rights activists, whose role is to sensitize people about the importance of the establishment of women's rights.

To crown it all, the slogans that are often raised concerning Morocco's way to democracy can be refuted. Indeed, the real political participation of women is still absent. In other words, there is still inequality between individuals, especially between men and women. Therefore, article 8 of the Constitution states that "men and women enjoy equal political rights and all citizens of the age of both sexes, in the exercise of their civil and political rights, are voters" (Tahri, 2003, p. 1) is not applied on the ground effectively. Interestingly, it is important to foreshadow the idea proffered by The United Nations Development Program, saying, "No society can achieve the desired state of well-being and human development, or compete in a globalizing world if half its people remain marginalized and disempowered" (Inglehart & Norris, 2003, p. 65).

Before ending, it is worth revealing the difficulties of conducting this research. The first is the difficulty in approaching a large sample of the population due to the conservative nature of the people who do not allow women to go out. The second is the reluctance of the people to express their opinions about politics in general and elections in particular, particularly since they were informed that they would be recorded. Another limitation of this research is the dearth of respondents to whom questionnaires were distributed. Only 50 people filled out the questionnaires; six were given face-to-face, and 44 others were distributed through the Internet, because most of the educated people of Ait Hazem reside in cities. Despite the difficulties and

limitations of this research, future research should be conducted to approach a huge number of respondents.

5.1.Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it seems very important to list some recommendations that can be taken into consideration to ensure that the political participation of rural women parallels that of men. Most importantly, the Moroccan government must consider educating illiterate women in rural communities. Once education is secured for all individuals, patriarchy is going to dissolve step by step in that people will know the importance of women's rights, and women will effectively participate in the politics of their communities. In addition to this, educated people belonging to rural communities, such as Ait Hazem, should sensitize the inhabitants of the village about the issues and rights of women. In so doing, they will help the government make the desired changes. Equally important, the candidates who compete in the communal elections must be educated people, but not illiterate ones whose purpose in enrolling in politics is to reach their objectives. As a consequence of this, the candidates, who are educated, will proffer programs that cater to women because they know their important roles in development.

All in all, it is of great interest to note that women will benefit themselves and their community at large when these recommendations are taken into consideration. Specifically, they will be responsible for their votes, and they will vote for the candidates they prefer. Consequently, the community will be enhanced due to the effective participation of all its residents. Given all this, the real sense of democracy will be attained.

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ⁱ The word Riffian is used to refer to the people who live in the North of Morocco. They speak the Amazigh variant Tarifit.