

Print Media Coverage of Moroccan Female Politicians

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Abstract: This article explores the issue of print media coverage of women electoral candidates during the communal elections of June 2009 and November 2011 respectively. It is true that Women politicians have become increasingly visible in the Moroccan public life. Yet, there are various obstacles to political participation that women face and which exist at different levels, and are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural norms and practices in the political sphere of Moroccan society. Indeed in addition to the social stereotypes and prejudices that still view female members as weak and in need of protection, women in electoral politics have to face the prejudices of one of the most powerful weapons of the political war i.e. media. In this respect, this article has as an aim to analyze the print media coverage of Moroccan political women to unveil the different topics under which women are portrayed as central focus during the period of elections. The article also compares media coverage of female politicians to their male counterparts. Content analysis is adopted as a research method to analyze the data obtained mainly from *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* during the above mentioned electoral periods. The study came up with a set of findings all of which reinforce the claim which consists of the fact that Moroccan political women are not that well represented in the Moroccan political scene as the already stated electoral campaign has shown. It has also revealed that media coverage of female politicians is still different to men's despite the fact that the presence of women in the field of politics has considerably increased.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Starting from 2004, the field of women's rights in Morocco has witnessed a considerable development in favour of women in general and female politicians in particular. Some of these developments were unexpected given the long lasting nature of the old family laws. Others saw the light as early as King Mohamed VI accessed the throne in 1999. These changes mostly targeted the status of women in domestic interests such as divorce, children custody, matrimonial responsibilities, etc. It seemed that political interests were neglected for a reason: they needed to be fought on a different front that transcends familial commitments. The role of traditional media was paramount in disseminating the change and inculcating it into a society where illiteracy hits hard among the community of women. The battle for political rights of women, at a time where discourse of gender equality and feminine emancipation seemed to eschew it, attracted little if any attention in a patriarchal culture that dominated mass media. The need for a re-evaluation of the portrayal of political women in media has gradually imposed itself and become as imperative as ever. Misconceptions about women's competence in politics brought to the surface numerous questions: Are women fit for politics? Is politics a feminine sphere, as well? Would male versus female competition in politics be a phenomenon worthy of in-depth analysis? Such questions would have remained hypothetical had not women fought and broke the glass ceiling of women's utmost political aspirations.

The present study takes on from where these questions left off. That is to say now that women in politics has reached high academic circles, it is the more challenging to decipher how women are represented to the world. The image of political women has become a daily happening. In this respect, print media, more specifically newspapers rather than other media outlets such as radio, TV or the internet for a variety of reasons should receive more awareness. First of all, like many print media in the world, newspapers in Morocco are more concerned with pinpointing different activities and events taking place in the political scene. Since the present study tackles the representation of female politicians in newspapers, more than any media outlet, will provide better information not only in terms of quantity but of quality as well. Moreover, *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* are adopted as the main source of the data for two important factors. To start with, most of the Moroccan newspapers are pro-partisan. Their coverage and treatment of female politicians will not be of a neutral nature. Second, the newspapers under study claim to have different editorial lines; *As-Sabah* has liberal tendencies while *Al Massae* has conservative ones. Such a fact will presumably help come up with different approaches of the representation of female politicians in the two newspapers. Last but not least, *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* had the widest readership in Morocco, especially during the elections of 2009 and 2011. This claim that

has been backed up by the high number of issues printed by *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* on a daily basis during that period. It is worth mentioning at this stage that in the present study, the researcher has opted for very specific time frame to investigate female politician representations in the print media, namely communal elections that took place in June 2009 and legislative elections that were held in November, 2011. The two time frames coincide with very important reforms and changes in the Moroccan society. First, the Family Code has undergone important reforms, which were meant to enhance the status of Moroccan women in general and female politicians in particular. Moreover, the elections happen together with the initiation of the quota system which came as a springboard for more political gains to reserve and secure and strengthen women's access to the Moroccan parliament. Additionally, the Arab spring has also led to great changes in the Moroccan society and women's situation thanks to the great efforts invested by female politicians and activists to change some of the injustices that women have endured for long. In this respect, the elections period selected in this study will help provide an overview on the extent to which newspapers cope with the current evolutions and breakthroughs that touch on the status of Moroccan female politicians.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research on women in media has sporadically abounded in the last five decades. Yet, women's portrayal in specific areas and from different walks of life seems to be proportional to other topics. In particular, the focus on political women in the media has not been as rich and multidimensional as women in advertising or violence on TV—to mention only these two prominent topics. Various factors contribute to how media portray female politicians. Within these media portrayals and depictions, which are presented to the public through media frames, biased and sexist images, disproportional topic coverage, stereotypical recreations and other widely tarnished facets of women's participation in political life help to strengthen the claim that women are not well portrayed and depicted throughout patriarchal societies.

In the Moroccan context, while past research has dealt with media framing, it has mainly focused on general issues such as activism, women as sex objects (mostly in advertising), women's participation in civil society institutions, women and revenue generating activities (RGA) as well as on women and/in migration. The present research takes these issues to a higher level by addressing political women's portrayal in the media. It is a topic that addresses the other issues within its core thesis. In other words, it assumes that if women reach political circles and are fairly portrayed by the media it follows that the so called "glass ceiling" in other domains is potentially breakable.

Recent research, such as Norris(1997) so often than not, reveals that female politicians are often under-represented and unfairly framed in the media when compared to their male counterparts. Such results may be interpreted by the mass audience, be they listeners, viewers or readers, as a sign that women are inferior in the political domain in Morocco. The present study is a part of a wider research that aims at examining the way Moroccan female politicians are framed in two of the most widely popular newspapers in Morocco namely *Assabah* and *Al Massae*. At this stage it is worth mentioning that this article is restricted to the content analysis part of the research; that is to say, it covers the different issues assigned to women during the elections periods mainly June 2009 and November 2011.

Research on the issue of female politicians' representation in the media in general has made it redundant to describe the universality of male dominance in formal political systems (Hewitt & Mattinson, 1989); Morocco does not constitute an exception. Yet, the degree of dominance varies from one culture to another. In a conservative society like Morocco, the social structure still regards women as weak second class citizens who are always in need of protection and by analogy cannot build a career in politics which is popularly perceived as a 'dirty game' not meant for the female members of society. Many western scholars and feminists such as Riddell, (1998) have established ready-made fixed universal images on women living in Muslim countries by presenting them as "poor veiled, illiterate, victimized, sexually constrained, and docile housewives" as if they were born to be responsible only for their houses, and in many respects, these images have paid off in conditioning women's small, limited and trivial roles. The effects of these images have given rise to more cynical and negative stereotypes which continue shackling and manacled women's efforts to gain a strong foothold in the political structure. The fact that there was only one woman in the first version of "post-Arab Spring" Moroccan government comprising more than thirty ministers reflects the arguments made by feminists and women that only via their political participation can women establish counter-images and change the negative perceptions and misconceptions bruited abroad and "officially" promoted by the different agencies of the state within the whole political system. A true and worthwhile application of an inclusive democracy and democratization will not come to fruition unless power-sharing policies are advanced in order to redress the grievances and injustices that women experience on a daily basis—primarily at the political level such a fact is supported by Haley's (1998) statement that

"The traditional subject matter of the discipline [politics]—'high policies'—treaties, wars, power politics as it is played out in the top echelons of the public sphere, not to mention the institutional politics of parties, executives and legislatures, is typically male dominated" (p.8)

Indeed, in spite of the barriers, women who dare venture into the unexplored territory of politics face discrimination by their male colleagues, voters, establishments, administrations, family, neighbours and most importantly the media which tend to spread inherent fallacious stereotypes about women. As part of this, many myths and stereotypes about women's political participation have developed breeding on this misconception. In most cases, women are depicted as passive, apolitical and conservative, false accusations which feminist political scientists have endeavoured to puncture. (Parker&Sim, 1997).

Different lexical descriptors have been used to defile and sully the image of women as being led by their emotions and lacking those mental/physical capabilities and capacities to cope with a fluid and changing world. Being described as passive, apolitical and conservative reflects the fact that a smear campaign is at work to instill in women's minds parochial and patriarchal/hierarchical ideas just to continue wresting control of the current status quo. Even when women are allowed to engage in politics, they usually act as extras in a show mostly run by males; otherwise, they just form a base of voters rather than stand as candidates to represent themselves as well as society at large. For this reason, media is confused about the right way to represent political women, which results in a remarkable under-representation. Indeed, even though traditional women have managed to expand their horizon into the public sphere thanks to the advent of feminism, media continue to depict them within the private sphere in accordance with their "primary" function that is to reproduce and nurture.

In a nutshell, before moving to unveil the purpose statement of this research study, it is worth mentioning that whatever new role and responsibilities women take on, their primary function is never overlooked; there are always strong allusions to women's physical appearance, marital status and household responsibilities.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the prevailing modes of representation and construction of political gender identities, roles and relationships in two daily Moroccan newspapers namely *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae*. Additionally, the goal is to pinpoint any similarities or differences in gender representation in the newspapers under study especially that they claim to have different editorial lines. On the other hand, the study aims at exposing the legitimate or illegitimate generalizations, as it were, that these representations make of women's participations in politics in a country struggling to bring gender equality.

Research Problem

Since there is a strong competition between male and female contenders to get involved into the political sphere and due to the lack of women's presence in the decision making structures, the majority of women do believe that print media intentionally disregard their politically active contributions in public life, especially, when the diminishing readership of print media is taken into consideration Jones, (1996). According to ardent advocates of the "soft sex", women are truly under-represented throughout history in the eyes of media. The latter lay much emphasis on their appearances, private lives while channelling little if any interest in their policy proposals. From this prospective, our research problem is to pin down the status of political women in print media. We engage our research by focusing on print media representation of the politically active participation of women in the public life. Our study investigates if and the extent to which the print media coverage is biased towards political women as stated in the hypothesis and research questions that follow.

Hypotheses

- ✓ Moroccan political women are underrepresented and/or misrepresented in *As Sabah* and *Al Massae*.
- ✓ Moroccan political women are represented according to gendered stereotypes/stereotyping.

Research Questions

Most female politicians are dissatisfied with the print press' often pejorative terminology used to refer to their activities in the field of politics. They are depicted as less serious in the legislative and judicial bodies. Thus, the research addresses some crucial questions about the print media coverage of political women's participation in the political sphere. Most prominent research questions include but are not limited to:

- What are the different issues women in general are associated with in *As Sabah* and *Al Massae* newspapers during the study period i.e. June 2009 and November 2011?
- How wide is the gap between the representations of female politicians compared to their male counterparts?
- Is the representation of female politicians linked to sexist and gendered stereotypes?

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on content analysis approach. The researcher has opted for this approach so as to pinpoint the number of photographs and articles that cover women in the political domain compared to other fields in which women are featured in the newspapers during the election period. Among the fields that were focused on a number of salient themes emerge: appearance, household and violence. Moreover, coverage of male politicians during the communal elections 2009 and legislative elections 2011 is also investigated in this research to reveal the difference in coverage of male politicians as opposed to female politicians in terms of quantity. As a research instrument, focus group was opted for as to ensure the researcher's neutrality in the selection of articles and photographs that cover the unit of analysis mentioned above. Below is an overview of the source of the data, the methods used in data analysis, and the research instruments.

Source of the data

The research depended completely on the two most reliable, independent newspapers in Morocco to date namely *Al Massae* and *As-Sabah*. Both have proved, through preliminary background research to have a wide readership as well as annual subscriptions and both can be safely said to stand on opposite ends of the multicultural and pluralistic Moroccan print media sphere. As such they tend to provide the reader with views that a large proportion of Moroccan people deem as trust-worthy. The research methodology requires gathering relevant data from two widely independent Moroccan Arabic-speaking daily newspapers: *Al Massae* and *As-Sabah* so as to analyze the portrayal of the Moroccan women candidates and print media's coverage. To put it differently, the research aims primarily to investigate whether print media under represent, over represent, misrepresent or simply puts women's image in a balance with men's representation. Women's active participation in the political sphere guarantees the probability of novel findings. In order to find concrete answers to these questions, the choice of *Al Massae* and *As-Sabah* is warranted for many reasons. They are avowedly non-partisan daily newspapers. This very specific detail allows freedom from the usually favourably opinionated/biased stance taken towards women's issues by partisan newspapers. While for both newspapers they are meagre by world standards, they are still important as they do not approach different topics the same way (Herradi, 2012). Both newspapers have developed quite a solid foothold in the Moroccan print press spectrum. While most Moroccan newspapers are historically known to be solely partisans, *Al Massae* and *As-Sabah* stand out from the few dozens of national newspapers as being pioneers of "independent" press that has quite often scooped entrenched and widely popular broadcast media within a society of about 50 per cent illiteracy rate. In April 2012, Al Jazeera depicted *Al Massae* newspaper as "the country's most popular daily". *Al Massae* was founded in September 2006 by Rachid Nini and in just a couple of months it rose to become Morocco's leading daily, with a readership of nearly 40,000. Since January 2007, *Al-Massae* has held on to this position by increasing both circulation and sales. "Our current print run exceeds 200,000 copies, whereas our sales rose from 90,425 in June to 132,000 in September. Our title has boosted the printed press market in Morocco," said Zineb Hmouna, Head of Communication and Marketing at *Al Massae* Media Group, explaining the reasons for this success in an interview with APN (2007) during which she states that *Al Massae* is the only Arabic-speaking newspaper that has had the ability to break down familiar 'taboos.'

As-Sabah is the second Moroccan Arabic-speaking daily newspaper chosen for this research. It first appeared in 2000. The choice of *As-Sabah* was based on its discreet rightist editorial line as well as its high circulation. It is also deemed by Moroccan readers as a symbol of moderate appraisal of both national and international topics. *As-Sabah* offers large-scale current topics in politics, society, economy and sports. Statistically, *As-Sabah* has a circulation of 135,000 copies a day (as of 2012). This newspaper is available and distributed across the kingdom. *As-Sabah* can be considered an independent and non-partisan newspaper free from any economic or political influence at its face value.

Content Analysis

To unveil some of the encroaching prejudices assigned to political women, a content analysis has been conducted to spot the different issues under which women are portrayed as the central focus during the electoral campaign of June 2009 and November 2011. The content analysis has been carried out for three main purposes. First, to pinpoint how frequently women are depicted and covered in relation to the private sphere activities when compared to their participation in public sphere activities; and to provide a description of the prevailing modes of representation and construction of gender roles. Second, to investigate any similarities or differences exhibited in the two newspapers concerning the representation of political women. Finally, to show how wide the gap is between the frequency of coverage of political women and their male counterparts, especially with regards to the important progress made by women activists and militants to ensure their presence in the parliament, decision making bodies and leadership positions in the communal and legislative elections.

Focus Group

The focus group’s main concern was the selection of articles and photographs that touch directly on Moroccan female politicians compared to their male counterparts as well as ones that cover women in other domains during the elections be it the communal June 2009 or the legislative November 2011. The use of the first focus group in the selection of the data was meant to ensure the researcher’s neutrality. The total of the newspapers that the focus group worked on is 120. 60 from *As-Sabah*, these cover the months of June 2009 and November 2011. The same applies to the remaining 60 that belong to *Al Massae* and which cover the same periods. It is worth mentioning at this stage that the data selection procedure has taken 2 sessions and each session lasted for about two hours in which 60 newspapers were covered. The approximate reading/selecting time was six to seven minutes for each informant to select data from the newspapers. The researcher though has noticed that along the selection/reading process there appeared moments of diminishing concentration levels in the informants as well as hesitation at selecting articles (which was interrupted by intermittent chats about selection). However, to encourage the focus group members the researcher offered some incentives namely refreshments and friendly ice-breaking sessions.

Focus Group Sampling Procedure

To select the focus group informants, many social variables were taken into consideration to ensure variation and eliminate the bias that might be caused by the social variables in the data they would select. In this respect, age, gender, region, education, profession and marital status have all been taken into account to choose the focus group members. The following chart illustrates the focus group’s background.

Informant	Age	Sex	Residence	occupation
1-	24	Female	Rabat	Nurse
2-	27	Female	Ain Aouda	Master University student
3-	29	Male	Temara	Technician
4-	26	Male	Ain Aouda	Univesity student
5-	39	Female	Rabat	Lawyer
6-	47	Female	Sale	Doctor
7-	44	Male	Sale	Businessman
8-	47	Male	Ain Aouda	Doctor

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

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Issues Associated with Women in *As-Sabah* and *Al-Massae*

Taken as a whole, despite the dissimilarities that the two newspapers reveal in terms of their editorial choices, ownership, circulation numbers, dates of launch and political orientation (*Al- Massae* is conservative and *As-Sabah* is liberal)¹, when it comes to women related issues, both newspapers are relatively identical, albeit with scarce differences. Indeed, in both newspapers women are largely depicted within the private sphere, accomplishing domestic activities related to house care and child rearing. The following graphs provide an overview of women’ coverage in different domains in *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* in 2009 and 2011 elections.

¹“*Al Massae* defends the traditional values close to the Islamic standpoint”(APN,2008).

“*Assabah* has been involved in a liberal reasoning that has brought to the Arab press a modern vision to life” (Herradi,2012)[My translation from French].

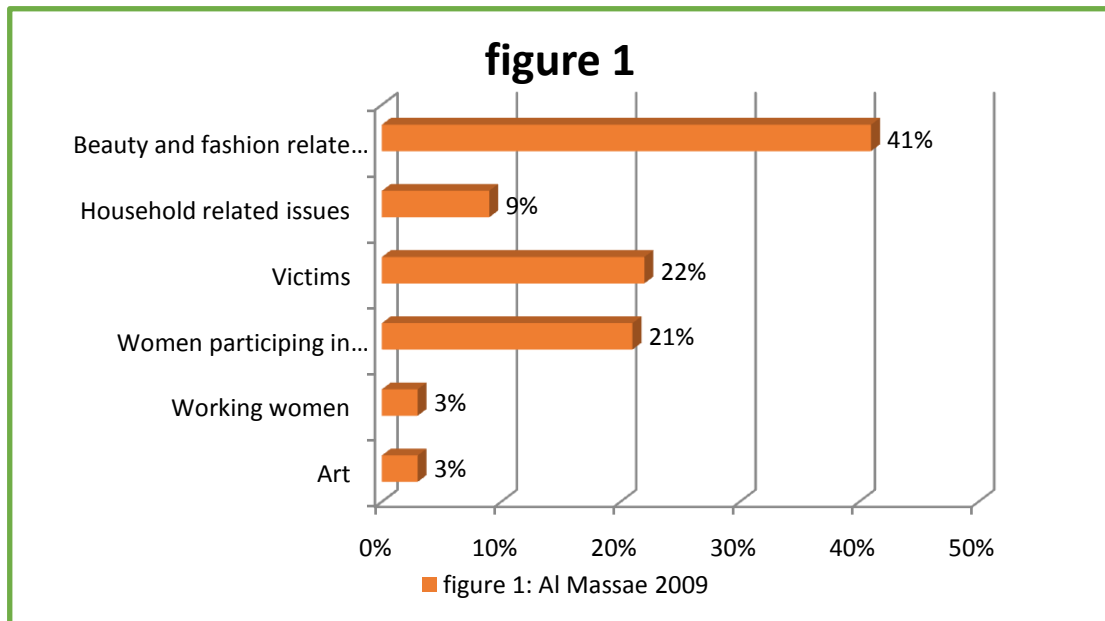


Figure 1: frequency of women' coverage in Al Massae 2009 communal elections

Women's coverage in *Al Massae* during the heated season of the communal election in 2009 seems to reflect a speck of that heat on its pages for political women. As Figure 1. shows age-old issues classically mediated to concern only women take the lead in the coverage. Women in Beauty and Fashion have been reported 41 times in comparison to the other issues. While this is barely surprising, it becomes an overwhelming number in comparison to women in politics(21 times). The latter number is most strikingly telling since it is close to the number of women covered as victims of violence. Figure 1 although it shows that women in politics are less likely to be reported than in beauty and fashion, caution should be made vis à vis the interrelatedness of these issues and the complexities that ensue when trying to treat them as discrete domains. Furthermore, a look at the number of women who are reported on as working women or women's work related issues (3 times) enhances the fact that no matter what domain that is thought to be primarily for men, women are less likely, if ever, to be reported in high numbers of interest.

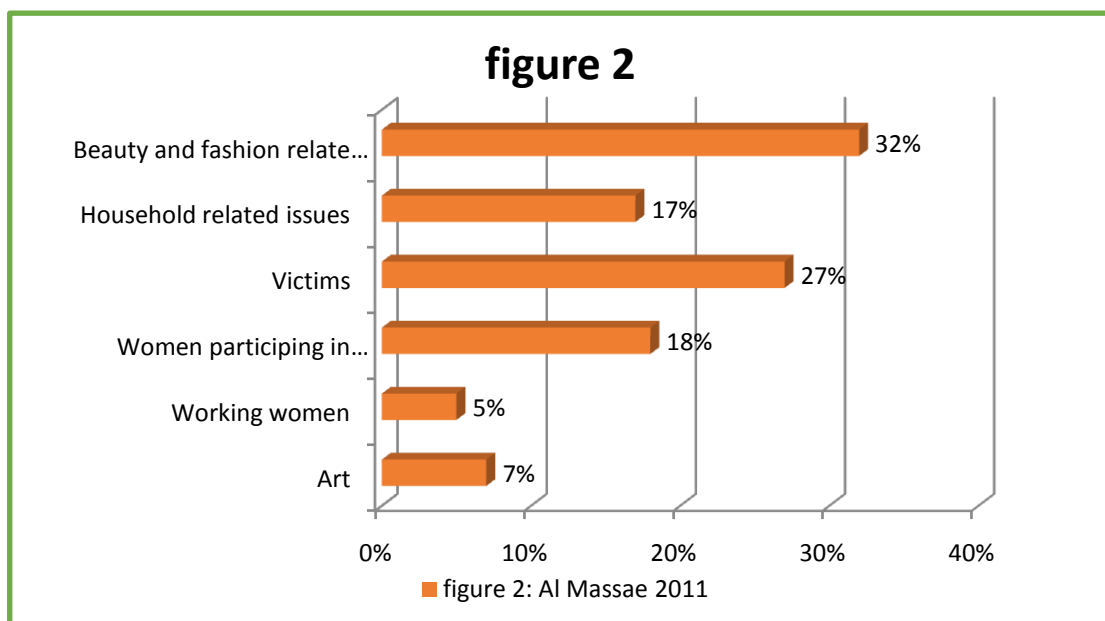


Figure 2: frequency of women' coverage in Al-Massae 2011 legislative elections

The legislative elections of 2011 have not affected circumstantially the trend of women's coverage in *Al-Massae*. As is evident in Figure 2.0 beauty and fashion seem still to be the niche interest that draws a journalistic attention to women. With the highest number of times, women's beauty and fashion still dominated

Al-Massae coverage despite the national stake involved in the legislative elections. However, more striking is the number of women covered in relation to Violence. in fact this number does not seem to fluctuate significantly no matter what period is covered in relation to other issues. Women in politics does not show any aberration or concordance when compared with other issues as well. In fact and as a general observation, there is little evidence to pin these numbers to a certain reason. But on the other hand there is the tendency to ascribe the shortage in covering women in politics to the fact that it is an emerging field for women.

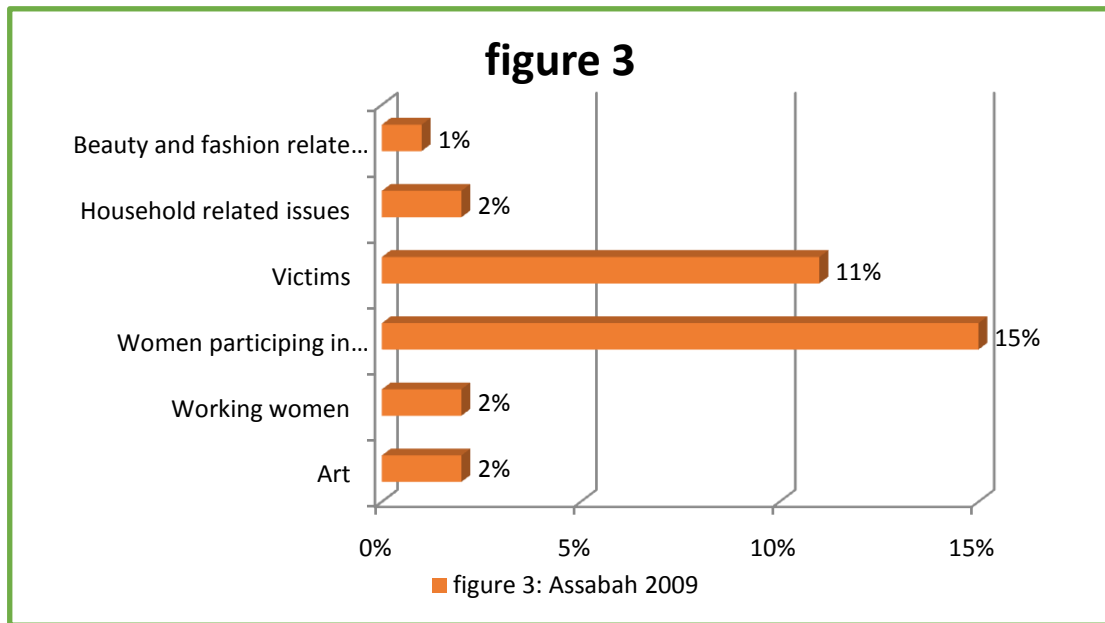


Figure 3: frequency of women' coverage in *As-Sabah* 2009 communal elections

Having its ideological tendency as a backdrop, *As-Sabah*, seems to have relegated most of its coverage of women to women in politics. Despite the small number of articles dealing with women in general, fifteen of them treated women in politics. The appeal that scandals related to women's abuse and violence does show to be a selling point in *As-Sabah*. Violence against women, as it is in *Al-Massae*, does not differ as a subject in the interest of the editors of *As-Sabah*.

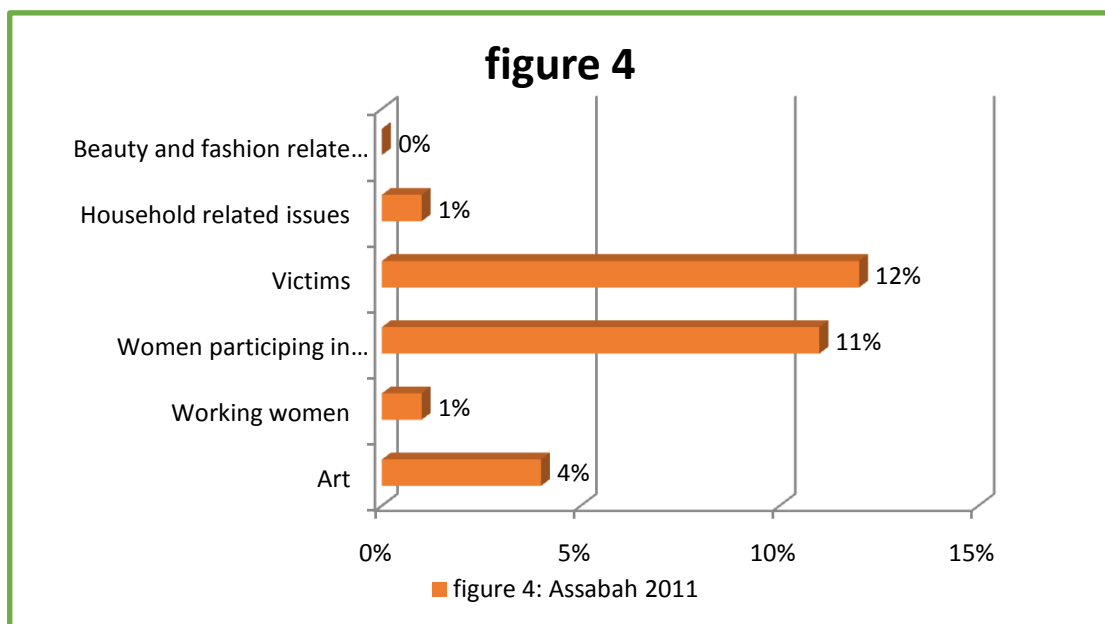


Figure 4: frequency of women' coverage in *As-Sabah* 2011 legislative elections

The tendency to cover women as victims of violence, domestic or otherwise, has not waned as an interesting subject in *As-Sabah* regardless of the historically important moment that were the legislative elections of 2011 (their importance stems from being an early post Arab Spring result). Proportionately, the number of articles dealing with women is comparatively small in *As-Sabah*. This does not suffice to draw a general picture of the practices of the newspaper; however, it helps in generating a preliminary idea about the pyramidal significance of violence and politics in *As-Sabah* during the legislative elections.

The aim of the above graphs is to shed light on the proportional interest such an issue has earned during the period under study. As been noted above, in *Al-Massae*, it seems that issues related to beauty and fashion take over other issues in both the period of the communal elections as well as during the legislative elections. And even if the time between the two periods extends to about two years, no difference can be discerned from the results. Of all the issues to which women, either solely or in a large part, were related, one can only be amazed that the data does not reveal any deviation from the “norms” and trends which women have always followed. At the most critical moments of the electoral campaigns beauty and fashion mattered most. Such results could be less meaningful if we know that the elections of 2011 did not get as much media hype as the elections of 2009 did. Yet, although the elections of 2011 took place right after one of the most remarkable historical events, now commonly referred to as the Arab Spring, and in which women have participated in unprecedented numbers, it is the more deplorable that beauty and fashion took over politics in *Al-Massae*. Considering that *Al-Massae* hosts a weekly women supplement, but by taking into account its proportion to the whole period under study, the results leave little to desire in the most circulated newspaper nationally.

Striking enough is the number of women victims of crimes and accidents that covers a respectable space in both newspapers. While to some extent that can be attributable to the importance of such issues in boosting newsstand sales, in relation to our thesis question and to the despicable hard cast image about women in the media, it lends our research a timely value. In both newspapers, despite the afore-mentioned differences, women victims are ranked second regardless of the period analyzed. As such, it seems enticing to precipitate that if we project these findings on the whole year, they legitimize the feminist struggles for equality and even for positive discrimination during the last decades.

On the one hand, such numbers reveal that women’s status swings in a pendulum that strikes towards two distant extremes: a majority of vulnerable women who are the easiest to fall prey to social mores, and a very small minority of political women whose status shields them against such issues but who are nonetheless ignored, or in the worst cases, misrepresented by the media. On the other hand, it speaks volumes about the necessity for more awareness on the part of women to change the balance of the pendulum in favor of their protection and safety.

Although it might be argued that the period under study is relatively short, qualitatively speaking a researcher might expect profuse data to glean reliable results. In fact, women seem to be the least interesting and appealing when involved in art or the job market during this period. For the most widely circulated newspapers, only a meager number of news stories involving such fields could be ascribed to many factors—not among them of course the value of art and a respectful career for women. Considered in general, the data could not have raised any attention has it not been concerned with a significant period in the history of Morocco. It could have simply fit in any ready-made assumption about women’s media negative representation. But in our case, it seems that the newspapers’ coverage followed the same rite of passage during this period too. They cast the news stories in the age old polar consideration of gender roles: men fit more for the public sphere, women fit for the private sphere. “A woman politician may be seen as more knowledgeable about child care, for example, while a man might be perceived as stronger on national security issues, irrespective of their personal experience interests, or expertise” (Norris, 1997, p.78). In other words, women were often referred to in relation their ‘domestic’ or ‘family’ lives. They are depicted as kind-hearted, empathetic, and caring. Men politicians, in contrast, are well-presented and framed in print media in stereotypical masculine manners, described as knowledgeable, and rational at decision making. What sustains such a contention even more is the number of issues correlating women with household issues. Although there was no difference between 2009 and 2011 mode of representation, which is most probably arbitrary in relation the other issues, the numbers do show an inclination towards fossilizing women in the household. The political parties’ campaigns seem to have been less interesting, and even less interesting was women’s participation in them. Such a state of affairs reveals an agonizing fact about the media campaigns orchestrated by the public media on the participation of women in the political life: they are useless and ineffective—at least for the two newspapers under scrutiny. However, in the election of 2011, it has become clearer that women now count more than just votes to be calculated but also as candidates who deserve equal treatment with their male counterparts, and as observers and moderators of the whole electoral process in their positions inside the political parties.

In another respect, given the miserable circulation numbers of *Al-Massae* and *As-Sabah* (by regional as well as by world standards) and the disparate quality of the two newspapers’ readership, one can visualize the extent to which women could make it to the front page as political candidates, or politicians as a whole. In

relation to the front page, the present study did not pay heed to whether women related issues were given front page treatment or not. Dealing with a decisive period of the electoral campaign, it has been taken for granted that different news types could be placed unevenly within all the newspapers' sections. Although front page treatment gives advantages to the news story, formats such as candidate profiles, regional news and even hard news could have been dealt with on any section.

Having noted that the comparison between *Al Massae* and *As-Sabah* defies any logical conclusions, for the fundamental differences stated above, it is more interesting though to pinpoint the broad disparity between the number of issues related to women as victims. While too small in comparison to *Al Massae*, the number of women reported as victims seems to be higher in proportion to the overall number of articles/news stories related to women. In this case what has been said about *Al Massae* can safely be applicable to *As-Sabah* as well. The most alarming conclusion to be drawn is that women's struggle for their rights seems to be fought on two fronts: that of asserting their right for equal treatment in politics, and that of safeguarding themselves against a society that is still unable to afford them total personal safety.

The liberal orientation of *As-Sabah* might have as well participated in the difference in the number of news items/articles dealing with women in politics (i.e. women who are in a way or another related to politics either as candidates, in office or occupying important positions in their respective parties). This is barely a surprise, given the quality of the material selected by the informants of the study and the fact that *As-Sabah* does not have a static weekly women supplement. Yet, what makes the difference still questionable is the unlikely congruity of these results with the period covered by the study.

Unfortunately, in our search for previous studies dealing with the representation of women regardless of any related event, to evaluate the results of this study, there was a dubious absence of such research. While our search focused only on studies tracking the frequency of women coverage in different domains including the public sphere during non-election periods, it however pointed to a fact that correlates with the theorist Kevin William's statement that

the media distort the real presence or prevalence of a group in society in different ways. There can be an under-representation of a group in the media, the media can over-represent by associating a group with one particular type of activity; the media can misrepresent by equating a group with a particular activity (Williams,2003,,p131).

The over-emphasis on confining women to the above issues implies that those very issues constitute women's primary area of life at the expense of other issues such as current affairs, in which they are relatively under-represented. Here it is worth mentioning that the percentages of women participation in politics highlighted in the above graph are ones that involve women as voters, supporters as well as those running for public office. That is to say, the frequency of media coverage of political women, who are the subject of the present study, is far less than the already indicated one as will be shown in the following subsection.

Coverage of Moroccan Women in Politically-Related Issues Compared to Non-politically-Related Ones

The figures below demonstrate the percentage of women politicians i.e. those running for public offices and the ones who are participating in politics as voters and supporters

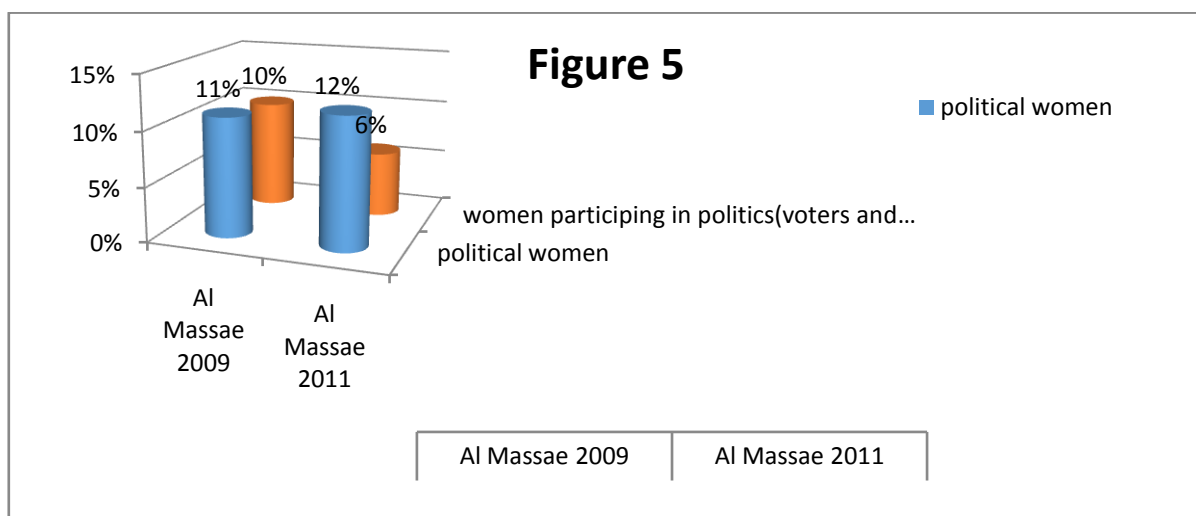


Figure 5: Frequency of females politicians candidates' coverage compared to females participating in politics(voters and supporters) in Al Massae 2009 and 2011

In accordance with studies such as (Altunt,1965) that found out that famous people are more likely to be covered in the media than lay people, the coverage of political women in *Al-Massae* reflects those findings. In both the communal elections of 2009 and the legislative elections of 2011 political women had the opportunity to be covered than women as voters and/ or supporters, with a big difference in the legislative election of 2011.

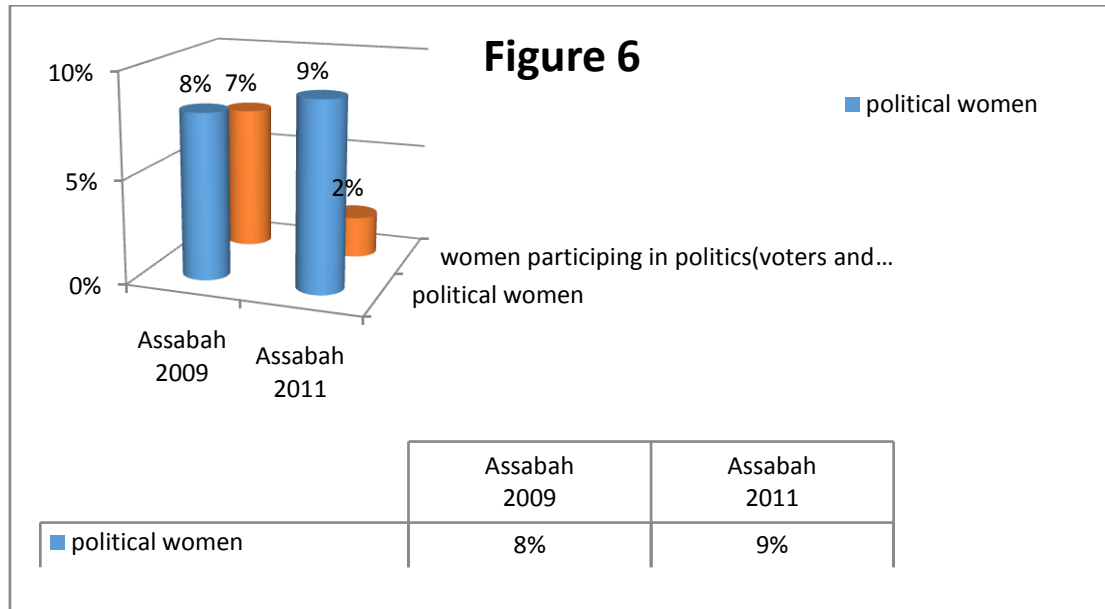


Figure 6: Frequency of females politicians candidates’ coverage compared to females participating in politics (voters and supporters) in *As-Sabah* 2009 and 2011

In *As-Sabah*, the coverage of women during the elections seems to reflect the political opportunity of women to get more of the spotlight in the newspaper. Although with a slight difference with the coverage of women as supporter or voters, there seems to be a general interest in women as politicians heightened by the political occasions of the election.

One of the remarkable facts in portrayal of females participating in politics is that the latter have received a denigrating coverage. Indeed, supporters; that is, women who assist campaigners, mainly males, are either depicted as public bath maids, prostitutes or sorceresses. As for voters, in most cases they feature on the newspapers pages as corrupt who sell their voices in exchange of small amount of money. Such an indecent framing conveys a dark image about women taking part during the election period and raise many inquiries about the way women politicians are framed, which is the subject of study of the coming chapter of the data analysis.

So far, we have focused on the representation of women in *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* during the electoral campaigns. For the data to make sense there is a curious need for it to be juxtaposed to how men fared during the same period, and especially how men engaged politically palliated the presence of women. This comparison goes hand in hand in our belief that politics has been considered a male “profession” *par excellence*. The following subsection gives an idea about the frequency of coverage of female politicians compared to their male counterparts.

Coverage of female Politicians Versus their Male Counterparts

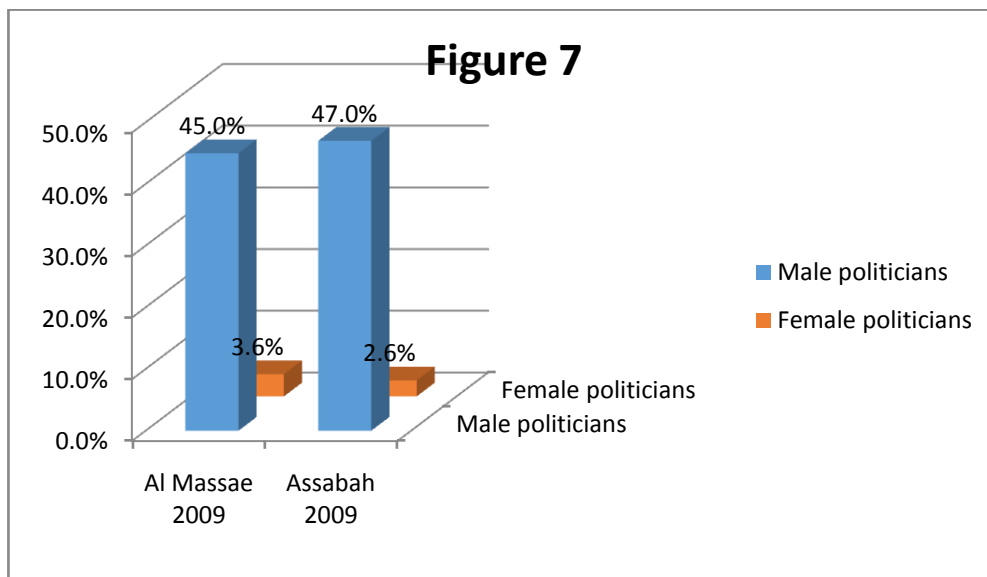


Figure 7: frequency of female politicians coverage compared to their male counterparts in As-Sabah and Al Massae 2009

The interest in political women during the elections of 2009 in *As-Sabah* and *Al Massae* could have been a positive conclusion about them. Nevertheless, the moment a comparison is drawn with the share of coverage sacrificed to their male counterparts, the number seems to be dwarfed. As Figure 7.0 demonstrates, in both newspapers, males are approximately thirteen times covered than females. This discrepancy, as wide as it is casts a pessimist shadow on the coverage of females; especially it confirms much of the literature dealt with previously.

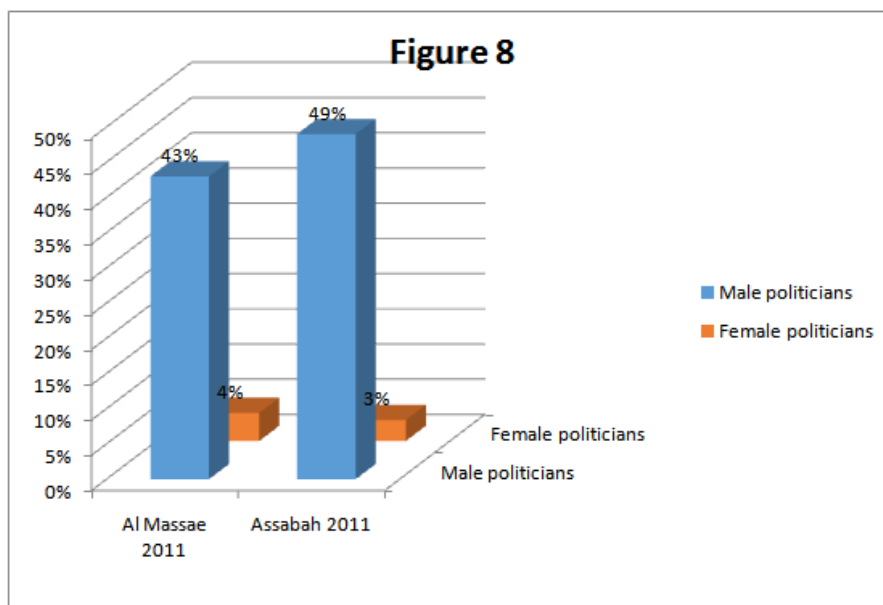


Figure 8: frequency of female politicians coverage compared to their male counterparts in As-Sabah and Al Massae 2011

The legislative elections of 2011 nothing has changed in the newspapers concerning the balance of coverage between males and females. Minimizing the significance of the first post Arab Spring legislative election, the coverage of male versus female politicians continued to copy previous trends.

Undoubtedly, men have for long dominated the political arena. The male influence upon the political life has always been an influential and evident one. Men make up the majority of candidates who run for public

offices, news reporters and anchors, political analysts and commentators, political show hosts as well as guests and also heads of political parties.

This barefaced, apparent imbalance makes the gendered political news a predictable outcome. Nevertheless, with regard to the huge efforts that women activists have invested in recent years to ensure their participation in decision making positions, and following their remarkable accomplishment in the communal elections of 2009, the above findings are noticeably alarming and surprising. They come as a clear back up to Dolan, Deckman and Swers statement that “*media reinforces the stereotyped images that women are less interested in politics than men, and the claim that women’s career choices and professional backgrounds are often incompatible with running for public offices*”. (Dolan, Deckman and Swers, 2011,p.30)

Women in two of the most widely read Moroccan newspapers are allowed more access to the traditionally female areas while their presence in the public sector is still characterized by a blatant inequity. In other words, women are more assigned to and even fit for less serious and less important areas of life. As pointed by the journalist expert Mills (1990) “*the march from the women’s pages to the front pages is hardly completed*”(p.332). In effect, moving from the front pages to the less important back pages, there is an increase in the frequency of the coverage of women.

V. CONCLUSION

All in all, despite the difficult barriers that women running for public offices manage to overcome, media and in this case print media remain one of the most crippling challenges that aim at undermining female candidates and public figures when they step into the political arena, especially when we consider the expansive power newspapers has in politics. As a matter of fact, media with all its types has repeatedly demonstrated its wide capacity to destroy or to back up a candidate campaign and political participation. History is full of examples of famous political figures who have been a victim of media defamation. Media is the ordinary citizen or voter’s window on the candidate’s competencies and qualifications it is through its lens that voters decide whom to elect. In print media, especially newspapers, journalists choose which candidate news are newsworthy at the expense of other candidates whose news may be less important. The findings show that women are far from overcoming the disparity in news coverage no matter how hard they have tried to be politically active so as to boost up their presence in news coverage of current affairs, and alter the outdated image of women being restricted to domestic activities.

As intricate as media effects on women, women’s high levels of illiteracy must not be overlooked as a factor that might also be cited as a cause for the meager number of women politicians in the media. For women, the more they can be “telegenic” (in our case fit for newspaper treatment for their visual merit), the more they are covered. Otherwise, no trace whatsoever can be made of them. Moreover, given the truth that journalists or the agenda-setters have the power to choose the amount of news stories that they perceive as newsworthy, the choice of issues allow them to frame those very issues and through framing they shape the public opinion “through the persuasive use of symbols”(Lewis and Reese, 2009).

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