



Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2023 Municipal Elections

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Overview

In the lead-up to Lebanon's municipal elections, which were expected to take place in May 2023 but extended by the parliament for another year until May 2024, Maharat Foundation, Madanyat and UN Women is working to identify, monitor and analyze the different forms of violence and barriers women who are running for political offices in the municipal elections may be facing, before, during and after the elections.

Introduction

This is the third report undertaken by Maharat and Madanyat in partnership with UN Women, to monitor and document violence against women in politics (VAWP). In June 2023, 44 journalists working in various Lebanese media institutions, including freelance journalists responded to a survey consisting of 13 questions. 65.9% of the respondents were women while 34.1% were men. The survey aimed to assess the understanding of Lebanese journalists regarding gender-based violence directed at women activists in the public realm, in addition to the adherence of media coverage in Lebanon to gender-sensitive reporting standards. Furthermore, a roundtable was attended by 17 journalists, during which the survey results were presented, and recommendations were drawn regarding media coverage of violence against women in politics and the consideration of gender balance in media work.

Forms of violence against women in the political sphere:

Journalists participating in the survey identified several forms of violence against women in politics, which are a manifestation of gender-based violence, including:

Marginalization before entering the political arena: According to the survey's results, women are often confined to traditional roles related to caregiving duties and perceived as fragile and incapable of engaging in political battles. Furthermore, they face constant marginalization and are excluded from electoral lists.

Violence during political engagement: According to surveyed journalists, "there is discrimination at the level of political parties that still allocate leadership positions predominantly to men, favoring the allocation of resources, efforts and votes to their men candidates." Additionally, "false news that undermines women's reputation are used to maintain men's dominance."

Underrepresentation and Gender stereotyping of women in the media: Surveyed journalists highlighted the fact that the media coverage of election campaigns is mostly focused on men. In this context, a journalist declared that "if independent women candidates do not receive sufficient media coverage to present their agenda, a large portion of the population will remain unaware of their candidacy. This highlights the failure of the Lebanese media to acknowledge women's capacity in decision-making."

They also noted a disparity in the representation of women activists or experts in specific fields compared to their men counterparts. In this context, one of the journalists participating in the roundtable, stated that "some journalists from older generations do not take women analysts or even former women ministers who are experts in their field seriously. Additionally, some women in politics are not taken seriously by their colleagues."

Moreover, according to the survey respondents, the types of questions directed at women tend to emphasize their stereotypical roles rather than their contributions as leaders in society.

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

56.8%

of respondents perceived a difference in media treatment between men and women

86.4%

of respondents believed that women are more susceptible to violence due to their public engagement

61.4%

of respondents witnessed cases of violence against women in the political sphere

88.6%

of journalists acknowledged the role of journalists in combating violence against women in politics through their journalistic work

90.9%

of respondents expressed their commitment to allocating equal spaces for both men and women experts in media coverage

Journalists' perception of violence against women in politics

According to the survey's results, **50% of men and women journalists believed that political violence against women exists in traditional media**, while the same percentage was reported for social media platforms. On the other hand, **61.4% of men and women journalists witnessed cases of violence against women in the political sphere, including digital and psychological violence.**

Violence directly faced by women journalists

The occurrence of violence against women journalists due to their media coverage or articles involving specific political forces is not uncommon. Women journalists often face verbal abuse and threats to remove what they have written. A woman journalist declared during the roundtable that **"media organizations do not take a stance against the violations faced by women journalists, which further encourages violence against them. Therefore, it is crucial to break the silence to emphasize the importance of preventing such acts"**.

Furthermore, another journalist highlighted the importance of shedding light on the violence experienced by women journalists in fields other than politics, such as sports. In this regard, he stated

that **"many women colleagues in sports journalism have left the profession due to harassment, lack of attention and job threats. Consequently, women journalists find themselves in a dilemma of either resigning from the profession or continuing in silence"**.

Media organizations' role in enhancing women's participation in the media

Regarding women's participation in the media, participants of the roundtable highlighted the lack of institutional policies within their respective media organizations in order to support women's media visibility. The absence of gender-sensitive reporting guidelines within their media organizations was also noted.

Journalists' role in combating violence against women

88.6% of journalists acknowledged the role of journalists in combating violence against women in politics through their journalistic work. Furthermore, 90.9% of the respondents expressed their commitment to allocating equal spaces for both men and women experts in media coverage.

EXPRESSIONS USED IN REFERENCE TO WOMEN ACTIVE IN THE POLITICAL FIELD:

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- **"Masculine"**
- **"Lack of understanding"**
- **"She should focus on her personal matters"**

As shared by participants during dedicated discussions

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Conclusion and recommendations

Media institutions play a crucial role in addressing political violence against women. This can only be achieved through gender-balanced and non-violent media coverage. Therefore, **97.7% of surveyed journalists expressed a need for further training in this area.**

Furthermore, respondents have drawn up recommendations, validated through the roundtable, to mitigate the impact of violence against women in the political field, whereby the most important of which are the following:

- Highlighting women's achievements in the media field to combat stereotyping.
- Providing training to journalists on the concept of violence against women, particularly in the political sphere, with the aim of minimizing the use of expressions and coverage that perpetuate violence against women.
- Providing training to women guest experts to equip them with the necessary skills to effectively address violence encountered during interviews.
- Organizing dialogue sessions aimed at raising awareness among women about their leadership capacities and showcasing their intellectual capabilities.
- Supporting media organizations in enhancing women representation in the workforce while promoting increased visibility for women experts in numbers that surpass their men counterparts in order to establish a gender equality policy in the media.
- Encouraging media institutions to seek accreditation from international bodies that distinguish them for excellence, and foster networking with other media organizations.
- Continuous monitoring and documentation of cases of violence and violations against women in the media should be undertaken.
- Establishing effective mechanisms for reporting violence against women in the political sphere and in the framework of journalistic work.
- Launching campaigns on traditional and digital media platforms to support women activists' participation in public and political spheres while creating safe media spaces for women to express themselves.
- Shedding light on the violence experienced by women journalists working in all journalistic fields.

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Maharat Foundation, Madanyat and UN Women will continue to undertake gender, media and elections monitoring in the lead up to the 2023 municipal elections, and will be working together, with KAFA (enough) Violence & Exploitation and LADE to support female candidates to address, prevent and respond to violence against women in politics.