

# Not Even in The Picture

*Women and the Media Mirror*



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# Table of Contents

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Summary .....	1
Introduction.....	2
Methodology .....	4
a. Media monitoring.....	4
b. Event monitoring.....	5
c. Key informant interviews (KIIs) .....	5
d. Ethical considerations.....	6
Study Limitations .....	7
Main Findings.....	8
a. Event monitoring.....	8
b. TV program monitoring.....	22
c. KII themes.....	47
Conclusion.....	59

# Summary

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*Building on the publication Not Even in the Picture (2025), which traced women’s exclusion from Lebanon’s political scene since the Taif Agreement, this follow-up study turns to the country’s television screens and public stages. It investigates how women are represented or remain invisible in the main political occurrences, talk shows, and national events that shape political discourse. Through media monitoring and key-informant interviews with producers, editors, and journalists, the research quantifies women’s presence as guests, experts, and leaders, and explores the structural and editorial barriers that limit their participation. The study aims to generate evidence-based insights that inform policies and media practices promoting gender-balanced representation in Lebanon’s public life.*

# Introduction

The first publication of *Not Even in the Picture* examined the persistent exclusion of women from Lebanon's formal political arenas. By analyzing photographs of peace negotiations, national dialogues, and state ceremonies over more than three decades, it highlighted a visual and symbolic absence that reflected women's marginalization from decision-making processes.

This publication builds on that work by shifting the focus to media spaces now central arenas of political debate and agenda-setting in Lebanon. As digital and broadcast platforms increasingly shape public discourse, women's visibility within these spaces remains limited. Television talk shows continue to feature overwhelmingly male guests, and when women do appear, they are often invited to address social topics rather than political or economic decision-making. Likewise, national conferences and public events that influence Lebanon's political trajectory rarely include women as keynote speakers or policy voices.

This study therefore extends its original mandate. Rather than focusing solely on photographic archives of political events, it examines in real time how political visibility is produced and reproduced in Lebanon's media landscape.

Television channels continue to play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of women's participation in political life. This remains particularly significant in the Lebanese context, where broadcast media still functions as a primary arena for defining who is recognized as a legitimate political actor. Although social media platforms have expanded alternative avenues for visibility and self-expression, television appearances retain symbolic authority and broad reach, especially among decision-makers and older audiences. Being present on prime-time talk shows confers a form of institutional legitimacy that digital platforms do not yet fully replicate.

Drawing on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of selected national talk shows, *Sar El Waqt*, 20-30, and *Halla' chou*, the research captures patterns that reflect the broader

dynamics under study. It asks: who is invited to speak, who frames political debate, and who remains systematically absent? By comparing media representation with participation in major national gatherings, the study documents not only numerical disparities but also the qualitative mechanisms through which exclusion is normalized and sustained.

In continuity with the first report, *Not Even in the Picture II* positions visibility as a measure of power. Images and airtime together define political legitimacy; when women are absent from them, their perspectives are excluded from public memory and national decision-making. Building on the data, interviews, and comparative media analysis presented in this study, the report moves beyond documenting exclusion to identifying the mechanisms that sustain it and the entry points to challenge it.

# Methodology

Not Even in the Picture II builds upon the previous study's documentation of women's exclusion from Lebanon's political events by extending the analysis to contemporary media spaces where political debate and legitimacy are shaped. While the first volume relied mainly on photographic archives to document women's historical absence from formal political scenes, the current research adopts a mixed methodological approach that combines visual analysis, quantitative monitoring, and qualitative content analysis. It was conducted over a nine-month period, from May 2025 until February 2026.

The study adopts a mixed-method approach combining media monitoring, event documentation, and key informant interviews (KIIs). This design allows both quantitative and qualitative analysis of women's representation, the factors shaping it, and the structural barriers that sustain their marginalization in public life.

## a. Media monitoring

A central component of the study focuses on Lebanese prime-time talk shows, which are among the most influential platforms shaping public opinion and political discourse.

The monitoring sample includes 12 episodes from leading Lebanese television programs *Sar el Waqt* (MTV), *20-30* (LBCI), and *Halla Shoo* (Al Jadeed), to be analyzed before the completion of the research period.

Each episode was systematically coded using a structured monitoring sheet developed by Madanyat. The sheet captures variables such as:

- gender of the host;
- number of guests by gender;
- professional role (politician, expert, journalist, activist, etc.);

- speaking time allocation;
- thematic focus of the discussion;
- visual representation, including the presence of women in promotional materials or panel arrangements.

This component aims to identify trends in women's participation as interviewees and experts, as well as patterns in how producers and hosts shape gender visibility on screen.

## b. Event monitoring

To maintain continuity with the visual methodology of the first Not Even in the Picture, the current study also documents four major national events held between May 2025 and February 2026.

For each event, photographs were collected and analyzed to assess women's visibility, speaking roles, and leadership presence. The analysis considered the following indicators:

- the total number of speakers and the percentage of women participants;
- the type of participation (decision-maker, speaker, moderator, organizer);
- visual prominence in official photographs and media coverage.

This component serves as a comparative link to the earlier research, revealing whether women's presence in public decision-making spaces has evolved since the Taif agreement in 1989-1990 till February 2026 or remains largely symbolic.

## c. Key informant interviews (KIIs)

In parallel, the study conducts 6 key informant interviews with senior figures from Lebanon's media landscape, including journalists, producers, and news directors.

These interviews explore editorial practices, guest selection criteria, and institutional attitudes toward women's participation in political talk shows.

Sample guiding questions include:

- How do media institutions select and invite guests to political talk shows?
- What barriers limit the visibility of women as experts or commentators?
- To what extent are women portrayed as decision-makers in political coverage?
- What measures could enhance gender balance in Lebanese media?

Insights from these interviews complement the monitoring data, providing a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that produce or restrict women's visibility.

#### **d. Ethical considerations**

The study upholds Madanyat's commitment to ethical research principles. Interviewees' participation in the KIIs is voluntary, and their confidentiality is respected when requested. All monitoring and data collection processes are conducted with transparency, gender sensitivity, and respect for freedom of expression.

## **Study Limitations**

While this study provides a structured and multi-layered analysis of women's political visibility in Lebanese media and national events, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the media monitoring component focuses on a selected sample of prime-time talk shows over a defined time period. Although these programs were chosen based on their high viewership, national reach, and agenda-setting role, the sample does not encompass the entirety of Lebanon's broadcast landscape. Other formats, including morning shows, news bulletins, digital programs, and regional channels, were not systematically analyzed.

Second, the number of monitored episodes (12) allows for the identification of recurring patterns but does not claim statistical exhaustiveness. The findings reflect structural tendencies within the selected sample rather than a comprehensive quantitative mapping of all televised political content during the research period.

Third, the event monitoring component documents major national events held between May 2025 and February 2026. While these events were selected for their political significance, the study does not examine smaller-scale or local-level gatherings that may display different representation dynamics.

Fourth, the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) provide insight into editorial practices and institutional attitudes, but they reflect the perspectives of a limited number of senior media actors. As with all qualitative interviews, responses may be influenced by professional positioning, institutional affiliation, or normative framing.

Finally, while the study documents patterns of visibility and exclusion, it does not measure audience perception quantitatively, nor does it assess the long-term impact of representation on electoral outcomes or public opinion. These areas remain important avenues for future research.

Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the study's findings. Rather, it clarifies its scope and reinforces its contribution as an evidence-based analysis of structural trends in Lebanon's political media landscape.

# Main Findings

## a. Event monitoring

### Municipal Elections 2025

#### A step forward, but still far from equal

In the 2025 municipal elections, women secured 10.37% of municipal council seats across Lebanon an increase from 5.4% in 2016. While this marks a notable improvement, it remains well below the global average and far from meaningful parity. Women constituted 12% of the total candidates, up from 7% in the previous election cycle.

In mukhtar councils (locally elected administrative officers) women achieved 16.4% representation. However, when it comes to the actual mukhtar leadership roles, women held only 2.42% of positions highlighting the limited access to influential decision-making roles at the local level.

This gap is not incidental. The role of the mukhtar is deeply embedded in local patronage networks, family lineage, land registration authority, and dispute mediation, spheres historically dominated by men. Unlike municipal council seats, which are contested through party lists, mukhtar positions are often shaped by informal power structures and community hierarchies that favor established male figures. As a result, women may participate in mukhtar councils, but rarely gain access to the central authority associated with the position itself.

These numbers reveal a persistent pattern: while women are more frequently represented on electoral lists, they are rarely supported into winnable positions.

For example, in the city of Tripoli, Lebanon's second-largest urban center, 22 women ran, yet none were elected.

Without structural reforms such as a binding gender quota, projections indicate that Lebanon would need more than five decades to reach even 30% women representation at the municipal level.



Source: Alwifak news,  
retrieved from [https://www.alwifaknews.com/archives/126340#google\\_vignette](https://www.alwifaknews.com/archives/126340#google_vignette)



Source: Beirut today  
retrieved from <https://beirut-today.com/>

## The Exclusion of Women in the “New Era” of 2025

Following years of political deadlock, Lebanon entered a so-called “new era” in early 2025 with the election of President Joseph Aoun in January and the formation of a new government under Prime Minister Nawaf Salam in February. Many hoped this shift would signal a more inclusive governance model, yet women remain largely marginalized.

### Key facts:

- The new cabinet included only 5 women ministers, out of 24, a slight improvement, but far from equitable.
- Despite public statements about reform, no binding gender quota law has been passed for either national or municipal elections.
- Institutions remain male-dominated, with women still largely excluded from influential parliamentary blocs, national committees, and reform commissions.

# The appointment of the new Central Bank Governor and his deputies

## and the importance of their work in financial and banking reform

On 29 July 2025, the four Deputy Governors of the Banque du Liban took the oath of office before the President of the Republic, Joseph Aoun, in the presence of the Minister of Finance, Yassine Jaber, and the Central Bank Governor, Karim Souaid. All four appointees are men: Wassim Mansouri (First Deputy), Makram Bou Nassar (Second Deputy), Salim Shaheen (Third Deputy), and Gaby Chinoyan (Fourth Deputy).



Source: This is Lebanon  
retrieved from <https://www.thisislebanon.com/lebanon/554748/>

The appointments included no women and offered little visibility into the criteria or mechanisms guiding the selection process, which appeared to follow established political and sectarian power-sharing practices rather than a transparent, merit-based approach. In practice, the Central Bank Governor relied on names submitted by political authorities, with candidates allocated according to sectarian affiliation, in line with power-sharing arrangements entrenched since the Taif Agreement, the 1989 accord that ended the civil war and institutionalized sectarian balance in state institutions.

It is also important to note that throughout the history of Banque du Liban, Lebanon has never witnessed the appointment of a woman as Governor or as Vice Governor, reflecting a persistent gender gap at the highest levels of monetary and financial decision-making.

In the absence of a clear, standardized nomination system grounded in competence, integrity, and accountability, such patterns are likely to persist. Informal conventions continue to override objective criteria, often resulting in the exclusion of highly qualified women in favor of less qualified male candidates, simply to preserve entrenched political balances. Any attempt to challenge these customs is frequently framed by political actors as an “existential threat” to the system itself.

This dynamic undermines the quality and credibility of public appointments and poses tangible risks to the governance of financial and monetary policy, particularly at a time when Lebanon urgently requires institutional reform after years of economic collapse. By prioritizing inherited practices over the public interest, the system reinforces stagnation, weakens reform prospects, and continues to disproportionately exclude women from decision-making spaces, keeping them, once again, out of the picture.

## The new judicial nominations

Nearly eight years after the last comprehensive judicial appointments, the Minister of Justice and the Council of Ministers approved a new set of wide-ranging judicial nominations, marking a significant restructuring of key judicial bodies. The process unfolded within a context of notable discretion and limited public transparency. As has often been the case in Lebanon's institutional practice, the final selections reflected political and sectarian power-sharing arrangements, which in turn shaped the distribution of leadership roles and representation within the judiciary.



Source: Lebanon debate  
retrieved from <https://www.lebanondebate.com/article/>

Despite ongoing national and international advocacy for strengthening women's participation in decision-making positions, women's representation within the newly appointed bodies remained constrained. In several instances, sectarian quota considerations appear to have taken precedence over merit-based gender balance, limiting women's access to senior leadership roles. In practice, the sectarian distribution of positions functioned as the primary filter: where a role was tied to a specific sectarian "slot," highly qualified women were frequently sidelined if they did not correspond to the required affiliation, while male candidates with comparatively weaker credentials were elevated precisely because they did.

Within the Constitutional Council, women's representation was particularly limited, with only one woman appointed among its members. The Constitutional Council plays a critical role in Lebanon's institutional framework: it reviews the constitutionality of laws, adjudicates electoral

disputes, and safeguards the balance of powers, making it a central guarantor of constitutional order and democratic legitimacy. Judge Tannous Mashlab was appointed President, and Judge Omar Hassan Hamza Vice President. The Council's members include Judges Aouni Ramadan, Akram Baassiri, Riyad Abou Ghaida, Fayez Farhat, Elias Mashrekani, Albert Aziz Sarhan, Michel Tarzi, and Judge Miray Emile Najm, the sole female member of the body.

The presence of women in such a body is essential not only for equitable representation, but also for strengthening the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and societal trust in constitutional oversight. The current composition highlights the continued gender disparity within one of Lebanon's highest constitutional institutions.



Source: Lebanon debate  
retrieved from <https://www.lebanondebate.com/article/>

By contrast, the Higher Judicial Council, Lebanon's highest judicial administrative authority responsible for overseeing the judiciary's functioning, appointments, and disciplinary matters, was appointed with equal numerical representation, comprising three men and three women. Overall, the new judicial appointments reflect both incremental progress and persistent structural limitations. While certain bodies demonstrate improvements in gender representation, broader patterns of political bargaining and sectarian allocation continue to shape outcomes, raising ongoing questions regarding transparency, meritocracy, and substantive equality within Lebanon's judicial system.

## The Mechanism Committee and the appointment of civilians

within the Lebanese delegation participating in the direct negotiations with Israel.



Source: Middle east transparent  
retrieved from <https://middleeasttransparent.com/ar/>

In the aftermath of the most recent Israeli war on Lebanon and the entry into force of the ceasefire, U.S.-led diplomatic efforts initiated discussions on a coordination framework between Lebanon and Israel, later referred to as the “mechanism.” Framed as a technical and security arrangement, negotiations were conducted within a restricted circle of military, political, and diplomatic actors, with representation from the Lebanese side remaining exclusively male. The only woman visibly present at the outset was Morgan Ortagus, a U.S. official involved in facilitating the early discussions, while Lebanese women despite contributing informally through technical preparation and coordination were absent from the official table at the moment when the framework, mandate, and rules of engagement were defined.

This absence stands in direct contrast to Lebanon’s formal commitments under its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which recognizes women as essential actors in conflict prevention, mediation, peace negotiations (WPS), and post-conflict governance. The gap between policy and practice became even more apparent when a civilian representative was later appointed to the mechanism and the role was once again assigned to a man, despite the availability of a substantial pool of Lebanese women trained in mediation, negotiation, and peacebuilding through national and international WPS initiatives.

The episode illustrates how security and diplomacy continue to be treated as predominantly male domains, even in processes explicitly linked to ceasefire arrangements and national sovereignty. As a result, the WPS agenda remains largely declarative at the highest decision-making levels: while women contribute expertise and preparatory work, they remain excluded from the formal arenas where peace and security decisions are negotiated and legitimized.

# The naturalization decree

## The President of FIFA has been granted Lebanese citizenship.

A single decision recently illustrated, in a strikingly symbolic way, the hierarchy of values that continues to shape Lebanese public policy. While Lebanese football was publicly celebrated, the longstanding demands of Lebanese women were once again sidelined.

The Lebanese President, Joseph Aoun, granted Lebanese nationality to the President of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), Gianni Infantino, on the basis of his marriage to a Lebanese citizen, Lina Al-Ashqar. This gesture was framed as an exceptional honor. Yet it inevitably raises a long-standing question: what of Lebanese women married to foreign nationals?

Lebanese women have been demanding the right to pass their nationality to their children since at least the 1950s, in response to the Lebanese Nationality Law of 1925 (Decision No. 15/LR), which explicitly grants this right to men while denying it to women. Under Article 1 of the law, Lebanese nationality is transmitted by descent through the father, while Lebanese women are excluded from this right, regardless of their marital status or place of residence.

These demands intensified in the 1990s, as women's rights organizations linked nationality reform to broader questions of post-war reconstruction, citizenship, and equality before the law. Since the early 2000s, campaigns such as My Nationality Is a Right for Me and My Family have brought



Source: Middle East eye, retrieved from <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news>

the issue firmly into public debate, framing nationality not as a privilege but as a fundamental right tied to dignity, belonging, and social stability.

Despite repeated reform proposals, Lebanese women remain legally barred from transmitting their nationality to their children or spouses. This discrimination persists in direct contradiction with Article 7 of the Lebanese Constitution, which guarantees equality before the law, as well as Lebanon's international obligations, notably under **the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which Lebanon ratified in 1997, albeit with reservations to Article 9(2) concerning nationality.

The contrast is therefore stark. While an international figure is granted Lebanese nationality through marriage by presidential decree, thousands of Lebanese women continue to be denied the same right within their own country. The justification most often invoked, concerns over demographic balance, has repeatedly been used to suspend women's constitutional rights in favor of political calculations.

This decision does not constitute an isolated incident, but rather reflects the continued enforcement of discriminatory citizenship laws and the failure to translate constitutional principles and international commitments into domestic legal reform.

## The Bar Association elections

The Beirut Bar Association elections, held on 16 November 2025, resulted in the election of eight members to the Bar Council, all of whom were men, under the leadership of the newly elected President, Imad Martinos. None of the four women candidates running for Council seats were successful.

This outcome is particularly striking given the composition of the legal profession itself. According to recent data from the Beirut Bar Association, women now constitute approximately 45–48% of registered lawyers, reflecting near parity with men. Among younger cohorts of lawyers, women often form the majority. Yet despite making up nearly half of all lawyers and dominating in the younger generations, women continue to be sharply underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions within the Association.

The 2025 elections illustrate a persistent structural gap between participation and representation. Despite comparable qualifications and professional standing, none of the four women candidates were able to secure a seat on the eight-member Council. One key factor is the lack of political and factional support for women candidates within the Bar's electoral dynamics, which remain heavily influenced by informal alliances, political affiliations, and endorsement networks. These networks continue to favor male candidates and rarely mobilize in support of women, reflecting a broader absence of political will to challenge gendered power structures within professional institutions.

As one of Lebanon's most influential professional bodies, the Beirut Bar Association plays a critical role in shaping legal discourse, public authority, and access to national decision-making spaces. The complete absence of women in its governing Council not only limits women's leadership within the legal profession, but also weakens their visibility and legitimacy in the public sphere. It further narrows the diversity of perspectives informing the Association's positions on legislative reform, rights-based advocacy, and institutional accountability, reinforcing patterns of exclusion within a body that significantly influences Lebanon's legal and political landscape.



Source: Beirut bar official page  
retrieved from: <https://bbalebanon/?locale>

## b. TV program monitoring

Within the framework of monitoring women’s representation in Lebanese broadcast media, this section provides a detailed editorial analysis of selected episodes from some of the country’s most prominent political talk shows during the period from September to November 2025, a phase marked by post-war ceasefire negotiations with Israel, heightened security debates, and continued political and economic crisis, during which media platforms played a central role in shaping public discourse. This analysis does not aim to assess the substance of the political views expressed, but rather to deconstruct how on-screen visibility is produced: who is invited, in what capacity, and under which temporal and interactional conditions.

The analysis adopts a qualitative approach that takes into account the number of guests by gender, the distribution of speaking time, the dynamics of debate management, and the way program hosts interact with guests. By tracing these elements across consecutive episodes, this section seeks to identify recurring patterns that shape women’s presence or absence, laying the groundwork for broader conclusions about the gendered structure of televised political debate in Lebanon.

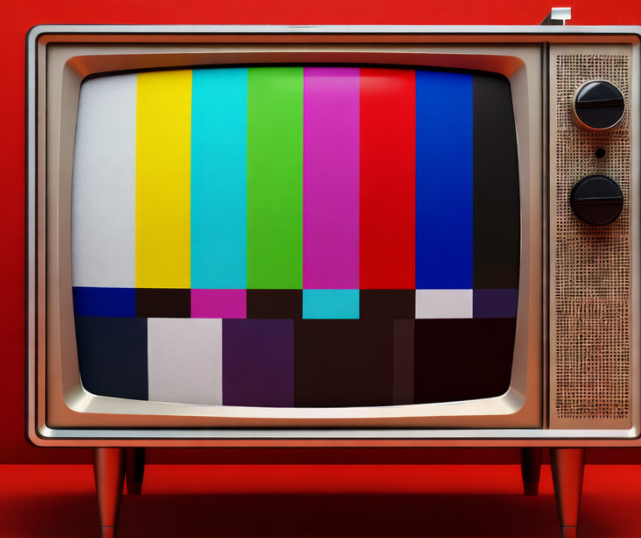
### Major Lebanese Television Channels

Channel	Chairman / Owner	CEO / Executive Leadership	Editor-in-Chief / News Director	Gender	Notes on Editorial Authority
MTV Lebanon	Michel Gabriel El Murr	Michel Gabriel El Murr	Walid Abboud (News Director & Editor-in-Chief)	Male	Centralized newsroom authority; strong agenda-setting role in political programming.
LBCI	Pierre El Daher	Pierre El Daher	Jean Feghali (News Director / Editor-in-Chief)	Male	Oversees editorial framing and political guest selection.
Al Jadeed	Tahseen Khayat	Karma Khayat	Mariam Al Bassam (News Director)	Male / Female	Only major channel with a female head of news; notable structural distinction.

The comparative overview of leadership structures across major Lebanese television channels reveals a consistent concentration of executive and editorial authority in male hands. With the notable exception of Al Jadeed where both the CEO and News Director are women, top decision-making positions at MTV, and LBCI remain predominantly male. This pattern is significant because newsroom leadership functions as a gatekeeping mechanism: it shapes editorial priorities, selects guests, defines framing angles, and ultimately determines who is granted political legitimacy on screen.

However, female presence in executive roles does not automatically guarantee gender-balanced representation in political programming. Structural, political, and market pressures continue to influence editorial choices across channels. The data therefore suggest that gender disparity in media visibility is not merely a reflection of individual bias, but of institutional power configurations and entrenched decision-making networks that shape access to public platforms.

In this context, leadership composition becomes more than symbolic. It directly affects agenda-setting, guest selection, and the normalization of who is perceived as a credible political actor in Lebanon’s public sphere.



**Consolidated Gender Representation Across Monitored Political Talk Shows (September–November 2025)**

Indicator	Result	Percentage / Observation
Total monitored episodes	12	%100
Total guest appearances	88	%100
Total women guests	7	%7.95
Total men guests	81	%92.05
Episodes with zero women	6	%50 of all episodes
Episodes with only one woman	5	%41.7 of all episodes
Episodes with more than one woman	1	%8.3 of all episodes
Average speaking time distribution	Women received significantly shorter speaking time when appearing as sole female guests	Particularly visible in multi-guest confrontational panels
Recorded interruptions	Repeated interruptions documented in at least two episodes involving female guests	Primarily in high-intensity political segments
Participation pattern	Women more frequently included in technical or bounded segments	Rarely present in extended agenda-setting political exchanges
Structural trend	High-stakes sovereign debates overwhelmingly male-dominated	Pattern consistent across all three channels

# Sar El Waet

## MTV Lebanon

*Sar El Waet* is a prime-time political talk show known for its confrontational interviewing style and agenda-setting discussions. Typically divided into three segments, the program focuses on current political affairs, accountability, and power dynamics, often shaping public debate through direct and high-pressure exchanges with political figures. The program is hosted and conducted by Marcel Ghanem, a Lebanese journalist and television presenter widely known for his assertive moderation style and his central role in Lebanon’s televised political debates. Over the years, Ghanem has positioned himself as a key agenda-setter in broadcast political journalism, frequently confronting political figures with pointed questions and framing discussions in a manner that emphasizes conflict, polarization, and political accountability.



Date: 25 September 2025

**Guests:** Ali Hassan Khalil (Member of Parliament), Joe Issa El Khoury (Minister of Industry), Nicolas Chammas (Secretary General of the Lebanese Economic Organizations), Jean Nakhoul (Journalist and political TV host), Maurice Matta (Business News Producer)

**Women's representation: Complete absence (except for one audience intervention)**

Women were entirely absent from all of the three segments, which marked the opening of the eighth season of the program by Marcel Ghanem. Female participation was limited to a single woman from the audience who addressed a question to former Minister and Member of Parliament Ali Hassan Khalil, with no women present as guests or experts.

The episode focused on two major political developments: the controversial illumination of the Raouche Rock with images of former Secretary General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah and Hachem Safi al-Din, and the electoral law, particularly the issue of expatriate voting. Despite the political and constitutional nature of the discussion, no female constitutional law or electoral experts were invited. This reflects a recurring pattern of excluding women from political and strategic issues, confining their participation when it exists at all to symbolic or marginal roles.



Source: MTV Lebanon,  
retrieved from <https://www.mtv.com.lb/vod/ar/program/662>

Date: 2 October 2025

**Guests:** Elias Hankach (Member of Parliament), Cesar Abi Khalil (Member of Parliament), David Hale, (former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs), Elias Khoury (Member of Parliament), Edgar Traboulsi (Member of Parliament), Lama Tawil (President of the Federation of Parents' Committees in Private Schools), Nehme Mahfoud (Head of Private Teachers Association), Maroun Nehme (Journalist), Ibrahim Haidar (Journalist), Maurice Matta (Business News Producer)

**Women's representation: One woman out of ten guests**



Source: MTV Lebanon,  
retrieved from <https://www.mtv.com.lb/vod/ar/program/662>

The episode opened with an extended political confrontation between MPs Elias Hankach and Cesar Abi Khalil over expatriate voting and the state's monopoly on arms, which occupied approximately 26 minutes of airtime. This was followed by a very brief interview with David Hale, lasting no more than two minutes.

In the second half of the episode, the issue of schools was discussed with the participation of Ms. Lama Tawil, alongside six other guests. Despite the fact that the topic is inherently educational and social, Tawil's intervention was delayed until after all male guests had spoken. When she was finally given the floor, she was repeatedly interrupted by both the guests and the host.

Her speaking time was limited to approximately three minutes, after which she was effectively excluded from the discussion for more than 15 minutes, before requesting an additional two minutes to comment. The episode also highlighted a condescending treatment by Marcel Ghanem toward the Minister of Education, Dr. Rima Karami Akkary. He used a reprimanding and patronizing tone, raising his voice and addressing the minister in a way that emphasized her absence and questioned her authority. This behavior reflects a clear double standard, as it is unlikely that a male minister would have been addressed in the same manner.

Although the episode included nine men, Lama Tawil was the only woman present, despite the fact that the issues discussed would have allowed for broader and more diverse female representation.

Date: 9 October 2025

**Guests:** Dr. Fares Souaid (Former Member of Parliament), George Nader (Former Army Brigadier), Ahmad Al-Ayoubi (Secretary General of the Civil Islamic Coalition), Hassan Jouni (Former Army Brigadier), Ziad Itani (Journalist), Dr. Mahmoud Jebai (VP of the Capital Markets Authority), Hicham Al-Mokammal (Chairman of Professional Auditors), Amata Moubarak (Lawyer), Mounir Shehadeh (Former Army Brigadier), Maurice Matta (Business News Producer)

### Women's representation: One woman out of eleven guests

Marcel Ghanem opened the episode with the issue of artist Fadl Shaker, a former pop singer convicted in absentia on terrorism-related charges, turning himself in to the judiciary and hosting his lawyer, Amata Moubarak, in the first segment alongside Brigadier General George Nader and lawyer Ahmad Al-Ayoubi. From the outset, the host attempted to suggest the existence of a regional "deal" behind the surrender, which the lawyer Moubarak denied.

Amata Moubarak was not given equal opportunities to speak compared to her two male counterparts. She was repeatedly interrupted, and the host ignored her attempts to respond, particularly when she raised a central question regarding responsibility for the killing of Lebanese army personnel. Her total speaking time did not exceed ten minutes, while the discussion effectively unfolded between the two men.

Moubarak was the only woman among ten male guests. In subsequent segments, the discussion shifted to regional politics, Gaza, the disarmament of Hezbollah, and then the state budget, with no female presence whatsoever. The episode reflects a recurring pattern in which a single woman is invited to address a sensitive legal-security issue, only for her voice to be minimized in favor of male guests who dominate the narrative and analysis.



Source: MTV Lebanon,  
retrieved from <https://www.mtv.com.lb/vod/ar/program/662>

Date: 16 October 2025

**Guests:** Camille Chamoun (Member of Parliament), Rindala Jabbour (Chairwoman of the Syndicate of Workers in Lebanon's Audiovisual Media), Mohammad Hamieh (Journalist), Dr. Charles Chartouni (Academic), Mounir Shehadeh (Former Army Brigadier), Maxime Chaaya (Explorer), Maurice Matta (Business News Producer)

### Women's representation: One woman

In this episode, activist Rindala Jabbour was hosted alongside four male guests. Jabbour discussed the reasons behind her resignation from the Free Patriotic Movement, before presenting sharp political positions in which she defended Hezbollah and its choices, framing the conflict in Lebanon as one between Israeli aggression and extremist terrorism.

Despite strong audience engagement with her interventions, Jabbour remained surrounded by men who were given longer speaking time. She was subjected to a personal attack by Charles Chartouni, who accused her of being "assigned" to repeat this discourse, an evident shift toward questioning her motives rather than engaging with her arguments.

It is worth noting that Marcel Ghanem intervened on this occasion to protect her from audience insults and prevent verbal abuse. However, this did not translate into a more equitable distribution of airtime or balanced moderation. Female participation therefore remained confined to a defensive position within a highly male-dominated space.



Source: MTV Lebanon  
retrieved from <https://www.mtv.com.lb/vod/ar/program/662>

# W Halaa Chou

## Al Jadeed

*W Halaa Chou* is a current affairs talk show that combines political discussion with social and public interest issues. Structured around three segments, the program places emphasis on dialogue and debate, offering space for in-depth interviews while maintaining a tone that is accessible to a broad audience. The show is hosted by Georges Salibi, a Lebanese journalist and television presenter known for a calmer, facilitative moderation style. Salibi generally prioritizes structured discussion and guest interaction over confrontation, positioning himself as a mediator rather than an antagonist, and allowing diverse viewpoints to be articulated within a controlled and conversational format.



Date: 28 September 2025

**Guests:** Ghassan Salameh (Minister of Culture), Ibrahim Mneimneh (Member of Parliament), Selim El-Sayegh (Member of Parliament), Qassem Kassir (Political Analyst), Tammam Nouredine (Political Analyst), Hussein Ayoub (Journalist), Ghassan Hajjar (Journalist)

### Women's representation: Complete absence

Women were entirely absent from this episode of *W Halaa Chou*, in which Georges Salibi hosted seven male guests. The discussion focused on the controversial illumination of the Raouche Rock, an initiative that sparked public debate over the symbolic use of a national landmark and the appropriation of public space for political messaging, as well as proposed changes to the electoral law, particularly those affecting expatriate voting. The latter remains a highly sensitive issue in Lebanon, as it directly raises questions of political representation, electoral balance, and the role of the diaspora in shaping domestic political outcomes.



Source: aljadeed TV  
retrieved from: <https://www.aljadeed.tv/watch/82639/>

Despite the clearly political and legal nature of these topics, no female politicians, legal experts, or analysts were invited to participate. This absence reflects a recurring pattern within the program, whereby major national debates, especially those related to governance, elections, and public policy, are conducted without any female representation, reinforcing women's systematic exclusion from televised political discourse.

Date: 5 October 2025

**Guests:** Tarek Mitri (Deputy Prime Minister), Waddah El-Sadek (Member of Parliament), Selim Aoun (Member of Parliament), Hassan Al-Dorr (Political Analyst), Hussein Ayoub (Journalist), Ghassan Hajar (Journalist)

### Women's representation: Complete absence

The episode opened with developments in Gaza and their repercussions for Lebanon, before turning to the controversy surrounding the Risalat Association, a religiously affiliated organization whose activities and public messaging had recently drawn political and media attention, particularly in relation to questions of influence, symbolism, and the use of public space. The discussion then addressed the illumination of the Raouche Rock, followed by debates on the disarmament of Hezbollah and the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Despite the program's regular segment featuring journalists and political commentators, a space where women could have been readily and credibly included, the episode excluded women entirely. In a context where women's access to formal political office remains structurally limited, media platforms have a heightened responsibility to diversify voices by drawing on women journalists, analysts, and commentators. This opportunity was once again missed.

The discussion was marked by heightened intensity and political polarization, with the host managing the debate in a way that reproduced familiar, male-dominated voices. No effort was made to disrupt this pattern or to introduce alternative perspectives, reinforcing the normalization of all-male panels even in formats that are not constrained by the availability of political officeholders.



Source: aljadeed TV  
retrieved from: <https://www.aljadeed.tv/watch/82639/>

Date: 12 October 2025

**Guests:** George Adwan (Member of Parliament), Ahmad Abdel Hadi ( Hamas's representative in Lebanon), Haitham Zaiter (member of both the National and Central Palestinian Councils), Mohammad Hijazi (Activist)

### Women's representation: Complete absence

This episode was dominated by major sovereign issues, including the disarmament of Hezbollah, Lebanese-Syrian relations, the state budget, and elections. MP George Adwan alone was given approximately 45 minutes of airtime before the discussion moved on to other male guests.

Despite the multiplicity of topics, there was no female presence neither as politicians nor as experts in regional or constitutional affairs reinforcing the image of politics as a closed, male-dominated field.



Source: aljadeed TV  
retrieved from: <https://www.aljadeed.tv/watch/82639/>

Date: 19 October 2025

**Guests:** Hanine El-Sayed (Minister of Social Affairs), Dhafer Nasser (PSP Secretary General), Louis Abou Charaf (Lawyer and Political Activist), Abbas Daher ( )Director of regional foresight center of information), Hassan Mneimneh (Principal at Middle East Alternatives in Washington DC), Hussein Ayoub (Journalist), Ghassan Hajjar (Journalist)

### Women's representation: One Woman

This episode constituted a relative exception with the inclusion of the Minister of Social Affairs, Hanine El-Sayed, who was given approximately 30 minutes to present the outcomes of meetings held in Washington with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and to outline the government's approach to reform and reconstruction.

El-Sayed delivered a detailed and substantive intervention, addressing technical, financial, and policy-related issues. However, once her segment concluded, the program shifted to a broader political discussion that lasted nearly an hour and was conducted exclusively among male guests. The minister was not included in this subsequent exchange, and no other women were invited to participate.

While the presence of a woman in a ministerial role marked a departure from the program's usual all-male panels, this participation remained compartmentalized. It did not translate into women's inclusion in the more confrontational and agenda-setting phase of the debate, reinforcing a pattern in which women are permitted to speak within clearly bounded, technical segments but are excluded from extended political discussion and contestation.



Source: aljazeera TV  
retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.tv/watch/82639/>

## 20-30

### LBCI

20-30 is a compact political talk show centered on focused, in-depth interviews. With a two-segment format, the program prioritizes sustained discussion over multiple angles, allowing for detailed exploration of political positions and public policy issues within a limited timeframe.

The show is hosted by Albert Kostanian, a Lebanese journalist and television presenter known for his structured and analytical interviewing style. Costanian typically adopts a measured, issue-driven approach, favoring extended questioning and follow-up over confrontation. His moderation places emphasis on clarity, argumentation, and policy substance, positioning the program as a space for controlled political dialogue rather than performative debate.



Date: 13 October 2025

**Guests:** Ghassan Salameh (Minister of Culture), Tamara El-Zein (Minister of Environment), David Schenker (Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs)

### **Women's representation: One Woman**

The episode examined the challenges facing the Lebanese government toward 2030, including reform implementation, state sovereignty, regional pressures, and economic recovery. David Schenker framed his intervention around U.S.–Lebanon relations, regional geopolitical dynamics, and the conditional nature of international support linked to governance reforms and institutional credibility.

A notable strength of the episode was the relatively balanced airtime between Minister Ghassan Salamé and Minister Tamara El-Zein. Unlike many media appearances in which women ministers are confined to their technical portfolios, El-Zein engaged substantively on cross-cutting political and economic issues, including institutional reform and state capacity. Her contributions extended beyond environmental policy and positioned her as a national policymaker rather than a sectoral representative.

Importantly, her interventions were not limited to reactive commentary; she articulated forward-looking policy priorities and addressed structural governance challenges. The host's framing allowed her to speak in a policy-oriented register comparable to her male counterpart, suggesting a departure from the more gendered patterns observed in previous episodes. While moments of interruption were present, they did not disproportionately target her interventions, and her authority as a decision-maker was largely acknowledged within the discussion.

The presence of an international diplomatic voice alongside two sitting ministers added strategic depth to the discussion. However, while this episode demonstrated a balanced and inclusive format, such representation remains closer to an exception than a consistent programming standard.



Source: LBCI  
retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/watch/73974>

Date: 20 October 2025

**Guests:** Majd Harb (Lawyer and Political activist), Nadim Koteich (General Director of Sky News Arabia), Hareth Sleiman (Political Researcher)

### Women's representation: Absence (with reference to a university professor's apology)

The episode centered on the prospect of direct negotiations between Lebanon and Israel, examining the political, legal, and strategic implications of such a move. The discussion addressed questions of sovereignty, the constitutional framework governing negotiations, the regional balance of power, and the potential domestic repercussions of entering formal dialogue. Panelists debated whether negotiations would constitute a pragmatic political step or a controversial shift in national positioning, particularly in light of Lebanon's internal divisions and regional dynamics.

Despite the significance of the topic, the panel remained exclusively male. The host noted that a professor of international relations from the Lebanese University had apologized at the last minute, signaling that a female voice had initially been considered. However, no replacement was introduced, and the discussion proceeded without gender diversity.

The absence of women from a debate on diplomacy, conflict, and national decision-making reinforces a recurring pattern in political media discourse, where high-stakes strategic issues are framed within male-dominated expert circles. While the acknowledgment of the professor's apology suggests awareness of representation, the lack of an alternative guest reflects the absence of institutional mechanisms to ensure consistent gender balance in political programming.



Source: LBCI  
retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/watch/73974>

Date: 27 October 2025

**Guests:** Yassine Jaber (Minister of Finance), Alia Moubayed (Economist specialized in emerging markets), Walid Abou Sleiman (Financial expert)

### Women's representation: One Woman

The episode focused on Lebanon's economic and financial landscape, addressing fiscal reform priorities, monetary policy directions, public finance management, and broader macroeconomic stabilization measures. Discussions extended to the role of the Ministry of Finance in navigating ongoing structural challenges, as well as issues related to currency stability, financial governance, and gold reserves.

Economist Alia Moubayed was given substantial and balanced speaking time alongside the Minister of Finance and the financial expert. Her contributions covered all major discussion axes, including fiscal policy, economic reform pathways, and monetary considerations. Importantly, her participation was framed strictly within her professional expertise, without gendered references or stereotypical positioning.

The exchange reflected a technically grounded debate in which Moubayed engaged on equal footing with her male counterparts. She was neither interrupted nor confined to secondary commentary, and her analysis was integrated into the core of the policy discussion.

This episode constitutes a positive example of women's inclusion in high-level economic discourse. It demonstrates that when editorial framing is merit-based and expertise-driven, women can be fully integrated into complex financial and macroeconomic debates without marginalization.



Source: LBCI  
retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/watch/73974>

Date: 3 November 2025

**Guests:** Rakan Nasreddine (Health Minister), Fadi El-Jardali (Professor of Health Policy and Systems), Tannous Bekaai (Head of the Division of Hematology and Oncology at Mayo Clinic in Arizona, and the David F. and Margaret T. Grohne Chair Professor of New Cancer Treatment Research), Hamvik Kouria (Specialist in Hematology and Oncology)

### Women's representation: Complete absence

This episode addressed a major public health and environmental issue, drawing on national and international studies examining the link between pollution and cancer in Lebanon. The discussion relied heavily on medical expertise, scientific evidence, and health policy analysis, and extended for more than one hour among four male guests.

The absence of women is particularly striking given the strong presence of female doctors



Source: LBCI  
retrieved from <https://www.lbcgroup.tv/watch/73974>

and researchers in Lebanon's health sector. Women today constitute approximately 40–45% of registered physicians in Lebanon, with even higher representation among younger cohorts. Lebanese universities including the American University of Beirut, Saint Joseph University, the Lebanese University, and the Lebanese American University graduate significant numbers of women in medicine, public health, and biomedical sciences each year.

Female doctors are also well represented across major hospitals and research institutions, including university medical centers and specialized cancer treatment facilities. In fields directly relevant to the episode, such as oncology, hematology, epidemiology, public health, and environmental health women serve as clinicians, department heads, researchers, and policy advisors, both in Lebanon and within the Lebanese medical diaspora.

In this context, the absence of any female medical expert, researcher, or health policy specialist cannot be attributed to a lack of qualified voices. Rather, it reflects a broader pattern in which men are consistently positioned as authoritative experts in televised debates, even in sectors where women's professional presence and expertise are well established.

This episode confirms that women's exclusion from broadcast media is not confined to politics or governance, but extends to scientific and health-related discussions that shape public understanding and policy responses. By failing to include women experts in such debates, media platforms contribute to the systematic invisibilization of women's knowledge and leadership across critical sectors of public life.

# Systemic Gender Bias in Political Media Programming

Monitoring a selection of Lebanon's most influential political talk shows reveals a persistent and highly structured pattern in the production of televised political visibility. Far from being incidental, women's marginalization is embedded in how the broadcast public sphere is organized: who is invited, who speaks, for how long, and on which issues. Across programs, political debate is consistently constructed as a predominantly male domain not only through numerical imbalance, but through the unequal allocation of airtime, the moderation of discussion, and the systematic exclusion of women from agenda-setting topics. Together, these dynamics reinforce a media environment in which authority, expertise, and political legitimacy are overwhelmingly associated with male voices.

## 1. Women's absence as the norm, and their presence as the exception

The sample shows that the complete absence of women from entire episodes remains a recurring phenomenon, particularly in programs that rely on a fixed roster of political guests and a narrow circle of repeatedly circulated names. . When a woman does appear, she is often the sole female among a large group of men, turning her presence rendering her presence symbolic rather than representative. This pattern suggests that women's inclusion is not based on expertise or the breadth of the expert pool, but rather on selective considerations that detach "representation" from the principle of balance.

## 2. Confining women outside sovereign files or to "predefined" roles

Even when women are invited, their participation is rarely treated as an integral part of sovereign political debate. Women are almost entirely excluded from files such as the electoral law and expatriate voting, arms and sovereignty, negotiations, and strategic choices. In contrast, their presence is more frequent in social or technical files, or as an exception tied to an official position. This reproduces an implicit divide between "hard politics," managed through male

voices, and "social/service-oriented" issues in which women are permitted to appear even when these files directly intersect with political and economic decision-making.

## 3. A gap in airtime distribution and "rules of turn-taking"

Representation is not measured solely by the number of guests, but also by access to speaking time. Monitoring highlights a recurring gap in airtime allocation in favor of male guests, through:

- granting men longer interventions within the same segment,
- prioritizing them in the order of questioning, or
- allowing dialogue among men to continue for extended periods after a woman has spoken, without re-engaging her.

This means that female visibility, when it occurs, does not automatically ensure equal access to the "platform," but remains subject to the authority of debate management.

## 4. Interruption and trivialization as mechanisms for weakening women's voices

A repeated pattern of interruption or bypassing attempts to respond emerges when the guest is a woman, whether by other guests or by the program host. In some cases, the woman's attempts to restore balance or respond to a direct question are not treated as part of a legitimate "right of reply," but are marginalized in favor of continuing dialogue among men. This dynamic not only weakens the substance of women's participation, but also sends an implicit message to the audience that women's voices hold lower priority in the public debate hierarchy.

## 5. Patronizing discourse and double standards in addressing women in decision-making positions

Some episodes display the use of reprimanding or patronizing language when addressing women in official positions, suggesting the application of a different standard in evaluating performance or tone of address. In this sense, the problem is not limited to women's absence

as guests, but extends to how women are spoken about when they are the subject of discussion or part of it, affecting the perceived legitimacy of their public presence and the image of women's leadership before the audience.

#### **6. Turning women into a “confrontation point” within a male-dominated panel**

When a woman is the sole female guest among several men, her presence is often structurally transformed into a confrontational position: defending herself, justifying her stance, or absorbing criticism directed disproportionately toward her. Research on gendered media communication shows that women in political debates are more frequently interrupted, subjected to tone policing, asked to substantiate their legitimacy, or framed as representatives of a “cause” rather than as authoritative policymakers in their own right. Their expertise is more likely to be scrutinized, their emotional register more closely monitored, and their authority treated as contingent rather than assumed.

This gendered dynamic manifests through subtle yet consequential practices: corrective or paternalistic language, repeated demands for clarification, asymmetrical questioning intensity, or the redirection of accountability toward the woman guest even when responsibility is collective. These mechanisms do not always appear overtly hostile; rather, they operate through patterns of conversational control and agenda-setting that shift the woman's role from contributor to respondent.

As a result, her ability to provide forward-looking, policy-oriented analysis is constrained. She is drawn into reactive exchanges not because of the substance of her intervention, but because of the structural configuration of the episode and its embedded power hierarchies. In such settings, diversity ceases to function as a genuine objective. Instead, the woman guest becomes a focal “point of tension” within the episode's dynamics, rather than being treated as a fully recognized knowledge producer and political actor.

#### **7. Limited positive models that demonstrate the feasibility of balance under clear criteria**

Despite the overall picture, the sample shows that balance is achievable when a disciplined editorial approach is adopted: hosting women as experts in economic or financial files, or as ministers within a comprehensive political dialogue, while allocating airtime comparable

to that of male guests and avoiding the confinement of women to narrowly “sectoral” roles. However, these examples remain limited and do not amount to a sustained editorial policy.

Based on this monitoring, the challenge lies not merely in the “number of women” on screen, but in an integrated system that determines who is invited, for which topics, and under what conditions within each episode. This system produces distorted representation on two interrelated levels: a quantitative imbalance (women's rarity or absence) and a qualitative imbalance (restricted speaking time, interruptions, and role confinement). Addressing this gap therefore requires a shift away from the logic of “exceptional invitations” toward an editorial approach that consistently integrates women as experts and opinion-makers at the core of sovereign political files, rather than at their margins.

#### **c. KII themes**

The following findings are based on a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted by Madanyat to assess structural, editorial, and political factors shaping women's representation on Lebanese television. The interviews were held with senior media executives, journalists, political analysts, and public figures who are directly involved in content production, editorial decision-making, or political communication.

The KIIs included:

- Pierre El Daher – Chairman and CEO of LBCI
- Karma Khayat – Vice Chairwoman and Executive Director of Al Jadeed TV
- Walid Abboud – Political journalist and television host
- Albert Kostanian – Journalist and host of the political program “20-30” on LBCI
- Laury Haytayan – Energy policy expert and public affairs specialist
- May Chidiac – Former Minister of State for Administrative Reform and media figure

Together, these interviews provide insight into editorial practices, political dynamics, and structural barriers influencing the visibility of women experts and politicians in Lebanon's televised political debate.

## 1. The current state of women experts' and politicians' presence on Lebanese television

Five of the six interviewees agreed that the presence of women experts and politicians on Lebanese television remains limited and irregular, even if several noted a “relative improvement” compared to previous years. None described gender balance as institutionalized or systematic. Instead, women’s participation was characterized as episodic, context-driven, and dependent on specific circumstances rather than integrated into the daily architecture of political debate.

One senior media executive stated:

“There are more women than before, yes. But it is not yet a natural or constant presence.”

This assessment aligns with the quantitative monitoring findings, where women represented only 7.95% of total guest appearances across 12 episodes, and 50% of episodes featured no women at all.

Interviewees offered two main explanations for this pattern.

First, three respondents linked media visibility to sustained engagement in public affairs. According to this view, television presence is not granted but earned through consistent involvement in key political files and the gradual construction of public credibility. As one interviewee put it:

*“Television reflects who is active and following the file closely. Visibility follows engagement.”*

Second, four interviewees pointed to structural factors that shape invitations and panel composition. They noted that women are more frequently invited to discuss social, advocacy-oriented, or sectoral issues, while sovereign, electoral, security, and strategic files remain dominated by male political actors. This distinction mirrors the monitoring results, which showed women largely absent from debates on electoral law, arms and sovereignty, negotiations, and high-stakes national decisions.

The interviews also highlighted recurring political dynamics affecting guest selection. Three respondents confirmed that some political figures impose conditions on panel composition as a prerequisite for participation. In particular, certain politicians insist on being hosted alongside counterparts of equivalent political status parliamentarians, ministers, or party leaders rather than engaging in debate with experts or civil society representatives.

While such conditions are not explicitly framed in gender terms, their effects are structurally gendered. Given the limited number of women holding parliamentary or ministerial office in Lebanon, status-based criteria significantly narrow the eligible pool of female guests. This contributes to the repeated circulation of the same male political figures, reinforces their media dominance, and further restricts women’s sustained integration into televised political debate.

Taken together, the interviews suggest that women’s underrepresentation is not perceived as the result of a single exclusionary decision, but rather as the outcome of intersecting editorial habits, political hierarchies, and status-based filtering mechanisms that collectively reproduce male-dominated panels, a pattern clearly reflected in the monitoring data.

## 2. The role of television channels in shaping public opinion on women’s participation

All six interviewees agreed that television channels play a central role in shaping public perceptions of women’s participation in political life. In the Lebanese context, where broadcast media remains a primary arena for political visibility, television does not merely transmit political positions; it constructs the symbolic boundaries of who is recognized as a legitimate political actor.

One interviewee noted:

*“Television doesn’t just host politicians, it defines who looks like a politician.”*

Respondents emphasized that regular on-screen presence contributes to normalizing the image of women as political actors, analysts, and decision-makers. In contrast, systematic absence reinforces the perception of politics as a predominantly male domain. This observation directly corresponds with the monitoring findings, which showed that women accounted for only 7.95% of total guest appearances and were absent from half of the episodes analyzed.

Four interviewees stressed that granting women consistent airtime can gradually build public confidence in their discourse and political performance. According to this perspective, familiarity reduces resistance, and repetition consolidates authority. However, the responsibility for change was not framed as resting solely with media institutions.

Three respondents argued that women’s visibility also depends on sustained engagement,

media preparedness, and strategic positioning. As one interviewee explained:

*“The channel can open the door, but someone must be ready to enter and stay.”*

Accordingly, the relationship between media platforms and women politicians was described as complementary rather than unilateral. While television channels possess the power to expand representation and reshape public perception through editorial choices, interviewees maintained that media inclusion alone cannot compensate for limited political positioning, fragmented networks, or inconsistent public engagement.

Taken together, the interviews suggest that television acts as both gatekeeper and amplifier: it can either reinforce existing gender hierarchies or contribute to transforming them but its impact is most effective when accompanied by parallel political and professional mobilization by women themselves.

### **3. Editorial criteria guiding the selection of guests on political talk shows**

Five of the six interviewees stated that competence is formally the primary criterion guiding guest selection on political talk shows, regardless of gender. Competence was defined in terms of analytical capacity, clarity of argumentation, subject-matter expertise, and the ability to sustain substantive debate in a manner that contributes to the episode’s overall quality.

However, four interviewees acknowledged that the concept of an episode’s “success” extends beyond knowledge value alone. Political controversy, rapid exchange, performative confidence, and audience ratings were described as influential factors in determining whom producers invite. Within this framework, media fluency and prior on-screen experience become decisive.

As one respondent explained:

*“On television, you have one chance, not two. If you fail, you are not invited again.”*

This perception of television exposure as high-risk reinforces a risk-averse editorial culture. Producers tend to rely on familiar figures who have already demonstrated comfort under pressure and the ability to generate dynamic exchanges. In practice, this results in the repeated circulation of the same guests.

This dynamic aligns with the monitoring findings, which showed a high concentration of

recurring male political figures across episodes and channels. Given that men historically dominate political office and have accumulated longer media trajectories, they are more likely to be perceived as “safe” choices.

While interviewees did not frame this pattern as intentional exclusion, its effects are structurally unequal. New entrants including many qualified women experts face higher entry barriers due to limited prior exposure. Thus, even when editorial teams assert neutrality of criteria, access to the screen remains shaped by political networks, reputational cycles, and visibility capital that disproportionately advantage men.

In effect, competence operates within a layered system in which prior visibility generates further invitations. This visibility cycle contributes to maintaining women’s underrepresentation, not necessarily through explicit bias, but through editorial risk management practices that privilege established male figures.

### **4. Gender balance between editorial discourse and actual practice**

Four of the six interviewees acknowledged that gender balance is not treated as a formal or independent editorial objective within most television stations. Instead, representation is described as a “natural outcome” of existing selection processes. Respondents indicated that stations generally avoid adopting explicit internal policies or numerical targets for women’s inclusion, citing concerns about tokenism or compromising perceived content quality.

As one respondent noted:

*“We don’t work with quotas. We choose based on relevance and competence.”*

However, two interviewees critically argued that leaving gender balance to emerge “naturally” within a structurally male-dominated media and political system effectively ensures its absence. In their view, neutrality in a context of structural imbalance produces unequal outcomes.

This assessment aligns with the monitoring data, which showed that 50% of episodes featured no women at all, and that women’s overall participation remained below 8%. These figures suggest that the absence of an explicit inclusion objective does not result in spontaneous balance.

Across interviews, women's participation was described as context-driven rather than institutionalized. Invitations often depend on specific files, official roles, or situational relevance, rather than reflecting a systematic editorial commitment to diversifying voices.

As a result, women's expertise remains contingent upon predefined editorial conditions. Their presence is frequently framed as an addition to the panel rather than an integral component of political debate architecture. This approach limits the transformation of gender balance into a consistent and sustainable editorial practice.

### 5. Practical challenges in identifying and inviting women experts and politicians

Five of the six interviewees identified recurring practical constraints affecting the inclusion of women experts and politicians in talk shows.

Three respondents observed that male politicians tend to be more proactive in positioning themselves for media visibility. They closely monitor programs, initiate contact with producers, and signal their availability. Women, by contrast, were described as less likely to engage in direct outreach or strategic self-promotion in relation to television platforms.

One interviewee stated:

*"Men call. They follow up. They make sure they are on the radar."*

Beyond individual initiative, four respondents highlighted the importance of informal professional networks. Male political figures often cultivate sustained relationships with journalists, editors, and hosts, relationships that naturally translate into recurring invitations. Women are generally less embedded in these long-standing circuits, which limits both their visibility and their continuity on screen.

The fast-paced nature of television production was also cited as a constraint. In breaking news situations or highly technical files, producers tend to rely on readily available and familiar names rather than investing additional time in identifying new experts. Given that men dominate existing visibility cycles, this reliance further reinforces male-dominated panels.

Two interviewees also noted that some women experts decline invitations, either for professional reasons or to avoid participation in highly confrontational debates. While framed

as an issue of availability, this factor further narrows the pool of potential female guests.

Although many of these constraints were described as logistical or technical, their cumulative effect is structural. They contribute to sustaining the gap between the actual availability of qualified women experts and their limited representation on screen, a gap clearly reflected in the monitoring findings.

### 6. Structural and logistical factors constraining women's presence

Five of the six interviewees identified structural political hierarchies as a primary factor limiting women's presence on political talk shows. Respondents pointed to male-centered party structures and media networks, where men continue to serve as primary spokespersons, especially on sovereign and high-stakes files. Women, by contrast, are more frequently assigned secondary or symbolic roles.

As one respondent noted:

*"When the issue is sovereignty or security, parties send their strongest political representative and that is usually a man."*

Interviewees also emphasized the role of political alignment in shaping guest selection. Television channels operate within defined editorial and political orientations, which filter which political actors are considered compatible with the platform. While this affects both men and women, it disproportionately impacts women due to their already limited presence in formal political office. Partisan filtering thus narrows an already small pool of eligible female guests.

Editorial risk management further reinforces this imbalance. Four interviewees acknowledged that producers prioritize established figures to ensure program continuity, audience engagement, and perceived quality. This practice reproduces visibility cycles, a pattern reflected in the monitoring findings, where recurring male figures dominated multiple episodes across channels.

Logistical factors were also cited. Political talk shows often air during late evening hours, overlapping with caregiving and family responsibilities that remain unevenly distributed across genders. Additionally, media engagement requires constant availability and

flexibility conditions that interviewees acknowledge are more easily sustained by men within Lebanon's current social structure.

Taken together, these structural and logistical factors produce cumulative exclusion. Women's underrepresentation is not attributable to a single gatekeeping decision, but to intersecting political, editorial, and social dynamics that collectively restrict sustained participation.

### **7. Audience reception of women experts and politicians and the reproduction of the gap**

Interviewees expressed divergent views regarding audience reception of women experts and politicians.

Three respondents argued that audience engagement depends primarily on performance charisma, clarity, and argumentative strength rather than gender. From this perspective, acceptance or rejection is individualized.

However, three other interviewees emphasized that audience reaction cannot be separated from the framing conditions of the debate. Moderation style, airtime distribution, and sequencing of interventions influence how authority is constructed on screen.

As one respondent stated:

*"If a woman is constantly interrupted, the audience reads that as weakness."*

This observation aligns with monitoring findings documenting interruptions and unequal speaking time in several episodes. When women are given limited space or positioned defensively within male-dominated panels, audience confidence may be indirectly shaped by the episode's structural design.

Interviewees also noted that segments of the audience continue to operate within traditional perceptions of politics as a male domain. Thus, audience reception is not independent but mediated by both editorial framing and prevailing social norms.

### **8. Conditions for impactful women's participation and models of successful presence**

Four interviewees agreed that impactful participation by women is achievable when specific conditions are met. Chief among these is invitation based on substantive expertise rather than symbolic inclusion.

As one respondent explained:

*"When a woman is invited because she owns the file, not to fill a seat, the impact is different."*

Preparation, confidence, and familiarity with the pace of televised debate were also identified as key factors. Continuity of appearance was repeatedly highlighted: sustained exposure allows women to consolidate authority over time, just as male figures have done through repeated invitations.

A supportive moderation environment was also described as critical. When women are granted uninterrupted space and integrated into core political exchanges, their contributions are normalized rather than exceptionalized.

Several interviewees additionally pointed to the role of civil society organizations in strengthening media readiness through training, expert databases, and networking.

### **9. The role of television channels in promoting more inclusive representation of women experts**

All six interviewees agreed that television channels possess structural capacity to expand women's representation beyond reactive or ad hoc invitations. Editorial decisions influence who is recognized as an "expert" and how political legitimacy is visually constructed.

Four respondents suggested that proactive editorial practices including developing expert databases, recurring invitations, and consistent framing of women as authorities could help break cycles of unfamiliarity.

However, two interviewees cautioned against cosmetic approaches. Sustainable inclusion requires integrating gender diversity into editorial mission and episode design, not merely adjusting guest lists.

In this sense, channels function not only as gatekeepers but as architects of political visibility. The monitoring data demonstrates that absence persists when gender balance is left to informal processes. Institutionalizing inclusive editorial standards would therefore be central to altering representation patterns.

### **10. The potential for adopting internal policies to improve gender balance**

Five of the six interviewees agreed that adopting internal policies to improve gender balance within television channels is both possible and institutionally feasible. However, four respondents expressed reservations regarding rigid numerical quotas, citing concerns about tokenistic representation or the perception that content quality might be compromised.

As one respondent noted:

*“If balance is imposed mechanically, it risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive.”*

Instead of quotas, most interviewees favored sustainable structural measures. These include expanding expert databases, building long-term relationships with women experts, and developing clearer selection procedures that ensure fairer speaking-time distribution and more balanced moderation.

Importantly, three respondents emphasized that internal policies alone would not suffice without a supportive institutional culture. As one interviewee stated:

*“A policy on paper changes nothing if daily practices remain the same.”*

The monitoring data particularly the recurrence of all-male panels in 50% of episodes suggests that the absence of structured editorial safeguards allows imbalance to persist. Interviewees therefore framed internal policies not as editorial constraints, but as organizational tools capable of gradually reshaping selection patterns when combined with genuine institutional commitment.

### **11. The role of civil society organizations in bridging the media access gap**

All six interviewees acknowledged the potential role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in narrowing the gap between the availability of women experts and their actual media presence.

Four respondents emphasized that editorial teams often operate under time constraints and lack readily accessible databases of women experts. CSOs were therefore described as potential intermediaries capable of supplying structured, up-to-date expert pools.

As one respondent explained:

*“Producers work under pressure. If you make access easier, inclusion becomes easier.”*

Recommendations included the development of dynamic, regularly updated databases categorized by specialization, as well as direct and institutionalized communication channels between CSOs and television stations.

Three interviewees also highlighted the importance of media training particularly in areas such as message framing, time management, and navigating confrontational formats. These interventions were viewed as strengthening women’s readiness within high-pressure broadcast environments.

However, two respondents cautioned against fragmented or short-term initiatives. Sustained coordination among CSOs was described as essential to avoid duplication and to exert structural influence on media ecosystems.

### **12. The responsibility of political parties and movements in amplifying women’s visibility**

Five interviewees agreed that political parties bear primary responsibility for amplifying women’s visibility in media spaces. Respondents stressed that women’s limited screen presence reflects their underrepresentation in party leadership and decision-making structures.

As one interviewee observed:

*“Television reflects party hierarchies. If women are not positioned inside the party, they will not appear outside it.”*

Respondents called on parties to move beyond rhetorical commitments to equality and to actively position women as spokespersons on core political files, not only on issues labeled as “women’s issues.”

Three interviewees specifically emphasized that assigning women to represent parties during critical political moments would significantly expand the pool of legitimate female political voices available to media platforms.

This party-level responsibility was framed as complementary to media reform. While channels control invitation mechanisms, parties control candidate positioning. Without structural shifts within party hierarchies, media-level interventions alone may have limited impact.

### 13. Concluding observations on the conditions for cultural and media change

Across interviews, there was broad consensus that strengthening women's representation in political media coverage requires more than isolated editorial adjustments. Five of the six interviewees emphasized the need for broader cultural change in perceptions of women's political roles.

Despite recognition of incremental improvements, respondents acknowledged that entrenched social norms and gender stereotypes continue to shape both guest selection and audience reception.

Interviewees identified two parallel axes of reform:

1. Reform within media institutions including balanced editorial practices and structured inclusion mechanisms.
2. Expansion of women's presence within political and institutional leadership structures normalizing their role as decision-makers.

The interviews ultimately converge on the conclusion that dismantling current patterns of underrepresentation requires a coordinated ecosystem approach. Media institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, and women political actors themselves must act simultaneously.

Absent such alignment, women's presence risks remaining exceptional rather than structural, a pattern clearly evidenced in the monitoring data, where women accounted for less than 8% of total guest appearances.

## Conclusion

This study confirms that women's exclusion from Lebanon's political visibility has not diminished with the evolution of media platforms; rather, it has adapted to new forms. As demonstrated through the monitoring of television talk shows, national events, and institutional appointments, women remain largely absent from the arenas where political authority, expertise, and legitimacy are publicly constructed. When women do appear, their presence is often exceptional, fragmented, or confined to predefined roles that do not reflect the breadth of their competencies or their actual engagement in public life.

The findings show that this exclusion is not the result of isolated editorial choices, but of an interlocking system of media practices, political hierarchies, and social norms. Quantitatively, women are underrepresented or entirely absent from decisive political discussions. Qualitatively, their participation is shaped by unequal airtime, interruption, marginal positioning within debate structures, and the persistent framing of sovereign and strategic files as male domains. These patterns are mirrored across political parties, public appointments, and professional bodies, reinforcing a self-sustaining cycle in which visibility and power remain mutually reinforcing for men and mutually restrictive for women.

The research also demonstrates that gender imbalance is not inevitable in effect. Episodes in which women were invited as experts or decision-makers and granted equitable space show that balanced representation enhances the depth, credibility, and pluralism of debate. However, such examples remain sporadic and dependent on individual goodwill rather than embedded institutional policy.

Addressing this gap requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward enforceable structural commitments. Media institutions—particularly national broadcasters—must recognize their role not merely as platforms, but as public authorities shaping democratic representation. This includes adopting clear internal measures to prevent all-male panels, establishing gender-sensitive editorial guidelines, diversifying expert databases, and institutionalizing eq-


uitable speaking practices. The normalization of male-only discussions on matters of national importance should no longer be treated as neutral or acceptable.

Importantly, this responsibility cannot be outsourced to time-bound, donor-funded initiatives led by civil society organizations. While NGOs play a critical role in advocacy, training, and bridge-building, sustainable change requires ownership by national media institutions and regulatory bodies. Strengthening public broadcasting and embedding gender equality standards within its mandate represent long-term, structural pathways toward more inclusive political visibility.

Political parties and state institutions must likewise assume responsibility by formally endorsing women as spokespersons and representatives in core political files, rather than limiting them to peripheral roles. Without institutional authorization and structural support, women's media participation will remain contingent and reversible.

Ultimately, women's visibility on screen is not merely a media concern; it is a democratic imperative. The architecture of televised debate defines who is perceived as legitimate, competent, and authoritative in public life. When women are systematically excluded, democracy itself is narrowed. Ensuring women's full and sustained presence in these spaces requires coordinated and institutionalized action across media, politics, and governance—so that women are no longer “not even in the picture,” but recognized as central actors in shaping Lebanon's present and future.

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