



Women Representation and Elections

Policy paper prepared by Maharat Foundation

Beirut - January 2022





Women Representation and Elections

This paper comes as a summary of the monitoring, conducted by Maharat Foundation, of the Media during the Electoral Campaigns from a Gender Perspective, especially the part related to women's appearance in the media during Lebanon's previous legislative and municipalities elections, through the different media platforms and outlets. This paper presents ways to contemplate media and gender dynamics before and during the elections, especially in a society where women are still marginalized. This paper will also cover activities the foundation carried out in line with the electoral coverage, especially the part related to media and electoral advertising, which constitutes an essential aspect of the electoral law and electoral education to ensure fair, transparent, inclusive and democratic elections. This paper aims to interpret the findings and suggests recommendations to enhance women's representation during the elections, through better media access, and raise citizen awareness regarding gender differences in elections, which can be used as guidance for the 2022 elections and beyond.



Who has access to more media?

Whoever TV stations give the speech to during times of elections is a very important question because whoever takes the word can advertise themselves and put forward their ideas to win the support of voters. For those who cannot access the screen, they won't be able to deliver their speech to the public and to introduce themselves, their projects and their program to voters.

2016 Municipalities election

The Study led by Maharat Foundation after the 2016 municipal elections showed that the number of media appearances or discussion about men and/or women in television news reports monitored during May 2016 (a sample of 1,534 news reports) reached 10% in television reports, and the media appearance of speakers in political dialogue programs during The Month of May between males and females was distributed between 11% for women and 89% for men out of a total of 146 different media appearances. Women's speech time fell to 7% from the 11% of appearance.

This indicator shows that the media does not give women enough time to talk compared to the time allocated to men. One of the most prominent conclusions is that the Lebanese media deals with gender issues from a community perspective and not from the perspective of the role anticipated by the media in narrowing the gender gap, specifically in fields of public affairs, elections and political participation.

2018 Parliamentary elections

The issue with the percentage of media appearances of active women in public affairs compared to the men's is influenced by many factors, including the proportion of women leaders in traditional parties and the proportion of women involved in public affairs, especially in the political arena.

The desire of women to engage and participate in politics exists, which indicates the number of women candidates in the last parliamentary elections in 2018, when the total number of women who formally submitted their candidacies to the Ministry of Interior reached 111 out of all 976 candidates, or 11.3%. This percentage increased to 14.4% with the withdrawal of dozens of candidates of both sexes, the final number settled on 86 women candidates out of a total of 597 candidates on the lists.

Who Makes the News? Lebanon Report

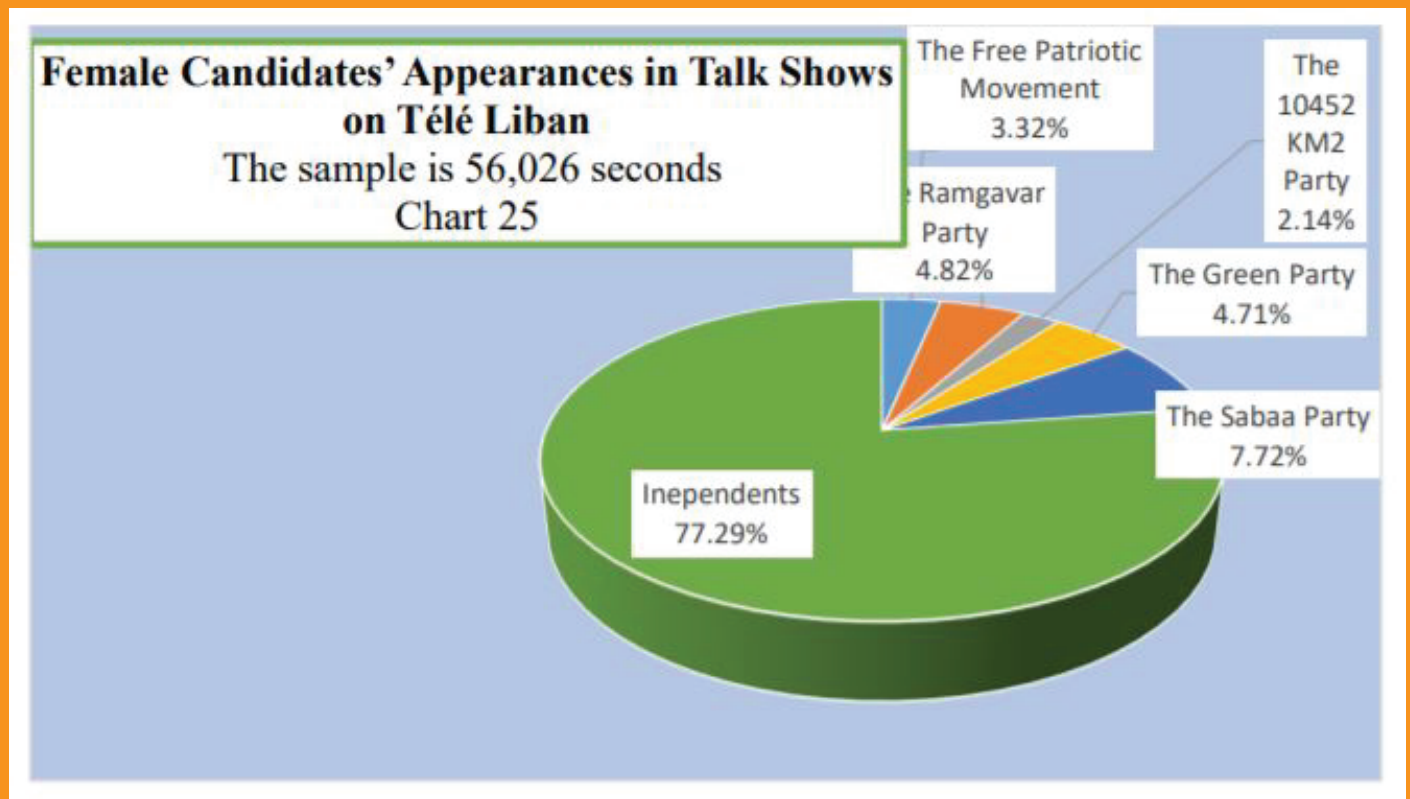
The results of the latest monitoring study carried out by Maharat Foundation under the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which takes place every five years to assess women's presence in news coverage, have shown progress in favor of women's news coverage in the Lebanese media compared to the first results of 2010, and representation increased from 5% 10 years ago to 13% in 2015 and 19% in 2020, but most keynote speakers, experts and commentators remain men, reflecting an unbalanced presence of women in news coverage, particularly in jobs and professions related to the government, police, military and business, or as an expert or commentator.



Case Study:

Electoral Law in favor of increased access for independent candidates: Tele Liban Case

Télé Liban was by far the biggest contributor in raising the percentage of coverage in talk shows and special interviews with a rate of 77.2% for independent female candidates.



The rates were disproportionate between Télé Liban and private stations in offering a space for independents and civil society. The high rate on Télé Liban is in line with article 73 of the Election Law which allows any candidate or list to use the official media for free. However not all candidates were aware of this right. Maharat assisted more than 10 independent women candidates to apply for free appearance on the public broadcast.

Furthermore, the percentage of coverage of electoral campaigns was in favor of the independents on Tele Liban, as most private stations already represented the political powers who were able to find access to private media and did not need the official media.



Social Media a need for women candidates to be more visible

Female candidates also used social media to access the voters. But here too they talked about and promoted the electoral campaign while male candidates were primarily focused on establishing their political positions. Women candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections were more active on Facebook than Twitter, as were the men candidates. The overall average of posts and tweets was 79.7 for men candidates, compared to 54.4 tweets for women candidates. In terms of the content of blogs and tweets, political positions were at the forefront with 27.8 percent for the men candidates, while the electoral campaigns were at the forefront for the female candidates, with 18.1%. This reflects female candidates' need to use social media platforms to announce their presence in the electoral campaign as a first step in preparation for a later role whereas male candidates were able to fulfill their role by commenting on events. The figures also reflect men's political experience in terms of topics they can influence or comment on.

It is also interesting that, paradoxically, posts regarding women's political participation were higher among men candidates by 3 percent, compared to 1.7 percent among women candidates. Being more powerful in the political equation, mentioning women's candidacy in their discourse is an added credit to the values they're promoting, which in turn reinforces their image as male democratic candidates who are open to equality. However, this is inconsistent with the percentage of women nominated by political parties and female candidates' media coverage, where men also have the lion's share in owning, managing and working in media organizations, and managing their news bulletins and talk shows. Therefore, it seems that talking about women's participation is just that, talking, or it's used as a promotional tool to win over female voters.



Challenges regarding women presentation

The main challenge is that the media does not play a positive role in highlighting the image of women active in public affairs or those who have sufficient qualifications to influence public opinion and enable them to appear equal to men. Findings highlight that media coverage is still men-dominated, while women are still marginalized during electoral campaigns.

In this context, there is a fundamental problem in the media coverage when it comes to the professionalism of journalists in dealing with women candidates in terms of questions and the way they communicate with them and the terms used.

An important aspect of media coverage is that political women are often portrayed as unusual and that their presence is not a natural trend or with a focus on the feminist aspects of the nominated woman or her natural role as a mother, head of a family in society. In fact, women active in political public affairs are often referred to as "women candidates" or "political women." Here, the media contribute to conveying the wrong message that their presence in the public affairs is not normal or an exceptional phenomenon, as happened in the coverage of the five candidates during the parliamentary elections for the Akkar district, who formed an exclusive list of women only in the face of lists formed entirely of men candidates. Thus, the media and journalists should focus on the coverage of the candidates' programs and ideas, not on what is exciting and attractive to the general public.

The problem

The problem presented above is rooted in society needs engines of change, that starts with the media, which highlights the image of influential women and pushes towards changing the patterns of thinking and stereotypes about women working in the public affairs. This comes in light of the shifting events Lebanon is witnessing such as the October 17 protests and the economic, living and social crises which stands as a factor to increase the representation of women in politics and its occupation of influential leadership positions on the political map. Not only through new political groups but also in the structure of traditional parties.



Case Study: Lorient le jour editorial policy in favor of women political participation

The results of the study of women in the legislative elections in Lebanon in 2018, showed the French speaking newspaper Lorient Le Jour distinguished itself by taking initiative, where it allowed women candidates to appear on their pages through private interviews and recorded the largest direct access of female candidates in this newspaper by 56%, accounting for more than half of the total public access rate compared to the rest of the newspapers combined. The newspaper's private interviews with candidates, the majority of whom were women, accounted for about 82 percent of the total private interviews conducted by the various newspapers monitored with election candidates. It asked men and women candidates the same questions, plus the question of whether or not they were deputies before. This prompted the supervisory body wrongfully to consider it a kind of political propaganda for women candidates and not just regular news coverage that is at the core of the media role to promote gender equality and active participation. Thus the commission should reconsider its role as it is not only limited to ensuring the balance in media appearances between the candidates in general, but should stimulate the presence of women in media.



Lack of voter education

When it comes to voter education, the percentage of coverage was insignificant and almost nonexistent in newspapers and television, with an overall rate of 0.19% in newspapers and a slightly better but still negligible 2.93% on television. In the distribution of overall rates of posts and tweets by men and women candidates, the topic of electoral awareness and education received 2.8% on both sides.

The low irrelevant rate for electoral education in the press and on television is problematic as citizens do not have adequate knowledge about the electoral work, the electoral mechanism, democratic culture, and especially of the new Election Law, which can be a disabling factor to the acknowledgement of women's potential and right to choose to lead and influence in Lebanon's politics. With knowledge comes choices, and with choices comes change.

Recommendations and Actors

Media outlets



The media should diversify their sources and allow women to stand out in parallel roles for men in news coverage, make their voices heard and express their opinion on various topics as partners in decision-making. The media must contribute to raising public awareness of the importance of the role that women can play in politics and work to improve the image of women and highlight their capacities at the political, economic and social levels.



The necessity of activating educational programs on gender issues; a cultural production that promotes gender justice in the face of a patriarchal culture.



The media adopt a gender editorial policy that supports women's issues and their political participation.

To electoral media and advertising



The need for the private media to seek, within the framework of its social responsibility, to provide fair, impartial and balanced electoral media for all male and female candidates.



The commission supervising the elections should play its role in defining the media and advertising spaces for effective monitoring and making more free spaces available for visibility.



The necessity for candidates to use mechanisms available for complaints and review in accessing the media, provided by the current election law.

Recommendations to public actors and political parties



The heads of political parties, traditional or other, should allow women to reach the highest party positions without obstacles related to inheritance or nepotism. Women should also be allowed to preside over candidate lists, reflecting better media coverage of women candidates.



Involving women in government through portfolios that differ from education and social affairs.

The Lebanese Parliament



The House of Representatives should pass the women's quota law in the formation of electoral lists and in parliamentary representation.



Update the law on organizing parties. Here, women can activate their presence in parties.



Women Representation and Elections

Prepared by the Consortium of organisations working on Elections (The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, The Lebanese Union for Persons with Physical Disabilities, Maharat, and the Lebanese Transparency Association). The policy paper is within the framework of the “Talk Politics” program, which is implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Program and funded by the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development. The program aims to provide citizens with information about electoral reforms and to involve them in the democratic process.



This publication was funded by the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development. With technical support from the United Nations Development Programme. The opinions expressed in this publication do not reflect Official positions of the European Union, the United States government, or the United States Agency for International Development or the United Nations Development Program.



Co-Funded by the European Union
بتمويل مشترك من الاتحاد الأوروبي

