



Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2022 Elections

Violence Against Women in Politics

FINAL REPORT

Final Report on Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2022 Elections by the joint project “Marsad VAWP” between Maharat Foundation and Madanyat.

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Violence Against Women in Politics

Executive summary

Violence against women in politics is particularly widespread in Lebanon as women are subjected to many forms of violence including physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence, in addition to being marginalized in various spheres of public life. By perpetuating discrimination and harmful stereotypes against women in politics, media outlets and social media contribute to violence against women in politics. Similarly, social media are now used as a new way for perpetrators to subject women to violence. However, due in large part to the location of VAWP at the intersection of feminist and political science literature, research on and policy responses to VAWP have been negligible until a few years ago, especially in countries where women's representation is still low. Hence the importance of collecting and analyzing data in relation to that matter.

Therefore, this joint study between Maharat Foundation and Madanyat with the support of UN Women seeks to monitor violence against women in the political sphere during Lebanon's 2022 electoral period through media outlets and social media platforms by monitoring, documenting, and analyzing the political and media discourses during the electoral period to better understand violence against women in the public sphere through media and social media.

The study methodology included identifying relevant actors, the main media accounts that will be monitored on social media platforms, and the mainstream media, and identifying the relevant lexicon related to violence against women in the political sphere. To accomplish this study, news bulletins and talk shows of 7 TV stations were monitored, in addition to 117 social media accounts including female candidates, female activists and female political actors.

According to the study, 7% of all comments made on the monitored social media pages of the 18 female candidates during the month of March were motivated by gender violence. Based on a sample of 102 women candidates who were the most active female candidates on social media platforms in April, the percentage of comments on women candidates' sites falling into the category of VAWP was 2 percent. However, it is worth mentioning that this drop in the percentage of VAWP comments during the month of April in comparison to the February-March period cannot be attributed to a decrease in the number of VAWP comments but rather to the larger number of monitored accounts, diluting the effect of VAWP on certain targeted women. During the pre-election period, the proportion of VAWP comments rose from 2% to 3% in May compared to April. As for the post-election phase which extends from May 16, 2022, until May 20, 2022, 0,7% of the comments could be classified as VAWP based on the monitoring of the social media pages of 8 elected female candidates.

Maharat Foundation also monitored the presence of women across electoral and political TV segments and shows on Lebanon's television stations. The findings show men dominated political discussions on TV from February to May, with male representation standing at 93% and



female representation standing at 7% during the February-March period. As for April and May, male representation was respectively standing at 78% and 88%. Furthermore, several incidents of violence on TV against female candidates were recorded during the period from February 2022 to May 2022.

In order to end violence against women in politics through media and social media in Lebanon, Maharat Foundation and Madanyat urge decision-makers to strengthen complaint mechanisms in the context of VAWP by involving various levels of judicial institutions. Maharat Foundation and Madanyat also call upon media outlets to ensure inclusive and balanced media coverage. Furthermore, social media platforms should adopt a contextual and cultural approach that ensures gender sensitivity in the context of content moderation. Moreover, women candidates should share experiences related to VAWP through increased networking in order to build best practices that will contribute to countering gender-based violence against women. Finally, Maharat Foundation and Madanyat call upon civil society to build a feminist platform to empower women in politics in order to create a common agenda to fight VAWP.



Introduction

Women in Lebanon suffer from marginalization in the diverse public and social fields of life, as they are excluded from essential roles within the political sphere. They are also subjected to various types of violence in the political field, as the media outlets and social media platforms are often being used as ways to subject women to violence, in addition to the reality of the discrimination and gender stereotyping of the active women in the public sphere, which is clearly reflected within the media coverage. In fact, women are subject to harassment and violence in various forms, originating from political and social actors, the public, and the media.

From this perspective, this joint study between Maharat Foundation and Madanyat aims to monitor violence against women in the political sphere through media outlets and social media platforms by monitoring, documenting, and analyzing the political and media discourses to better understand violence against women in the public sphere through media and social media in Lebanon.

This study also aims to offer the opportunity for discussions regarding women's political participation and the elimination of all types of discrimination and gender-based violence against them, while emphasizing their role in the public field.

Therefore, the campaigns of violence directed against women are monitored within the television and social media platforms by observing influencers and political actors, in addition to studying several cases of violence as data is being collected and identifying and analyzing the sources and types of violence while mapping the social networks and accounts that publish violent discourse and/or those confronting it.

Furthermore, the study investigates the diverse types of violence against women in the public sphere through field case studies in order to monitor how gender issues were addressed by the media in relation to Lebanon's 2022 electoral process, including measuring the presence, portrayal, and representation of female candidates by the media.



Part one: the general framework of the study

1. Study objectives and methodology

The monitoring project aims to monitor, document and analyze the political and media discourse to understand violence against women within the public sphere, the media outlets and social media platforms during the Lebanese elections period. The media plays a key role in enhancing the political, cultural and social performances on women related topics, their capabilities, and their leading roles in the society on an equal basis with men, specifically within the public affairs field.

The methodology focuses on identifying relevant political and social actors to be monitored on the diverse social media platforms and mainstream media, while tracking and detecting the relevant lexicon used on violence against women in the political sphere. In fact, this study takes into account the electoral calendar for the selection of topics and contextual analysis.

The monitoring sample includes accounts of actors and influencers on main media outlets and social media platforms in order to investigate and identify the forms and types of violence within the multiple discourses that are used, which allows for determining the relevant lexicon related to the violence against women in the political sphere.

As for the monitoring mechanism, the study is based on collecting and analyzing data according to specific criteria and standards, during a four-month period, extending from January 2022 until May 2022. Maharat and Madanyat teams produced 3 reports within the specified duration of the project.

The outputs of this project will be used to:

- Influencing the debate on women's political participation,
- Shedding light on the digital violence and its effects on women and democracy,
- Encouraging to eliminate all types of discrimination and gender-based violence in the political and information technology fields by highlighting and raising more awareness about this issue.
- Introducing necessary changes in the policies of the social media platforms and the national legal and policy frameworks to protect its users.



2. The context of the struggle of the Lebanese woman

Lebanese women inaugurated the Arab women's press in the mid-nineteenth century. Before establishing her own newspaper in 1914, Salma Abi Rashed had taken over the editor-in-chief of her brother's newspaper, *Al-Naseer Al-Siyasiya*, and was recorded as the first woman to enter the political press, yet her career did not last long due to the outbreak of the First World War.

Female "journalists" from the first generation focused on advocating for women's issues and rights, as they contributed as well to the struggle for independence and national freedom through the multiple magazines that they published¹. Thus, their contribution to the adoption of the 1953 law, gave Lebanese women the right to vote and run for parliament, and to become the first Arab women to obtain their political rights.

Nevertheless, the changes after the independence and with the outbreak of the civil war affected the contents of women's magazines. These, shifted to more commercial purposes, and framed women by limiting their interests and capabilities to the fashion industry, which led to the loss of the previous feminist and political approach to defend women's and society's issues.

In fact, this formula reinforced the stereotypical view of women in general. As for female journalists, they were excluded from political journalism and its analyses, except few of them. They were assigned secondary roles and faced obstacles in their career development, which was reflected in an almost complete absence from the management of newsrooms and the boards of directors of media stations and newspapers, except for those who inherited positions from their families, such as Nayla Tueni, Elham Freiha and Karma Khayat.

With the development of technology and the media, these multiple media platforms switched to political platforms. In fact, female journalists emerged within these platforms which are out of reach for those who enter politics from outside the "men's club" and broke the stereotypes of patriarchy: by extension, the paths of many of them turned into the politics, such as Minister May Chidiac, MP Paula Yacoubian, Ghada Eid, Layal Bou Moussa and others who ran for parliamentary elections, whereby their media work contributed to highlighting their political views.

However, traditions and unequal power relations play a prominent role in defining gender roles and drawing stereotypes under the patriarchal and hereditary family system. And because politics in Lebanon is dominated by men, they have resorted to placing barriers and using multiple types of violence against women to exclude them from this field aiming to limit their work and participation within the private sphere.

¹ Lebanese women inaugurated the march of female Arab journalists - Asharq Al-Awsat Newspaper. March 8, 2021- Issue No. 1544, <https://tinyurl.com/nbarwn9c>



Consequently, female journalists working in the political field became targets of various types of violence, specifically when breaking some stereotyped rules and becoming the famous and loud voice for women in politics through the “fourth power” considering the low number of women involved in politics and the scarcity of their media appearances. In addition, many female journalists face intersecting forms of violence due to their race, religion, affiliation, sexual orientation, etc..., even though the Lebanese Constitution, in its thirteenth article, guarantees freedom of the press and expression, while its seventh article enshrines equality and equity between all its citizens².

3. Exclusion of women from politics

With the parliamentary elections approaching, campaigns began to reflect the general atmosphere of the country. Considering the refusal of passing a law allocating a quota for women in Parliament³, within the presence of one woman out of 24 ministers in the government, and with the prime minister’s repeated words regarding restricting women to stereotyped roles⁴, it was evident that women were effectively excluded from the political framework and were not empowered with the necessary tools to reach decision-making positions.

In this context, extensive campaigning appeared and intensified to limit the political role and participation of women, through coordinated campaigns of violence against women, female journalists and everyone defending them, particularly those opposing the existing regime.

Since 2010, Maharat Foundation has documented in several studies one pattern related to the representation of Lebanese women in the media, which is the marginalization of their role, their lack of participation alongside men in shaping public discourse and in the production of news through media coverage⁵. Despite the crystallization of some efforts within media organizations to fight gender stereotyping and discrimination based on sex and gender within the institution and towards the public, which encouraged the media to submit non-stereotypical reports on female candidates and to represent them as active political participants and capable leaders, while seeking to increase the balanced and meaningful representation of women in the media. However, the results of the scientific monitoring of the electoral coverage from a gender perspective during the electoral campaign period issuing the position of women on the screens and the space given to them during news bulletins and talk shows implicate that the political

² Lebanese Constitution, Articles 7 and 13.

<https://www.presidency.gov.lb/Arabic/LebaneseSystem/Documents/LebaneseConstitution.pdf>

³ Middle East Newspaper. (October 8, 2021). Issue 15655 – “The fall of the “women’s quota” with a “knockout” in the Lebanese parliament”, <https://bit.ly/3sEliqm>

⁴ Manar Sharbaji. (September 21, 2021). A proper timing for masculinity. Magaphone.News website, <https://bit.ly/3MkO1t7>

⁵ Maharat Foundation, 2020, “Who makes the news? - Lebanon national report”, <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/1904/gmmp-lebanon-report-2020-ar-final.pdf>



sphere in Lebanon is still dominated by men *par excellence* and that women are still marginalized⁶.

In another study, "A Study of Media and Communication Attitudes in a Time of Change," conducted by Maharat Foundation, part of which was devoted to monitoring women's representation in the media and their political participation, its result is identical to previous studies. In fact, a range of case studies and media monitoring have shown that women are still marginalized in the Lebanese media, and not taken seriously⁷.

As in monitoring and analyzing women candidates' speeches and their 2018 election campaigns on social media platforms, the candidates, through their electoral campaigning, pushed in reducing the gap within media coverage of their political positioning in the mainstream media outlets⁸.

4. Defining violence against women

Within the framework in defining violence, this study will adopt, the terms in accordance with the definitions implemented by the Human Rights Council at the United Nations on the issue of violence against women, its causes and consequences. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women in this council, Dubravka Šimonović, on combating violence against women journalists, provided the following definition of violence against women:

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that "violence against women, including violence against women journalists, is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in the public or private life". The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women, noted that the definition of discrimination includes "gender-based violence, i.e., violence directed at women because they are a woman or who disproportionately affects women. Journalists are exposed to

⁶ A study conducted by Maharat Foundation on media representation of women in the 2018 legislative elections in Lebanon showed the marginalization of women candidates, as the direct coverage of female candidates in news bulletins reached 3.46% compared to the general coverage of all candidates of 96.5%.

<https://maharatfoundation.org/media/1461/maharat-document-elections-2018finale.pdf>

⁷ Maharat Foundation, November 2021, "media and communication trends in time of change",

<https://maharatfoundation.org/studymediatrends2021>

⁸ the study on women in the legislative elections in Lebanon in 2018 conducted by Maharat Foundation showed the distribution of blogging topics for female candidates on Facebook, where electoral advertisements came in the forefront with 29.2% and electoral activities by 24.3%.

<https://maharatfoundation.org/media/1461/maharat-document-elections-2018finale.pdf>



violence and their safety is at risk in the course of their work; however, women journalists are disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence and sexual harassment, both in the workplace and on the Internet.”⁹

Another report by Dubravka Simonovic on violence against women on the Internet from a human rights perspective gave the following definition:

“The definition of violence against women on the Internet extends to any act of violence against women that is used to perpetrate, aid or exacerbate, in whole or in part, information and communication technology, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms, or e-mail that targets a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately.”¹⁰

5. Types of violence against women in public life

Gender-based violence targets gender differences between males and females, and is based on expectations, roles, and stereotypes set by societies for women and men. This existing patriarchal social system uses violence as a reaction to any non-stereotypical gender expression that deviates from the prevailing and specific norms and roles that it considers, to threaten its existence and the extension of its actual and intellectual dominance and authority.

The national context - political, economic, social, cultural, religious - plays a role in determining the forms, intensity and impact of violence that active women in politics may be exposed to. Both in the public and political sphere, women may be subjected to several forms of violence, including:

- **Psychological violence:** Causes moral damage and psychological harm to the victim and frightens her through blackmail and verbal attacks, personal defamation, and the dissemination of misleading information with the aim of distorting the reputation and undermining the dignity and social status of women.
- **Sexual violence:** includes sexual assault, threats of exposure, harassment, insinuation, blackmail and sexual harassment of all kinds and forms.
- **Physical violence:** aims to physically harm women or members of their families, such as assassinations, kidnappings, beatings and domestic violence, with the aim of preventing women's political participation.
- **Social violence:** It is the violence resulting from patriarchal customs, legacies and traditions and includes: pressure on women from a religious, clan, regional, or familial point of view on the basis of belonging to this group, blaming women for causing the loss

⁹ Combating violence against women journalists, report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, May 6, 2020, <http://undocs.org/ar/A/HRC/44/52>

¹⁰ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, “causes and consequences of violence against women and girls on the Internet from a human rights perspective”, 18 June 2018, <http://undocs.org/ar/A/HRC/38/47>



or dispersal of the family, clan or sect, or harming alliances through exercising her political work, preventing her from running for elections or forcing her to vote for specific candidates.

- **Economic violence:** Coercive behavior that controls and confiscates economic resources and opportunities.
- **Legislative violence:** Violence based on negative legislative discrimination against women.
- **Digital violence:** It is the most common and recent type of violence at the present time and poses a challenge to women due to the psychological, economic and social impact that it may have on them¹¹. It includes the abuse of women through bullying on social media, avoiding positive criticism and generalizing mistakes to women in general. It is also considered a rapid method to generalize and spread fake news and to make allegations with the possibility of escaping from accountability by hiding behind fake accounts. Despite its peculiarity as a form of violence against women, the development in the field of communications, the Internet and the spread of the media led to an accumulation of types of violence against women.

6. Violence against women in politics

Violence against women in the political sphere (VAWP) limits the opportunities for women's political participation and restricts the exercise of their political rights, which include their rights as a voter, a candidate, a party supporter, a job, or a public activity.

This violence may take many forms, using biased language, methods of communication, and representations that are biased against women on discrimination or stereotypes, violence and blackmail. In fact, various media platforms play a prominent role in its transmission and dissemination, which focus, particularly in the digital age, on women's bodies, sexuality, traditional social roles, and stereotypes rather than their competence, ability and effective contributions to the public sphere.

Across this context, electoral campaigns constitute a favorable environment for the emergence of this type of violence against women, especially in societies with patriarchal structures in which women still suffer from marginalization in political representation, access to the media, and effective recognition of their leadership role and management of the public affairs.

¹¹ UN WOMEN, (2021), Violence against women in the online space: insights from a multi-country study in the Arab States,

https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Arab%20States/Attachments/Publications/2021/11/Summary_Keyfindings_Final_EN.pdf



The issue of violence against women in politics is distinguished by the fact that it falls between the two domains of gender-based violence and women's political participation¹². Violence against women in politics, like any other form of violence against women, is rooted in the concept of gender inequality, and the idea of authoritarianism, stereotyping, control and discrimination. In fact, social media is the main channel for this type of violence and includes all forms of assault, harassment, coercion and intimidation against a woman as a political actor on the sole basis that she is a woman.

Although violence against women in the political sphere takes many forms, it focuses on one common goal, which is to restrict women's political participation and control, and prevent them from taking their equal places and positions alongside men in a field of work that is still characterized and dominated by males in general.

It does not only constitute a violation of women's specific rights, but also a threat to human rights in general and to democracy that is based on participation and the ability to express opinions and raise their voice without repression or harassment based on discrimination or sexual bias. It also aims to dissuade, domesticate and exclude women from seeking to achieve change in their societies through their political or public participatory work or by taking leadership positions, whether through candidacy or appointment.

In Lebanon, women constitute 6.25% of the members of Parliament¹³, 4.16% of ministers, and 5.6% of members of municipal councils¹⁴. Although Lebanon ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997, no practical steps have been taken to empower women and protect them from all forms of violence and discrimination as required in the Convention, especially within the political field¹⁵.

Violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics:

- targets women because of their gender, just because they are a woman.
- It is exercised by the patriarchal authority that refuses women's entry and participation into the public space and aims on restricting them based on stereotyped roles linked to the private sphere.
- It specifically discourages women from engaging in active political work or even thinking about it, and it has unrecognized dimensions of democracy and human rights implementation.

Violence against women in politics includes all forms of hostility, harassment, intimidation and blackmail that seek to silence, marginalize and exclude women from the political framework

¹² Abir Chebaro (2021). Our Voice Challenges Violence against Women in Politics - A Guideline. Madanyat, <https://www.madanyat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Good-Practice-Handbook-Arabic.pdf>

¹³ UNDP (2018), Lebanese Parliamentary elections: Gender Key Results https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/2018-lebanese-parliamentary-elections-gender-key-results?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCOjwlemWBhDUARIsAFp1rLUtYIDckRLOzIakalS30MzEYSe2FzJ6T1aOYrztPb0Bumbl9kZGsyUaAoe8EALw_wcB

¹⁴ The National Commission for Lebanese Women's Affairs. (2019), Sixth periodic report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for Lebanon.

¹⁵ Ibid.



simply because she is a woman. This violence, in its many forms, is usually based on gender-subjected ideas about women's bodies, appearance, and traditional social roles - primarily as mothers and wives - with the aim of denying or undermining their capacity or competence in the political sphere¹⁶.

7. Violence throughout the media

a. Violence throughout the Internet

With the development of information and communication technology and its use by female journalists and political activists as a work tool, the seriousness and gravity of the violence against these users increased on smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms, or e-mail, simply due to being women in politics¹⁷.

These campaigns of violence aim to silence female journalists and teach aspiring political workers lessons about what they may face if they wish to work in this field, which creates a hostile environment for women.

By extension, this translates as a violation of democracy and freedom of speech and is also an obstacle to the political empowerment of women.

This Online Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) creates a hostile and discriminatory environment that pushes women to self-censor, remain silent, or otherwise withdraw from online political discourses. It is one of the most prevalent forms of violence that hinders women's active political participation, yet is still poorly researched¹⁸.

In addition, digital violence has implications for digital, psychological, and physical safety and can cause harm to the victim: in fact, these practices may be destructive for the targeted women¹⁹, such as pushing some to limit their practice of any activity on their social media accounts and/or self-censorship, or to withdraw from their fields of work to protect themselves²⁰, such as Ms. Nawal Berri, who stopped her political activity on her social media accounts.²¹

¹⁶ NDI, (2021), Not the Cost: A Renewed Call to Action to End Violence Against Women in Politics, <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Submission.pdf>

¹⁷ UNESCO, Violence against female journalists online, 2020- 2021

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136_ara

¹⁸ NDI. (2019). Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics,

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Tweets%20That%20Chill%20Report.pdf>

¹⁹ UNESCO, Violence against female journalists online, 2020- 2021,

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136_ara

²⁰ NDI. (2019). Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics

²¹ Al-Arabiya (2021), Journalist Nawal Berri: I did not say goodbye to the media... and Lebanon no longer resembles us. <https://bit.ly/3hGieol>



b. Violence through visual media

Women running for political positions challenge social norms and are often seen as outsiders, even as subjects to scrutiny, stigmatization and targeting - not only by their political competitors but sometimes by the media, their communities or their families²². Women also face structural obstacles to accessing unbiased and unpaid financial and media resources, as stated during an interview with candidate Josephine Zougheib.²³

Maharat Foundation's report on the analysis of TV media coverage monitoring data in February 2022 shows that "the female presence compared to the male dominance in the media scene continues to be marginal," as the appearance of women on Lebanese television stations does not exceed 7%, compared to 93% for male speakers²⁴. As for the issue of women's political participation in the electoral debates, it ranked last in the discussion topics, with a percentage of no more than 0.05%, while the majority of the speakers came from the electoral experts category, journalists and traditional political analysts, who are in favor of men²⁵.

Except for the increase in advertising and propaganda campaigns on TV screens promoting and giving women candidates a preferential vote in the upcoming elections, the issue of women's representation in politics does not have a high priority on the agenda of the media. In fact, the campaigns appear to be a kind of promotion of the station and its image and doesn't support women's participation in decision-making, knowing that they are already absent from decision-making positions in most media stations and are forcibly absent from political talk shows at peak times due to the high financial allowance imposed by the stations.

While women are absent from local media stations as a major political player, LBCI Lebanon station has dedicated the "Fifty - Fifty in politics" talk show on its screen to promote female candidates, which is funded by embassies and non-governmental organizations.

The talk show "Fifty-Fifty in Politics" is shown at peak time, but conflicts in its timing with one of the most important political talk shows that host important figures and reaches a high viewership on a competing channel, which weakens the audience reach which may only watch it based on their interests in the invited candidate.

²² Daniela Gasparikova , Violence against women politicians: an unacceptable cost of gender equality , UNDP (2021).

<https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/blog/2021/violence-against-women-politicians-montenegro-parliament.html>

²³ Interview with Josephine Zougheib conducted by Abeer Shabaro on March 9, 2022 by phone.

²⁴ Maharat Foundation, Report on the monitoring of TV stations during the month of February 2022, <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2099/feb-report-elections-ar.pdf>

²⁵ Maharat Foundation, 2022, Report on the monitoring of TV stations during the month of January 2022, <https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2070/jan-report-elections.pdf>



In this talk show, the presenter hosts one of the female candidates who explains her electoral talk show through pre-prepared questions, without any dialogue with other guests or the audience. The interview has been prepared, coordinated, and interviewees were trained in advance, which makes the media environment "safer" from any type of violence that may affect women through the media.

Nevertheless, a few followers interacted, and offensive and violent comments appeared against the candidates on the pages of the organization that sponsors the talk show during the promotional campaign, which classifies this type of violence as digital violence.



Part Two: Study Methodology

Violence against women in the political sphere through social media

Project goals and methodology

The monitoring project aims to monitor, document and analyze political and media discourse to understand violence against women in the public sphere in the media and social media platforms, with the aim of encouraging the debate on women's political participation and eliminating all types of discrimination and gender-based violence against them.

Violence against women in the political sphere (VAWP) limits women's opportunities for political participation and restricts their practices of their political rights, which include their rights as a voter, candidate, supporter of the party, or holding a position, job or in the public sphere activity.

This violence may take many forms, using biased language, methods of communication and negative representations against women, based on discrimination or stereotypes, violence and blackmail. Various media play a prominent role in its transmission and dissemination, which focus, especially in the digital age, on women's bodies, sexuality, traditional social roles, and stereotypes rather than their competence, ability and effective contributions to the public sphere.

Electoral campaigns constitute a favorable environment for the emergence of this type of violence against women, especially in societies with patriarchal structures in which women still suffer from marginalization in political representations, access to the media, and actual recognition of their leadership role and in managing public affairs.

Methodology preparation and strategy:

The methodology includes identifying relevant actors, the main media accounts that will be monitored on social media platforms, as well as the mainstream media, and identifying the relevant lexicon related to violence against women in the political sphere. This methodology takes into account the electoral calendar to put the issues and analyses in their context. Accordingly, the methodology is:

- Determining the monitoring sample (sites and accounts of actors and influencers on social media)
- Determining the forms and types of violence that are the subject of monitoring and analysis
- Defining the relevant lexicon related to violence against women in the political sphere.
- Identifying the sources of violence and the appropriate ones related to it.



Monitoring Mechanism: Data collection and analysis according to the established criteria and standards

Monitoring Duration: Four months (February - May)

Outputs: Maharat and Madanyat teams produced 3 reports for the duration of the project.

Methodology for monitoring violence against women in politics on social media.

This section of the methodology deals with the issue of gender-based violence in the political and public sphere through the websites, and specifically through social media platforms.

Gender-based violence consists in targeting gender differences between males and females, in expectations, roles, and stereotypes set by societies for women and men. This current patriarchal social system uses violence as a reaction to any non-stereotypical gender expression that deviates from the prevailing and specific norms and roles that are considered to threaten its existence and the extent of its actual and intellectual hegemony and authority.

The national political, economic, social, cultural, and religious context play a role in determining the forms, intensity and impact of violence to which active women in the political field may be exposed to.

It appears that the rate and intensity of violence rises whenever the activist is from the new political generation, being new to the political framework with no experience, educated, independent, at a young age, and belonging to the opposition or to the minority groups, and if advocating for women's rights in a place characterized by its hostility towards these rights²⁶.

Women activists in the political arena still face violence that takes many forms, whether it is in person or electronically. In fact, violence against women via the Internet is an extension of violence against women in the real world, and the ideologies based on gender and patriarchy.

Online abuse against politicians is often misunderstood as inevitable, as most public figures sometimes find themselves on the receiving end of violent attacks. However, the incidence of cyber violence that female politicians face is higher than the rate of violence faced by male politicians, and the targeting methods vary²⁷.

Journalists are also regularly subjected to online attacks, and women journalists face a double burden: being attacked as journalists and as women, affecting their personal and professional lives as well as the public's right to seek information. In extreme cases, these attacks lead to self-censorship or worse: women withdraw from the public sphere, leaving the male-dominated

²⁶ Abir Chebaro (2021). Our Voice Challenges Violence against Women in Politics - A Guideline. Madanyat, <https://www.madanyat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Good-Practice-Handbook-Arabic.pdf>

²⁷ Council of Europe. Cyberviolence against women. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence/cyberviolence-against-women>



field of journalism or politics with fewer female voices threatening pluralism while the perpetrators of online attacks bear no consequences most of the time²⁸.

The severity of cyber violence intensifies whenever women are visible and well-known in the public sphere, active on the social networking sites, and the greater the number of their followers on these social accounts, which have become a platform for expressing political opinions and an available alternative to traditional media²⁹.

Part 3: Findings of the study

TV coverage:

The monitoring period extended from the month of February 2022 until May 2022.

Breakdown of total access to TV between men and women candidates - February to May 2022:

% Gf TV appearances	Feb - March	April	May
% For Male candidates	93%	78%	88%
% For Female Candidates	7%	22%	12%
% Of Voter educational material	0.05%	1%	1%

Maharat Foundation monitored the presence of women across electoral and political TV segments and shows on Lebanon's television stations during February and March. The findings show men dominated political discussions on TV, with male representation standing at 93% and female representation standing at 7%.

²⁸ Ibid 8.

²⁹ Rheault, L., Rayment, E., & Musulan, A. (2019). Politicians in the line of fire: Incivility and the treatment of women on social media. *Research & Politics*, 6(1), 205316801881622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168018816228>



TV coverage: male vs female (Feb-March 2022)	
Men representation	93%
Women representation	7%

These numbers reflect candidates and pundits speaking on issues related to the elections. Given that 15% of the candidates running are female, this shows a disproportionate bias for male representatives and candidates. Women's political participation in the electoral process was rarely touched upon on these segments/shows, with the issue ranking last in topics broached (utilizing not more than 0.05% of the TV airtime). There were no recorded incidents of violence on TV against female candidates during either month.

The Lebanese LBC Foundation did air a dedicated talk show, the "Fifty-fifty in Politics" talk show, to showcase candidates. A number of viewers interacted online with the show, and offensive and violent comments appeared against the women candidates on the social media pages of the organization sponsoring the talk show. In addition, a newspaper article ran on the talk show, suggesting it runs against Lebanese cultural and social norms.

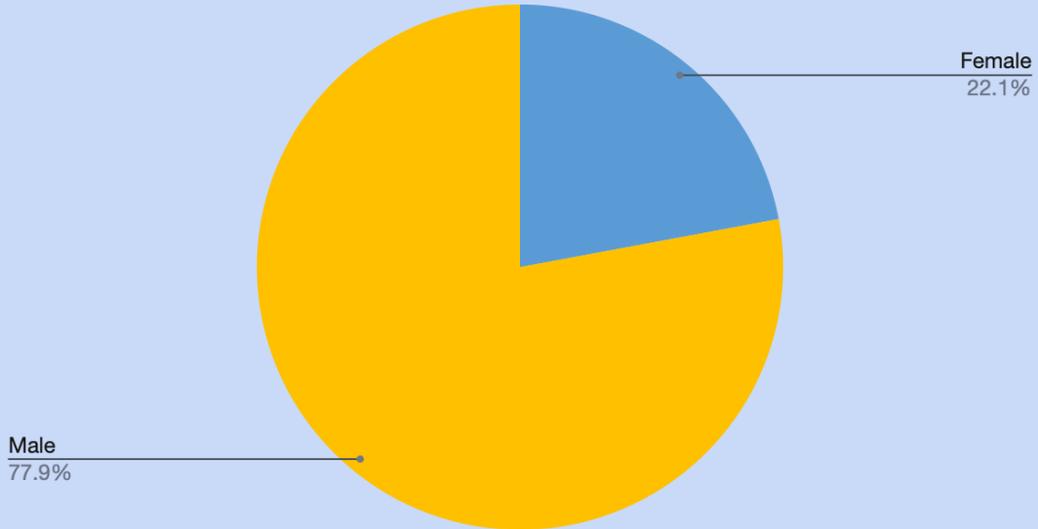
This echoes the lack of media coverage of the candidacy of Josephine Zougheib who was the first woman to submit her candidacy on January 18, 2022 as an independent candidate. This lack of coverage confirms the marginalization of women, especially when they are independent candidates in the TV coverage of the Lebanese media. Indeed, despite of Zougheib's candidacy for the 2018 parliamentary elections and receiving 728 preferential votes, she did not receive any media coverage on the news of TV stations, despite the candidate's invitation to the media to cover the launch of her electoral campaign. On the other hand, the news pages on Facebook did not follow up on the announcement of Zougheib's candidacy in a noticeable way, only a few local pages of the Kesrouan region published this news on January 18.

As for the month of April, the findings show men dominated presence in news bulletins with a decrease in women's access to TV news bulletins (4%) in addition to an increased appearance in talk shows (22%). There were 3 recorded incidents of violence on TV against female candidates during this month.

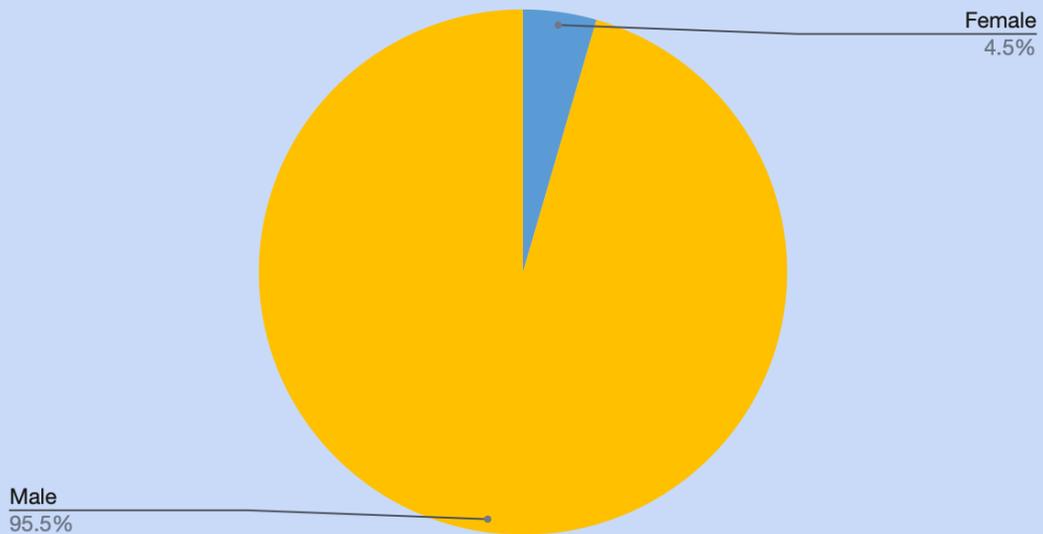


Women TV Appearance in April

Distribution of appearances in news bulletins/ talk shows between men and women actors from a total of 724096 seconds in April 2022



Distribution of appearances in news bulletins/ talk shows between men and women actors from a total of 49046 seconds in April 2022



Examples of monitored VAWP reactions and statements on TV stations during the month of April:

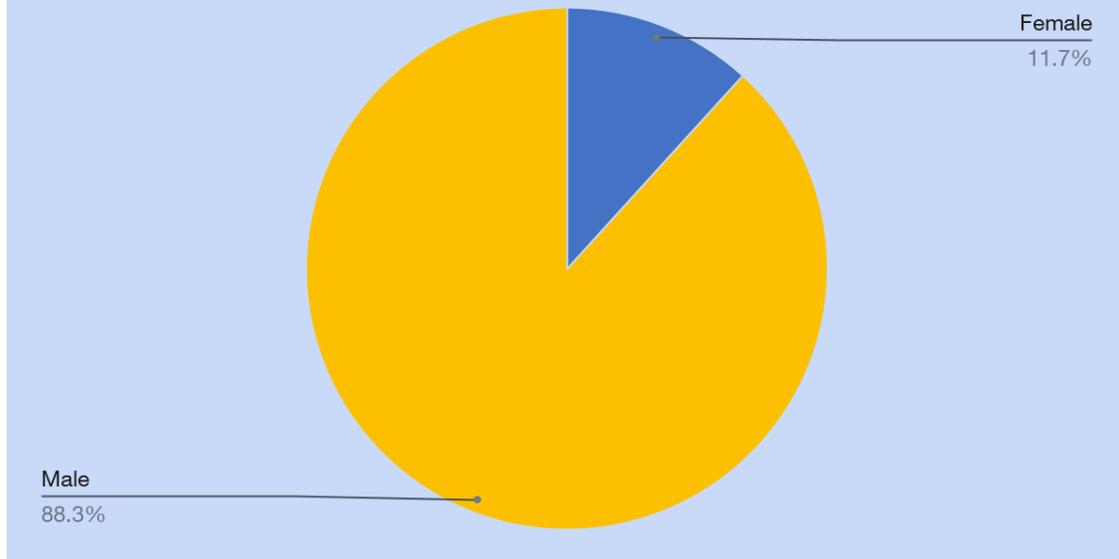
Many cases of VAWP were recorded on TV during the month of April. During a TV talk show broadcasted on MTV channel, the MP Elie Ferzli repeatedly used the words "darling" and "my beloved" as a way of intimidating the female candidate Rima Njeim in a patronizing way as if she was a little child in need of care. Moreover, while Njeim was holding Ferzli responsible for attempting to run over the demonstrators who opposed the Capital Control Law in front of Parliament, Ferzli diverted attention from this serious issue by emphasizing her attractive beauty. Another candidate, Simon Sfeir on another talk show named "Ras bi Ras" on LBCI prevented the female candidate Josephine Zougheib from presenting her point of view by intimidating her, raising his voice and his finger at her.

Cynthia Zarazir, a candidate in the Beirut I district was subjected to sexual violence when she appeared on a show with Hisham Haddad on the 26th of April 2022 to promote her campaign wearing a T-shirt reading "How was your first time?". The program's host used this question to make sexual insinuations. In addition, he treated her with contempt, reducing her to her physical appearance by asking her why a pretty girl like her bothered with political activism instead of going out and having fun.

Based on the TV monitoring process, the total access for women candidates in TV talk shows and news bulletin from the 1st till the 15th of May indicated **80,457 seconds** compared to **604,695 seconds** for men candidates.



Breakdown of total access to TV between men and women candidates from 1 to 15 of May



Within the period extending from May 1 until May 20, 2022, 2 cases of televised violence against female candidates were reported:

1st Case: Karen Boustani and Charbel Khalil:

The talk show “Mich Ali” presented by Charbel Khalil on the OTV channel broadcasted on the 2nd of May, 2022, a short video during the TV show in which the host compared the candidate in Keserwan district Karen Bustani to a “thief stripper”, while shaming her appearance and looks and accusing her of stealing purchases from the supermarket.

2nd Case: Ghada Aoun:

On May 22, 2022, on “Sar El Waet” talk show, MP Najat Aoun was introduced to Ghada Aoun, the Lebanese judge and state prosecutor. During the introduction the presenter laughed and said, “the other Aoun is the one with messy hair”, relegating women to their looks and reminding those in the room and the audience that they will be judged on how they look.



Social media platforms:

The social media monitoring extended from the month of February 2022 until May 2022.

#	February - March	April	May (May 1 until May 15)	May (May 16 until May 20)
# of comments & replies	5,870	39,371	28,005	10,143
# of comments classified as violent speech	723 Total: 101 (Feb) – 622(March)	831	841	71
% of VAWP	7%	2%	3%	0.7%

The violence is classified into:

- **Cyberbullying**
- **Harassment and threats of a sexual nature**
- **Bias against women**
- **Threats and intimidation.**

During the month of March, 7% of all comments left on the social media accounts of the 18 female candidates were characterized by gender-based violence. In April, the percentage of comments on women candidates' pages falling into the category of VAWP was 2% based on a sample of 102 women candidates who were the most active female candidates on social media platforms. It is significant to note that this number might reflect/change within reporting as candidates may have immediately deleted/reported some of the more violent comments. The percentage of VAWP comments in May increased slightly compared to April, from 2% to 3% during the pre-election period.

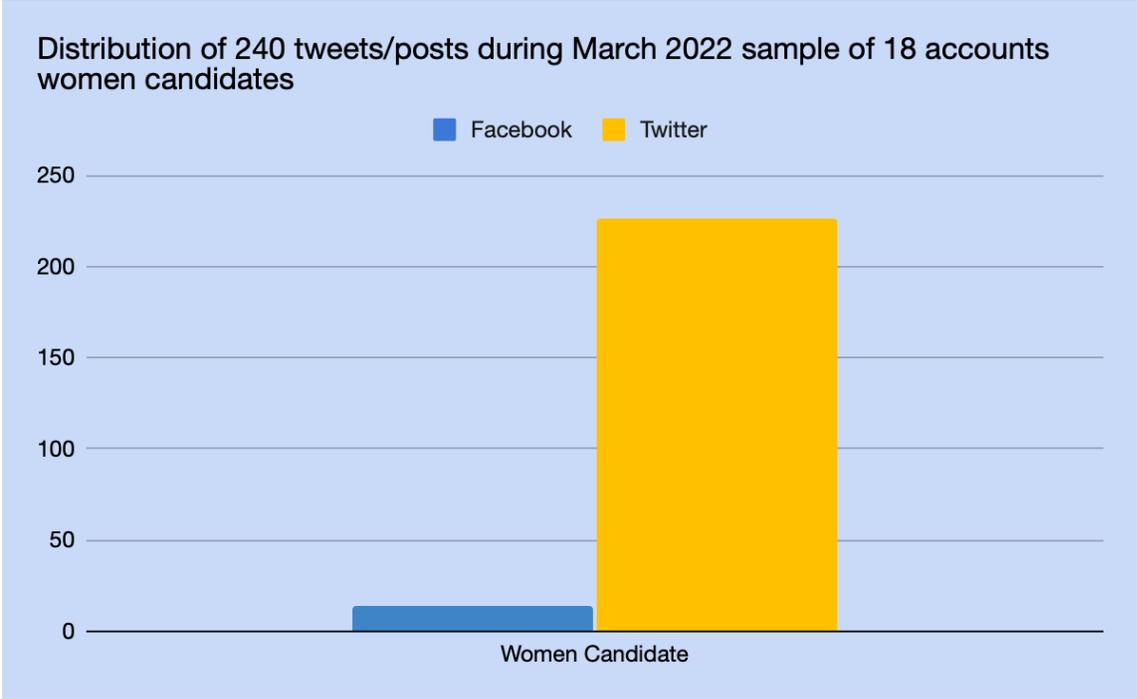
During the months of February and March of the year 2022, the monitoring process included the social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) of 18 women candidates. Comments on their pages, positions, activities and opinions by followers or users were monitored and analyzed on social media.



The announcement of some female candidacies during this period aroused violent comments on social media. For instance, the candidate in the Kesrouan region, Josephine Zougheib was subjected to violent reactions on social media that included physical bullying about her appearance, a fake news campaign and defamation, which hindered her ability to interact with her constituents. Furthermore, various forms of violence were used against women during the months of February and March. This can be exemplified by the case of Nahida Al-Khalil who announced on her Facebook page on March 27, 2022, that she was subjected to psychological violence through a pressure campaign because of her daughter's homosexual identity, with the aim of preventing her from being a candidate in the Beirut II district. It is also worth mentioning that Laury Haytayan had the highest percentage of offensive comments based on the sample of monitored accounts during February 2022.

240 tweets/posts were monitored and analyzed during the month of March. Of the 5,870 comments responding to these 240 tweets/posts by the 18 candidates, a total of 410 comments were characterized as gender-based violence. This represents 7% of all comments, broken down as - 81% online bullying, 9% violence based on age or appearance, 6% threats or harassment on a sexual basis, and 4% bias against women.

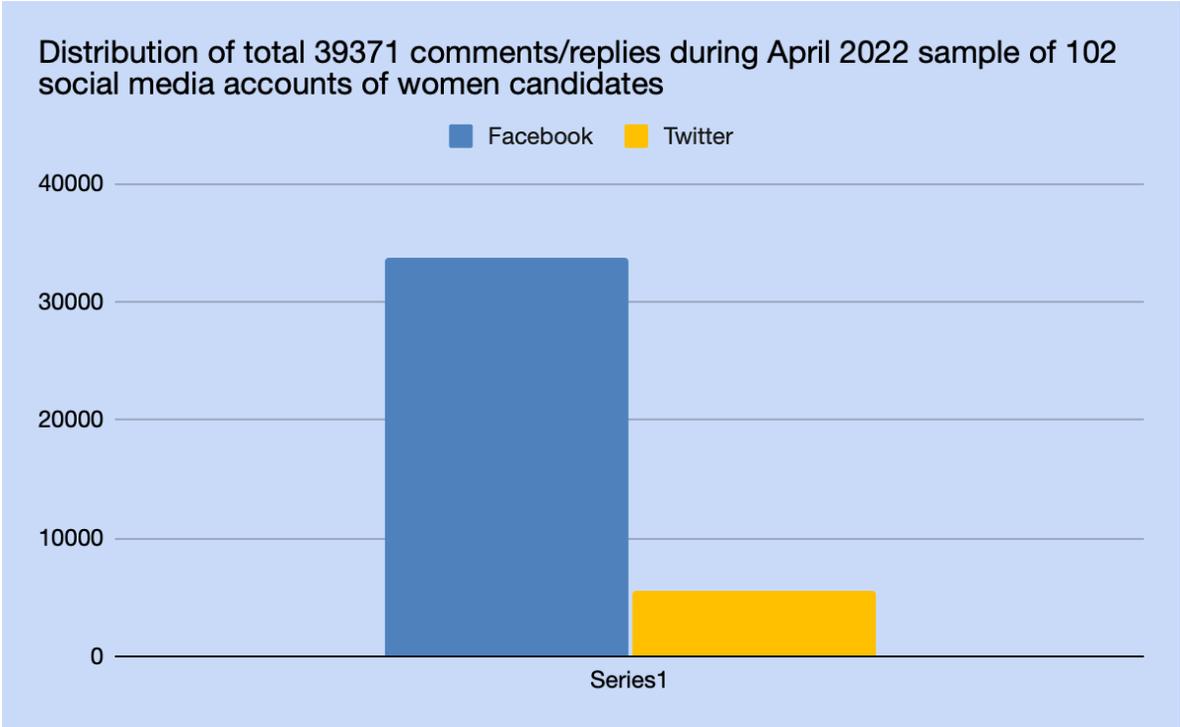
These comments and responses were distributed between Twitter and Facebook as follows:



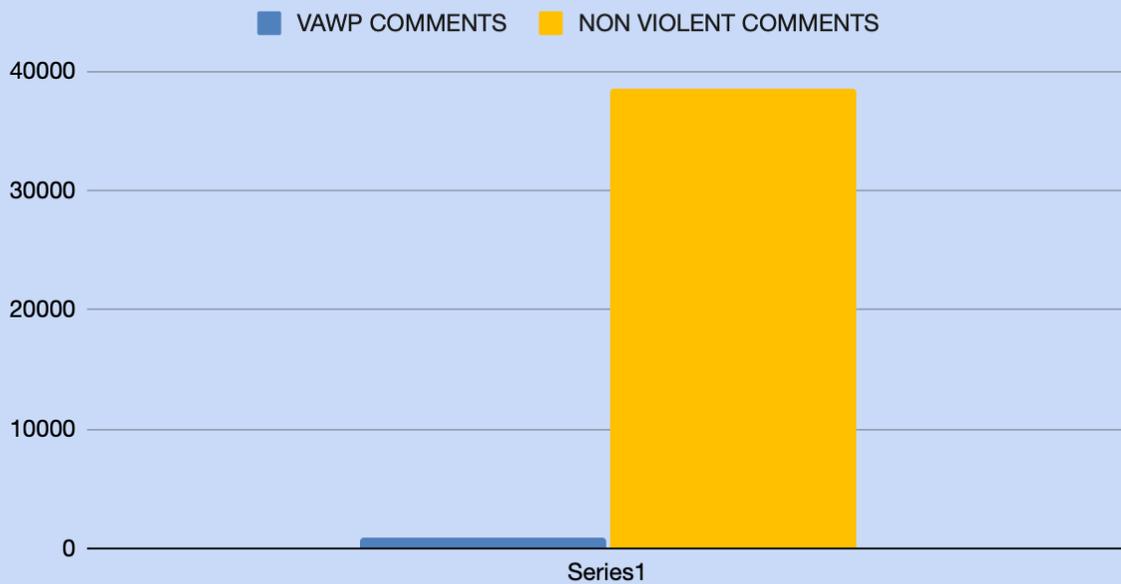
During the month of April of the year 2022, the monitoring process included the social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) of 102 women candidates. Comments on their pages, positions, activities and opinions by followers or users were monitored and analyzed on social media.

Of the 39,371 comments responding to 2,710 posts by the 102 candidates, a total of 831 comments are characterized as gender-based violence. In April, this represented 2% of all comments left on the social media accounts of the 102 female candidates. The percentage of VAWP comments has decreased from 7% to 2% because of the larger number of monitored accounts (102) in comparison of the February - March report (18 candidates were monitored) without any indication that the abusive comments and reactions have in fact receded. On the contrary, the reactions towards female candidates and journalists (hosts) have reflected a mix of a patronizing attitude and demeaning comments.

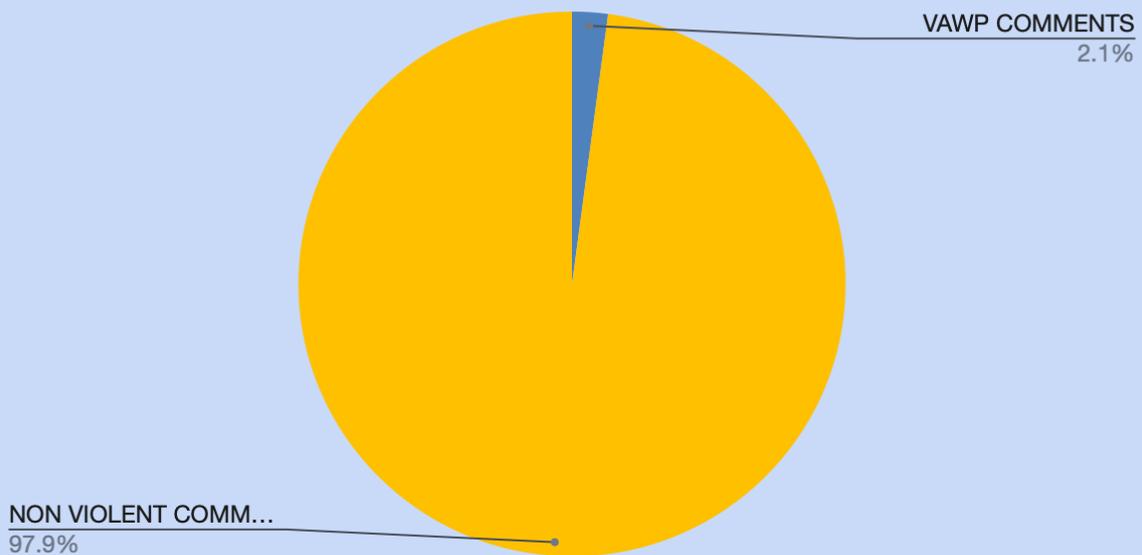
The comments and responses were distributed between Twitter and Facebook as follows:



Breakdown of total 39371 violent/non violent comments/replies during April 2022 based on a sample of 102 social media accounts of women candidates



Percentage of violent comments against women from total 39371 comments/replies during April 2022 based on a sample of 102 social media accounts of women candidates



From May 1st until the 15th of May, the social media accounts of **112 women candidates were monitored**. From May 16th, after the election, until the 20th of May, 2022, the social media accounts of the 8 elected women were monitored.

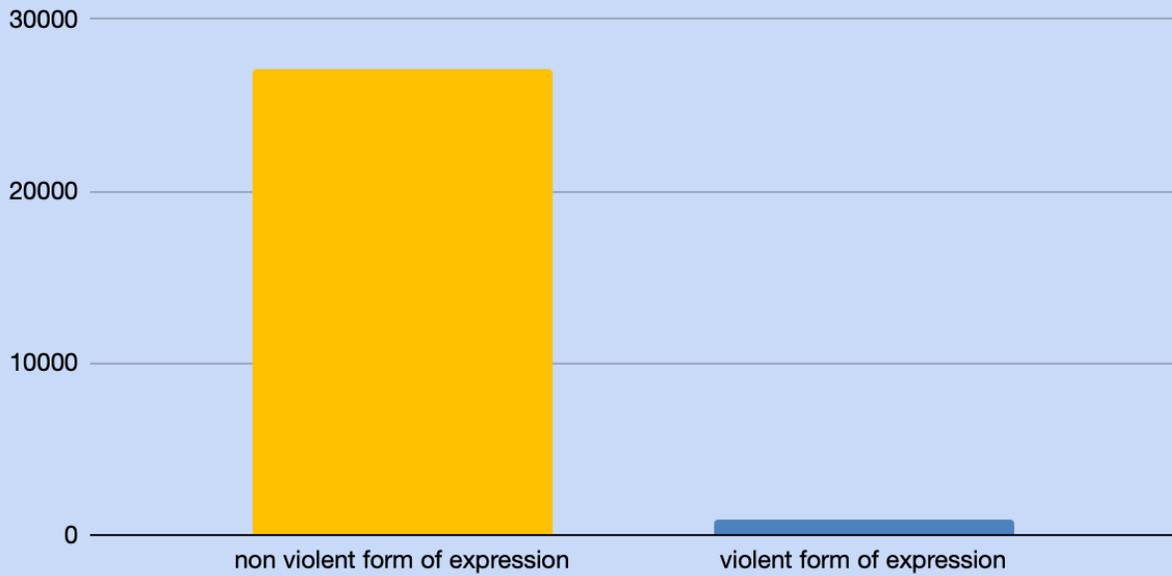
#	Pre-Election	Post-Elections
# of comments & replies	28,005	10143
# of comments classified as violent speech	841	71
% of VAWP	3%	0.7%

Of the 112 monitored women candidates during the pre-electoral phase (1st of May 2022 until 15th of May 2022), 92 were active social media users, with a total number of 2,203 tweets/posts on Twitter and Facebook shared by them.

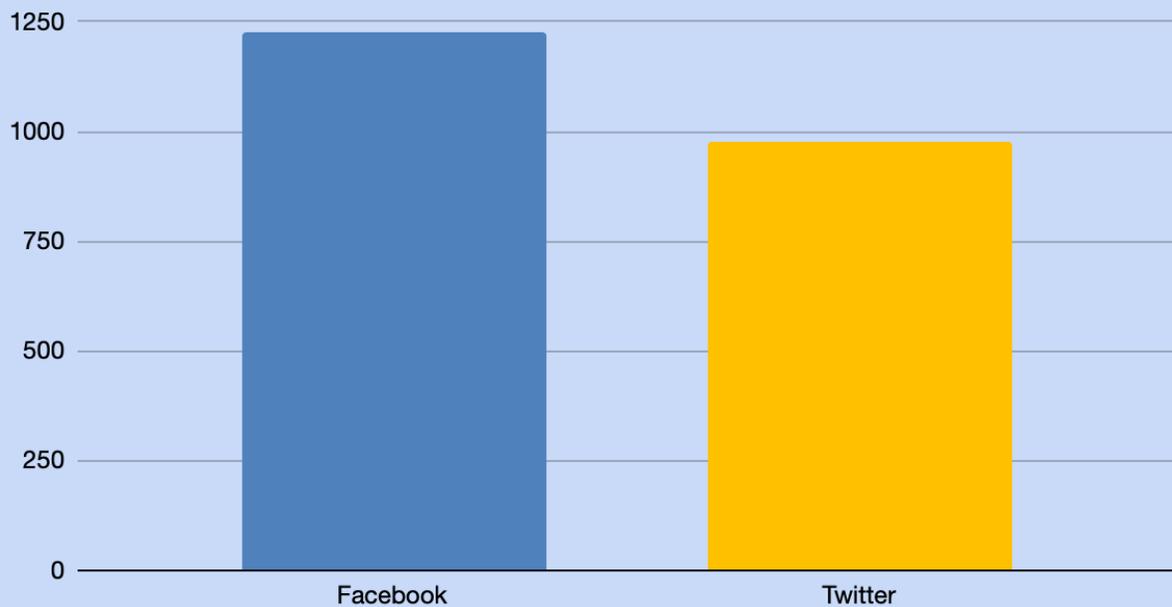
From a total of 28,005 comments & replies on the 92 active women candidates monitored during the pre-election phase, 841 were classified as violent speech against women in politics, representing 3% of all comments posted on their social media accounts, a slight increase of violence against female candidates compared to the 2% violent comments in April. Noting that the percentage was higher in February and March as the sample of women candidates was less and the number of monitored accounts is larger in April and May. Nevertheless, the reactions towards female candidates have reflected a mix of a patronizing attitude and degrading comments within the same violent context reported in April.



Breakdown of violent form of expression from total 28005 replies/comments on 2203 posts/tweets of total 92 active social media accounts of women candidates from 1- 15 May



Distribution of monitored total 2203 posts/tweets of total 92 active social media accounts for women candidates from 1-15 May



Indeed, multiple VAWP cases were recorded and highlighted during the pre-electoral phase in the following table:

Women candidate	Number of violent comments
Layal Bou Moussa	252
Nada Boustany	241
Paulette Yacoubian	84
Karen El-Boustany	57
Rima Njeim	42
Bushra Khalil	20
Carla Boutros	19
Miriam Skaff	18
Lina Al-Tannir	16
Zeina Majdalani	13
Cynthia Zarazir	13
Halima Kaakour	12



Based on the following table, it is significant to mention that the winning independent candidates, Cynthia Zarazir and Halima Kaakour, appeared to have the least number of attacks on social media platforms, yet Nada Boustany, another winning candidate affiliated to the Free Patriotic Movements, stands within the top women candidates who were highly harassed with 241 comments that were classified as VAWP. She was subjected to violent comments which included accusations of distributing money and allegations of corruption as well as defamation. Therefore, it is worth noting that the political agenda and setting of women candidates affected their positions within the online public sphere and the VAWP spectrum during the pre-electoral phase.

However, unlike many female candidates, especially non-partisan women, Boustany benefited from considerable support on behalf of her party's supporters.

It is also worth mentioning that some supporters of Boustany and the Free Patriotic Movement responded to the negative comments against her using the hashtag #Zahra-Al-Tayyar (Flower of the Movement) which is the nickname given to her by the head of the movement, MP Gibran Bassil. This type of nickname minimizes the role of women by referring to them in a patronizing way.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that several types of VAWP were noted during the pre-election phase including sexual harassment. For instance, Paula Yacoubian became the target of comments of sexual nature following the publication of a comment about appraising the work of former parliamentarians. In addition, she was subjected to a smear campaign on May 6, 2022 that accused her of corruption and exploiting media influence as well as sexual temptation to advance her political career.

Accusing a candidate of treason was an additional way used during the pre-election phase to discredit women. Loyal Bou Moussa, a candidate in the Batroun region on the list of "Shamalouna", was the target of a campaign of false information regarding her political affiliation on May 6, 2022. A leaflet appeared, claiming that she belongs to the Syrian Nationalist Party and accusing her of treason. Its authenticity was denied by Bou Moussa. The campaign against Bou Moussa is considered an attempt to ruin her chances of winning in a region that does not support the orientations of the Syrian Nationalist Party.

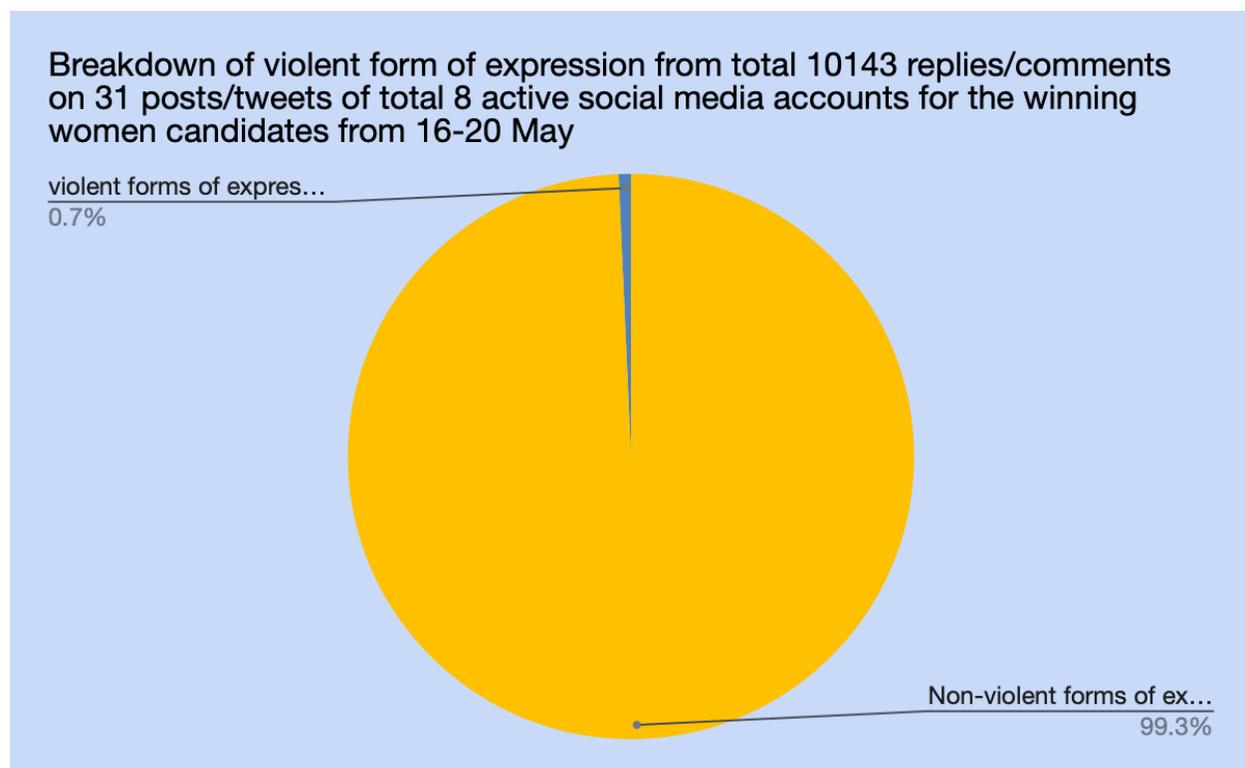
In addition, Lina Al-Tannir, another female candidate, became the target of an online campaign on the 13th of May 2022, during which she and her family were subjected to social and psychological violence because of her marriage to a man from a different region and sect.



During the post-election phase from May 16, 2022 until May 20,2022, the social media accounts of the elected female candidates were monitored:

- Paula Yacoubian
- Halima Kaakour
- Setrida Geagea
- Cynthia Zarazir
- Najat Aoun
- Nada Boustany
- Ghada Aoun
- Inaya Ezzedine

Based on the monitoring database, the women candidates published **31 posts/tweets** on their official social media accounts during the time. The total replies and comments reported were **10,143**, with **71 replies/comments** that can be classified as violent forms of expression against women (0.7%).



Part Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

In addition to being marginalized within the political sphere, Lebanese women become victims of various social violence as soon as they get involved in public affairs, or when they take public positions within the political arena, whereby society still considers political affairs to be reserved for male actors.

The marginalization of women in politics begins with their marginalization in the media in terms of preventing their appearances on screens and blurring their positions and demands. In fact, numerous studies have confirmed the continuous marginalization of women on television and in various media outlets. This study reaffirms this aspect through the deliberate neglect of television stations to women candidates for the 2022 parliamentary elections.

As in the public sphere, women are also subjected to various violent campaigns emanating from men. In fact, violence against women in politics includes all forms of hostility, harassment, intimidation and blackmail that seek to silence and exclude them from any political activity and practices simply because they are women.

In addition, attacks on women use hate language, rumors and stereotypes. The cyberspace, through the Internet and networking sites, has become a wide field in which women are exposed to various types of violence, in coordinated or spontaneous campaigns, some of which can be identified and others whose source is unknown.

Across this context, this study showed, by keeping the pace with cases of violence that were monitored with many women during the electoral period, how women quickly turn into an easy target and are exposed to all kinds of digital violence such as: defamation, hate speech, psychological abuse, threats of physical harm, sexual violence, bullying, and so on.

It also appeared that these campaigns targeting female journalists and candidates are organized by electronic armies or fake accounts, supported by political parties and aiming to prevent women from expressing their opinion due to the conflict of interest between their positions and the interests of these organizations.

Furthermore, it seems that the direct violent campaigns against activists, on the sole basis of their gender further expose them to bullying, and confirms that women in the Lebanese society are still firstly targeted based on their gender.



Such campaigns undermine women and their role in society and obstruct them in managing public affairs and participating in political decision making. Yet, one thing that was noticeable was the absence of positions to defend the targeted female candidates and journalists in front of the violent campaigns that they were subjected to. By extension, this sheds light on the absence of sensitization on the danger of this type of violence, which requires more awareness campaigns to emphasize its seriousness and its repercussions.

Recommendations

Decision-makers:

- Strengthen complaint mechanisms in the context of VAWP by involving various levels of judicial institutions.
- Improve judiciary procedures related to violence against women in order to enable the judiciary to respond adequately and impartially to the issue, consistently with international human rights standards.
- Eliminate all kinds of discrimination against women in laws and policies including in the Nationality law and multiple Personal Status laws through appropriate legislation.
- Increase voter education material focusing on women's political participation.
- Comply with international human rights standards relating to gender equality and women's rights.
- Ensure that political parties set up internal reporting procedures and mechanisms to address VAWP in addition to adopting adequate codes of conduct and zero tolerance policies for perpetrators of VAWP.

Media:

- Ensure that media TV hosts adopt a gender-sensitive approach with guests while avoiding condescending or patronizing attitudes.
- Promote positive portrayals of women's political leadership.
- Contribute positively to voter education through gender-sensitive material.
- Ensure inclusive and balanced media coverage.

Social media platforms:

- Adopt a contextual and cultural approach that ensures gender sensitivity in the context of content moderation.
- Provide information on the functioning of electronic armies and algorithms related to VAWP.



- Increase engagement with civil society actors to enhance reporting mechanisms and measures to mitigate online violence.

Women candidates:

- Set up adequate social media strategies to counter VAWP online.
- Use effectively online reporting mechanisms to counter VAWP.
- Participate in training programs that aim to provide tools to mitigate online gender-based violence and raise awareness on available complaint mechanisms.
- Share experiences related to VAWP through increased networking in order to build best practices that will contribute to countering gender-based violence against women.
- Encourage women to take legal action when they are subjected to gender-based violence in the political sphere.

Civil society:

- Provide legal support to women who are subject to gender-based violence in the political sphere.
- Monitor incidence and prevalence of VAWP at the country level by collecting information on VAWP-related incidents.
- Support women candidates who are targeted by gendered disinformation campaigns or defamation campaigns in launching a counter-campaign.
- Establish a situation room to track violations against women candidates and capture their magnitude within the electoral context.
- Set up inclusive capacity-building programs to enable women to address all forms of gender-based violence in the political sphere.
- Raise awareness on VAWP concepts and gender-based violence terminology.
- Create safe spaces for women activists and women candidates to enable them to openly discuss the issue of VAWP.
- Build a feminist platform to empower women in politics in order to create a common agenda to fight VAWP.
- Increase digital media information literacy efforts



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