



Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2023 Municipal Elections

IN BRIEF | March 2023

Overview

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

Introduction

This is the second report undertaken by Maharat and Madanyat and led in partnership with UN Women, to monitor and explore the perceptions of women political leaders and change makers in response to women's participation and violence against women in politics (VAWP) in the 2023 municipal elections. During March 2023, three focus groups were undertaken with 16 women from Tripoli, 18 from Bekaa and 8 from Matn, in addition to 30 in-person surveys that were filled in during and outside of the sessions.

Furthermore, analysis of social media content and social listening was conducted to monitor public discourse on women's participation in municipal elections and the extent to which it contained any kind of violence during the time period. The monitoring focused on 81 accounts of winning women candidates from the 2016 municipal elections, including nine women candidates who are active on their social media platforms.

91.3% of the women respondents who are active in the political field, including members of the municipal council, civil society representatives, public service employees, and aspiring municipal election candidates, agreed that there is violence against women in the political field, and the manifestations of violence against women in the political sphere varied, between social violence within the municipal council, violence on social media, and moral and psychological violence.

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

91.3%

of respondents agree that violence against women in politics exists

73%

of respondents report that they face social and family-related obstacles in the political space

66.4%

of respondents reported experiencing harassment on social media

47.6%

of respondents had not heard of any official methods or mechanisms of reporting on VAWP in the municipal councils



Societal and family violence

The activists who took part in the discussion sessions perceived societal norms as one of the root causes for this difference, which in turn prevents them from assuming prominent positions. It was found that **73% of the respondents faced family and social obstacles in the political field, with honor being one of the most prominent forms of VAWP indicated by the respondents at 61.6%.**

Furthermore, **24% of the respondents confirmed that they were threatened by a family member because of their local public activity.**

Digital violence

The survey's results highlighted that **66.4% of respondents had been subjected to harassment on social media platforms.** Forms of harassment include, **cyberbullying, sexual harassment and threats, gender biases and stereotyping of women to intimidate women who are active in politics.** This follows the trend observed by Maharat and Madanyat ahead of the Parliamentary elections in May 2022.

Reporting violence against women in politics

Women participating in the sessions reflected on the absence of laws to protect women from violence in the political field. The results showed that **47.6% of respondents had not heard of any official methods of reporting complaints in the municipal councils, and 17.2% indicated that means for reporting on violence against women in politics might exist.**

Participants expressed the importance of implementing a "quota" to ensure women's equal and inclusive participation, and to reduce the discrimination suffered by women in the political field.

Law No. 205

The adoption of Law No. 205, dated 30-12-2020, aimed at criminalizing sexual harassment and rehabilitating its victims, stipulates the following: "no one may be subjected to arbitrary interference in his private life or to campaigns that harm his honor and reputation, and every person has the right to be protected by law from such interference or campaigns", has not deterred individuals from practicing violence on a municipal scale, because "the problem does not derive from an absence of laws, but rather from a lack of awareness to enforce them".

COMMON STATEMENTS IN THE LEBANESE SOCIETY



- **How will you be able to make decisions when you are on your period**
- **A woman who wants to represent the family**
- **Men are superior to women**

As shared by participants during dedicated discussions



Conclusion and recommendations

While women report significant barriers and violence to political representation in Lebanon, this has not deterred women from continuing to try to impose their political leadership in public affairs. In fact, the results showed that **46.8% of the respondents in the survey would run for the next municipal elections.**

As a result of the research undertaken, Maharat and Madanyat have drawn up recommendations to mitigate the impact of violence against women in the political field, whereby the most important of which are the following:

- The temporary application of a gender quota, to address the low percentage of women and the monopoly of men for leadership positions in the public sphere.
- Put in place mechanisms and improve information ecosystems - such as the promotion and adoption of relevant policies and laws to reduce violence against women in politics within the municipal councils.
- Empower and support aspiring female candidates through financial assistance.
- Civil society organizations must hold training courses for women on their rights to engage in political activities, and other courses for women and men to exchange views on gender equality and inclusion in the political field.

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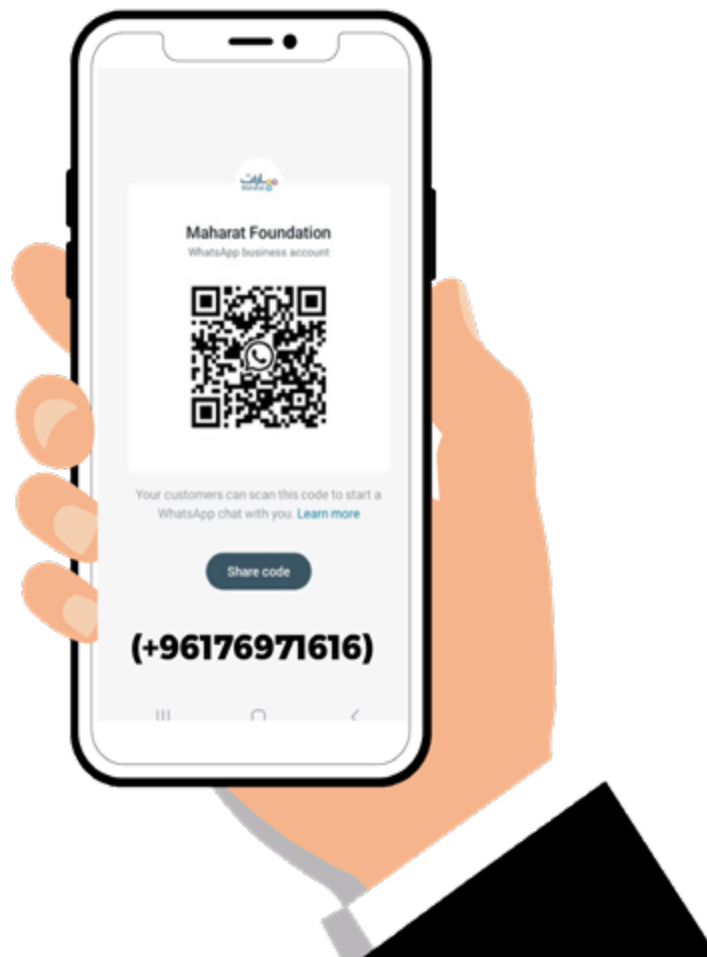


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Marsad Reporting Hotline

Within the framework of monitoring and documenting violence against women in politics and in response to the recommendations brought forward in the monitoring activities, Maharat Foundation and Madanyat launched a hotline (+96176971616), through which women can report on digital content that includes any kind of violence.

Maharat will work through its partnership with Meta, owning the Meta websites, WhatsApp and Instagram, using the direct reporting methods provided by this partnership for each content that opposes the community policies of these platforms.



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