



Media and Gender Monitoring of the 2023 Municipal Elections

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Overview

In the lead-up to Lebanon's municipal elections, which were expected to take place in May 2023 but extended by the parliament for another year until May 2024, Maharat Foundation and Madanyat in partnership with UN Women are aiming 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 fourth report undertaken by Maharat and Madanyat in partnership with UN Women, to monitor and document violence against women in politics (VAWP). In June 2023, 36 members from various municipalities across Lebanon participated in a survey comprising 20 questions. Among them, eight members also took part in a listening group discussion, while an additional 4 members were engaged through direct interviews.

The study material aims to assess violence against women reaching decision-making positions within municipalities.

Forms of violence against women in the political sphere according to women municipality members

Members of municipalities participating in the survey identified several forms of violence against them from their fellows in municipalities, which are a manifestation of gender-based violence, including:

Marginalization before entering the political arena: Based on the discussion within the listening group, it was noted that women frequently face marginalization upon entering the decision-making sphere. They encounter instances of bullying, where fellow members of the municipality undermine them and exclude them from decision-making processes.

Violence during political engagement: According to the survey and the participants in the listening group discussion, there is a prevalent bias towards men candidates among municipality members during decision-making engagements, leading to an unfair advantage for men over women.

Municipality members' perception and experience of violence against women in politics

67% of respondents perceived a difference in treatment between men and women within their respective municipalities, indicating the existence of gender disparities. Additionally, 53% of respondents reported experiencing violence within their respective municipalities. In this context, one of the participants shared her experience, declaring that *"the former mayor attempted to physically assault me by hitting me, but I quickly reacted and defended myself. I recorded the incident in the meeting minutes. Of course, this type of violence is rarely used against men"*.

SNAPSHOT OF FINDINGS

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of respondents perceived a difference in treatment between men and women within their respective municipalities.

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44%

of respondents who reported cases of gender-based violence received no protective measures, emphasizing the inadequate response to such incidents.

44%

of respondents felt that there are not enough protection measures to prevent and address violence within their respective municipalities.

50%

of respondents believed that there is insufficient awareness on topics related to gender-based violence in politics within local communities.

Digital violence

The survey also highlighted the significance of social media in the public activity of municipal members, with 92% of respondents utilizing these platforms. However, 31% of respondents faced violence specifically on social media, indicating the need for better online protection measures and awareness campaigns.

Reporting violence against women in politics within municipal councils

44% of respondents who reported cases of gender-based violence received no protective measures, emphasizing the inadequate response to such incidents. In this regard, a participant stated during the listening group discussion that *“the laws may not have sufficient provisions to punish the offender, and the matter could be resolved with the aggressor only paying a fine of 300,000 L.L.”*

The same percentage of respondents felt that there are not enough protection measures to prevent and address violence within their respective municipalities. Moreover, it was found that 31% of respondents are not familiar with the means of complaints and reporting.

Furthermore, 50% of respondents believed that there is insufficient awareness on topics related to gender-based violence in politics within local communities, indicating the need for awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. Consequently, women who experience violence may not speak out. For instance, two women who experienced violence in a municipal council declared during the listening group discussion that they refrained from disclosing until the council’s term ended, leading to the reelection of their aggressor.

Negative impacts resulting from the postponement of municipal elections

The postponement of municipal elections has undoubtedly resulted in negative consequences for both current members of the municipality and candidates. Indeed, women who are current municipal members have expressed their concerns about the delay, which adds more pressure on them.

In addition, the postponement of municipal elections negatively affected the motivation of women to run for office as highlighted by one participant during the listening group discussion who stated, “prior to the election delay, all the trainees were enthusiastic about candidacy, but after the postponement, the number of attendees in the training sessions decreased”.

Hence, it constitutes a missed opportunity to achieve equal and balanced representation within municipalities.

Conclusion and recommendations

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:

1. Conduct capacity-building training for women, focusing on public speaking, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence to empower them in their roles.
2. Launch awareness campaigns within local communities to address topics such as violence against women in politics, gender stereotypes, and inclusive decision-making. Open dialogue, transparency, and equal participation are vital to creating an environment where every member’s voice is heard and respected.
3. Provide candidates with increased exposure by offering them platforms on TV shows, radio stations, podcasts, and other media outlets to amplify their voices and reach a wider audience.
4. Members of Parliament should develop an internal comprehensive code of conduct for the Parliament to address and deter any form of misbehavior or disrespect towards women parliamentarians, fostering a safer and more inclusive environment.

By implementing these measures, municipalities can work towards creating a supportive, inclusive, and gender-equal environment for all members, fostering a culture that promotes diversity, respect, and equality.

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Maharat Foundation, Madanyat and UN Women will continue to undertake gender, media and elections monitoring in the lead up to the 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.