



PURSuing EQUALITY IN RIGHTS AND REPRESENTATION

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES RUNNING
FOR PARLIAMENT IN LEBANON'S
2018 ELECTIONS



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Acronyms:

CEDAW	—————	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
MP	—————	Member of Parliament
SDGs	—————	Sustainable Development Goals
VAW	—————	Violence against women
VAWP	—————	Violence against women in politics
VAWPP	—————	Violence against women in political and public life

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Lebanon's 2018 Parliamentary Elections witnessed a massive jump in the number of women running for Parliament, from 12 in 2009 to 113 (representing a 941 per cent jump), with women representing 11 per cent of all candidates that registered to run in the 2018 election. On average, women running were younger and better educated than their male counterparts¹. Moreover, a 2019 LCPS study noted that most women who ran were non-party affiliated or ran within the civil society coalition, Koullouna Watani.

In late 2018 and early 2019 UN Women interviewed 87 per cent of the women who ran for Parliamentary election (75 of the 86 women; of the 113 women who registered to run, 86 made it on to candidate lists). This report summarises their stories and experiences as candidates. Of those who were interviewed, 68 per cent had prior experience in politics, and half had support from their families and extended families to run. Support from

extended families was more likely to be granted when women ran with political parties, rather than as non-party affiliated. 89 per cent of those interviewed stated that their first priority in office would reform on women's rights, with youth rights and corruption issues coming tied second and third. The study showed that amongst the challenges faced by female candidates, financial restrictions and constraints were the most highlighted, especially when considered in contrast with the financial situation of male candidates. Women reported feeling 'ashamed' to fundraise, citing that it was 'unethical' of them to do so if they knew they may not win. On average, the female candidates interviewed reported spending between \$3,000 and \$20,000 throughout their campaigns.

¹ The average age for male candidates was 57, while for female candidates it was 49.3. Moreover, it found that the share of female candidates who at the time of election held postgraduate degrees (master's degree and PhD) was larger than that of their male counterparts by a considerable margin. Attalah, A, & Zoughaib, A, Lebanon's Parliamentary Election of 2018: Seats, Coalitions, and Candidate Profiles. (2019). Policy Paper. LCPS.

While campaigning, female candidates enjoyed less access to the media than their male counterparts, which decreased their exposure to voters. Throughout the election cycle, female candidates received only 5 per cent of the total press coverage available and 15.8 per cent of Lebanese TV coverage during the electoral campaigning period.² Compounding this, 44 per cent reported being subject to gender discrimination by the media, with discrimination linked to the types of questions they were asked or nature of the coverage they received. Fifty percent of female candidates interviewed for the study stated that they experienced disproportionate pressure over their image by the media, pressuring them to both wear either more make up, and less. Of the 50 per cent of those interviewed who stated that they did not experience gender discrimination from the media, 71 per cent were above 50 years of age. The vast majority (93.3 per cent) of the candidates who were criticized for caring too much or being “pretty and sexy” were under 50 years of age.

Seventy-eight percent of those interviewed reported that they had been victims of some form of violence

2 Jocelyn Nader & Tony Mikhael. (2018). Women in Lebanon's 2018 Legislative Elections: Monitoring the Media During the Electoral Campaign from a Gender Perspective. Available at: http://www.maharatfoundation.org/media/1460/maharat-study-elections-2018_finale_en.pdf. Accessed February 2020.

during the election period. The most prominent setting for such violence was social media, with 45 candidates experiencing abuse online – most of which took a gendered nature. Candidates experienced unwelcomed sexist comments such as “you are the beauty of the list,” “go raise your children,” “go cook,” “get some experience,” “in our region women don't govern,” “wish you find a husband,” and “run for Miss Lebanon instead,” among others. Fourteen candidates suffered from direct threats against them personally and/or against their children, as candidates reported threats such as, “We know where your kids are – stay within your limits.”

Yet, despite this, 91 per cent of interviewed candidates (interviewed before Lebanon's popular uprising began in October 2019) stated that they were planning to run again in the next election. Most candidates (76 per cent) indicated that they would start working on their campaigns at least two years in advance, to build trust and relationships with constituents. Candidates indicated that in the next election they would set clear plans and budgets for their campaigns, while also giving further consideration to mobilizing resources and fundraising. Finally, almost half of the candidates interviewed stated that they believed that their candidature was damaged by the newly implemented electoral law, and called for its reform.

INTRODUCTION

Women in Lebanon attained the right to vote and to run in elections in 1953, yet it took nearly 40 years, until 1992, for women to be represented in Parliament. In the 1992 parliamentary elections, three women were elected to Parliament: one from the North, one from the South, and one from Mount Lebanon. In the following five parliamentary elections the number of women elected ranged from three women Members of Parliament (MPs) to six women MPs elected in 2018, the most Lebanon has seen.

Women in Lebanon have a long history of being active in social and public life, including during its civil war. Women have also played a significant role in non-governmental organizations and many social organizations in Lebanon. Although formal laws do not hinder women from participating in political life, culture and informal societal rules and norms still stand in the way of women running and being elected to Parliament, equal to men. Whether the patriarchal system, traditions, or religion, there are a number of hurdles that stand in the way of women's participation in the political life.

*The primary factors contributing to the dearth of female participation in Lebanese politics derive from the structure of the society in relation to gender. This structure includes the patriarchal zu'ama system, the patrilineal kinship basis of the society, the sectarian system of government, the power of religious institutions, and the legacy of French colonialism.*³

With 2018 being the first time Lebanese people were able to vote for a new Parliament since 2009, the 2018 general parliamentary elections were one of the most highly anticipated parliamentary elections. Observation missions reported on a number of issues, such as violations of the secrecy of the ballot

3 Catherine Batruni & Marcus Hallinan. (2018). Politics, Progress, and Parliament in 2018: Can Lebanese Women Make Headway? Lebanon Support. P.1.

and of electoral silence, instances of violence at polling stations, and continued pressure on voters.⁴

In a move which raised hopes about the role of women in political life moving forward, an unprecedented number of women, 113, registered as candidates, out of which 86 made it to candidate lists. This represented 11 per cent of all candidates that registered to run in the election.⁵ The district Beirut 2 saw the highest level of female candidacy while West Bekaa-Rachaya had only a single woman on the ballot.⁶ In contrast, the 2009 parliamentary elections only saw 12 women candidates registered. The 2018 elections resulted in six women being elected to Parliament, while the outgoing Parliament had only four women parliamentarians out of 128 Members of Parliament (MP). While the number of female MPs rose from four to six, a total of six women out of 128 MPs still leave Lebanon as 149th out of 152 countries on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index measuring political empowerment. On the index, Lebanon surpasses only Yemen and Oman in the Middle East.⁷ This very slow progress in women's political participation stems in large part from deep-rooted gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes, which view women as secondary to men.

Yet, offering some optimism for more representative governance structures in Lebanon, UN Women and Promondo research from 2018 found broad social acceptance for the idea of women in leadership positions, including in Lebanon's Parliament, as

4 Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, Observation Mission of 2018 Parliamentary Elections. (2018). Preliminary Report Summary.

5 976 candidates registered to run in the 2018 elections, of which 597 joined lists. Attalah, A, & Zoughaib, A, Lebanon's Parliamentary Election of 2018: Seats, Coalitions, and Candidate Profiles. (2019). Policy Paper. LCPS.

6 Ibid. Page 19.

7 World Economic Forum, Gender Equality Gap Report. 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

highlighted below.⁸ 75.3% of men and 88.3% of

8 Promondo & UN Women, Understanding Masculinities: International Men and Gender Equality Survey IMAGES) – Lebanon. 2018. https://imagesmena.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/IMAGES_Leb_Report_Final_Web_Dec13.pdf

women in Lebanon agreed that there should be more women in positions of authority, and 87.9% of women, and 80.1% of men strongly supported women’s role in the Parliament.

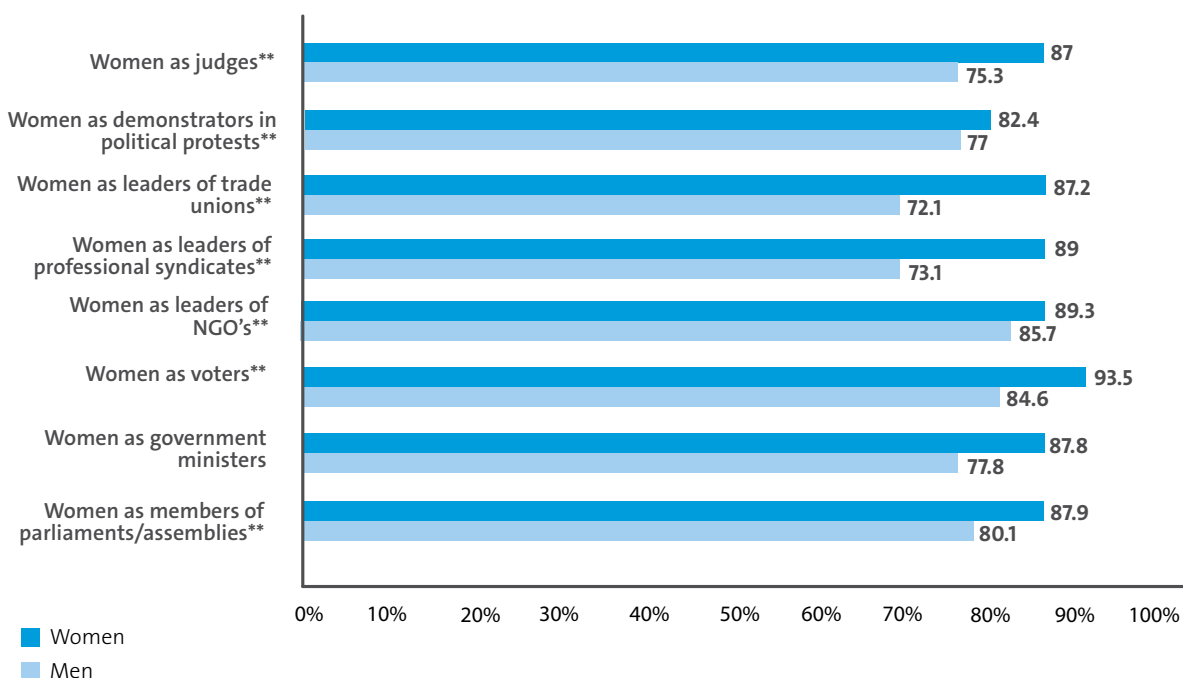
Attitude towards Women’s Participation in Leadership Positions, Specific Jobs and Politics

Proportion of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with selected statements related to women’s participation in leadership positions, specific jobs and politics, IMAGES MENA Lebanon 2016

	Men	Women
There should be more women in positions of political authority	75.3	88.3
Women are too emotional to be leaders	44.6	22.8
Women who participate in politics or leadership positions cannot also be good wives or mothers	41.0	21.5
Women should leave politics to men	30.5	15.5
A woman with the same qualifications can do as good a job as a man	77.2	91.9

Men’s/Women’s Strongest Support for Women in Public Life

Percentage of men and women by who agreed or strongly agreed with statemets supporting women in public life, IMAGES MENA Lebanon 2016



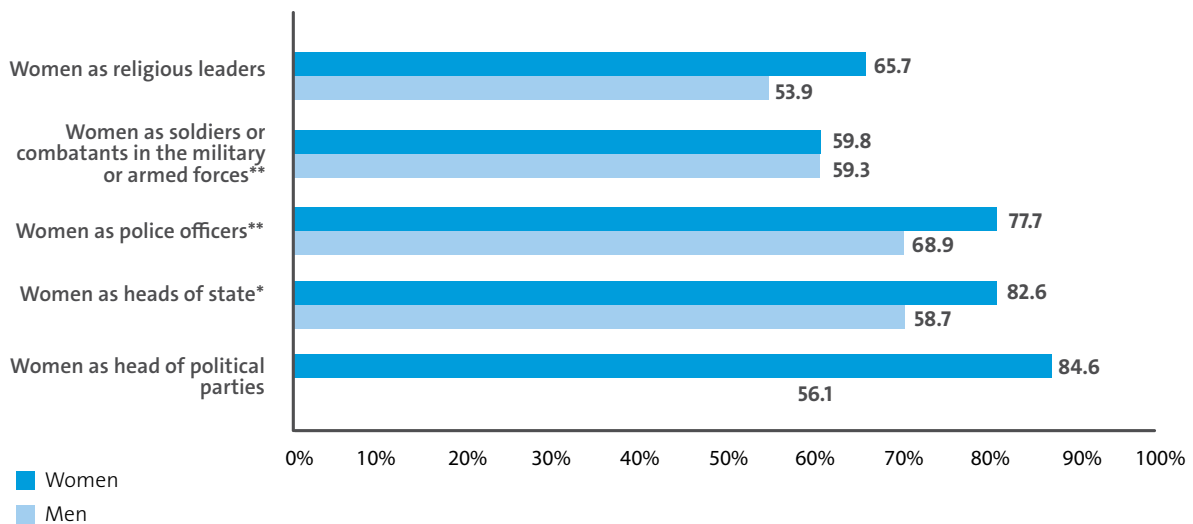
**Statistically fewer Syrians than Lebanese approved of women in this position

However, support for women’s role in public life was low – in particular from men - for positions that could be defined by their seniority, access to power and authority – religious authorities, the armed forces, the head of state and as the head of political parties.



Men's/Women's Weakest Support for Women in Public Life

Percentage of men and women by who agreed or strongly agreed with statements supporting women in public life, IMAGES MENA Lebanon 2016



*Statistically more Syrians than Lebanese approved of women in this position
 **Statistically fewer Syrians than Lebanese approved of women in this position

This continued barrier to accepting that women have a right to engage in and compete for leadership posts in Lebanon finds its roots in a culture defined by male dominance over women, one closely intertwined with a history of militarism and unrest.

Methodology

This report is based on a study conducted after the 2018 elections which aimed to capture the experiences, thoughts, reviews, motivation and challenges of women candidates from their own perspectives, and to explore the story of each candidate. The study gathered quantitative and qualitative data provided by 75 women candidates, encompassing all constituencies (15) and political parties (8 members of political parties and 67 independents).

The study adopted a multidisciplinary approach looking into the legal, social, economic, political, and cultural factors affecting the experiences of women candidates, through a holistic perspective looking at the story of each candidate from different viewpoints.

Women candidates were interviewed about:

1. their personal and political background,
2. their perceptions and experiences of harassment, intimidation or violence to which they may have been exposed,
3. their family support,
4. their financial status and management of their campaign, and
5. their experiences with the media and the image pressure they perceived.

Results of the study indicate that women candidates who registered and ran for elections did so being aware of the challenges and obstacles that awaited them, and bravely making the decision to engage in political life, nonetheless. Candidates also discovered new challenges during their electoral journeys, which were reported during the interviews. The study participants also indicated that, for the most part, women candidates will continue their political work and are planning to run for the 2022 parliamentary elections.

The present report looks at the experiences of women candidates before and after the elections. It presents an overview of women candidates' background and priorities, examines their decision to run, including timing, and their political priorities and electoral programme. It also discusses the financial challenges and campaign management, media and image pressure, and experiences of VAWP as reported by women candidates from the 2018 elections. The final section presents lessons learned and maps potential ways forward to support women candidates in future elections.

BEFORE ELECTIONS

Women candidates' background

The study looked into women candidates' prior experience in working within the political sphere, in order to assess different experiences for candidates from different backgrounds. A 2019 study by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies found that, women candidates tended to be younger and more educated than their male peers. The average age for male candidates was 57, while for female candidates it was 49.3. Moreover, it found that the share of female candidates who at the time of election held postgraduate degrees (master's degree and PhD) was larger than that of their male counterparts by a considerable margin.⁹ This issue of female candidates bringing with them significant experience was echoed in the findings of this study. The majority of women candidates interviewed, 51 out of 75 (around 68 per cent), were involved in the political field prior to taking part in the 2018 parliamentary elections:

- **30 (40 per cent)** had been working in the political sphere for 10 years or more,
- **13 (17.4 per cent)** had been working in the political sphere for 5 to 8 years,
- **8 (10.6 per cent)** had been working in the political sphere between 2 to 3 years,
- 24 had no prior experience in working in the political sphere. **22 of these 24 candidates (29.3 per cent)** had been active within the social and cultural spheres, in the country or abroad, and
- only **2 of the 75 women candidates** interviewed (**2.6 per cent**) did not have any prior experience working in the political, social, or cultural spheres.

⁹ Attalah, A, & Zoughaib, A, Lebanon's Parliamentary Election of 2018: Seats, Coalitions, and Candidate Profiles. (2019). Policy Paper. LCPS.

Nonetheless, even without having had any previous political experience, women who joined political party lists were motivated to take part in the elections by a belief in their own abilities to change and to work as legislator. As one candidate said,

I always dreamt of making Lebanon a better place and looked at Parliament, as a tool to achieve that dream. I hesitated to accept at the beginning but having made achievements within my social work with limited abilities, I believe if I had the chance to get into Parliament I would get more resources to make bigger changes.

Women with academic and civil society backgrounds were motivated by their experiences and believed they could move from theoretical plans to the implementation phase through parliamentary work. They explained that running for office came as a natural culmination of their careers and a desire to put their expertise into effective laws in Parliament. "I have a plan for financial inclusion whose aim is to assess the lands and design projects to invest in them, and I believe my plans would meet the reform requirement," one of the academic candidates said. Another candidate in the same field said, "My educational level and professional experience provide me with the ability and tools to serve people better as a Parliament member."

One of the candidates, who has vast prior experience working within humanitarian organizations, decided to shift to the political field in the hope to be more efficient in making a difference. She said, "I had previously tried to refuse this reality through my social and humanitarian work and even through social media and conferences, but I realized later that it was all talk, and that is not sufficient."

Some of the candidates believed that their families had previously tried to keep them away from politics, and that only made their determination grow. One of the women candidates, who had more than 30 years of experience in the political field, mentioned that, “My father moved me to another country to study in order to keep me away from politics; however, his efforts failed. I believe in change through politics and I believe in my capacities to make this change happen.”

Overall, women candidates who had previous political experience were more confident in their capacities, and thus may have been able to run a more efficient campaign. This, however, did not keep candidates from all political and social backgrounds from running in the 2018 parliamentary elections, which could be considered a great step forward in the fight for women’s equal representation and participation at the political level.

Decision to run

Women candidates reported different motivations for running for election. The study showed that a large number of women candidates ran in the elections due to a personal drive, with hopes of being agents of change – running to raise the profile of women in politics, to pass gender equal and youth sensitive policies, and running in large numbers as independents.

Some were motivated to change the situation and to present an image of Lebanese women different from what was portrayed in mainstream media: “I entered politics to prove that women in public life can be agents of change and fight corruption, and to change the stereotypical image of women in Lebanon.” Some women ran for elections to break the stereotypical image of the Lebanese mother:

“Running for elections is my way of taking care of my kids. I know I can make Lebanon a better place for the sake of both my kids, and other people’s kid’s futures,” a candidate stated.

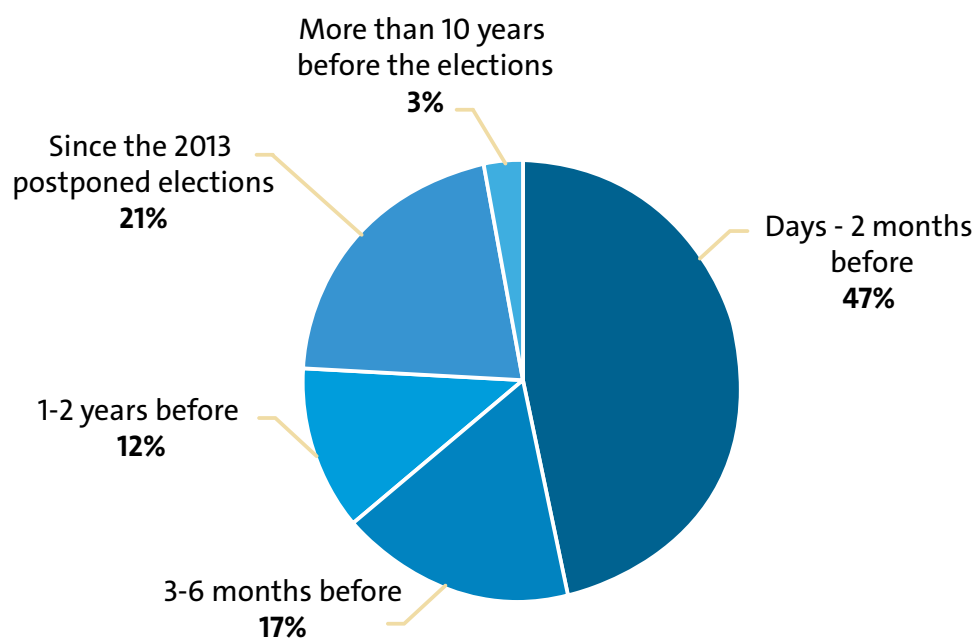
Some candidates ran due to being requested to by their spouses, while others indicated that it was at the request of a political party. One candidate highlights, “running for the parliamentary elections was never my aspiration but I was contacted by a political party, who happens to be a family friend, and I was asked to join them; so I did.” A few candidates who ran as part of political party lists indicated that they leveraged the invitation from party leaders to run for elections and highlight their own agenda and priorities. One of the candidates said, “*My decision was influenced by the call of a Minister who asked me to join his list, and I accepted because I had already established my program and wanted to be in decision-making in order to put it into practice.*”

Those women who ran as independents defied long standing traditional rules which favor political party list nominations over independent list nominations. The 2019 LCPS study noted that most women who ran were non-party affiliated or within the civil society coalition, Koullouna Watani. By taking a decision to run the elections as independents, women were able to stand against political party lists and form lists consisting of new faces and mentalities. Some candidates expressed their detachment from traditional political parties, while others expressed their refusal of being part of the current reality. “*I believe it is not necessary for candidates to come from political dynasties to run for elections,*” one candidate stated, while another said, “*I decided to run as an independent candidate because I believe it was the best way to highlight my refusal of the Lebanese reality.*”

Timing of the Decision to Run for the Elections

Lebanese 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Out of 75 female candidates



The study also looked at the different times when candidates first took their decision to run for elections. The majority of women candidates took the decision to run up to two months prior to the elections, with 35 candidates out of the 75 interviewed. At the other end of the spectrum, 16 candidates had taken the decision to run for elections in 2013, since the initial delay of the scheduled elections, which allowed them to continue the work they had already started. Two candidates took the decision 10 years prior to the elections. Additionally, 13 candidates took the decision to run for the elections 3 to 6 months prior to the date and 9 candidates 1 to 2 years prior to the election date.

One of the main challenges faced by women candidates during the elections, and one of the main reasons that women were unable to convey

their messages to their potential voters was the fact that the majority had decided at a late stage to run for the elections. This gave women candidates less time to prepare, fundraise, formulate a campaign plan and campaign messages, among others. Women candidates also indicated that they were unable to manage their campaign efficiently, or to advocate for their programmes through door to door visits.

Nonetheless, the study found that the success of the candidates was not directly impacted by the availability of time, and that timing was not the strongest factor in determining success. Three of the eventual winners (50 per cent) had decided to run for elections just 2 months prior to the elections date; on the other hand, one of the candidates indicated that she had been running since 1998 and had yet to be successful.

Supports and barriers

Candidates highlighted different experiences when talking about whether or not their families supported their running for elections. Of the 75 women candidates interviewed, 39 candidates (52 per cent) indicated that they had the support of their direct family members, while 19 candidates (26 per cent) had the support of both their direct and extended family members. Meanwhile 9 candidates (12 per cent) ran despite their families, both direct and extended, not supporting their decision, and in one case a candidate ran while being supported only by her extended family members and not her direct family members.

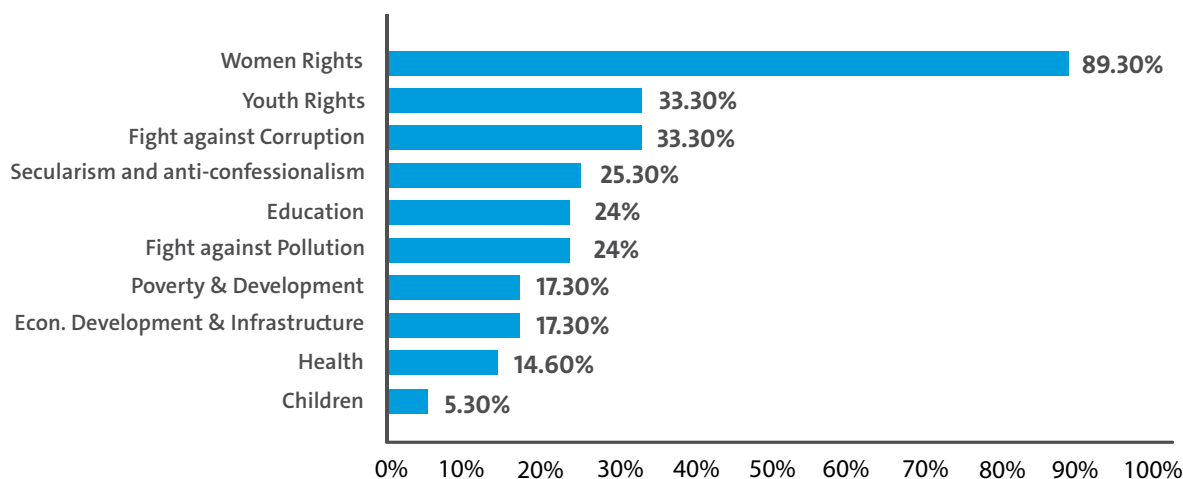
Overall, direct family members (father, mother and husband) showed support for women's candidacy, especially if the candidate was married, more than the extended family members who tended to prefer the candidacy of men to that of women. It is important to highlight that in the cases where candidates ran as part of political party lists, they often enjoyed the support of both direct and extended families, as opposed to candidates who ran as independent candidates, who received less support from their families. This may be due to the fact that, in many cases, family members are supportive of certain political parties, and candidates running as independents can be seen as running against the family's preferred political choice.

Political priorities and electoral programme

Women Candidates' Electoral Program Priorities

Lebanese 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Out of 75 female candidates



The study also looked at women's electoral programmes and their priorities, in order to assess their different political focuses. As shown in the above chart, women candidates indicated that their top priority (89.3 per cent) was working

on advancing women's rights and women's participation. Most candidates mentioned that they were looking to make legal reforms to reinforce the status of women in the political, social, and economic domains. The second most important



priority for women candidates was defending youth rights, with 33.3 per cent considering this a priority. Fighting corruption was equally important, where 33.3 per cent considering this a priority as well.

Women candidates indicated that another focus for their programmes would be improving education and its institutions and fighting pollution, with 24 per cent considering both to be within their priorities. The other issues tackled by women candidates are distributed as follows: initiating a secular system and fighting against the confessional system with 25.3 per cent; poverty and development with 17.3 per cent; economic development and infrastructure with 17.3 per cent; health with 14.6 per cent of candidates; improving children's rights with 5.3 per cent; and other issues such as sovereignty oil, gas and others.

The fact that only 10.6 per cent of candidates did not consider women's rights as one of their priorities indicates that the notion that women candidates do not support other women's political participation is false. Women candidates indicated that they would focus on their priorities through legal reforms, including seeking the independence of courts, enhancing the efficiency and accountability of parliamentary work, and other legal measures. Youth rights were to be targeted through legal reforms and strategies aimed at creating jobs and enhancing the political representation of youth. Education was also a priority for women candidates, as well as targeting improving citizenship rights and democratic values and enhancing employment opportunities. Pollution was one of the main issues tackled by the candidates, as it was perceived as violating the rights of the candidates' children to a future without pollution.

DURING THE CAMPAIGN

Financial constraints and campaign management

The study showed that amongst the challenges faced by female candidates, financial restrictions and constraints were the most highlighted, especially when considered in contrast with the financial situation of male candidates. Financial restrictions were one of the most prominent obstacles that candidates faced in the previous elections, partly due to the lack of a clear law identifying financial electoral rules. With financial restrictions and limited budgets, campaigns were restricted to basic and traditional means of campaigning, which utilize less funds. Given that fundraising is an important part of campaigning, this placed women at a disadvantage from the beginning.

Financial challenges and fundraising

The study revealed that 73 out of the 75 candidates interviewed (97.3 per cent) faced financial challenges and considered these challenges to be the most serious, significantly affecting their chances of winning. Most women candidates started off with a very limited budget, which was generally financed out of pocket, from the candidates' own savings, with limited help from families. As one of the candidates, who had already taken part in four elections, claimed, *"I spent my life paying the bank back for the expenses of my campaign."* Another candidate claimed that, *"I sold a real estate, inheritance from my parents, to be able to pay the expenses of my campaign."*

Of the 75 female candidates interviewed, 53 (71 per cent) indicated that they did not host any type of fundraising events. This was for several reasons and concerns, which can be categorized into six categories:

1. the cultural aspect of being ashamed to fundraise. Thirty candidates explained that they were too ashamed and shy as they viewed fundraising as "asking" for money, and thus they held back from organizing any fundraising events. As one of the women candidates said, "I'm not used to ask for money from anyone; I just can't do it."
2. feeling that it was unethical to ask for money. Fifteen of the interviewed candidates felt that it would be unethical and not fruitful to hold fundraisers as they believed that people should not donate. "How can I accept money from people, I should help them and not the other way around," one of the women said. Some of the candidates also felt that it would have been unethical as they were already sure they would not be able to win. "I refuse to fundraise since I know I won't win; this would be unethical," said one of the candidates. Other independent women explained that they believed it would be unethical for them to fundraise in person, and that fundraising should be done by the political parties instead.
3. the lack of candidates' expertise in fund raising. Some candidates said that they knew that fundraisers were important for their campaigns, but that they lacked the technical skills and knowledge of holding such fundraisers. Overall, 28 candidates belonged to this category (37 per cent). Due to the nature of electoral fundraisers in Lebanese politics, there is very little knowledge and technical assistance on the fundraising process. "I don't know how to host a fundraising event; none of my team had the expertise to do it," confirmed one of the women candidates interviewed.

4. the limited time available prior to the elections prevented some candidates from holding fundraising events. 17 candidates out of the 75 interviewed (23 per cent) mentioned that they did not have the time to hold fundraisers, due to several constraints including the limited team expertise and size. The time available for campaigning this past election was very short especially in comparison with other countries where campaigns start as early as a year prior to the elections, and earlier in some cases. Therefore, it can be inferred that time constraints constituted a major obstacle for candidates.
5. candidates believing that fund raising would be inefficient. Two candidates believed that fundraising would be inefficient for their campaign and therefore chose not to hold any fundraising events. In their view, it was not important, and it would not have produced sound results. Instead, they shifted focus to other means and methods of campaigning.
6. the lack of need for fund raising. Four candidates believed that there was no need for fundraising, either because they already had the means or because they failed to see any benefit in fund raising. These candidates also preferred to shift the focus of their campaign to other issues.

Here it is important to highlight a recurring stereotype that many candidates as well as voters hold when it comes to electoral campaigning and fundraising. It is often believed that if a candidate does not have the financial capabilities to run for



elections, then they should not be running in the first place. This perception is endorsed not only by voters, but also by the candidates themselves.

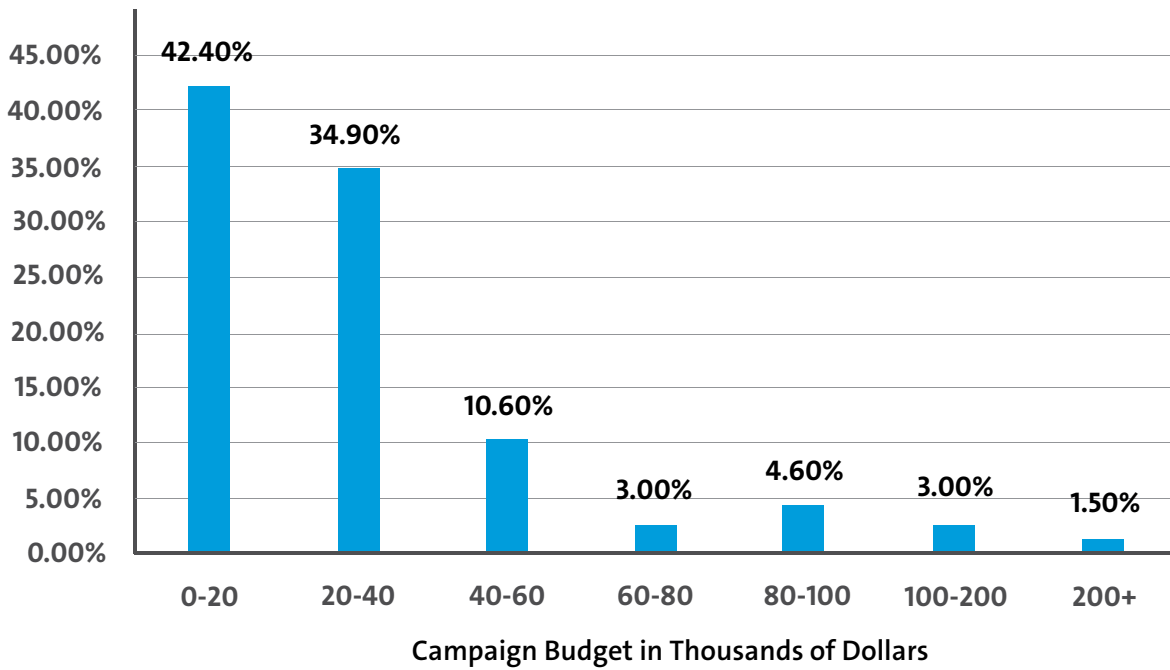
It is important to note that most female candidates did not have a campaign manager, as indicated by 45 candidates. When candidates had campaign managers, the managers were usually members of the family or inexperienced volunteers, as indicated by 16 candidates with campaign managers. Only 14 candidates confirmed that they had hired and paid an electoral campaign manager to head their campaign.

Budget allocation

Campaign Budget

Lebanese 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Out of 75 female candidates



The study examined the financial aspects of the candidates' campaigns. Of the 75 women candidates in the study, 9 candidates refused to declare the budget they had allocated for their campaign. Of the 66 candidates who declared the budget they had allocated for their 2018 parliamentary elections campaign, on average they had an approximate total budget of US\$37,643.94. The highest budget was of \$250,000 and the lowest was \$3,000:

- **28 candidates (42 per cent)** had an allocated budget of between \$20,000 and \$3,000. This is the largest group,
- **23 candidates (35 per cent)** had an allocated budget of between \$20,000 and \$40,000,
- **7 candidates (11 per cent)** spent between \$40,000 and \$60,000 on their campaigns,
- **2 candidates (3 per cent)** spent between \$60,000 and \$80,000 on their campaigns,
- **3 candidates (5 per cent)** had an allocated budget of between \$80,000 and \$100,000,

- **2 candidates (3 per cent)** spent between \$100,000 and \$200,000 on their campaigns, and
- **1 candidate** spent \$250,000 on her campaign.

These results indicate that the allocated budgets for the 2018 campaigns were relatively restricted. Many of the candidates did not have the financial capabilities, or in some cases did not want, to spend a large sum of money on their campaigns.

While candidates in general, and female candidates in particular, faced several challenges throughout the 2018 parliamentary elections campaigns, financial challenges remain one of the most common. The absence of fundraising only exacerbates the issue and renders female candidates at a disadvantage. It is crucial therefore to take a closer look at the reasons behind candidates' choice to not hold fundraisers in order to design ways to increase the financial support for women candidates.

Media and Image Portrayal

In any election campaign, media plays a prominent role in shaping a society's participation, values and beliefs. Discrimination against women on online and offline platforms not only affects the voter decisions, but also has an adverse bystander effect, namely it deters other potential women candidates from becoming involved in politics or in other public-facing sectors and hinders women's other career aspirations.

Media Exposure

Women candidates enjoyed less access to the media than their male counterparts, which decreases their exposure and affects their results as voters are influenced by the lack of visibility. In the 2018 elections, female candidates received a mere 5 per cent of the total press coverage available and 15.8 per cent of Lebanese TV coverage during the electoral campaigning period. Furthermore, the type of exposure women candidates received was different from men, with men candidates being primarily hosted for news interviews and on talk shows and women candidates only representing 0.87 per cent of the first story covered on TV news.¹⁰

Out of the 75 respondents,

- only 9 (12 per cent) did not perceive any gender-based media discrimination, which means that 88 per cent of women candidates did feel gender discrimination in the media. The nine candidates thought that they had received

sufficient media coverage and had not faced any discriminatory questions. However, the nine candidates believed that competing with wealthy politicians who had the ability to pay for added coverage, including going on shows and interviews with more ratings and viewers, was unfair.

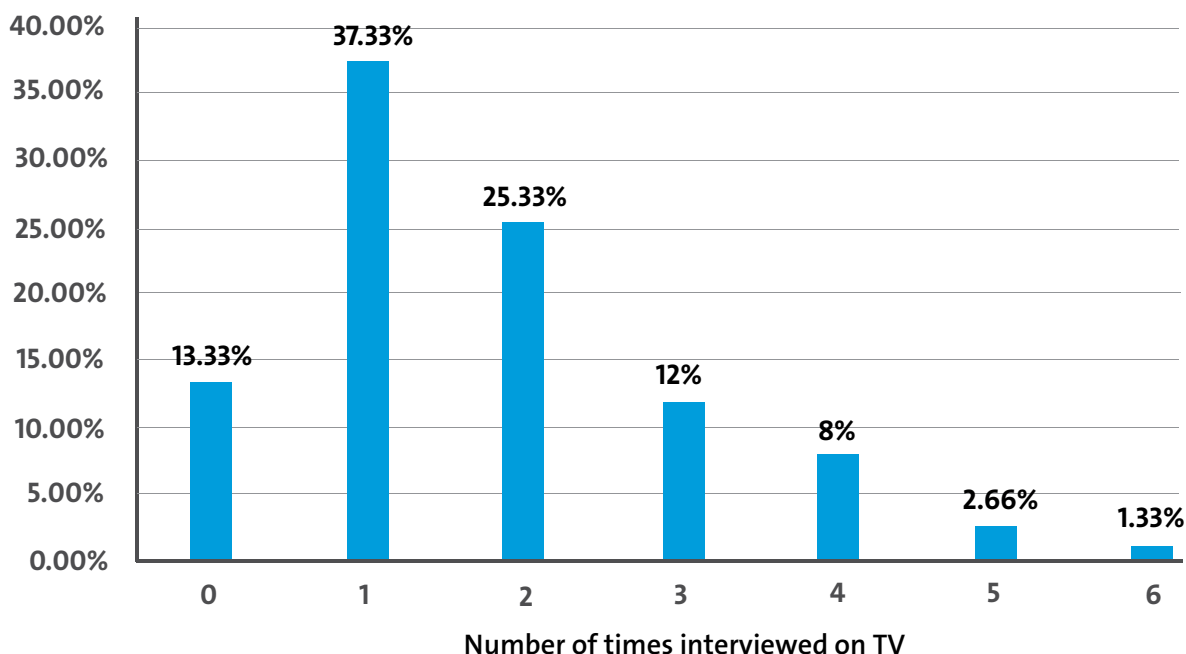
- 66 (88 per cent) considered that they were victims of media discrimination in regard to the total time received in media coverage, as well as the discriminatory questions that they received during their interviews.
- 64 (85.3 per cent) received TV time through interviews. This means that eleven of the candidate respondents (14.6 per cent) did not receive any TV time throughout the entirety of their campaign. Women candidates who did not receive any media coverage were left to try and make up for the missed opportunity by reverting to social media exposure.
- 28 (37.3 per cent) expressed their frustration at the fact that they were only able to secure one TV spot, with the majority of these appearances on "Tele Liban", the Lebanese national TV, as it was free of charge. Such TV appearances offered very limited visibility compared to other, more well-known, TV channels and shows. The inflated prices set by some of those TV and media stations impeded the candidates' ability to secure air time, as they were found to be unaffordable. Many of the respondents also highlighted that they believed it was unethical and illegal to be expected to pay for such exposure, regardless of whether or not they were able to afford it.

¹⁰ Jocelyn Nader & Tony Mikhael. (2018). Women in Lebanon's 2018 Legislative Elections: Monitoring the Media During the Electoral Campaign from a Gender Perspective. Available at: http://www.maharatfoundation.org/media/1460/maharat-study-elections-2018_finale_en.pdf. Accessed February 2020.

Exposure of Female Candidates on TV Interviews

Lebanese 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Out of 75 female candidates



Out of the 75 candidate respondents, 19 (25.3 per cent) were interviewed twice on TV, and only nine (12 per cent) appeared three times. Only five of the candidates (6.6 per cent) appeared on TV four times, two (around 2.6 per cent) appeared on TV five times, and one (1.3 per cent) appeared six times. Only six women candidates were interviewed by international TV channels.

In total, women candidates appeared on TV channels a total of 132 times, nine of which were appearances on international TV channels and 123 were interviews conducted by local channels. In six cases, women candidates were able to secure appearances on international outlets only, not appearing once on local outlets. This meant that those candidates were unable to receive enough visibility in Lebanon and, consequently, their potential voters did not have the opportunity to get to know enough about them and their electoral agendas. *“I felt European countries are more interested in knowing us than our own country,”* one of them said.

Discriminatory nature of interviews

Alongside the challenges of accessing media airtime, candidates also faced discrimination during the airtime they received. This ranged from the types of questions being asked, the nature of the discussion, the comments, and the focus on unnecessary aspects.

Out of the 75 respondents, 33 (44 per cent) considered the questions that they were asked to be of a gender-based discriminatory nature and labeled some of the questions as unnecessary. This meant that the women candidates were not given the chance to benefit from the little airtime they received and were unable to express their political views or explain their electoral agendas.

In many cases, women candidates hosted on shows or interviews were mainly asked about their interest in running for the elections, and to justify their decision with regards to their families

and aspirations. On the other hand, their male counterparts were mainly asked about their political views and agendas, and spent no time discussing such personal queries. Because of this discriminatory approach, women's presence in politics was communicated as an unnatural act, and women had to spend their limited airtime justifying their general interest in the elections, instead of their programmes and ideas which needed to be conveyed to the public.

Several of the women candidates were asked about their ability to manage their and their family's daily lives while dealing with the pressures of being in politics, while some were asked about their personal lives and their family's opinion. In one of the cases, an interviewer asked one of the female candidates, *"Would you have time to run for elections and to campaign?"*, something that was not questioned of male politicians. Other discriminatory questions were asked about attaining the husbands' approval and that of their families, about kids, questions about their personal lives, including their marital status, and family relationships going forward. As one of the candidates noted, *"If we were men, I think all the questions would have been about the program."*

In similar fashion, a number of the questions focused on shedding doubt at women candidates' ability to succeed in their plans, and in being elected. *"Being a woman, do you believe you have a chance at winning?"* is one question that seemed to be asked over and over to many women candidates. In cases where candidates were known through their social work, most were asked about their ability to shift from the social field to the political field. As one of the candidates noted, *"I received questions about my ability to move into Parliament given my background in education and teaching. I don't think they'd ask a man such a question!"*

Questions like these made some women feel that they were not taken seriously in politics. *"I felt like the questions were asked to make sure I am taking the candidacy seriously,"* one of them stated.

Others felt like the questions were not addressed to a person in politics tackling political crisis and offering solutions. *"At no point of the interview did I feel intellectually challenged. I was expecting more interesting questions,"* an experienced woman in politics said. *"I felt like all questions were superficial as if I were unable to talk politics,"* another candidate said.

As some candidates reported, another discriminatory approach was that they were bombarded with questions on all kinds of topics as if being tested to make sure they understood politics. As one of the candidates noted, *"I was bombarded with questions as if they were questioning my abilities."*

Meanwhile, candidates who were experts in their field were only queried about their areas of expertise and not about their political views and agendas. As one of the candidates said, *"I had two interviews during my electoral campaign, none of which tackled my electoral agenda."* Some candidates reported only being questioned about gender-based violence and gender discrimination, while environmental experts only received questions about the ecological crisis and economists were only questioned about the economic crisis. This supports the notion that women are seen as experts or social activists in certain fields, rather than real politicians who are able to discuss and tackle reforms at the political and legislative level.

Furthermore, women candidates indicated that, during interviews, most attention and time was shifted away from them and focused on male politicians. This held true regardless of whether the presenter was a man or a woman. Female candidates were often interrupted by male guests and by the presenters in order to switch topics and focus. In one instance, even when a candidate was invited to an interview, she did not receive any questions about her candidacy or electoral agenda and was instead used as a stepping stone to enquire about the leader of her list (who was a male politician) and about the leader's views and electoral program.

Image portrayal

During their campaigns, women candidates faced attacks on their image and were unfairly portrayed in some cases. Out of the 75 candidate respondents, 37 (49.3 per cent) said that they experienced unfair pressure over their image, especially after receiving some exposure in conventional and social media. This included female candidates receiving comments from strangers on social media, and from family and friends on their looks, pressuring them to wear more or less makeup. Half of these candidates experienced pressure for being too natural and paying too little attention to their appearance, while other candidates experienced pressure for being too sophisticated and paying too much attention to their appearances.

In total, 14 candidates (18.6 per cent) were criticized for neglecting their looks and image and told that they should wear more makeup and formal clothes. As one of the candidates indicated, *“One of my friends called me after a video I posted on Facebook and asked how I could make this video with my wrinkles! She suggested I should have Botox before I talk to my voters next time.”* She was shocked and frustrated at the shift of focus away from her agenda. Additionally, 6 of the candidates (8.1 per cent) were criticized for their looks and told that they looked ugly on social media.

Other candidates were criticized for caring too much about their image. Thirty candidates were harassed for being “pretty and sexy,” asked to wear less makeup, change the color of their nails, and wear nude colors instead. Some comments were taken as compliments by the candidate, such as: *“I love your eyes,” “You are the prettiest on your list,”* or *“It is good to see pretty women in Parliament; we are fed up with ugly men,”* while some comments were perceived as rude when asking them to *“Run for a beauty pageant instead of parliamentary election,”* or *“Go to a plastic surgeon and not to the Parliament.”* As one of the candidates stated, *“I was*

taken lightly because of my beauty and they tried to tell me that I am not good for politics because it needs smart women instead of pretty ones.” In this case, the candidate felt like it was unfair to be judged for her looks instead of her political views.

Thirty-eight women candidates (50.6 per cent) did not feel like they experienced any kind of image pressure, and that people did not comment on their looks but rather about their platform. It is worth noting, when investigating the differences in results, that 27 of the 38 women (71 per cent) were above 50 years of age, and 4 of them (10 per cent) did not get any TV exposure. The vast majority (93.3 per cent) of the candidates who were criticized for caring too much or being “pretty and sexy” were under 50 years of age. It seems that the younger the candidate is, and the more she is exposed to the media and seen by the public, the more she receives pressure because of her looks.

In a display of resilience, women who experienced pressure from both sides, of being too negligent or too caring, indicated their refusal at changing their looks, as their looks were considered as part of their identities. This gave them a chance to stay true to themselves and not change under the pressure of being in politics. *“I refused to wear less makeup or to change my hair color because this is me and I don’t want to change,”* commented one of the candidates.

The above results show that women candidates in general received less media attention than their male counterparts, and faced discrimination in more than one way during their media appearances. This resulted in women gaining less exposure and potential voters not being able to hear about women candidates’ electoral agendas, which contributes to an adverse effect on the overall results. Women were also discriminated against and pressured over their image, as opposed to having most of the focus on their electoral campaigns, which also led to adverse effects when it came to voters’ perspectives.

Violence, harassment and discrimination

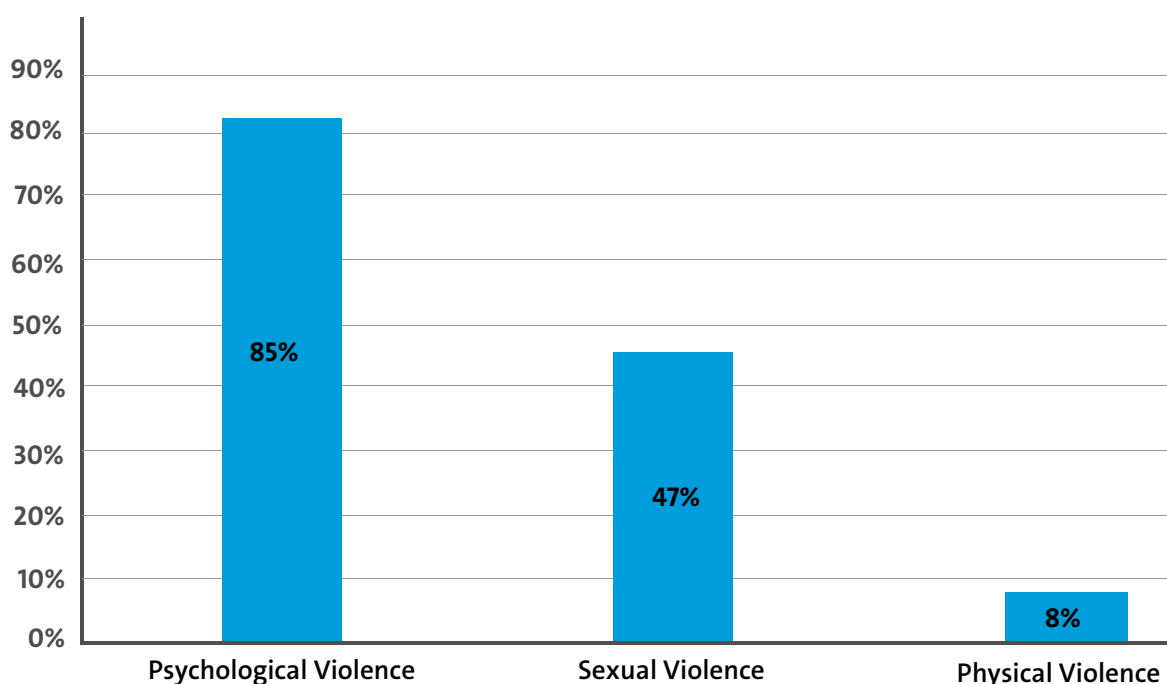
The study revealed a number of cases where women candidates were the victims of different kinds of violence, including psychological and emotional violence such as threats, character targeting, online abuse, ridicule and harassment; physical violence such as beatings and property damage; sexual violence such as sexual harassment, threats, assaults and rumors of a sexual nature.

Women candidates mentioned a variety of perpetrators who were responsible for such acts, including family members, members of political parties and members of opposing parties, voters and media representatives, among others. Candidates indicated that such acts of violence were seen in a number of different settings including at home, in the media (mainstream media as well as social media), in public spaces, and at political party meetings.

Types of VAWP

59 out of 75 (78.6%) female candidates were victims of VAWP Lebanese 2018 Parliamentary Elections

Out of the 59 female candidates



Based on candidates' feedback, 59 candidates out of the 75 (78.6 per cent) were victims of some form of violence during the election period. The most prominent setting for such violence was social media, with 45 candidates experiencing abuse online. Overall, the main perpetrators were

- members of the opposing political group with 69 per cent of reported attacks,
- 56 per cent of attacks coming from people with unknown or fake accounts,
- 17 per cent from family members, and
- 12 per cent from candidates on the same list.

Out of the 59 candidates who were victims of violence, 50 candidates suffered from psychological violence, which includes any hostile behavior or acts likely to cause psychological harm, suffering, intimidation and/or fear. The most reported form of psychological violence was ridiculing and unwelcomed comments, with 41 candidates indicating that they received comments such as *“you are the beauty of the list,” “go raise your children,” “go cook,” “you’ll have fun during the election,” “get some experience,” “in our region women don’t govern,” “wish you find a husband,”* and *“run for Miss Lebanon instead,”* among others. 14 candidates suffered from direct threats against them personally and/or against their children, as candidates reported threats such as, *“We know where your kids are – stay within your limits.”*

The highest rate of reported harassment was from social media outlets, with 62 per cent of reported incidents coming through that route.

Women candidates considered sexual harassment a common practice and highlighted that this was especially true on social media. Out of the 59 candidates who were victims of violence, 28 reported that they experienced sexual harassment in more than one form. Of the different forms of sexual harassment that candidates experienced, 21 candidates reported being subject to verbal abuse such as being called a *“bitch”* or *“whore”*, while 12 candidates reported being victims of sexual harassment in the form of online comments and messages, or during live, face-to-face interactions. 13 candidates were accused of sexual misconduct and had rumors being spread about them, which included claiming that women were selected on lists in exchange for sexual favors, or rumors about sexual orientation.

In most cases perpetrators were unknown or fake accounts (89 per cent) and the remaining 11 per cent were from members of opposing political groups. As was the case in other violations, social media was

the place where perpetrators felt most comfortable to write sexual assaults or to sexually harass the candidates (54 per cent). 11 per cent of the sexual assaults and sexual accusations were perpetrated on the mainstream media by opposing groups, and 18 per cent personally (sexual assaults and sexual harassment).

Candidates were also subject to psychological violence post-election results, with candidates reporting hearing degrading and offensive comments such as, *“your worth is equal to the number of votes,” “the money you spent should have been spent on your kids,” “we told you you’re going to lose,” “stubborn and you don’t listen,”* and *“you humiliated yourself.”* Bullying on social media and face to face from family members and from the opposing groups was very harmful to the candidates and made some of them isolate themselves socially for months following the results.

Physical violence includes any violence that inflicts bodily injury on a candidate or members of her family. In the study, 5 candidates out of the 59 victims of VAWP reported being victims of physical violence. Perpetrators of this type of violence were often members of the family or members and supporters of opposing groups, and the physical violence took place at home and, in some cases, on the street.

In most cases, candidates were unaware of the fact that what they went through is considered violence against women in politics, and that it is a form of discrimination against them and women in general. A few of the victims spoke freely about their experiences and the violence that they went through, while others were scared of being portrayed as weak or having failed to maintain a respectful image. In many cases, women candidates felt uncomfortable disclosing some of the details of their incidents, particularly when perpetrators were from the same political group or family members, as opposed to being from opposing political parties.

AFTER ELECTIONS

Lessons learned and way forward

From the interviews and the data collected during this study, it was found that the candidates faced a number of challenges relating to all aspects of the electoral cycle, from finances to media, VAWP, family resistance and time management, among others. When candidates were asked about their lessons learned and what they thought of their prospects going forward, the vast majority showed great will and determination in deciding to continue their political careers, with 91 per cent of interviewed candidates stating that they planned to run the next election, and only 9 per cent expressing reluctance to run again.

An important lesson learned identified from the 2018 parliamentary elections was the vast majority of candidates saying that they required more time and planning. Most candidates (76 per cent) indicated that they would start working on their campaigns at least two years in advance, while some also mentioned that they now considered this as an on-going undertaking and that they would start working on their campaigns immediately to be able to run for the next parliamentary elections in a more efficient manner.

When looking at budgetary and financial issues that candidates faced in the 2018 parliamentary elections, 32 of the 75 candidates indicated that they needed to better manage their campaign funding, budgeting and financing if they were to run again. Candidates indicated that in the next election they would set clear plans and budgets for their campaigns, while also giving further consideration to mobilizing resources and fundraising. Candidates also indicated that following the 2018 elections it became apparent to them that in order to build a successful campaign and to raise their chances of

being elected, more attention should be given to financial management and fund raising.

However, some independent candidates were more reluctant about fundraising and giving importance to financial budgeting, as they believed that they would not be able to financially compete with tenured men with access to vast resources within political parties. Some independent candidates thought that no matter what they would do, they would not be able to compete, as one of the candidates highlighted, “How can I compete with millions of dollars owned by political chiefs who are often men?” The candidate also mentioned that she runs for elections in order to “express my right to do so, and not to win,” as she believes that despite her not having hopes of winning, she is leading the fight for the women in politics and women’s political participation.

When looking back at some of the challenges which women faced, almost half of the candidates interviewed (around 45 per cent) revealed that they believed that their candidature was damaged by the newly implemented electoral law. Candidates believe that the introduction of a preferential vote added more barriers to women’s participation as it automatically makes voters choose one candidate of the list, likely to be a man. Some candidates suggested that the law should be changed, either by abolishing the preferential vote or by adding another preferential vote, to make it two and allow for women winners too. Some of the candidates indicated that they will lobby to change the electoral law in order to be replaced with a law which is more suited towards women candidature.

On the other hand, when talking about macro level change, women candidates overwhelmingly (97 per cent) were in support of a gender quota, which ensures a certain number of seats in the Parliament would go to women. Most candidates thought that



their bids were undermined with the absence of any adequate quota in the election law and that including a quota in the next draft law would be a solution to the absence of women representation in Parliament.

Women candidates felt affected by the existence of corruption and unfair procedures which were witnessed by themselves or their representatives during the elections. Overall, of the 75 candidates who were interviewed, 30 (40 per cent) indicated that they believed corruption directly affected their potential results and candidacy. Most candidates said that in trying to deal with this wide-spread issue going forward, they would attempt to exert more pressure on stakeholders to ensure proper implementation of existing laws and policies. Candidates indicated that corruption, as witnessed in the 2018 parliamentary elections, was one of the main reasons they would refrain from running for the next parliamentary elections, believing that it would be pointless to do so in the face of such issues.

Another issue addressed by candidates was the gender discrimination in media coverage. After facing dealing with unfair media coverage and unfair portrayal of candidates' image, many candidates indicated that they would be better prepared to deal with media visibility and representation given their 2018 experiences. Overall, 26 candidates (34.6 per cent) indicated that, in the coming elections, they would work on a visibility plan to ensure their electoral programmes receive proper visibility among potential voters. Candidates indicated that, among others, they would try to appear more often on different types of media outlets, work on having a more active social media presence, and plan their media activities with a specialist to help them maximize visibility. Engaging with the media in training personnel to deal better with women-in-politics is crucial to help women candidates attain equal chances, realizing the prominent role media can play in helping promoting gender equality in politics and in all domains.

VAWP was one of the most discussed topics in the study. The results indicate that most candidates were victims of some form of VAWP during the 2018 parliamentary elections; however, many did not know that what they experienced constituted violence. It was evident that women candidates were increasingly aware of the issues associated with VAWP, though, and 26 candidates in the study (34.6 per cent) asserted that raising awareness on women in politics in general, and on VAWP in particular, is a must to increase women's participation and allow them to conduct their work in politics in a more efficient and safe manner.

Women candidates saw that training and technical assistance could be beneficial to their campaign and results; however, only 9 per cent thought that training would be a game changer in their election bid, as long as deeper systemic issues remained. Women candidates mentioned that many are already well prepared, trained, and experienced, but they are still unsuccessful in their election bids due to a number of systemic and deep-rooted discriminatory issues. A quarter of the candidates highlighted the importance of training their teams and having experienced managers running some aspects of the campaign. The 18 candidates mentioned how they found themselves unable to accomplish some of their plans due to working within a challenging and unexperienced team, which required more funding, time and training.

Candidates believed that even hired managers were, in most cases, not gender sensitive, which made them believe that more electoral managers need to be trained on how to manage women electoral campaigns in a gender sensitive manner. This includes training managers to be able to support candidates dealing with issues such as discrimination and VAWP, how to address women and men voters, how to plan for fundraising, and how to deal with media and social media accounts in a gender sensitive manner.

In some cases, candidates said that the lists and political parties that they agreed to run with might have negatively affected their chances at winning. In fact, 12 candidates (16 per cent) said that they would choose different lists for running with in the next election, which was especially true in the case of independent candidates. Some candidates mentioned that they would leave their current independent list and join other independent lists or become part of political party lists as many believe that their chances of winning as independents are slim.

Despite all the challenges, injustices and discrimination that women candidates experienced during the 2018 election cycle, it was very encouraging to see the resilience of candidates, with 68 candidates (91 per cent) out of the 75 interviewed candidates indicating that they planned to run for the next elections in 2022. This spoke to the resilience, perseverance and the insistence of women in Lebanon to be the change for themselves and the future of women in politics in Lebanon, especially young women aspirants. However, it is very important to take the lessons, challenges and highlights from the documented experiences of candidates into account in order to ensure that similar challenges are not repeated going forward.

It is crucial to provide better conditions, fairer policies, fairer representation and just laws to ensure inclusiveness for future women candidates. It is also of high importance to target the deep-rooted systemic issues which women in Lebanon face, including discriminatory laws, procedures, societal outlook on women leaders, and violence against women perpetrated with impunity.

Grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, UN Women works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women; and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security.

Placing women's rights at the center of all its efforts, UN Women leads and coordinate United Nations System efforts to ensure that commitments on gender equality and gender mainstreaming translate into action throughout the world. It provides strong and coherent leadership in support of Member States' priorities and efforts, building effective partnerships with civil society and other relevant actors. UN Women Lebanon works on issues of women's political participation, women's peace, and security, women's economic empowerment, and changing social norms around gender and masculinities.



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