

MONITORING 2025 MUNICIPAL AND MUKHTAR ELECTIONS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

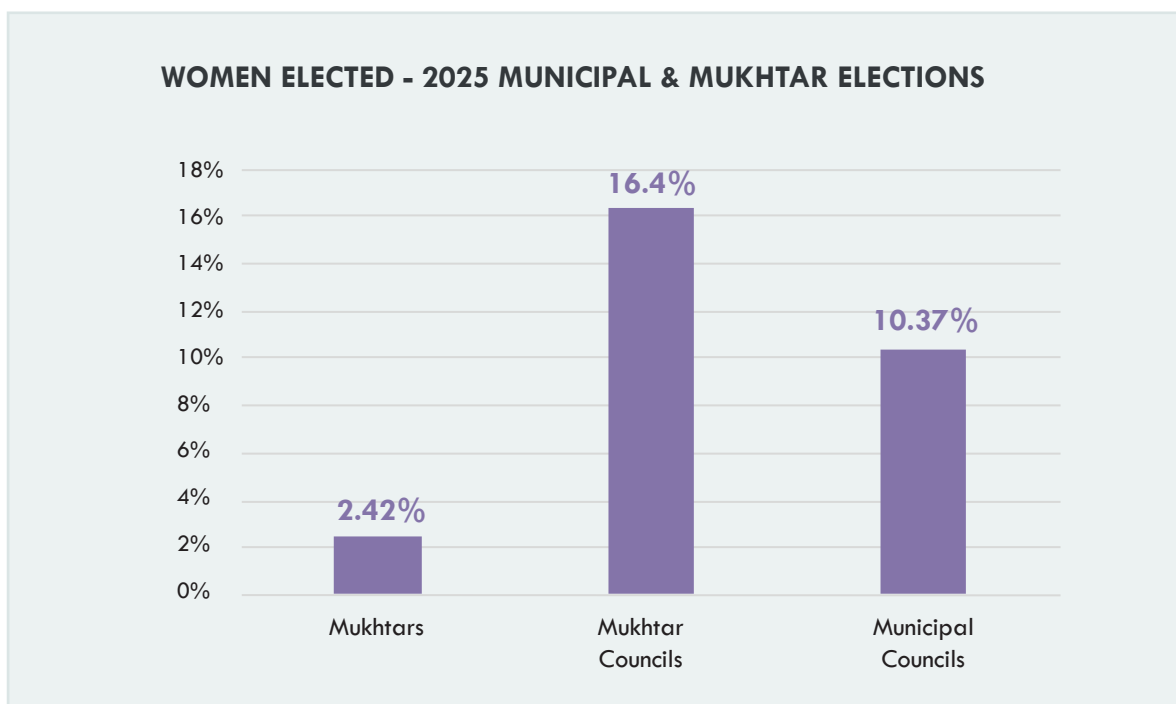




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1. BACKGROUND

Lebanon's 2025 municipal and mukhtar elections took place in a context of severe political, economic, and social crises, following multiple delays since 2022. Despite these challenges, the elections marked a turning point for women's political participation: 1,331 women won municipal seats, a 100% increase compared to 2016. This surge highlights both progress and persistent structural barriers facing women in local governance.



2. METHODOLOGY

The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), with technical support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), monitored the elections from a gender perspective, using qualitative and quantitative tools across all governorates. The methodology included surveys with 1,025 women voters, 207 women municipal candidates, 45 women mukhtar candidates, as well as interviews with 9 political parties, 7 female qaimaqams, and one woman governor.

3. KEY FINDINGS

WOMEN VOTERS

Survey results reveal that women’s voting decisions were shaped by a dual dynamic: while appearing individual on the surface, they were deeply embedded in family, partisan, and geographic networks. For many women, family remained the primary source of electoral information, overshadowing independent access to official resources, despite the growing role of social media and civil society. This was especially evident in rural areas where face-to-face interactions and family gatherings remained the dominant means of learning about candidates.

Women also faced structural barriers to participation, such as restrictions on mobility, exclusion from campaign events, and confusion about what constitutes legitimate persuasion versus unlawful pressure inside polling stations. These constraints often reduced their vote to a reflection of pre-determined family decisions rather than independent political choice. The absence of a national electoral education strategy leaves many women vulnerable to biased or incomplete information.

At the same time, survey findings highlight women’s strong willingness to support female candidates, challenging stereotypes of women as politically disengaged. Yet this support has not fully translated into electoral victories due to structural obstacles, including Lebanon’s personal status laws, patriarchal family norms, and limited legal protections. Although many women expressed approval for gender quotas, awareness of the broader structural reforms required to achieve genuine parity remains limited. Women’s political participation continues to be undermined by their treatment as “second-class citizens” within both legal and social frameworks.

WOMEN MUNICIPAL CANDIDATES

While women’s candidacy reached unprecedented levels in 2025, only about 12% of total candidates were women, exposing the persistence of exclusionary dynamics. Most female candidates were first-time candidates, indicating both a healthy influx of new faces and a lack of continuity in women’s political engagement. Their motivations ranged from civic duty to personal challenge and family encouragement, but few had access to the institutional support needed for sustainable political careers.

The survey highlights a contradiction: most women felt integrated into their electoral lists and expressed growing confidence in their abilities, but their actual participation was often confined to secondary or logistical roles, not decision-making. In many cases, women were symbolically added to lists but sidelined from campaign events, media appearances, or leadership discussions. This gap underscores the structural marginalization women face, even when formally included.

Candidates reported multiple layers of pressure, from families, parties, and communities, often expressed in cultural stereotypes that question women's place in public life. Political and online harassment further constrained their participation. Despite these pressures, women showed notable resilience and solidarity: over 90% said they supported other female candidates, suggesting strong potential for grassroots women's networks.

Financial exclusion emerged as a major barrier. Few women had equitable access to campaign funding, which remains concentrated in male-dominated patronage networks. The absence of fair funding mechanisms left women dependent on personal resources, while high campaign costs in media and logistics intensified inequality. Moreover, 70% of female candidates had never received electoral training, feeding into the stereotype of "unpreparedness" and leaving them vulnerable to dismissal.

Overall, while women demonstrated political will and growing community trust, their candidacy continues to be shaped by patriarchal family structures, weak party support, and financial inequities.

WOMEN MUKHTAR CANDIDATES

For women running for the mukhtar position, the role carried symbolic and practical meaning. Candidates viewed the mukhtar not only as a bureaucratic officer but as a community leader and agent of change, offering a more approachable and less confrontational entry point into politics than municipal councils. Many ran as independents or within family lists rather than party structures, reflecting both a liberation from party marginalization and continued dependence on traditional family networks for legitimacy.

Yet women's success remained limited: very few won mukhtar seats (2.42%), a reflection of the position's strong ties to family influence and local prestige. While women found more space within collective mukhtar councils, their exclusion from individual leadership posts underscores the ceiling of acceptable women's roles in local politics.

Many women drew their candidacy experience from backgrounds in social or environmental activism, which opened new pathways into politics but also highlighted their distance from traditional political institutions. This raises questions about how women can build long-term political expertise if their engagement remains confined to non-political or community-based spaces.

POLITICAL PARTIES

As key gatekeepers of political life, parties play a decisive role in shaping women's political opportunities. While parties often express rhetorical support for women's participation, their practices frequently reinforce patriarchal and family-centered networks that marginalize women. Candidate selection remains tied to family influence, with parties preferring male candidates with social or local capital to secure electoral wins. This dynamic reproduces exclusionary power structures at both the local and national levels.

The survey highlights that parties often invoke women’s “competence” as a conditional measure of inclusion, obscuring the systemic discrimination that actually hinders women’s access. Many rely on a model of “formal equality,” as in claiming neutrality in candidate selection, while ignoring the structural inequalities that women face. This approach shifts the burden onto women to “prove” themselves, rather than requiring parties to dismantle discriminatory practices.

The central challenge, therefore, is not women’s abilities but the lack of political will within parties to accelerate women’s integration into leadership. Parties rarely adopt internal regulations to guarantee gender balance in candidate selection or leadership structures. International experiences show that reforms such as internal quotas, women’s committees, targeted training programs, and financial incentives can shift these dynamics. Without similar strategies in Lebanon, women’s advancement within parties remains slow and conditional.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Women qaimaqams played a pivotal role in managing the elections under difficult logistical and administrative conditions. Despite resource shortages, infrastructure challenges, and the demands of supervising remote areas, they demonstrated significant capacity in ensuring the process moved forward smoothly. Women administrators’ presence had a visibly positive effect on the credibility and efficiency of election management.

Nonetheless, their contributions were hindered by the absence of formal mechanisms to promote gender representation in administrative roles. Many reported the need for more institutional support from the Ministry of Interior, particularly in digital tools, continuous training, and stronger logistical arrangements. Building a professional environment that supports women administrators, through capacity-building, digitalization, and recognition of their leadership, would strengthen the integrity of future elections.

VIOLATIONS AND HARASSMENT

LADE documented widespread irregularities, including breaches of campaign silence, partisan interference in polling stations, intimidation, and direct pressure on women voters and candidates. Women also reported gender-based harassment and political violence, both online and offline.

4. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

- The majoritarian electoral system continues to reinforce traditional power structures, limiting women's opportunities compared to proportional systems used elsewhere.
- Absence of a women's quota in municipal elections leaves women's representation vulnerable to entrenched patriarchal networks.
- Personal status laws, discriminatory nationality and labor laws, and socio-economic inequality further weaken women's agency in political life.
- Cultural stereotypes and patriarchal norms remain a central barrier, framing women's candidacies as symbolic rather than substantive.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO PARLIAMENT

- Adopt a modern electoral law based on proportional representation, incorporating all reforms highlighted by LADE in its general report on monitoring the 2025 municipal and mukhtar elections.
- Approve a temporary women's quota of no less than 30% on candidate lists, with a clear timeline for evaluating implementation and results. LADE stresses that quotas are a core component of any electoral reform aimed at strengthening democracy. However, quotas should not be separated from comprehensive reforms to the entire electoral framework. In line with the demand for proportional representation without preferential voting and with closed lists, the most democratic and effective quota is a candidate quota with alternating placement of names on lists (zebra system). This model balances women's representation with proportionality and avoids the pitfalls of reserved seats in Lebanon's sectarian system.
- Introduce legislative amendments granting financial exemptions or incentives to lists that achieve gender parity.
- Amend the legal provisions regulating the Supervisory Commission for Elections to guarantee its independence and effectiveness, ensuring that women make up at least one-third of its members.
- Lift Lebanon's reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Adopt a unified civil personal status law.
- Enact a law against political violence in line with international standards, with clear mechanisms for monitoring and accountability.
- Pass all necessary legislation to protect women from all forms of violence and discrimination in both public and private spheres.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

- Adopt a political gender equality strategy and related national action plans, with a concrete objective of achieving equality. This should be based on comprehensive, up-to-date, sex-disaggregated data, with mechanisms to monitor progress and setbacks, publish data regularly, and conduct annual or semi-annual evaluations.
- Allocate adequate budgets and financial resources for implementing national policies and plans.
- Build the capacities of election management staff on gender justice and equality issues.
- Ensure women's access to leadership positions in election administration, including qaimaqams, polling station heads, and committees.
- Build municipal capacities to integrate gender perspectives into policies and plans.
- Require municipalities to adopt clear gender mainstreaming policies in local programs, service delivery, and committee formation. This would help transform women's representation after elections into substantive policy influence rather than symbolic presence.
- Provide updated quantitative and qualitative sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators in Lebanon, including on women in the labor market and education, to design more targeted interventions for women's political empowerment.
- Collect and publish systematic data on the prevalence, causes, and effects of political violence against women, and evaluate the effectiveness of prevention and response measures to improve them accordingly.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and collaborate with stakeholders, including officeholders, political parties, public sector, media, teachers, community and religious leaders, election bodies, private sector, trade unions, judiciary, and law enforcement, to promote positive discourse on gender equality and support women's political participation.
- Strengthen the mandate and resources of the National Commission for Lebanese Women to play a greater role nationally.
- Take measures to prevent, monitor, and hold accountable acts of political violence against women, whether in public discourse, traditional media, or social media, and strengthen the capacity of journalists and digital platforms to prevent stereotyping of women in decision-making.
- Develop Ministry of Interior databases and systems to adopt and transparently publish sex-disaggregated statistics and results.
- Integrate women's rights, women's leadership, gender equality, and stereotype-free pedagogical methods into curricula, eliminating gender stereotypes from teaching materials.
- Enhance protection services against all forms of violence faced by women, including political violence.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLITICAL PARTIES

- Commit to nominating women and adopt temporary affirmative measures in candidate selection for municipal elections.
- Mainstream women's issues into party agendas. In parliament, this includes adopting protective laws and exercising oversight over government policies; within government, this means supporting policies and decisions that advance women's presence in politics.
- Build the capacities of women party members, raise their political awareness, and ensure real opportunities to accumulate political experience and develop female party leadership.
- Take measures to expand women's membership, assign them senior responsibilities, and entrust them with representing the party in elected positions.
- Strengthen the gender dimension across all party units, offices, and structures, and activate women's committees within political parties.
- Revise party internal policies to reflect gender justice and equality principles.
- Publish updated quantitative and qualitative data on gender disparities in party membership.
- Establish internal policies and procedures for reporting, investigating, and addressing harassment and sexual abuse to create safe spaces for women within parties.
- Promote knowledge and awareness of human-rights-based approaches among all party committees and structures.
- Enhance cooperation with feminist organizations on women's demands and priorities.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- Develop a feminist-political discourse that transforms individual experiences into collective issues and directs feminist work toward a political program capable of addressing gender-based violence and rebuilding unjust political structures. This discourse should move beyond service-based "empowerment programs" to a comprehensive feminist-political agenda. In this way, women's participation moves from simply "increasing seats" to a transformative project that redefines politics from a feminist perspective.
- Strengthen networks and joint advocacy with legislators, governmental and national bodies, and political parties to advance women's rights and gender equality.
- Provide innovative participatory tools that engage women as rights-holders across all Lebanese regions.
- Offer sustainable capacity-building programs targeting women from different areas, with new mechanisms to engage young women activists in public life.
- Document, publish, and exchange women's experiences.

- Strengthen and expand feminist solidarity mechanisms among women's and human rights organizations.
- Adopt an intersectional approach to ensure inclusivity of women from diverse backgrounds, preventing the reproduction of exclusion within the feminist movement itself.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MEDIA

- Mobilize the media to promote a culture of equality and combat stereotypes that misrepresent women's roles in public life.
- Highlight women's achievements in Lebanon and showcase their expertise, knowledge, and professional competence.
- Involve more women, including young women, in media programs that address national and policy issues.
- Adopt codes of conduct and internal policies with sanctions against incitement or stigmatization targeting women.



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