



Lebanese Women and Politics: A Comparison between Two Field Studies

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The first decade of the history of independent Lebanon witnessed the arbitrary exclusion of women from the definition of the “Lebanese” who were granted and guaranteed equal rights and duties in the Lebanese Constitution.¹ Women were denied their political rights either explicitly in electoral laws² or implicitly by holding elections on the basis of electoral lists that did not have female voters on them yet.³

As such, female participation in Lebanese politics became a subject of scholarly concern and research. However, due to the fact that discrimination against Lebanese women was not restricted to political rights, most of the published research before 1992 focused on discrimination in the Law and on how to remove it. Very few researchers raised the question about the real reasons behind the total absence of female representation in the country’s political institutions before and throughout the war.

This situation changed after the return of peace to Lebanon and the various calls for the restoration and strengthening of democratic practices. The number of researchers interested in the subject of female participations in politics increased and research witnessed an important qualitative and quantitative change especially with the availability of funds from international, regional and local institutions that worked and continue to work on increasing women’s awareness of the importance of her participation in the running of the affairs of the state. Despite this, female participation in Lebanese politics, with the exception of exercising the right to vote, is still much less than is expected and desired.

This research aims at highlighting the major factors influencing female participation in parliamentary and municipal elections by comparing the results of three field studies conducted in the second half of the nineties. The first is a study based on survey research of female voters using a stratified random sample of 300 women, taking sectarian and regional divisions into consideration in drawing the sample and on direct interviews with a sample of candidates to parliament both conducted during the parliamentary elections of 1996.⁴ The second was a study of female candidates to and members of parliament based on direct interviews with them conducted in 1997,⁵ and the third is a study of female candidates in the municipal elections of 1998 based on direct interviews with a stratified sample of the total candidates (93 candidates).⁶

The first part of this study provides a brief overview of female participation in public positions between 1953, and the present. Comparison between candidates in local and national elections on a number of variables is provided in part two. Part three presents the factors influencing this participation at the local and national levels.

I. Female Participation in Public Positions: A Brief History

A. Women In Public Positions 1953-1975

Lebanese women did not enjoy any political rights before 1952. This restricted their participation in politics to indirect means and channels i.e participation in the electoral campaigns of male candidates, in protest activities,⁷ and act-



ing as informal aides and advisors for sons and husbands. Optimism prevailed late in 1952 with the removal of all legal obstacles in the face of formal female participation in political life. This optimism did not last long. It started to fade away with the unsuccessful attempts at ensuring that all the rights provided for in the law are exercised in practice.

Apart from the right to vote, which Lebanese women exercised wholeheartedly, as indicated by the size of the female electorate in both national and local elections, other rights were not equally enjoyed in practice, mainly the right to assume public office. Between 1953 and 1972, nine women ran for parliamentary seats, some of them more than once (with a total of 14). With the exception of Mirna Al Bustany, who was elected by a unanimous vote in 1963 to complete the term of her father who died in a tragic accident, no woman ever reached parliament before the early nineties.

At the level of the executive authority, total absence of women was and is still observed in the formation of successive governments as in the appointments for the top positions in the regional administration. In public administration generally the number of female employees decreases as one goes up the administrative hierarchy (11.7% in grade four positions, less than 7% in grades two and three and less than 1.5% at the grade one level).

The picture is not brighter in the judicial authority. Women have been excluded from top and sensitive judicial positions such as the Constitutional Council and Supreme Judicial Council. As is the case in public administration, the number of women decreases as one goes up the judicial hierarchy.

The situation in the local administration was not much different. Women were excluded from positions filled through appointment not elections (the positions of Muhafez and Kaemmakam). The total number of female members in elected municipal councils all over Lebanon never exceeded 1%, out of which only two women were elected to head a municipal council (out of 390 positions). Only one woman was elected mayor (out of 1800 mayors in Lebanon) and the number of female members in all the mayorship councils never exceeded 0.05% of the total number of members.

This minimal participation by women in formal Lebanese political institutions has been used by some advocates of female participation as an evidence of the existence of discrimination against women. Such accusations and claims raise the question on whether discrimination on the basis of sex is really existent and intended or whether this level of female participation is a result of other factors? Answers to these and related questions will be provided below.

The war in Lebanon (1975-1990) did not change the situation as far as participation in formal institutions is concerned. No national or local elections were held and female

absence from positions filled by appointment continued to be the norm. The war and the changing social, demographic, economic and political conditions dictated more female participation and involvement in the political life qualitatively and quantitatively. Women joined militias and political parties, carried weapons and fought, participated heavily in protest politics, joined various organizations and associations active as pressure groups, etc. However, even in this, women were denied access to higher and leadership positions. This is highly noticeable in political parties as well as in interest groups (except in some of the professional groups, the membership of which was a prerequisite for practicing the profession such as the Pharmacist Order).

B. Women In Public Positions 1991-2001

The picture started to change after the war came to an end and the return to democratic practices. In 1991 appointments were made to fill the seats of the deceased members of parliament. Nayla Moawad, wife of the assassinated first Lebanese president after the Taef agreement was appointed. This, and the previous experience of Mirna Al Bustany, led some to comment that a woman has no chance of becoming member of parliament "unless she is in black", mourning a dead father or husband. However the elections held in 1992, 1996, and 2000 respectively disclaimed this by the arrival of three women to parliament. (see table 1).

This positive development in female representation in parliament was not accompanied by any changes in female par-

Date	Muhafazah	Number of candidates	Number of withdrawals	Number of Winners
1953	Biq	1	1	-
1957	Beirut	1	1	-
	Beirut	1	1	-
1960	South	1	-	-
1963	Mount Lebanon	1	-	1
1964	Beirut	1	-	-
	Chouf	1	1	-
1965	Mount Lebanon	1	-	-
1968	Beirut	1	1	-
	Mount Lebanon	1	1	-
1972	Mount Lebanon	4	2	-
1991	North	1	-	1 (appointed)
1992	North	1	-	1
	South	2	-	1
	Mount Lebanon	2	-	1
1996	North	3	1	1
	South	2	-	1
	Biq	2	-	-
	Mount Lebanon	3	-	1
	Beirut	1	-	-



ticipation in the executive and judicial authorities despite the demands voiced by various local and international groups and organisations. Females were even denied the right to apply for the Judges Training College during the nineties. This raised protest from various woman organizations. The judicial institution defended its position by saying that over 90% of female judges want to work in the capital and its suburbs due to family obligations which will create problems when it comes to the appointment of judges to different regions in the country.⁸ The change however started to appear upon the government's declaration in 1998 of its decision to hold the municipal elections for the first time in 35 years. In this women saw an outlet to their frustration.

A review of daily newspapers published in Lebanon during the three weeks that preceded the municipal elections coupled with investigations in the field revealed that about 500 women have made public their intention to run for the municipal councils. Only 353 remained officially in the battle of which 140 won.⁹ Many saw in these numbers a source of optimism and described it as the "woman thrust on municipal councils". However, optimism based on these figures is not rationalized. A simple calculation of ratios and percentages reveals that it is not different from the pre-war period. Three women were elected to head municipal councils and the number of female members in 708 municipal councils did not go over the pre-war 1% figure of the total number of members. What calls for optimism and may be an indicator of important developments in female participation are three phenomena. The first is the regional and sectarian distribution of female candidates. There were candidates from all sects in all areas of Lebanon and mostly in rural conservative areas than in the urban areas. Second is the percentage of those who won from the total female candidates (50% average for Lebanon and 100% in some districts in Beqa, the North and the South). Third is the fact that the number of winners in rural conservative areas was much higher than in the large urban municipalities.

These phenomena are highly indicative of change and do discredit many of the claims that the conservative traditional character of the Lebanese society is the major obstacle facing female participation in the running of the affairs of state and society. The significance of these and other indicators becomes clearer when comparison is made between the candidates for parliament and those who ran for municipal councils and the factors at work in determining the chances of each in reaching the position they ran for.

II. Comparison between Female Candidates in Parliamentary and Local Elections on Certain Variables

The following comparison aims at highlighting the major characteristics of the group of females with the ambition of becoming members of the national and local elites.

The Sectarian Distribution of Candidates

In general, the number of Christian candidates was more than that of Muslim candidates. In the parliamentary elections of 1992 there was three christian candidates and two Muslims, in 1996 there was six Christians and four Muslims.

The candidates belonged to the three larger sects in Lebanon (the Shiites, Sunnis and Maronites) with the exception of only one Catholic and one Armenian Orthodox. Explanation for this fact can be found in political confessionalism which distributes parliamentary seats equally between Christians and Muslims and proportionately between the various sects of each religion. With the sectarian minorities allocated a small number of seats, the chances of females becoming the sole representatives of their sects in parliament in a highly patriarchal society decrease. This discourages women belonging to these sects to engage in the electoral battle.

Since the law does not provide for a sectarian distribution of seats in the municipal councils, we find female candidates from all sects in the local elections with the total number of Christian candidates approaching three times the number of Muslim candidates (257 Christians vs 96 Muslims). Moreover, the larger number of female candidates was found in purely Christian and mixed areas and very few ran in purely Islamic areas, mainly those dominated by fundamentalist Islamic movements. While 53% of the Christian candidates won, the figure was 45% for the Muslim candidates with the exception of three districts (the Minieh-Dounieh, Hasbaya and Rashaya districts) which witnessed the winning of all the Muslim candidates.

The fact that two out of the three female members of the 1992 and 1996 parliaments respectively were Christians may be used by some to support a widely held belief that the Christian community, influenced by western values, is more open on the issue of the freedom and rights of women and is less patriarchal in its culture than the Muslim community. Such a conclusion provides nothing more than a distorted view of the situation. To say that Muslim society is less open in relation to women's rights and freedom doesn't necessarily mean that the Christian community is more open. Interviews with the sample of candidates in local and national elections showed that acceptance of the idea of a female running for the elections by the family and the municipal society was determined by a variety of other factors.

The Candidates Educational Level

Although the electoral law does not require more than being literate (i.e able to read and write) a major feature of the female groups of candidates is their educational level especially when compared with the male groups. About 80% of the female candidates were holders of university degrees (in medicine, engineering, pharmacy, law, sociology, political science, mass media, literature, etc.). The majority of the



remaining 20% have finished their secondary education. Those "able to read and write" were very few in number. About 15% of university graduates hold a Masters or PhD degree in their field of specialization. Education, work experience, and competence were factors stressed by the candidates as major determinants of their chances to win the battle. Besides building a personality and enhancing financial independence, these three factors improve and broaden a woman's network of public relations.

The results of the local elections supported the female candidates expectations on the role of these factors: about 95% of those elected were educated and got a sizable number of votes (ranked 2nd to 4th in the number of votes they obtained). However, the very small number of women elected in the large municipalities including Beirut despite the relatively large number of highly educated and competent female candidates indicate that the role of education and competence as determinants of electoral behavior decreases with the increase in the intensity of political struggles paving the way for a greater role for other, mostly traditional, factors.

This is supported by the interviews conducted with female candidates in the 1992 and 1996 parliamentary elections. Although the three women in the three elected parliaments since 1992 have been holders of diplomas or university degrees, the candidates have indicated that education and competence are not major determinants of their chances in the battle when compared with the role of other factors despite their importance for a good performance once a woman wins the election.

The fact that most of the educated and competent women were elected in small municipalities and in rural rather than urban areas is a significant indicator of the change in attitude towards women and their role in society in the long thought of as "conservative and traditional" areas of Lebanon. These signs of change are very promising if the small electoral district is readopted in national elections.

C. Distribution of Female Candidates on the Variables of Age, Personal and Social Status

Age of female candidates in local elections ranged between 25 and 64 years. The majority however, and especially of those who won, were under 40 years of age. Married candidates were generally beyond the stage which requires their stay at home to care for children and which may have affected negatively their ability to commit themselves to responsibilities outside their homes.

In the parliamentary elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000 respectively the age of candidates ranged between 38 and 72 years. With the exception of Bahiya Al Hariri and Ghenwa Jaloul who were in their forties when first elected, the age of those elected to parliament ranged between 55

and 65 years. The candidates in the 1996 elections had among them 5 married, 4 widowed, one divorced and two single women. The figures didn't change much in the elections of 2000.

The majority of candidates in local elections came from the middle class. Those from the upper and lower classes did not exceed 3% of the total. No more than 10% of the female candidates are members of politically active families (locally or nationally). In this we find a major difference between candidates in local and parliamentary elections.

Being a member of a politically active family is a major incentive to run for a parliamentary seat and may be a determinant factor of the results. Moreover, "inheritance of seats" by a female member of the family in the absence of a male heir was more apparent in parliamentary elections than at the municipal level. This may be either because many families refused to be represented on the municipal council by a woman or because the norm of inheriting municipal seats is giving way to emphasis on competence. Both explanations find support in our sample of candidates.

D. The Candidates' Party Affiliation and Membership in Women Associations.

What attracts attention most in the analysis of the interviews conducted with candidates in national and local elections is their negative attitude towards political parties active on the Lebanese scene. Over 90% of the candidates were non partisans and didn't believe that Lebanese political parties were ready and willing to help their female members assume decision making positions either inside the party or outside it. This attitude was shared by candidates who were members in political parties because some parties, even the most progressive, have refused to be represented by a woman, while others, mainly the fundamentalists, have fought tough and, in some instances, ugly battles against female candidates.¹⁰

Noteworthy is the fact that this negative attitude towards parties is shared by the war generation (both male and female) as indicated by field research conducted in the early nineties.¹¹ However this attitude is stronger among women than among men. In this we may find an explanation of why the majority of female candidates', even those who were allies of party candidates on electoral lists, stressed their independence. Moreover, those who stressed the positive role that political parties can play in enhancing more female participation in public life were talking about "parties" in general and not about Lebanese political parties.

A very small percentage of the studied sample of candidates in local elections are members of Feminist organizations. Despite the time and effort invested by some of those organizations to help candidates organize their campaign, most candidates complained of the little resources, mainly human, that such organizations can mobilize to help female



candidates effectively. Such complaints were voiced more by candidates running for parliament or in large municipalities due to their need for volunteers to act as observers on their part on election day.

Many of the candidates in the national and local elections were active in social, environmental, educational, health and religious organizations. Training in such civil society activities and organizations were behind the decision to run in municipal elections. However services in this field did not necessarily pay on election day for candidates on the local level as they did for those running for the parliamentary seats although they were very important in preparing them for municipal work once elected.

E. The Candidate's Decision to Run for Elections

For about 70% of the sample of candidates interviewed, the decision to run for local elections was a purely personal decision based on a belief in the need for female participation in the public sphere. The other 30% were asked and encouraged by family and friends. The majority of candidates considered their decision to participate in the elections as an attempt at changing the social stereotypes about women and their traditionally expected role. This position reflects an implicit belief in the existence of discrimination against women and in putting all attempts at participation by women in a context of gender conflict and struggle.

The decision to run on a list or independently was not a personal choice for the large majority of female candidates who preferred running on a list. Various factors intervened to limit their choices thus determining their chances in the electoral battle.

The major difference between those running for parliament and for municipal councils is that while the first group stressed the need for female participation in politics and considered participation at the local level a first and necessary step towards achieving this end, candidates in local elections considered municipal work an extension of their private sphere that has nothing to do with politics. Very few of the latter group had future ambitions to be politically active at the national level. This fact reflected a negative view of politics in general and of the nature of the political process in Lebanon in particular. In this one may find part of the explanation for the large difference in the number of candidates in national and local elections respectively.

What is shared by all female candidates is their belief in women's ability to introduce positive change first, at the level of relations within the institutions she will be joining (parliament or municipal council) and, second, at the level of work and performance. This is based on a belief in female seriousness, organizational ability and lack of readiness for compromise. Female participation will, in the opinion of female candidates, reflect positively on the performance of parliament and the municipal councils respectively.

III. Factors Influencing Female Participation at the Local and National Levels

Comparison between the experiences of candidates in parliamentary elections and those in local elections revealed that the obstacles that faced both types of candidates are very similar, while the factors that increase women's chances of being elected to parliament are different from those at work on the municipal level. Moreover, while it was possible to reach generalization on the factors at play in determining a female's chances of being elected to parliament it wasn't as easy at the local level due to regional particularities, conditions and experiences, thus making comparison more difficult except at a certain level of abstraction.

A. Factors Enhancing the Election of Women to Parliament and Municipal Councils

The major factors that play a role in increasing a woman's chances of becoming a member of parliament are:

- The traditional concept of inheritance of political seats among prominent Lebanese political families and the absence of a male heir (as evidenced in the cases of Mirna Al Bustany and Nayla Moawad).
- When the males in a politically active and influential family provide support for female candidacy as part of role distribution among members of the family (Bahia al Hariri).
- The female being a member of a politically active family who have a broad network of political and public relations.
- Support from people in power.
- Availability of financial and human resources needed to run a campaign especially in large electoral districts.
- Being of the same region and sect as that of her husband (the case of Linda Matar and Zeina Al-Ali Chahine).
- The personality of the candidate and her ability to provide services to her constituency (Moawad, Hariri).

Noteworthy is the fact that two women have reached parliament as a result of special circumstances: Maha Al Khoury Assaad won by 41 votes due to the decision by many Christian groups not to participate in the elections of 1992 and Nohad Saïd who won the battle as a result of the divisions that rocked the National Bloc party in 1996.

In sum, we find that female entry into parliament was not through free competitive elections with equal opportunities for all as it was through the prevalent traditional social structures. The door to such structures is not opened to the woman except by the man or in his absence.

The factors that served female candidates in local elections are:

- Competence and educational achievements.
- The candidate's personality and her network of public relations in her region.
- The young generation's demand for change and bringing new and young blood to the municipal councils (the majority of female candidates were relatively young).
- Attempts made by those forming the electoral lists to

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include at least one female on their list to gain the support of female voters.

- Absence of intense political, family or sectarian conflicts inside the municipal area, although these have served female candidates in few cases in which she was suggested as a compromise.
- A candidate's emphasis on her running as a representative of the municipal area and not as a representative of a family.
- The fact that municipal seats are not distributed on a confessional basis which decreased the impact of the patriarchal character of the Lebanese society.
- A candidate's political neutrality.
- Lack of male candidates due to immigration or their being employed in the public sector (mainly security forces).

Although the role of the traditional social structure is apparent in influencing the chances of female candidates in local elections, we find that it wasn't as significant as in the case of national elections.

B. Obstacles Facing Female Candidates

Interviews conducted with female candidates indicated that it was difficult to generalize. The nature of such obstacles differed between urban and rural areas, between one sect and another, between the married and the single candidate, etc. Moreover, some obstacles were not exclusive to women. They were faced by men and women alike. Such obstacles reflected the dominant political culture, the social structures and the nature of the electoral process in Lebanon. In what follows are some of the major obstacles facing female candidates. Those common to parliamentary and local elections are highlighted.

The first obstacle facing female candidates in local elections was that of the name. The electoral law requires a female candidate to use her maiden name. This posed a problem for married candidates at every stage of the elections. As one candidate put it "We lost half the battle before it even started".

A woman who is known by her married name had to reintroduce herself to her supporters. On election day she had to have enough people at every post to remind voters of who she is and which name to write. When the count started many papers were discarded for having different names. When candidates tried to bring this to the attention of authorities their pleas were neglected. Many candidates considered this an evidence of a conscious attempt at removing them from the electoral battle.

In principle, this problem was shared by female candidates running for parliament. However, no issue was made out of it since both the maiden and married name were accepted and counted. This provided another evidence used by candidates running at the local level to support their argument on the existence of a conspiracy against them.

Being of a region and/or sect different from that of her husband was another problem faced by the married female candidate. In areas witnessing tough political, family or sectarian electoral battles (mainly in parliamentary elections and in large municipalities), some women were opposed and fought on the basis of being "strangers" to the area in which they were running for elections and some of them were accused of being "agents" for the political leaders of their original sect. This highlights the negative impact of the personal status laws and the Lebanese culture on female participation in the running of the affairs of the state.

The other side of such a problem is the one faced by the single female candidate. If she wins in the municipal election and happens to marry someone from outside her municipal area, she has to resign her position. Such problems are never faced by the man.

Two other related obstacles facing female candidates are the cost of the electoral campaign and the ability to run on a list. While the cost of the electoral campaign was a major obstacle in parliamentary elections and in large municipalities it was not a major problem in small and medium sized municipal areas in the local elections. In this we find a partial explanation of the relatively greater success of female candidates in small and medium sized municipalities in comparison with their counterparts in large municipalities and in national elections. In the absence of legal controls on the financing of electoral campaigns, this obstacle will persist and its effect will continue to be felt by both sexes though more by women due to their relative lack of financial independence.

The cost of the campaign in large electoral districts made it difficult for the woman to venture on her own. Some sought running on a list which meant having to pass by the traditional structures. Very few women were able to pass such structures in a highly patriarchal society. In areas which witnessed tough electoral battles women on the lists became the victim of political compromises on election day (the case of the municipal elections in Sidon).

Moreover the interviews with some female candidates in large municipalities (mainly Beirut) who were trying to get "on any list" revealed lack of female awareness of the political side of municipal elections. This have created problems for few of them with their families, led to their exploitation on the hands of some "disguised" political groups, and eventually decreased their chances of winning.

Running on a list was not as difficult in some small and medium sized municipalities in rural areas as it was in large municipalities. The woman's chances of being included on a list and of winning proved to be higher in areas, a) dominated by one political leader (such as Bteghreen and Bneché), b) where the population was homogeneous and well off, (Rabieh), c) areas which witnessed male immigra-



tion during the war (some areas in the Chouf), d) where the young males are members of the security forces who are banned from running for elections (many areas in Akkar), e) where agreement was hard to reach among competing groups which led to the woman being suggested as a compromise (Zahlé and some areas of the western Beq'a'a).

The position of some religious leaders towards female candidacy was an obstacle faced by some candidates. A comparison between parliamentary and local elections reveals a difference in the positions of various sects towards female participation in politics. Negative attitudes towards female candidacy in national and local elections or an attempt to exert pressure on female candidates by religious figures was never reported or even felt among christian candidates.

Similar generalizations were hard to reach on the position of Islamic sects. Differences are found between sects as well as among the extremists and moderates within the same sect. In general, moderate Islam does not oppose female participation in politics and public affairs despite its clear preference for the male. As revealed by the experience of Muslim female candidates, moderate Islamic movements did not publicly oppose their candidacy but tried to exclude them in practice. This appeared in a) the very small number of female candidates on the lists formed by moderate Islamic groups and b) the fact that the female candidate was the subject of political compromise on election day in areas dominated by those groups.

Extremist Islamic groups (Sunni and Shii) publicly opposed and fought female candidates by all possible means which ranged between an advice by a Sheikh to withdraw and spreading rumors that affect a female candidate's reputation and honor. This was clear in the position of extremist Islamic groups towards Mona Haddad's candidacy in the parliamentary elections and the candidacy of many Sunni females in the local elections in the North and Shiite candidates in the South.

Noteworthy here is the contradiction in the position of such groups from female candidates of the same sectarian affiliation and females from other sects. The extremist Sunni groups in the North supported Nayla Moawad and Bushra Dabaj in the national and local elections respectively. Hizbollah in the South supported the Sunni Bahia al Hariri. This contradiction in their positions reveals that such groups may accept female participation if dictated by political needs as long as the candidate is not from their own sect due to the implications of this on man's traditional position and status.

No pattern was depicted in relation to the Durze community in local elections. The granting of support to a female candidate by religious figures or withholding it from her was dictated more by the specific conditions in each area (party, family, or other forms of struggles) than by a pure religiously-dictated position on the issue of female partici-

pation. Finally, the Alawite group, mainly due to the very few seats allocated to it, rejected the idea of being represented by a woman (Tripoli).

Each of the above factors played a role in determining females chances in the national and local elections but none was by itself sufficient in explaining the results of the elections. Other important factors were: a) the Lebanese patriarchal culture which defines a woman's role in society with leadership reserved for the man and b) the role of the family in Lebanese political and public life and which still prefers to be represented by a man, especially where inter-family or intra-family divisions exist and where male representatives are available.

Despite the fact that the majority of female candidates in local elections did not run as family representatives, they were nonetheless treated as such. This indicates the inability of the majority of the voters to accept the concept of "an independent candidate" in a culture fragmented along sectarian, family and regional lines.

Two other factors were highlighted by female candidates as having a negative impact on their chances in the elections. The first is the time element, especially in the local elections. Because of the government's declaration of holding the elections, then postponing them, the majority of candidates had no more than three weeks for their campaign. The second is the female attitude towards a female candidate. As some female candidates put it "women proved to be a woman's candidate's worst enemy". Although this factor was apparent in the case of few female candidates it did not prove to be true in the case of candidates in rural areas and small municipalities who won by the votes of women and men.

Conclusion

The above comparison between female participation in national and local elections reveal differences in the formation of the female political elite at each level. The factors at work in the formation of the female elite in parliament is not that different from that at work in the formation of the Lebanese political elite since 1943. As such the arrival of three women to parliamentary seats can be considered a consecration of tradition rather than an indicator of modernization.

On the other hand, the majority of the female elite that appeared as a result of the local elections of 1998 cannot be considered a traditional one. The sources of its power were mainly education, competence and achievement, rather than support from traditional social structures. This applies to the majority of the male group as well. This can be an indicator of important changes in Lebanese society and in its attitude towards modernization and development. The fact that this untraditional female (and male) elite is concentrated mainly outside the big cities provides a source of optimism: change



Muhafazah	District	Number of candidates	Number of winners	Number of Losers	% of winners from total # of candidates
Beirut	Beirut	17	1	16	6%
	Kesrwan	27	5	22	18%
Mount Lebanon	Jbeil	21	2	19	9%
	Chouf	21	10	11	47%
	Aley	24	12	12	50%
	Metn	25	14	11	56%
	Baabda	24	5	19	21%
TOTAL		142	48	94	34%
North Lebanon	Tripoli	9	1	8	11%
	Bchari	9	3	6	33%
	Menieh-Donieh	3	3	-	100%
	Batroun	17	10	7	59%
	Koura	31	14	17	45%
	Zghorta	25	14	11	56%
	Akkar	36	18	18	50%
	TOTAL		130	67	67
Beqaa	Baalbeck	5	3	2	60%
	Western Beqaa	7	4	3	57%
	Zahleh	8	4	4	50%
	Hermel	3	-	3	0%
	Rashaya	2	2	-	100%
TOTAL		25	13	12	52%
South Lebanon	Sidon	14	5	9	35%
	Tyr	7	-	7	0%
	Jezzine	2	-	2	0%
TOTAL		23	5	18	12%
Nabatiyeh	Nabatiyeh	13	7	6	45%
	Hasbaya	1	1	-	100%
	Bint Jbeil	2	1	1	50%
	Marjeyoun	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		16	9	7	68%

is coming from below and is not being imposed from above. Since these elections were held in small electoral districts, they were more representative of Lebanese society and its demands than the national elections.

Another major finding revealed by this comparison is that the increase in female participation at the local level does not reveal a change in society's attitude towards this participation (the ratios are the same) as much as it reveals a change in the woman's view of her role, abilities, and status in society. In fact, the obstacles are more or less the same as before but the woman's readiness to overcome them is stronger today than before.

The various field studies summarized above have shown that the chances of women increase with the decrease in the size of the electoral districts. This is a fact that those con-

cerned with increasing female participation at the national level should take into consideration when discussing electoral laws.

Moreover, these chances increase with the decrease of campaign costs. As such, more pressure must be exerted on policy makers to provide legal controls on the financing of electoral campaigns. Also some provisions of the personal status laws have to be amended if equal opportunity among all Lebanese regardless of their sex is to be achieved.

Finally, our research has revealed the need for field studies that aim at evaluating female experiences at the national and local levels, comparing them and learning from them to improve female participation qualitatively and quantitatively. Organizations concerned with this may work on holding conferences that will allow members of this female elite to share experiences and exchange opinions. It is important to remember that the goal of enhancing female participation in running the affairs of the state requires a continuous process of education and training and not only a few weeks' activity before election day.

End Notes

1. Article 21 of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926. For a detailed account of this exclusion of women, see Laure Moghaizel "The Woman in Lebanese Legislation. Beirut: Nawfal Institute 1985 pp.13-19.
2. Electoral Law issued on 10/8/1950 arts 6 and 21 and the Law of 27/11/1947 regulating municipal elections.
3. Law issued on 31/11/1952 art 136.
4. See Helou Marguerite "Women and Politics in Lebanon" in the Parliamentary Elections of 1996

and the Crisis of Democracy (Beirut: Lcps), 1998.

5. Helou Marguerite "Female Candidates and Members of the parliaments of 1992 and 1996", Bahithat, vol 4, 1997-1998.

6. Helou Marguerite "Women in Municipal Elections" in Municipal Elections in Lebanon 1998 & (Beirut: LCPS), 1999.

7. Examples of such participation are to be found in the activities of feminist groups and organizations between 1934 and 1952. For a detailed account of this period, see Emile Fares Ibrahim, The Lebanese Feminist Movement.

8. The culturally set role for the Lebanese woman is considered one of the major obstacles facing her assumption of public and political positions. For more on this, see the National program for the Support of Female Participation in Political life, Beirut: René Mouawad Inst. European Union, 1999.

9. These figures were obtained from the Kaemmakamus' offices.

10. For a detailed account of this, see Helou, Women in Municipal Elections.

11. Lebanese Intellectual Association, Which Citizen? Which State?, Beirut 1992.