

الجمعية الكويتية لحقوق الإنسان  
KUWAIT SOCIETY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS



MEDI

# How Media Contributed to Women's Loss in the 2020 National Assembly Elections

ASSESSMENT OF THE  
YEAR 2020



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MEPI

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## Introduction

The Kuwaiti Society for Human Rights monitored the local media's handling of women's issues during 2020. It concluded that the absence of women's representation in the National Assembly 2020 has several factors, most notably "Media's Disregard for the Role of Women in Society," whereby it directly or indirectly promotes the stereotype towards them or diminishes their vital role as an actor in society.

The Society also noted that the media coverage of women and their issues during the past year, which was rich in various events, has been very low, seasonal and dependent. By seasonal we mean that women's issues only emerge during international events related to women, while dependent means that it relies on data issued by public interest associations or women-related activities, bearing in mind that seasonal coverage may disappear if non-profit organizations do not conduct activities for women, which means that most media outlets do not make much effort to place women's issues within their media space.

Many different media outlets do not take into account the position that women occupy as a main actor in society. The media should be the frontline to defend women's issues and seriously highlight their role, as well as highlight the obstacles to their activities, especially since the media has become more influential than before. Media has penetrated our lives from all audiovisual and readable directions. It is important that they be effective and helpful tools to enable gender equality in all areas.

## Analysis of the General Approach to Women's Issues during 2020:

The year 2020 witnessed multiple events that affected women in general, both in terms of their presence on the forefront to fight the outbreak of the new Corona virus (Covid-19) or in terms of their direct and indirect impact from the quarantine restrictions that imposed on everyone to stay at home, which contributed to the increase in violence against women. It is worth noting that the Kuwait Society for Human Rights examining these negative impacts on women, through a specialized study that will be shared later after its completion.

During the past year, the Society monitored the performance of media and concluded

the following:

- The media appearance of women in media is not at the required level. The mention of women coincides with any ongoing event, in the sense that there is seasonality in highlighting women in society or their issues. In addition, during the presentation of women's issues that are raised in civic events, the focus is on the prominent headlines in the event or prominent attendees.
- The largest share of women mentioned in the media goes towards statements or news related to their participation or the temporary presentation of community activities in which women have participated or that have been implemented to serve women's issues. There is no tendency to single out or allocate media pages or materials related to women's issues or aspirations.
- Media work in general and the presentation of women's issues in particular is carried out in an exploratory manner for the views of a number of personalities. This method is the most easy and is not used much at the present time. The press has reserved advanced seats in the preparation of investigative reports and careful humanitarian journalism. These materials are rarely used when addressing women's issues in media.
- Many media outlets, especially electronic ones, carry out the process of transferring materials from other media outlets without making their own coverage. Usually news is transmitted from the Kuwait News Agency "KUNA", from which the material is transmitted as received, and sometimes it is edited into a short text news.
- The media do not rely on "articles and cartoons" when reporting on the achievements of women.
- There is a dearth of interviews with women and feminist figures, although it is assumed that the interviews are the most prominent coverage to highlight the achievements of women, especially those who have achieved an important international position for Kuwait and raised the name of Kuwait.
- Some media outlets, especially news outlets on Twitter, deliberately raise some issues on women's events in order to interact on their platforms and not to raise the issue and raise awareness about it.
- Sometimes some coverage discriminates against women and presents them in a way that does not support equality between them and men, and sometimes even demeans their status in an indirect way. The process may be unintended, but it reinforces the stereotype of women, not to mention the presence of speeches that do not take into account the status occupied by women, as there are still speeches that traditionally introduce women.
- There are no wide range of spaces to talk about women, their rights, issues, and the

importance of empowering them to participate in different areas of life. Women's issues are absent from the media scene and appear only in events related to women.

- Most of the media, while striving to promote concepts of awareness of women's rights and gender equality, are not at the same time free from a discriminatory practice against women, whether in terms of using terms, stereotypes and traditional expressions harmful to women, or using phrases, names, attributes and pronouns that are predominantly male.
- The absence of women's appearance in media indirectly affected the tweeters' handling of women's issues. The media is influencing society. The greater the media marginalization of the role of women, the greater the societal marginalization of women's activity or considering it strange. Upon following up on the interaction of the tweeters with the role of women in addressing the Corona pandemic, we noticed that they considered the role of women as great, and the greatness here does not mean encouragement as much as the surprise of how a woman can do this while being a woman!
- We can say that media coverage of women's issues is characterized by seasonality, limitations, and superficiality. Likewise, no in-depth materials are presented that is explaining the details of the case, following it closely and providing serious treatments.
- There is a dearth of fixed spaces for presenting women's issues within the various journalistic arts. For example, there is no fixed column on which journalists are rotated to discuss women's issues. There is no fixed page in paper newspapers that displays the developments of the women's issues file in Kuwait.
- With regard to women working in the Ministry of Information, statistics for employees in the government sector as of June 30, 2018 indicate that there are 2,386 Kuwaiti women employed in the Ministry of Information out of a total of 7,055 Kuwaiti employees, representing 33.8 percent of the total number of Kuwaiti employees. A number of 160 non-Kuwaiti women work in the Ministry of Information out of a total of 1,121 non-Kuwaiti employees, at 14.2 percent of the total number of non-Kuwaiti employees in the Ministry, that is, there are 2,546 working women in the Kuwaiti Ministry of Information out of 8,176 employees. They constitute 31.1 percent of the number of employees.
- Many journalists working in the media do not make a special effort in addressing women's issues. They depend on the presence of women in events or on the issues that are raised in civic events. Even this matter is subject to the extent of the journalist's interaction with the issue of sending him to cover the event. Some are

satisfied with making a news, statement or a brief report, while others address seriously the issues and deal with the issue from seemingly sufficient dimensions. However, we emphasize that this is not sufficient because it does not contain, for example, treatments of the issue or an in-depth discussion, meaning that the process is more like a transfer of what is being conducted in the events, that is, if the event is discussed extensively, this will be reflected in the media coverage.

- Some media outlets publish advertisements and use women as a front for the advertisement. Sometimes the unjustified use of women leads to the use of women as a promotional commodity.

**It is unreasonable for women's issues to be marginalized in media in this way, as how can half of the society, in a literal and digital sense, be absent from media coverage, especially since women's issues are numerous and have negative repercussions, and they are frequent and not seasonal.**

## **Reality of Women in News**

**The news has gained the greatest share in raising women's issues or presenting women in general. However, according to the analysis of news, the largest area goes towards statements by women and not news to cover women's issues, noting that some of the statements may be specific to women's issues. Nevertheless, women as a human and vital resource highlight their role in the media modestly, even though they are supposed to be presented as leaders of the movement for economic and political change and not only as practicing the societal or functional role. Women play an important role in reaching the highest levels of success and creating sustainable development.**

## Women and the National Assembly .. Crushing Defeat

The last (figure <sup>[1]</sup>) drop from the dome of Abdullah Salem and (Al-Shanab) dominated all seats in Parliament in a very crazy manner. With this women's tragedy that caused us an overwhelming injury, we unfortunately received in the Media Observatory for the Advocacy of Gender Issues "Shaqaiq", the loss of 33 contestants in the elections to make the scene bleak for us and for women, despite the fact that the number of women registered in the voting registry is estimated at 293,754 women, a number that exceeds the number of males by nearly two hundred thousand names registered on the ballot register, i.e. 52 percent<sup>[2]</sup>.

Kuwaiti women lost the course of the National Assembly elections. This loss puts us in front of a very important question: Why did the women lose the battle even though the players on the field own the ball? Why was the ball not passed towards women and women in society turned into soldiers to help men, and men only, to further marginalize Kuwaiti women's issues, especially issues of housing and the legal derogation of women's status? Why were women not united in choosing who to represent their issues?



Safaa Al-Hashem

[1] A lock of hair .. A symbolic picture of the exit of the only woman from the National Assembly seats, which was occupied by Representative Safaa Al-Hashem

[2] Report of the Kuwait Society for Human Rights in monitoring elections

**We believe that the answer to these questions is the same: because of the marginalization of women in the media.**

This loss is not the focus of discussion here, but rather the media coverage of it, and how the media addressed this defeat. Did it devote sufficient space to discuss the causes and factors that led to this painful drop in the right of the State of Kuwait, which is the pioneer in the region, whether in terms of the democratic process or in terms of involving women in both the political and development process.

In conjunction with this loss, we will follow how the media interacted with the 16-day campaign to combat violence against women. Have these seasonal days been invested in allocating daily spaces to discuss women's issues, or was the occasion just ignored?

## **How did the media address these developments?**

A follow-up to a sample of newspapers (Al-Qabas, Al-Rai, Al-Jarida) on their approach to the issue of women's loss of access to the National Assembly, as well as their interaction with the 16-day campaign to combat violence against women. These are the two most prominent issues that emerged during the reporting period. In this monitoring, the quality of the published material will be analyzed, in addition to the press template used in the coverage. The aim of this is to present the space and the way in which these newspapers address the issues of women that are prominent to Kuwaiti society.

# First, Loss of Women in the National Assembly

## Al Qabas Newspaper:

Al-Qabas newspaper published a report in which it said that 5507 votes were the total number of voters for the female National Assembly candidates in 2020, with a rate of 1.4% of the total votes cast <sup>[3]</sup>. The report reviewed a number of 5 statistical indicators presented by the author, including a point for the loss of women in elections, which the newspaper worked on making it the title of the report as well as an entry for it.

On December 6, 2020, the newspaper published a brief report on the elections entitled: "Changing 62% of the Nation's Composition." <sup>[4]</sup> The report contained 645 words, including 35 words related to the absence of female representation. Then, it published a report on the absence of women under the title: "Absence of Women's Representation ... Many Causes but One Trauma." <sup>[5]</sup> The report presented the results obtained by women while not looking for the reasons and motives that led to this loss. The report said: "The electoral analyst <sup>[6]</sup> attributed the failure of women in the 2020 nation's elections to the failure of their parliamentary performance... ", which means that the woman was held accountable for the results of the loss, and this analysis is completely unreasonable and illogical.

In a news item titled: "Failure of Women in Elections is disturbing.. Qualified Women must be Appointed as Minister." <sup>[7]</sup> The newspaper reviewed a statement issued by the Sami Al-Munis Cultural Forum. It is noted that a suitable space was created for the statement, which means that there is a noticeable interest in a content that is not dedicated only to women, but the newspaper quoted the appropriate title. The newspaper also published an article entitled: "Women and the National Assembly Elections," <sup>[8]</sup> which was a response to the statement of the former representative, Safaa Al-Hashem, which she made to the newspaper earlier. We quote this sentence from the article: "The Kuwaiti people who supported women's elections and helped three of them to reach the Assembly previously, is not against the election of women, but it wants change." It is noticeable that women have been held accountable for the consequences of loss. Change in the National Assembly does not mean removing

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[3] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5824583>

[4] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5822405>

[5] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5822657>

[6] The report reserves the right to publish the name

[7] The report reserves the right to publish the name.

[8] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5823743>

women from the political scene, and men are not only the pioneers of change, at least the National Assembly involved earlier women names who had positive and influential activity.

On the other hand, the newspaper published another article entitled: "We demand the government to appoint a woman minister" <sup>[9]</sup> by Professor Bahija Behbani, who devoted the article to discussing the reasons for the failure of women in the elections, in which she presented acceptable and logical views to some extent. In the context, the newspaper published another article by writer Magda Al-Attar entitled: "The Setback of Women<sup>[10]</sup> was the Beginning", "it is a political setback .. perhaps a societal setback in looking at women and their role that has not yet reached weaning, to realize that participation in political life is no longer a luxury, but rather a core of the goals of building a modern state."

It is noticeable that the newspaper devoted a lot of reports to discuss the issue of women's loss in the National Assembly elections, especially since on December 12, it published an article entitled: "Or maybe women do not want women" <sup>[11]</sup>, in which the writer predicted that the reason for the failure of women is that women did not vote for women. On December 14, the newspaper published an article entitled: "Zero Representation of Women!"<sup>[12]</sup> to act as a response. It is clear from this approach and the differing responses to the same newspaper that there is a general trend in support of women in Al-Qabas newspaper, while preserving the professionalism and neutrality of the media work.

## **Al-Rai Newspaper:**

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On December 6, the newspaper published a comprehensive 13-page coverage of the National Assembly elections. It is noticeable that the coverage contained 83 field pictures, including 45 pictures for men by 55%, and 37 pictures for women by 45%, and a picture that did not show any of the genders. In other words, there was a gender equality in terms of publishing pictures of field coverage for elections.

On December 8, the newspaper devoted an entire page to discuss what it called: "The Thunderous Fall." <sup>[13]</sup> It is noticeable that the report relied on the statements of 10

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[9] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5823743>

[10] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5823477>

[11] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5824245>

[12] Report Link: <https://alqabas.com/article/5824865>

[13] Report link: <https://www.alraimedia.com/article/1511458/-المرأة-الكويتية-لا-ثقة-سياسية>

women, including 3 who were candidates. The statements focused on stating the reasons that led to the loss of women in elections.

On December 10, the newspaper published an article entitled: “The Half of Nation Assembly.”<sup>[14]</sup> It is noticeable that the article held the women accountable for the results of the loss, as it hinted that the names that ran for the elections were not worthy of the confidence of voters, about whom the article said: “opened their eyes, comprehended and insight.”

### **Al-Jarida Newspaper:**

On December 6, the newspaper published a report on the elections and their results. On the front page, it confined itself to noting the following: “For the first time since the 2008 elections, Kuwaiti women lose their representation in the National Assembly, as no female candidate has succeeded in the 2020 nation’s elections.”<sup>[15]</sup>

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[14] Report link: <https://www.alraimedia.com/article/1511697/مقالات-مجلس-نصف-الامة>

[15] Report link: [https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1607224319976182400/?utm\\_source=whatsapp](https://www.aljarida.com/articles/1607224319976182400/?utm_source=whatsapp)

## **Second: The 16-days campaign to combat violence against women**

During the reporting period, the 16-day campaign to combat violence against women was launched. However, what is interesting is that the monitored media ignored the event, and Al-Rai and Al-Jarida newspapers were satisfied with making news about commercial companies participating in the campaign or short statements.

With the exception of Al-Qabas newspaper, which allocated different areas. The newspapers did not invest in the occasion to discuss the various issues of Kuwaiti women, especially with the approaching elections for the National Assembly. It would have been good for women's issues to be discussed and highlighted to push women forward to represent their issues in the dome of Abdullah Al-Salam, but apparently there is a general disregard when addressing women's issues, which led to women's loss in the 2020 nation's elections.

The 16-days have passed without the media working to combat violence against women in society. This is not new. The 365 days of the year pass without the media trying to harness additional efforts to serve Kuwaiti women, especially as their number in society exceeds the number of males, which means that the media should dedicate large spaces to address women's issues, in the event that it believes that the role of media is enlightenment and awareness and not just to convey different news.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

Through monitoring the media performance of prominent women's issues during the reporting period, we concluded the following results:

### **First, Results:**

- We have not monitored any research effort to examine the loss of women, analyze this loss, learn its lessons and how it can be overcome in the next elections.
- Most of the media coverage was superficial or somewhat in-depth, but it did not provide insights and perspectives on the reflection of the local media reality on the absence of women from the dome of Abdullah Al-Salem.
- Al-Qabas newspaper was the most concerned with the issue of women's loss and devoted a number of reports to it over long days.
- Most of the articles published, which were monitored, were concerned with the overall outcome of elections, and did not mention the loss of women, while other some mentioned it very casually.
- Most of the women's media materials published during the period are technical materials or statements made by women who have provided them for various local cases.
- The most important international event that sheds light on violence against women has passed, without the media paying attention to it or giving it any kind of responsibility.

## **Second, Recommendations:**

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- ➔ The media should realize that it is a fourth authority, which means that it is a basic partner in the processes of construction, development and realization of Kuwait Vision 2035. This makes it at the forefront of actors in achieving visions that depend on investing in human capital and achieving gender equality, which the media has not yet believed in.
- ➔ The media should go beyond issues of publishing news, and move to the next stage, which is discussing issues in different press templates that depend on providing different information about the issue and not just promoting it, or promoting the party that carried it out, or the person who is making the statement about it.
- ➔ The media should intensify their next efforts to single out half of their spaces to present the roles that women play on the one hand, as well as to discuss the various obstacles that women face in society and to subject their issues to discussion through investigative reports and human stories, presenting the causes, treatments and solutions, and work towards forming a public opinion in support of resolving issues which limits women's activities and realizes their rights.
- ➔ The media should follow the example of Al-Qabas newspaper in highlighting women's issues, knowing that this is not sufficient. There should be greater and standard efforts to serve women's issues in society.
- ➔ The media should make greater efforts to host feminist models who have knowledge, community work, or expressive intellectual views, in order to encourage more women to present themselves more to society.
- ➔ Specific spaces should be devoted to women's issues. Different writers should be recruited to write on them to highlight the challenges they are facing, and to work on printing weekly supplements on women's issues that are supervised by male and female journalists who specialize in this aspect.



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