



Women and Politics: Coverage of 2021 Parliamentary Election Campaign in the Albanian Online Media

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the online media coverage of political discourse and portrayal of women, as political candidates and voters, during the electoral campaign of 2021 in Albania and raises two research questions with regard to this, employing a gender perspective. The study uses a qualitative methodology. Media content analysis is employed for the analysis of 1420 online articles, from 15 portals, 7 TVs, and 8 newspapers. The results show that political candidates are the subject of a gendered portrayal in media. Women receive less amount of time, more focus on personal life versus professional, and on “soft” issues; young candidates are on focus for being “surprise” or “clean” candidates; political party leaders follow the same gendered discourse, the narrative of political candidates’ interest, and objectives for women voters relates to their traditional role; women candidates’ looks and appearance are targeted in the media; and sexist language promotes hate speech and derogatory comments. To add to this picture, some women candidates promote the gender stereotypes’ game to appeal to their electorate, while there is almost no reflection by the media on the problematics of gender portraying during the electoral campaign.

Keywords Media · Women · Gender · Electoral campaign · Sexist language

Introduction

Media treats women and men differently, throughout the world, and it looks like this is in the same line with their participation in political processes. Gender stereotypes are present in both processes, with men being more visible and dominant, resulting in less visibility for women and respectively less political success (The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012).

According to Cook and Cusack (2010), gender stereotypes are “generalized views and preconceived ideas developed by society according to which individuals are categorized into particular gender groups, typically defined as ‘women’ and ‘men’, and are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex.”

Gender stereotypes are present in political life in many ways. On the one hand, the participation of women as

members of the parliament is increasing, yet on the other hand, unlike men, they are less likely to hold ministerial positions or the highest office in the country. In those cases of women being appointed at a ministerial position, they are still affected by a stereotypical approach because they will hold portfolios like social welfare and not economics, politics, and security which are considered stronger and typically for men (The Electoral Knowledge Network, 2012).

Evidence has emphasized the fact that women politicians tend to receive less media attention in proportional electoral systems. They lag behind compared to men, and when they do receive attention, it is focused on their appearance and personal life. Also, they receive more negative media coverage and, to some extent, stereotypical or trait coverage (Van des Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

Women candidates are in a less favorable position due to this type of reporting, and the same holds true for women politicians. The effect of this representation is not affecting only the career prospects of women in politics, but it also contributes to their underrepresentation in politics. On the other side, it strengthens the impression that politics are a masculine arena. To add to that, young women interested in politics may be discouraged to pursue a political career,

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resulting in a vicious cycle of women's underrepresentation in politics (Van des Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

Additionally, public opinion is inevitably influenced by the way the media presents the facts. The principal concerns to the voting choices are related to the differences in coverage between men and women and/or the use of sexist language for women candidates and gender stereotypes that may affect the voters' opinion and eventually their voting decision. Women politicians tend to be interviewed more on "soft" issues like culture, health, education, or even fashion. This approach may give the impression that they are not good enough for other "hard" issues. This may be the case also for ministerial positions, where women are being given "soft issues" portfolios, and when in charge of "hard issues," they are perceived as less fit. Coverage of women's physical appearance, personal background, marital status, and children reflects the connection of women with physical beauty, nurturing and supporting roles overall. Some of the most typical issues for women are loss of weight, hair color, and dressing, and these are influencing voters' opinions (Council of Europe, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Previous studies have analyzed media and gender issues, based on various theories. This paper refers to three of them, which constitute its theoretical framework. The agenda-setting theory refers to "the capacity of the media to direct the public's attention to certain issues presented as the most important ones at that moment. As a result, the public's attention is biased to certain issues on the political and electoral scene to the detriment of others" (García Beaudoux et al., 2007). The framing theory, which is linked to the agenda-setting theory, goes a step further in discussing how this selection of issues happens by the media and under what influences. According to it, "several factors exist that influence professionals when they produce news and present it according to a given framework or approach. These include their personal experiences, their orientation (ideological, political or religious), journalistic routines, the parameters and measures of the media organization, and even the format in which the news is presented" (Llanos & Nina, 2011). Third, the role congruity theory, according to which, when the members of a group do not show stereotypical (expected behavior) for a social role, they are less valued for it (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender stereotypes can influence how women are valued in a leadership role, how their counter-stereotypical behavior is portrayed, and how expectations with regard to personal coverage, emphasize that and lower issue coverage for women, as summarized by Van der Pas and Aldering (2020), in a very recent meta-analysis of gender differences in political media coverage. These are the main theories at the core paper, but

they are not exhaustive in the analysis of women's portrayal in the media.

Albanian Elections, 25 April 2021

Parliamentary elections were held in Albania on April 25. The current Prime Minister Edi Rama representing the Socialist Party (SP) has earned 74 of 140 seats in parliament securing an unprecedented third consecutive term. In these elections, a total of 1841 candidates for MPs competed, 39.76% of which were women. The total percentage of women candidatures was slightly lower than the one in the 2017 elections, where 40.25% of the candidatures were women. Besides the considerable participation of women in political candidatures, only 48 women (approximately 34%) of them will be part of the parliament. Yet, this is higher than the 41 seats held by women in the 2017 elections (Albanian Women Empowerment National Democratic Institute, 2021; Network, 2021).

Beyond the increase of women's participation, sexist and derogatory language toward women candidates persisted. National Democratic Institute discussed with some women candidates, and it appears that they had a less equitable access to finance for campaigning. Also, during the campaign, women were less covered by the media compared to men (National Democratic Institute, 2021).

Aim of the Study and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to provide an analysis of online media coverage of political discourse and the portrayal of women, both as political candidates and voters, during the electoral campaign of 2021 in Albania. Its research questions were the following:

- How the online media portrays women as political candidates?
- How the online media portrays women as voters?

Methods

In order to deconstruct the media pieces used for this research, a qualitative media content analysis was employed. Before employing the content analysis, a screening process of the articles to be included for analysis was performed. This screening was based on several steps, beginning with identifying the list of the most relevant 30 webpages of online and legacy media outlets, including 15 portals, 7 TVs, and 8 newspapers. Using the online application SentiOne, a full list of articles published online by the selected media during the 30-day electoral campaign (March 26–April 24, 2021) was

extracted in an Excel database. The article database was further filtered through the use of key research terms. The set of research terms for the selection of articles were “grua,” “gra (-ve,—të),” “seks,” “gjin (-ia),” “vajz (-a,—ë),” and “femër (-ra)” (respectively in English: “woman/women, sex, gender, girl, female”). Even though this list is not exhaustive, these are the broader terms used for women as political candidates or as voters. At this stage, the researchers aimed to capture the greater picture of the situation; thus, they targeted more media articles through the use of these broader terms.

The authors read all the titles of the respective media pieces and carried an initial screening of them. After that, they read the full article and again conducted a second screening of them. The final database, including 1420 articles underwent further content analysis, excluding articles that were republications. Major categories and sub-categories of the included articles were derived after several readings of the final articles and discussions among the research team. This process was guided by the theoretical framework this paper was based upon. The major areas of focus of this paper were oriented by the agenda-setting theory, the framing theory, the role congruity theory, and gender stereotypes.

Analysis and Results

Portrayal of Women Political candidates—Subject of Gender Stereotypes

Based on the content analysis of the selected articles, it results that women candidates in the Albanian elections of April 25, 2021, were again the subject of gender stereotyping, explicit and implicit. The analysis of articles shows that the rhetoric of political parties’ leaders and media coverage around women candidates and women as voters still portrayed gender roles and stereotypes.

Women as Political Candidates

The narrative of political communication related to women candidates reflects the two aspects of women’s participation in politics: on the one hand that of a “strong” woman with masculine traits and on the other hand the image of a more traditional, fragile woman with more feminine traits, like caring, sensitivity, kindness, etc.

a. Personal Life vs Political Life As opposed to their male counterparts, it was noticed that women political candidates received more questions and attention on family status, family relationships, and similar issues during their interviews or in the way media portrayed an event when women were present. Questions about family—politics life balance were present for women candidates, as well as reference to their

children and other family members. For example, often when referring to women political candidates, media included information about their family, e.g., when discussing about a woman candidate, the fact that she is a “mother of three children” was also mentioned, particularly in meetings with women voters. A promoted way of being for women candidates during the electoral period was “sacrificing” family time for politics.

Further on, sometimes media used information from previously given interviews of women candidates about their intimate life and reproduced them with sensational headings, which brought the interest of other media for some days, until the news faded. An example here is that of a political candidate of the DP (E.R., 2021). In one of her previous interviews (before being a political candidate) among many other things, she was asked about the weirdest place that she had had sex. Even though this fragment was only a small part at the end of the interview, it circulated in the media with headings like “A political candidate of DP says she has had sex in a boat” (“Basha’s candidate: When I had sex in a boat,” 2021).

b. Young Women as Political Candidates During these elections, political parties in Albania included many new young political candidates, both men and women. However, young women received more attention in political discourse, both for their “clean” political figure and their academic qualifications, but also for their physical appearance. The latter was used as an argument to undermine and underestimate other characteristics that are more important for politics, meaning that they did not have them, e.g., sometimes an opposite political party was saying “it is not enough to have two beautiful girls in the party, political organization requires much more work than that.”

In contrast with that, the SMI party promoted the “clean” figure of young women political candidates in Vlora, as opposed to the “criminal – mafia like” figure of the opposite party’s candidates. Associations of women as less corrupted and men as more prone to engage in illegal activities are part of the traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2019).

Also, by the media, these women are set apart as “surprise” candidates or “teenage” candidates. An article even puts these words in the mouth of the candidate “Me, the surprise...,” even though that is not what she said during the interview (J.M., 2021).

c. Discussions of Women Political Candidates—Soft Issues There is sufficient evidence in literature about the association of women political candidates to “soft issues” like health, education, children, and unemployment as opposed to hard issues, like justice, crime, or defense. In the current composition of government, there are 9 women ministers in a range of ministries, from

education and health to infrastructure and energy, so they are included in the “soft” portfolio issues as well as in the “hard” ones. This was reflected in their political discourse, even though its substantial coverage was not very broad. Evidence of this gendered orientation of women political candidates was more present in meetings of opposition political candidates where the main issues of concern were related to children’s education and health and employment of family members, including themselves (“International Autism Day,” 2021).

However, it is worth mentioning that violence against women has received minimal attention from both women and men political candidates, even though it is a very concerning phenomenon in Albania, that affects the lives of many women.

d. Women Political Candidates “behaving masculine” Women’s presentation styles to the electorate are particularly constrained, because of traditional gender stereotypes: voters expect women and men to behave a certain way, and they also expect politicians to behave a certain way. In this framework, women are caught in the middle: if they behave “like women,” they might risk to be judged as not appropriate for the job, as in the case of discussing mainly “soft issues.” If they behave like their male counterparts, they are risking to be prejudiced as “iron – male ladies.” A well-known ex—politician in Albania wrote an article related to a woman political candidate that promoted herself as the “iron lady” in an effort to be more attractive to electorate. In the article, the author was requiring for women political candidates to stop “behaving masculine” and to start showing more feminine characteristics, like compassion (Pollo, 2021). The same reaction came from a male political candidate, toward a female opposite-party leader. The former accused her of incorporating an aggressive style of leading during her previous political years, and the media intensified the message with headings like “You wanted to behave like a man, while you were a woman” (“Gjekmarkaj to Topalli,” 2021).

e. Interaction Between Political Party Leaders and Political Candidates During the electoral campaign, often leaders of political parties—both men and women—presented the respective political candidates in meetings with the electorate. Middle age women political candidates frequently were presented as respectful family ladies that had contributed in local societies, whereas young women’s presentation as political candidates was more based on their academic achievements. In both cases, often they were promoted as agents of change.

However, it is interesting how the SP leader interacted with women political candidates that hold/held a ministerial or other high official positions. For example, he sometimes referred to the current and ex-Minister of Education, as “zysh” (eng. a short name for “Miss”, which is the usual

way children call their women teachers in pre-university education); that is an underestimation of their ministerial position, which did not get any response by the candidates (“Teacher, where are you?” 2021). As opposed to that, DP leader claimed many times that he knows how to “treat women with respect” (“Basha posts the video,” 2021).

In the same realm, reference to the physical appearance of women political candidates brought many headings in the news. SP leader mentioned that he knew a woman political candidate since his early adolescence and that she was “a very attractive girl, in the life of a teenager brings many fantasies” (Rama, 2021). This kind of presentation for a woman political candidate undermines other qualities of her and puts emphasis to her physical appearance. Media “caught” the phrase and reproduced similar, but much more sensational, headings for several days, like “Rama tells about puberty fantasies...” (Gazeta TemA, 2021) or “Bring the chocolates’ in SP: Rama reveals his obsession....” (“Bring the chocolates,” 2021).

With regard to another candidate, her physical appearance was commented, in a “banter” fashion, where the candidate was mocked about her weight, which would impede her to move, but even so, she likes to climb mountains. In this case, there is a response, although not to refuse the comment, but to justify her behavior, “I didn’t disappoint you yesterday Prime Minister, we crossed eight and a half kilometres of road.” (“I know it,” 2021).

Political Discourse for Women as Voters

In the political discourse of political parties’ representatives, women voters received attention mainly in meetings with women’s electorate. The political leaders’ communication during these meetings was mainly related again to women’s issues, like family and children, migration of their children, future mothers-to-be, equal pay among women and men, and similar issues (“Basha with students,” 2021). Also, it was noticed that women were primarily addressed to as hard-working, housewives dealing with many issues at the same time, performing/accepting traditional gender actions like cooking or accepting flowers, but also smarter and stronger than men.

a. Woman Equals Mother/Mother-to-be A very common and repetitive narrative for women as voters and electorate was the one of them being mothers or mothers to be. All political leaders put emphasis to this aspect of the life of women, not addressing other important dimensions of women’s lives. For example, in several meetings, the leader of DP referred to “suffering mothers in Albania, with tears in their eyes, because their children have migrated in other countries and cannot see them” (“Endrit Braimllari shows,” 2021; “It seems like,” 2021). Also, he equalized women’s

empowerment with family empowerment in several electoral meetings. On the other hand, the leader of the SP party promoted its government contribution to giving free textbooks for children (“DP’s meetings, Ruçi attacks from Fier,” 2021), supporting young mothers to be with the baby benefit scheme (“DP’s meetings like a convoy of expensive cars,” 2021) and enabling them to be in decision-making positions in the political arena. The baby benefit scheme, launched by the SP and SMI, was promoted in several meetings with women. Again, this rhetoric approaches women as future mothers, targeting only one aspect of a woman’s life, which is not relevant for all women.

The political leader of SP referred to women as smarter, quiet, never complaining, and hardworking family “heads,” that have the heavy burden to do many things in 1 day. However, this analogy related to women being less doubtful for SP’s performance so far (passive followers) and men being more skeptic/gamblers resembled DP, which undermines the initial positive connotation for women (“DP is the husband that gambles, SP is the wife,” 2021). Both SP and DP political leaders tended to promote the role of women in the family, as a better half that should be respected and encouraged, but not as a *stand-alone independent individual*.

The same holds true for the leader of the SMI who tried to appeal to the women’s role in the family and their contribution to society, even though to a lesser extent than the two other leaders. Here, women were also described as agents of change that refuse to accept violence (meaning from the SP party, an opposition party) and that they can get revenge for what they have suffered, through voting (“Monika Kryemadhi loses her mind, she repeats herself,” 2021).

Issues like women and girls’ rights, autonomy, sexism, violence against women, platform for employment opportunities, and balance between work and motherhood, were much less discussed in the political meetings.

b. Equal Employment Opportunities Lack of employment was one critical issue that was tackled during the electoral meetings, for both men and women. However, no platform on how this issue was going to be addressed was provided. The main discourse around unemployment, as covered in political meetings with women, was initially the one of their partners/husbands/boys and after that, their own employment. This line of thought is aligned with the general perception of women as caretakers and not active agents in a society. There were instances where the employability of women was addressed during the meetings with young women in particular. For example, women’s entrepreneurship was a recurring issue, but again without any specific measure/program to address it.

Overall, media coverage of these issues was mainly merely a reflection of the discourse and the discussions during the meetings.

Women Candidates’ Looks and Appearance

As mentioned shortly above, candidate looks and appearance are another topic of discussions in media publications portraying this electoral campaign, which receives attention by the media and also readers. An article talks of how in this electoral campaign, political parties have curated also their image, by adding candidates which win points with their looks (“SMP counter – reacts to DP with Vlora’s candidate,” 2021). Sexist language is easily noted in this regard, and it often encourages even more negative comments by the online readers. Two cases will be presented below, in order to illustrate this phenomenon.

Lediana Fratari, a new DP candidate, was continuously portrayed as “the sexy candidate.” In one article, she is presented as such in the title, although the content of the article is totally irrelevant to the title. Also, the photo chosen to present the candidate in this article is one portraying her in a casual situation, not taken through the interview or during her campaign activities, as many as they were (“Number 34, the sexy candidate of DP and businessman daughter,” 2021). Similarly, the same title is used in two other articles, also not related to its content, where the title starts as “The sexy candidate complains...,” and “The invite of the hot candidate...” (“The sexy candidate complains about the sport facilities, she poses...,” 2021; “The invitation of the hot DP candidate: come with me...,” 2021). In a following one, she is presented as seemingly “more carefully” as “the cute candidate,” but within the article, the author cares to emphasize the same point, of how she has become noted especially for her looks and provoking photos in social media, continuing with presenting not less than 21 photos, taken by her social media, which all actually present the candidate in meetings with her electorate (“Photos: DP’s candidate starts celebration: with me Albania wins,” 2021). In another one, even though the title seems regular, the interviewer clearly states the differential treatment, starting the interview by saying “I would like to start differently. A beautiful and rich girl, what are you doing in politics?” (“Lediana Fratari: I belong to the idealists that want to change Albania,” 2021). Altogether, there are only two articles to be found, where there is no focus on this candidate’s appearance. Some of these articles receive a high number of very negative comments, such as in the case of this article (“The invitation of the hot DP candidate: come with me...,” 2021), which received 45 comments, most of them using sexist and very derogatory language, and this other one, which received 10 comments, all of them using the same language (“Photos: DP’s candidate starts celebration: with me Albania wins,” 2021).

Najada Como, a new SP candidate, already well-known to the public as the medical head of the public health fight against COVID -19, actually got strongly into the limelight

during the electoral campaign because of her recent change of looks. “Astonishes with her new look...” was the recurring title theme of several articles that prevailed in the online media for some days, also encouraged by the republication of the articles in some of the websites that were analyzed (“Look at the drastic change of look of SP’s candidate,” 2021).

How Women Candidates Portray Themselves and Other Women

The article review also shows that some of the women candidates join the gender stereotypes game, by playing to these stereotypes, in various ways; by emphasizing traits traditionally considered and accepted as feminine, and on the other hand, criticizing traits who are not accepted as such; or by using these last ones in order to make themselves equal to men.

Some portray themselves as mothers and wives, when addressing the electorate (“Kryemadhi appeals to women for trust,” 2021; “When you are from Kolonja: Xhacka joins women in cooking,” 2021). Others try to do the opposite, e.g., one candidate portrays herself as strong versus soft, in confront to the man candidate perceived as strong: “Do I seem soft to you? Softness is not my main feature. Strength is a character quality, not a gender one, and of that I have a lot” (“Do I look soft?” 2021). Being non-conflictual is also portrayed as a woman’s trait and used as such in speeches that refer to this quality as one that makes women choose non-conflictual candidates/parties: “Women look for peaceful cooperation, away from conflict,” says one woman candidate, while another one says “they are more sensitive to social policy issues,” both arguments used to support the choice of one party over another (“Rama calls Ilir Meta,” 2021; “Confessions of Tirana candidates,” 2021). Another one says that women should be voted, because they can improve the community, being the ones that never complain, despite difficulties (“Women are emancipating force,” 2021). On the other hand, debate among women is considered not appropriate for women, according to one candidate: “I find it very ugly that two women debate with each-other” (“It looks ugly when two women debate”, 2021).

Media Self-Awareness on Women Portraying During Electoral Campaign

The article review does not show almost any reflection by the media about the problematics of women portraying during the electoral campaign. There is only one article entirely focused on sexism as an internalized norm in politics, which was not included in this analysis since it was written just before the election campaign (Erebara, 2021). Even so, it

can be mentioned that it analyzes how both main political parties use the gender issue to gain points in their electorate, through reinforcing gender stereotypes, using women as “campaign make-up” or as candidates whose equality “is given by the leader of the party.” “During the campaign, only one article was found who shortly mentions use of family values (transmitted by spouse of candidate) and candidates surrounded by women, as techniques used by candidates during the electoral campaign, in the image race, but overall this kind of analysis is lacking in the media discourse” (Maho, 2021).

Discussion

Based on our findings, the online media coverage of women in the 2021 elections in Albania presented a gendered portrayal, reinforcing the findings of other relevant studies (Albanian Women Empowerment National Democratic Institute, 2021; Network, 2021). In this section, we discuss these findings in relation to the agenda-setting theory, the framing theory and the role incongruity theory, and the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

As outlined in the introduction, the media has the capacity to lean the public’s attention toward certain topics versus others (Garcia et al., 2007). The analysis of articles showed that the media kept more of a focus in the personal lives of women and in their meetings regarding “soft” issues, to the detriment of their public and professional life, and their discussions over other important issues. With regard to how this selection happens, as the framing theory reflects upon (Llanos & Nina, 2011), our analysis observes that on one hand, there is a lack of awareness of the media with regard to the gendered portrayal of women candidates, shown also in the lack of articles related to analyzing these problematics. Thus, they mainly report what happens, such as plain reports of political meetings, therefore reproducing the gendered views of political party leaders and candidates, including some women candidates. On the other hand, it seems the media itself holds these views, which are reflected in an emphasis of gender stereotypes, sensational headlines, and in the targeting of women candidates’ looks and appearance, sexist language, and lack of moderation of comments containing hate speech and derogatory comments in some portals. They also report without reflection, the criticism on women candidates “behaving masculine,” and sometimes emphasize it in their headlines, thus lowering their value, because of not showing stereotypical behavior for their role, as the role congruity theory states (Eagly & Karau, 2002). All the reflections above show how gender stereotypes of women influence how they are portrayed in leadership roles and in counter-stereotypical behavior, similarly to what Van der Pas and Aldering summarize (2020).

The main implication for the practice of this analysis is that the media needs to increase its awareness of the problematics of the gendered portrayal of women during electoral campaigns, by not repeating the society's bias and by offering reflective analysis on this phenomenon, during the campaign, thus contributing in shifting the public and political discourse toward promoting gender equality.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Women, political candidates for the 2021 elections in Albania, continued to be the subject of a gendered portrayal in media coverage. The personal life of women was more in focus in the respective articles, shifting the discourse from public and professional life to private—family-related issues. Further on, their presence was more evidenced in meetings/discussions related to soft issues, like family/children/health. In contrast with this traditional woman's role, other political candidates were accused on behaving masculinely, because of their attitudes and more aggressive behavior, as perceived by the discussant. These approaches, even unwillingly, might damage the perception of voters for women candidates' professional qualities and continue to carry the complexity of gender stereotyping.

While the presence of young women in the political arena was a positive step toward their participation in politics, biased comparisons with old-male candidates put them at the center of media attention for the wrong reasons: being "surprise" candidates or "clean." Women from smaller parties are the most discriminated, as they have received the least amount of media time.

Political party leaders and their interaction with women political candidates fell into the same gendered discourse. Although, there is an overall progress in the use of non-gendered terms (e.g., "men and women" instead of "males and females"). In practice, they have used terms that undermine again women candidates' professional aspects.

The narrative of political candidates' interest and objectives for women voters again stays in the field of "family and children." In electoral meetings with women voters, these were the prevailing issues, equalizing women with mothers/mothers-to-be. When discussing employment, political candidates were initially referring to "men's" employment.

Women candidates are targeted continuously on their looks and appearance in the media. The sexist language used in these types of articles often promotes hate speech and derogatory comments by the readers, especially in those portals which do not moderate comments.

Some women candidates also promote the game of gender stereotypes, using various ones related to themselves, other candidates, or women as voters, to appeal to their electorate.

There is almost no reflection by the media on the problematics of gender portraying during electoral campaign, shown by the lack of articles in this regard.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the report, the main recommendations identified, which contribute to fair electoral campaigns for women, are listed below:

- The gender perspective should be present in all initiatives adopted by media companies in relation to the coverage of elections.
- Media practitioners and political candidates should avoid the use of gender stereotypes or biased language and identification of women candidates with reference to their family status or their relationship to others ("mother," "wife," etc.).
- Political parties should be mindful in their discourse concerning women, in order for them to enhance a gender equality perspective.
- Media practitioners can benefit from gender equality capacity-building activities, including coverage of political issues in general and electoral campaigns in particular.
- Sexist language, hate speech, and derogatory comments in the media can be reduced through gender-sensitive articles and moderation (or turning off) of comments in online articles.
- The problematics of gender portraying need to be part of the media discourse during electoral campaigns, raising self-awareness and public awareness in this regard, and promoting gender equality.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no competing interests.

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