



Wa3i Youth Platform

The Effect of Disinformation on Women's Political Participation

Political Report





Abstract:

The Internet and social media have become the main source of information for everyone, including women. Social media has become an integral part of women's lives and they use them to reach the public to share their ideas and policies as an alternative to the often biased media coverage against women. However, women often find themselves exposed to horrendous sexualized disinformation aiming at distorting their reputation to delegitimize, discredit and discourage their participation in politics

The anti-women disinformation campaigns have detrimental effects on the women and girls who watch the attacks on prominent women. When the common females observe such campaigns against female public figures, they are likely to be discouraged and lose the interest to enter the public sphere and participate in political life.

The present study aims at understanding the effect of disinformation campaigns on Yemeni women's political participation in their parties, in decision-making centers, and their participation in peace-building.

The study found that women's participation in politics is generally weak at all the levels of parties, decision-making centers, and peace-building processes except for the 2013-2014 national dialogue participation. Women's political participation declined after the war owing to the political and military conflict and the collapse of the countries' institutions, insecurity, division amongst the ruling elite, who do not perceive women's participation as a priority amidst war. Further, partisan females' roles declined in their respective parties because of the division of the parties between the sides of the conflict.

During the war, politician females were targeted with smear disinformation campaigns based on gender violence. The purpose of these campaigns has been to undermine women's participation in public life and politics in particular. These campaigns included the spread of a culture of fear by the Houthis' de facto authorities in Sana'a, extremist religious discourse, and political disinformation.

The study, further, found that there is a directly proportionate relationship between the spread of disinformation and the decline of women's political participation. Violence against women in politics



affects not only targeted political women but also sends clear messages to ordinary females that violence awaits them in the political area. It also sends messages to the entire society that females should not participate in politics.

The effect on women's political participation is evident through the systematic exclusion in parties and false promises, and decline of the number of women in decision-making centers in addition to the political exclusion, and women's marginalization in peace negotiations.

The study found no evidence for the women national committee to support female political participation since the post-war period and their roles have become ineffective especially in Sana'a. The international community had a superficial role in supporting women's participation in the peace-building process.

Finally, the present study recommends enhancing the protection for female politicians against disinformation campaigns through adopting media and information illiteracy programs to train and raise women's awareness about disinformation issues. Women's engagement should be activated in the different structures of the political parties and gender-based perspectives should be integrated into the parties' programs and internal policies. Women's access to decision-making centers should be supported in parties and the public sphere. The government should support orientations of the civil society organizations towards general awareness on sexualized patterns and sexism online including sexism against female political icons.



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Introduction:

Yemeni women have obtained their rights to political affiliation and participation in elections as candidates and voters in 1990⁽¹⁾. As a result of female politicians' tough struggles, Yemeni women have been eligible to participate in the political process through elected councils and decision-making centers. Female politicians have been exposed to a series of disinformation campaigns associated with gender-based violence aimed at undermining women's political participation.

The US National Democratic Institute defines 'sexualized disinformation' as the use of false information to confuse or mislead and the manipulation of gender to attack women and influence political outcomes. The objectives of such disinformation operations are primarily to exclude women from politics, to change women's and men's opinions about women's political participation, to change the policies of a party, and to influence political outcomes. As a result, women's free and equal participation in politics is undermined at the expense of flexibility and inclusive democracy⁽²⁾.

Further, disinformation media campaigns target women per se regardless of their practical and intellectual competence. The media campaigns pose violence, gender, and sexuality-based discrimination, so they hamper women's progress in all fields, particularly in the political sphere⁽³⁾.

The Internet and social media have become the main source of information for everyone, including women. Social media has become an integral part of women's lives and they use them as an alternative to the often biased media coverage against women, so they can reach the public to share their ideas and policies. Social media allowed women wider access to the audience let alone create an opportunity to shape their narratives and engage directly with proponents and voters. However, women often find themselves exposed to horrendous sexualized disinformation aiming at distorting their reputation to delegitimize, discredit and discourage their participation in politics.

The anti-women disinformation campaigns have detrimental effects on the women and girls who watch these attacks on prominent women. When the common females observe such campaigns against female public figures, they are likely to be discouraged and lose interest to enter the public sphere and participate in political life. Also, disinformation is a form of violence against women on the Internet. When state actors exploit gender-based violence to conduct disinformation campaigns targeting politically active women, they consciously and deliberately undermine women's freedom,

¹ Constitution of the Republic of Yemen 2001, Articles (42,43,58)

² Addressing online misogyny and gendered disinformation: A how-to guide, NDI. September 21, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndi.org/publications/addressing-online-misogyny-and-gendered-disinformation-how-guide>

³ Al-Saudi, W. The role of false news in increasing discrimination and gender-based violence, Prosper Blog. December 1, 2021, Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3p23UuT>



their safety, and their political participation. Therefore, they promote the agenda of the ruling regime⁽⁴⁾.

The present study aims at understanding the effect of disinformation campaigns on Yemeni women's political participation (in their parties, in decision-making centers, and their participation in peace-building). The data has been collected through the following:

- Review the previous literature on the topic
- Analysis of some social media content, Facebook and Twitter
- Content analysis of 10 zoom interviews for many women leaders,
- A survey of 30 people in different regions in Yemen,
- Three focus group interviews with eight individuals in each group in three different provinces (Sana'a, Aden, and Hadhramout).

First: The Reality of Women's Political Participation:

Women's political participation has been weak generally at the level of parties, decision-making centers, and their participation in peace-building process, except for their participation in the national dialogue in 2013-2014, as follows:

1. Women's representation in the leadership bodies of the parties has been low. 259 women were represented in all the parties out of a total of 12,975, constituting 2% representation⁽⁵⁾. The highest position women occupied in a political party was the assistant secretary-general in the General People's Congress and Nasserite Unionist People's Party. There is a lack of women's representation in senior positions in other parties such as the Yemeni Islah Party⁽⁶⁾, the newly founded entities such as Ansar Allah (Houthis), the Southern Transitional Council, and the Justice and Construction Party⁽⁷⁾. According to a Houthi female leader, there is clear discrimination between men's and women's roles in Ansar Allah, particularly in senior positions. This exclusion is based on the

One of the respondents said that women are active during elections as voters, but they are not represented in political partnership

⁴ Jankowicz, N. et. al., Malign Creativity : How gender, sex, and lies are weaponized against women online, January 27, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/malign-creativity-how-gender-sex-and-lies-are-weaponized-against-women-online>

⁵ Nadi, R. et al. Women's political participation after the process of change in Yemen, Arabian Center for Research and Studies, number (39), January, 2019

⁶ Al-Hajj, A. & Al-Aslami, A. Analysis of the internal system of the Yemeni Islah Party. Unpublished paper

⁷ Al-Sakkaf, N. Yemeni women's involvement, representation, and influence in political parties and components. Unpublished research, February 2021



societal traditional value system pursued by the parties' leadership. She further stated that political systems and internal regulations do not create barriers against women's participation in leadership positions. There is, however, a wide reservation against women's political participation in general, especially in leadership positions. She scapegoated women's exclusion in senior positions in the Houthis' Group on the armed conflict⁽⁸⁾.

2. The majority of Yemeni political parties abstained from nominating women resulted in the weak political representation of women in the different elections. Although the registered women in the voters' lists increased from 18% in 1993 to 27% in 1997 to 42% in 2003⁽⁹⁾, the female candidates running for office decreased from 42 women in the 1993 elections to 19 in the 1997 elections, and 11 in the 2003 elections. The number of women candidates running on behalf of the political parties also decreased from 17 female candidates in 1993 to 8 in 1997 to 6 in 2003⁽¹⁰⁾. Moreover, the women's representation in the parliament declined from two female MPs in the parliamentary elections of 1993 and 1997, to one female MP in 2003⁽¹¹⁾. The traditional as well as newly emerging political parties, including Islamic-oriented parties, sought to win the voting women's allegiance as a popular electoral base. Recently, women are exploited for war mobilization.

One of the respondents said that the political parties have deliberately excluded women from the party lists on the pretext that the present situation is unstable for women to play political roles. Also, these parties have not played any role in enhancing the women's conditions.

3. Women's political participation declined significantly after the war owing to the political and military conflict, the collapse of the state institutions, insecurity, and the division of the ruling elites who consider women's participation is not a priority at a time of war. Also, the women partisans' roles declined within the parties due to the division of their parties between the sides of the conflict. One of the respondents stated that the repercussion of the political parties' weakness and their inability to activate their roles after the war led to demoting women's role within the parties⁽¹²⁾.

⁸ ibid

⁹ Report of the European Union mission to observe the presidential and local elections in Yemen, 20 September, 2006. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3oaWEew>

¹⁰ Abdel Hafeez, A. women and politics, (Sana'a: The First Democratic Forum, women and yemeni political parties, August 5, 2004, p. 37. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/30g6mV2>

¹¹ Abu Asbaa, B. A survey of women's political empowerment projects in the Republic of Yemen 1995-2005, (Cairo: Arab Women Organization, 2006) p. 8. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/Dc0FWI>

¹² The author's interview with an interviewee on December 05, 2021



4. In the Houthis- controlled provinces, women played negative roles during the war via holding rallies and meet-ups for mothers to mobilize for battlefronts. However, most women continued to spare no efforts to have their voices heard. They exerted huge effort to obtain representation and participation in peace-building. Several feminist entities and coalitions were established to engage women in the peace process.

Second: Disinformation Campaigns Tainted with Gender-based Violence:

Lucina Di Meo and Saskia Brechenmacher state that female politicians are not only disproportionately targeted, but also are subject to different sorts of harassment and abuse. Attacks targeting male politicians relate mostly to their professional duties. However, online harassment of female politicians focuses more likely on their physical appearance and sexuality. Online harassment also includes threats of sexual violence and degrading or sexualized images. Women in politics are frequent targets of gender disinformation campaigns, which are defined as the widespread of misleading information and images. Such campaigns often create storylines based on misogyny and gender preconceptions. Disinformation campaigns can discourage women from running for office, push them out of politics, or drive them to shy away from online participation in ways that harm their political efficacy⁽¹³⁾.

Disinformation campaigns can use gender-based violence in public life to increase political polarization, widen social divisions, amplify contentious debates, amplify social and political marginal ideologies and theories, and reinforce current power dynamics by discouraging women's participation. These actions exclude marginalized members of communities from the political processes and democratic

The head of the Muwatanat Wa3i- a human rights organization specializing in monitoring violations on citizens in Sana'a- Radhya Al-MutawaKel says that the least derogatory commonly heard phrase against women is that "woman should be at home" in a city women are used to having guts more than men. She further added, "I talked to more than one of your leaders. They state that intermingling men and women are not their battles. Who is responsible for your available teams in streets then?"
From Al-MutawaKel's Facebook post addressing Houthis'

¹³ Di Meo L. & Brechenmacher, S. Tackling online abuse and disinformation targeting women in politics, Carnegie, November 30, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/11/30/tackling-online-abuse-and-disinformation-targeting-women-in-politics-pub-83331>



institutions. Hence, the effective participation and representation of the marginalized members' in their institutions is reduced further⁽¹⁴⁾.

The following section presents some disinformation instances, since 2015 post-war, targeting women and aimed at undermining their participation in the public life and politics in particular.

1. Spreading a Culture of Fear:

The spread of a culture of fear involve Houthis' de facto authority assaults on female demonstrators, including arrest campaigns against women from the General People's Congress Party (the former ruling party) based on their political demands. They also suppressed women's demonstrations because of their demands for their salaries⁽¹⁵⁾.



Women were also prevented from working outside their homes in restaurants and public places. In a tweet, on Twitter, Amnesty International condemned that the Houthis' de facto authorities' actions to prevent women from working in restaurants describing them as 'shameful and discriminatory'. It adds, "We stand with all women in their struggle for their rights in Yemen"⁽¹⁶⁾. Houthis also raided many stores selling women's Abayas (the daily outfit that Muslim women wear in public) in 'Hail Street and Al-Tahreer Square' markets in Sana'a under the pretext that the



¹⁴ Scott, V. understanding the gender dimensions of disinformation, COUNTERING DISINFORMATION, April 01, 2021. Retrieved from <https://counteringdisinformation.org/topics/gender/0-overview-gender-disinformation>

¹⁵ In pictures, Houthis attack a women's demonstration in Sana'a they injured female demonstrators and arrested dozens, Al-Ain Al-Akhbariya, January 18, 2018, Retrieved from: <https://al-ain.com/article/houthi-demonstration-women-sana-a>

¹⁶ Alhalali, K. Concern in Sana'a over restrictions on women's work outside home: Amnesty International condemns the measures, but the Houthis deny the existence of the decision. Independentarabia, Friday, 5, February, 2021. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3F7R7g2>



Abayas were colorful and tight⁽¹⁷⁾. Houthis held meetings in the capital's different neighborhoods calling on the citizens to prevent women from wearing tight and colorful Abayas.

Furthermore, Houthis raided famous cafés in the center of Sana'a, under the pretext of the presence of women smoking hookah. Houthis attacked and expelled the women, claiming that they 'delay victory', according to Houthis' justifications⁽¹⁸⁾. Recently, the Houthis established a new female battalion named 'Al-batool' specializing in monitoring women's outfits in convention centers and wedding halls⁽¹⁹⁾.

In addition, Houthis implemented rules and regulations selectively during the Corona pandemic and in a discriminatory approach against women. They closed beauty salons and ignored barbershops. These campaigns aim to silence public female figures and deter them from seeking public roles.

2. Extremist Religious Discourse:

Religion has been exploited to incite violence against women many times. The number of takfiri fatwas have increased targeting female politicians and activists in society. The most notorious fatwas has been the issuance of a fatwa describing the participating women in the National Dialogue Conference in 2013-2014 as infidels owing to their demand for a quota⁽²⁰⁾.

The same approach of taking advantage of religious discourse has persisted through the Houthis' control of power.

The Houthis' authorities arrested the Yemeni model and actress Entisar Al-Hammadi. Human rights activists say that her arrest has been on the grounds of her work, as such jobs are forbidden⁽²¹⁾.

Further, it is worth noting that the conservative and hard-line interpretations of Islam have been a pretext to attack women and restrict their roles. A video from a Friday sermon by the preacher Abdullah Al-Udini from Taiz province has become viral on social media. In the video, the preacher attacks female activists and the civil society organizations that submitted the shadow report to the UN regarding the CEDAW Convention. The preacher claims that Yemeni women demanded the abolition of laws related to Islamic sharia and that Islam was unjust to them and their rights. He claims

¹⁷ Houthis burn women's Abayas in Sana'a markets, Manasat 26 September. Retrieved from: <https://sep26p.net/archives/12648>

¹⁸ The Houthis chase women in cafes: "They delay victory", Al-Ain Al-Akhbariya, June 30, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://al-ain.com/article/houthis-ban-shisha-smoking-women-sanaa>

¹⁹ Claiming that they are "delaying victory" Houthis chase women in cafes, Civil Network for Media, Development and Human Rights. June 30, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3sCEC9c>

²⁰ Quota for women preoccupies Yemen, Al Jazeera, November 10. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3sawnRr>

²¹ Yemen.. Houthis militia arrests a famous actress, Sada Elbalad, 12/04/2021. Retrieved from <https://www.elbalad.news/4773676>



that women demanded homosexuality rights and to travel without a close relative, i.e. mahram. The preacher said that all these demands contradict Islamic sharia. He, further, claims that the international organizations and the UN envoy support women in writing a new constitution that violates Islamic sharia⁽²²⁾.

3. Political Disinformation:

Female politicians are subject to smear campaigns based on sexism attacking their morals and questioning their honor. The overarching aim of such sexualized campaigns is belittling women's credibility, reputation, and professionalism.

Female Yemeni activists are not an exception. They have been subject to many smear campaigns because of their political stances. During the women's participation in the demonstrations and sit-ins of the 2011 revolution, they were attacked by former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who exploited the Islamic sharia as a pretext to demand the segregation between women and men in the sit-in squares⁽²³⁾. In addition, women were attacked by Sheikh Hamid al-Ahmar, a leader in the Yemeni Islah Party, saying that he: "saw a bad behavior, so the square was turned into a dance platform. These women wanted to go with their male friends and lovers to hold hand-in-hand in the demonstrations. This is inappropriate as it is against our religion."⁽²⁴⁾

Women leaders were also subject to a widespread disinformation campaign on social media when they criticized the formation of the Yemeni government that excluded women on December 18, 2020. The female activists organized an anti-government campaign called (A government without women has no legitimacy). However, they were attacked and most of the comments called on women to 'stay at home because they are good at the Kitchens. The activists were falsely accused of seeking senior positions.



²² Sheikh Aludini, A. The Sermon of Islam and Women. Youtube video 22/12/2022. Retrieved from [youtube.com/watch?v=H43yR_A_93Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H43yR_A_93Q)

²³ Yemen: Ali Abdullah Saleh attack on women's participation in revolution. Iknowpolitics 5/2012. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3E5Z015>

²⁴ Al-Sufi, S. Yemen - Have women's freedom declined and their role ended after the victory of the revolution? Retrieved from <https://p.dw.com/p/15XpA>



Females are derogatorily depicted while humiliating a man describing him as "a woman" as if women are a stigma and ignominy, while 'men' indicate 'honor' and 'power'. This is the patriarchal mentality.⁽²⁵⁾

When women participated in the peace process during Kuwait negotiations in 2016, the UN invited seven women for the negotiation. The participating women were targeted on social media channels with several derogatory comments much more than men. The comments focused on their appearance and outfit. One of the

One of the respondents says that talking about women has become difficult. In an interview with a member of the Reconciliation Committee, she says, she asked him about women's participation. He replied, "Now it is a period of war, the women's role will come later." She says that although Yemeni society depends heavily on women during this period because men go to the battlefields, women do not have the right to participate.

comments says, "the world's seven old women brought by Weld Al-Sheikh, Kuwait negotiations enters a female predicament that puts the negotiation at a crossroads⁽²⁶⁾. A second comment says, "these women did not, and will not, do any good for Yemen, except for making a fortune for their own at expense of the suffering of Yemenis".

The female advisory group for the UN envoy office to Yemen was subject to media disinformation during the Stockholm consultations in 2018; (who are those and where about they came from), (discussing peace with a side that is not involved in the war circle is a waste of time and effort and ludicrous).



In the de facto Houthi-controlled areas, several civil society organizations have

been frozen via banning the renewal of licenses for organizations. Dozens of civil institutions and charitable foundations, which their allegiance is not guaranteed to the de facto authority, have been closed.⁽²⁷⁾

²⁵ Twitter page, Yemeni Feminist Voice. Accessed on 14 December. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/YeFeministVoice/status/1338265638926757888>

²⁶ A member of the Houthi delegation in Kuwait attacks the seven participating women in Kuwait, describing them with the Islah party in obscene terms, revealing dangerous secrets, Ababiil.net, May 7, 2016. Retrieved from <https://ababiil.net/yemen-news/85309.html>

²⁷ Houthis close tens of non-governmental organizations, DW. 13 December, 2013. Retrieved from : <https://bit.ly/3FbowXI>



Third: The Effect on Women's Political Participation

It can be said that there is a directly proportional relationship between the spread of disinformation, which includes instances of violence against women, and the decline of women's political participation. Violence against women affects not only the targeted women directly, but also sends a message to ordinary women that violence awaits them in the political sphere. Further, violence affects the entire society that females should not participate in politics⁽²⁸⁾. An interviewee in the focus group from Sana'a indicated that the smear campaigns against women targeting their reputation affected their political participation to a great extent and led to women's withdrawal from the political activities, as the ongoing situation in Sana'a⁽²⁹⁾. In the following section, the impact of disinformation on the decline of women's political participation is discussed.

1- The Systematic Exclusion of Women in the Political Parties and the False

Promises

Since the war, the political parties have encountered a crisis of confidence within the society due to the disintegration of the political authority, which affected the performance of the political parties and led to further division. The parties inside the country are controlled by the de facto authorities of the Houthis and Southern Transitional Council. However, the legitimate government controls the parties outside the country. Consequently, the performance of the parties declined and they became incompetent.

This situation is reflected in women's political participation. Women can no longer support or object to any political decisions or even demand a better status for women. Ultimately, this scenario has led to women's weak political participation in parties and in general.

Women believe that their partisan roles have been undermined continuously by authoritative actors. They think that political parties exploited women's participation in the 2011 sit-ins for their agenda and the parties' increased representation in the political entities. When women's participation becomes useless or perceived to create a threat, women have been attacked physically or threatened by violence and defamation. A female political activist said, "Both the government and the political parties played roles in distorting women's imagery"⁽³⁰⁾.

²⁸ Stopping violence against women in politics (2021, p.10). National Democratic Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NTC%202021%20ARABIC%20FINAL.pdf>

²⁹ Interview with the focus group in Sana'a. On December 04, 2021

³⁰ Rogers, J. Haddad, S. & Wright, H. Report: It's dangerous to be the first: Security barriers to women's political participation in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, Saferworld: London. 2013, p.13. Retrieved from <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/172936/its-dangerous-to-be-the-first-web-arabic.pdf>



The political parties have deliberately excluded women from politics under the pretext of instability. In the de facto Houthi-controlled regions, authorities refused to include women in politics. In addition, they deposed active female leaders from their positions and replaced them with ineffective women who do not believe in the importance of women's roles in politics. The Houthis refuse to involve women in power except for the affiliated Houthi women. Through the interviews, the Houthis say that Yemen undergoes an exceptional situation of aggression⁽³¹⁾. They claim that it is an issue of priority that should also be a priority for women. There is no room for discussing women's participation until the war is over, according to the Houthis' perspectives.

Women attributed their weak participation to venues of holding the meetings for the political parties and government. Meetings are held in Qat chewing sessions, exclusive for men according to customs and traditions⁽³²⁾. In general, all parties are blamed for women's weak political participation, it is noteworthy that Islamist parties which claim the right to determine the correct Islamic behavior, as the Houthis and the Islamist-oriented Islah Party before, negatively impacted women's participation the most.

Figure (1) shows results about women's decreasing participation. 93.3% of the respondents stated that there is a clear decline in women's political participation in parties and decision-making centers. 66.7% of the respondents believe that women have the right to obtain a no less than 30% in decision-making centers. Despite the positive responses, one of the respondents believed that there was no positive shift in the status of women whether in the political parties or public life. The only prevailing voices have been men, and they present no compromise for women. She believed that there should be a stable political regime to enhance women's status⁽³³⁾.

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³¹ Aggression here refers to (The countries of the Arab coalition headed by Saudi Arabia, the legitimate government and any power hostile to the Houthi's authority)

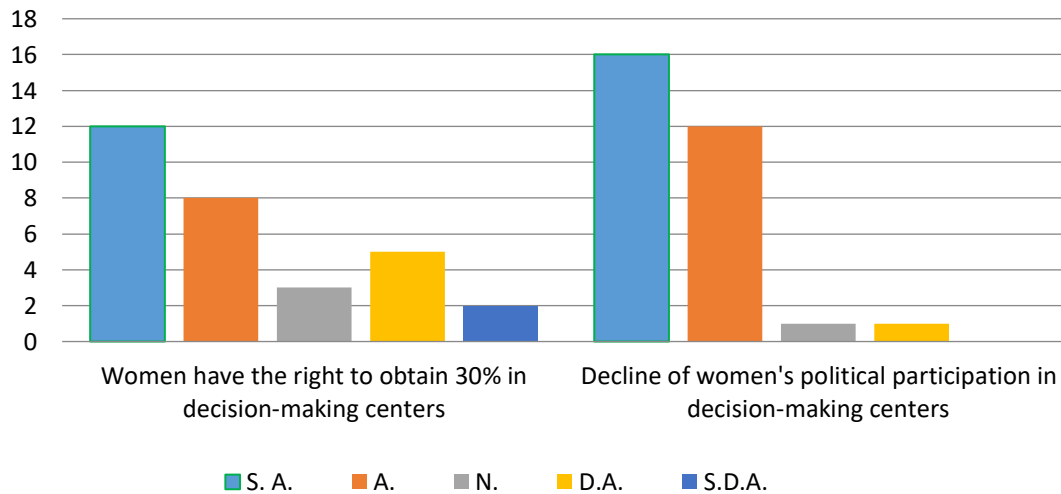
³² Rogers, J. Haddad, S.& Wright, H. Report (2013, p.17)

³³ Research Interview on December 12, 2021



Figure (1) the sample’s perspectives on the views of parties and political powers of women’s political participation

Figure (1): The sample's opinion on the level of women's political participation in parties



Note: S.A.= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D.A.= Disagree, S.D.A.= Strongly Disagree

2- Women in Decision-Making Centers:

The absence of women in decision-making centers can be attributed to several factors, the most important of which are:

- The low societal culture on the importance of women’s roles. One of the respondents attributed the women’s exclusion from political parties to the dominant patriarchal mentality. She further said that women come as a second class after men. Although political parties propagate their support for women, these ideas are not implemented in reality⁽³⁴⁾.
- Women are not independent when it comes to making decisions within all Yemeni parties. They follow their parties and the parties that will not accept women’s independent decision-making. She said that Yemeni religious-oriented political parties are more likely to have extremist views towards women’s issues and they do not accept women’s political participation⁽³⁵⁾.

³⁴ Research Interview, December 12, 2021

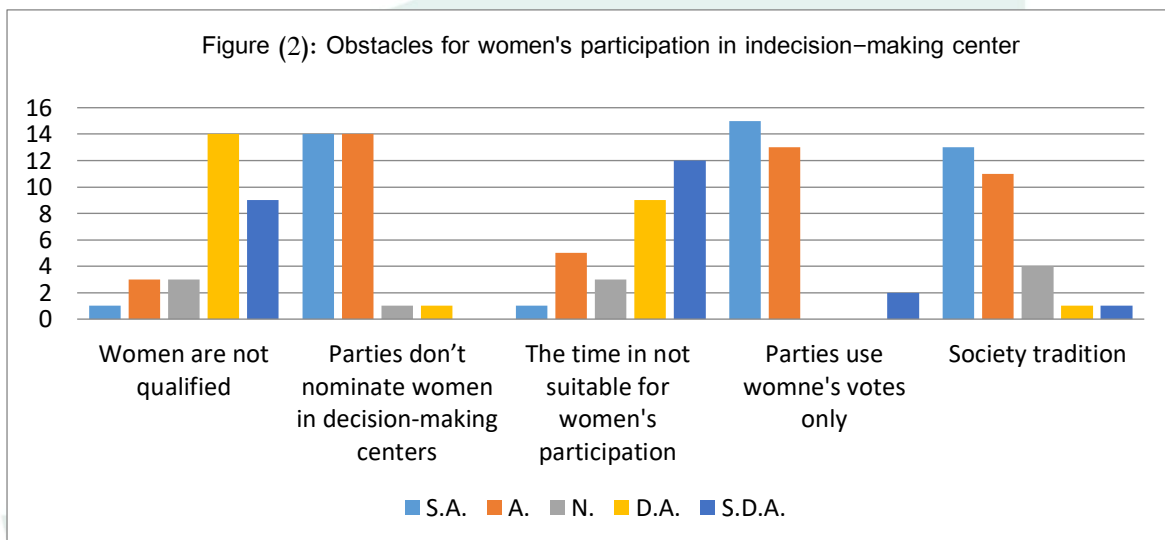
³⁵ Yemeni women - a ‘Voice’ without an echo in the political life? Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3fm1jrB>



It can be said that the processes of political consistency amongst political parties greatly affected women's participation in decision-making centers. The distribution of seats in the government and senior political positions is based on partisan quotas. This fact contributed to the absence of women in decision-making centers. Therefore, women were excluded from the representation in the formation of the Yemeni government on December 18, 2020.

The data in Figure (2) shows that the political parties do not nominate women to positions in decision-making centers. 93.3% of the respondents confirmed the parties use women's votes in elections, but they ignore their participation in decision-making centers. The majority of respondents disagreed with the obstacles related to traditions of society, women's disinterest in political participation, and women's qualifications. The political parties take these obstacles as a pretext for excluding women from participation in decision-making centers.

Figure (2): displays obstacles for women's participation in decision-making centers



Note: S.A.= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D.A.= Disagree, S.D.A.= Strongly Disagree

3- Political Exclusion and Elite Marginalization of Women in the Peace

Negotiations:

The representation of partisan women in the various peace negotiations between the legitimate government and the Houthis and their allies remained weak and frustrating for women⁽³⁶⁾. Only two

³⁶ Research Interview on December 12, 2021



female leaders participated (Fayqa al-Sayed and Rana Ghanem) in the peace negotiations, while the seats for women were 7 seats at the negotiating table, 6%, compared to 102 seats for men, at a rate of 94%⁽³⁷⁾.

One of the respondents said when the two sides of the conflict were asked about excluding women in the negotiations, they answered that the time now is not for women⁽³⁸⁾. However, women continued to make efforts to get their voices heard, to create space to participate in the peace-building process at different levels⁽³⁹⁾. Women believe that this exclusion will affect their participation negatively in the post-conflict period⁽⁴⁰⁾. Consequently, women took the initiative to establish feminist political entities to involve women in peace-building and participate in civil political entities such as initiatives and civil society organizations⁽⁴¹⁾.

Regarding the respondents' question about the obstacles to women's participation in political negotiations, Figure (3) shows that the majority of respondents (83.3%) believe that "the political parties do not nominate women to participate in the political negotiations." Similarly, 83.3% of respondents believe that "the disagreement of the conflict sides to involve women in negotiations" was one of the most important reasons. Interpreting the perspectives of the majority of the respondents confirms the same conclusion. 96.7% stated that "the political parties exploit women's votes in elections and ignore their participation in political negotiations." On the contrary, 46.7% of the respondents agreed that the obstacles were "related to women per se and the women entities, 20% disagreed, whereas 33.3% were neutral.

Finally, 50% of respondents agreed that the international community's unsupportive roles for women's participation in the political negotiations was considered one of the greatest obstacles, while 33.3% were neutral and 16.7% disagreed.

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³⁷Women, peace and security. Website of the office of the special envoy of the secretary-general of the United Nations for Yemen, [D.T]. Accessed on 9 November, 2021. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3lf7kpk>

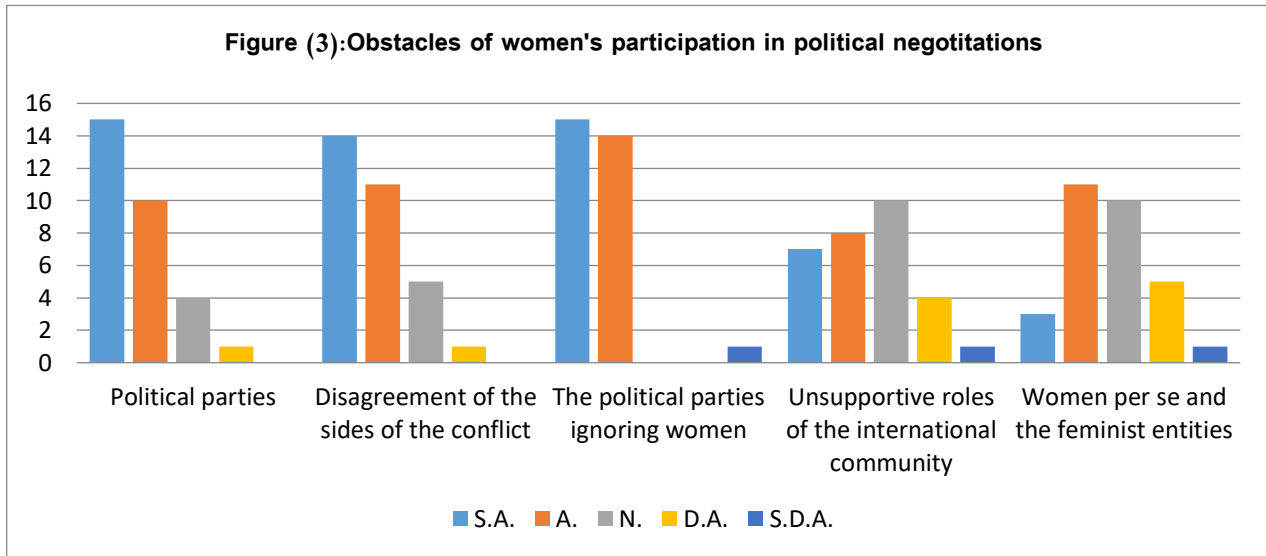
³⁸ Research Interview on December 13, 2021

³⁹ Al-Joufi, M.A. The effects of war and conflict on Yemeni women and their role in establishing peace (2015-2017), Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights (YOHR), 2017, p. 33.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p. 22

⁴¹ *ibid*, p.23

Figure (3) shows obstacles to women’s participation in political negotiations



Note: S.A.= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D.A.= Disagree, S.D.A.= Strongly Disagree

4- The Roles of National and International Mechanisms for Women’s Political Participation

All the respondents agreed on the absent role of the Women’s National Committee since the post-war period⁽⁴²⁾, in Sana’a particularly. The respondents attributed this to the fact that the committee has been taken over by inactive women who do not believe in women’s roles and do not understand the mechanisms, laws, or women’s supportive agreements. One of the respondents said that the committee leadership unjustifiably refused women’s participation⁽⁴³⁾.

Figure (4) shows the sample’s opinions on the roles of national and international mechanisms in supporting women’s political participation. 60% of the respondents agreed that the Women’s National Committee did not play any role in supporting women in political participation, especially after the war.

When it comes to the role of the international community in promoting women’s political participation in the peace-building process, the interviewees in the focus groups stated that the international community did not support the peace process. The continuation of the war is tangible proof. The interviewees in the focus group pointed out that the women’s modest participation was

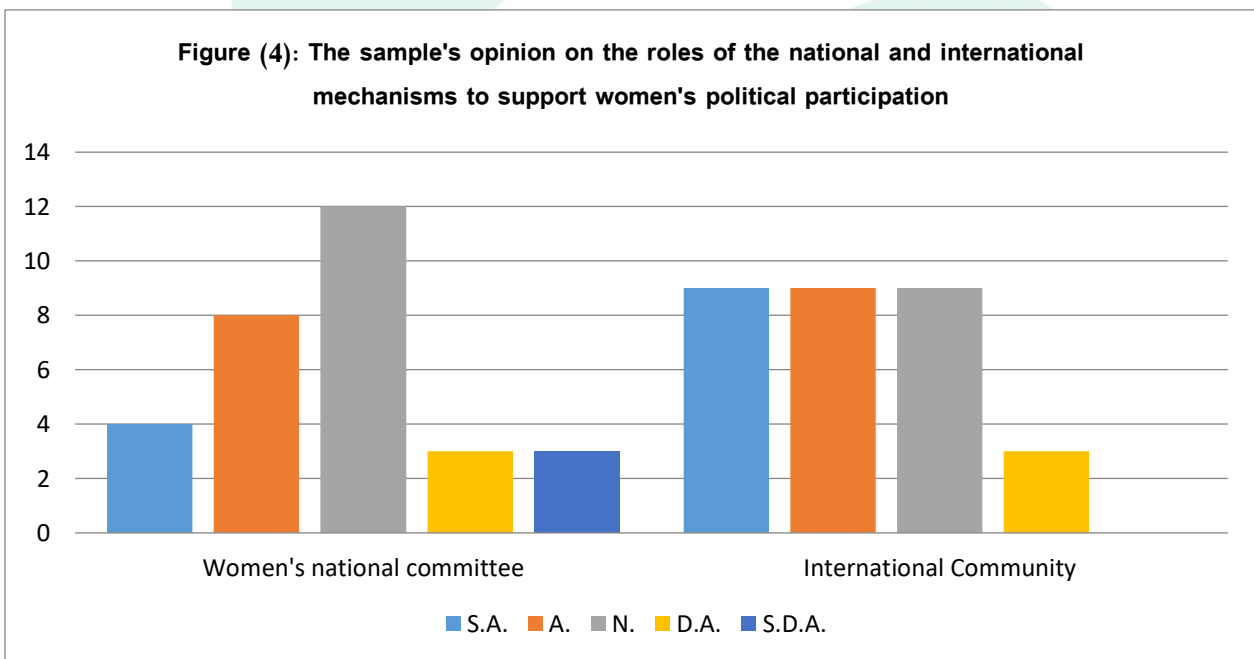
⁴² Focus group Interviews in Sana'a, Aden, and Hadhramout, on December 04, 2021

⁴³ Research Interview on December 14, 2021



superficial. However, 60% of respondents to the questionnaire stated that the international community supported women and the peace process, while 10% said that the international community was not supportive, and 30% of respondents were neutral.

Figure (4): the sample's opinion on the roles of the national and international mechanisms to support women's political participation



Note: S.A.= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; D.A.= Disagree, S.D.A.= Strongly Disagree



Conclusion

The prevalent use of technology has opened up new spaces for women's participation in various political activities. Social media websites have become the only outlet through which women can express their opinions in light of the suppression against them. However, lack of control over the cyber arena has facilitated the disinformation campaign, so it has contributed to spreading a culture of fear among women. As a result, women are excluded from politics in the parties and the decision-making centers. On this basis, the present study recommends the following:

- Female politicians' protection against the threat of disinformation should be enhanced. Since they are targeted on social media, there should be media and information illiteracy programs for women to raise their awareness.
- Women's roles in the political parties' structures should be reinforced. Also, the internal policies of the political parties should include gender perspectives via redefining women's issues in the political and internal programs. The parties should have crystal clear mechanisms to give women access to decision-making centers within the party and in the public sphere.
- The government should support the civil society organizations and their public awareness-raising goals on racism and sexualized patterns against female politicians on the Internet.
- The political parties should take practical steps to prevent misogyny, violence, and any form of harassment against women in public life and on their media channels, their political narratives, their activists, and affiliated entities.
- Political parties should put much effort to ensure transparency, accountability, and gender mainstreaming in managing their political narratives, addressing complaints firmly, and standing with victims especially females.
- Female politicians should be trained on protection strategies against sexualized disinformation and sexism.
- Campaigns should be launched to raise awareness about media disinformation against women and its effect on democracy.



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