Women on Boards in Lebanon's Media Sector

Governance Structures, Power Dynamics, and Pathways to Decision- Making

A STUDY ON MEDIA GOVERNANCE AND GENDER EQUITY

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Lebanese League for Women in Business × British Embassy Beirut / FCDO **2025**

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Prepared for: Women on Boards Program at the Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB)

Supported by: UK Embassy in Lebanon

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Country: Lebanon

Acknowledgment

This study was commissioned by the Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB) and funded by the UK Embassy. The author would like to express sincere appreciation to LLWB for its guidance, coordination, and continued commitment to advancing women's leadership and governance in Lebanon. Main research support was provided by Chebaro Abir, Chemaly Rita, and Zaayter Ghady. Coordination by Hammoudi Samer.

The author is deeply grateful to all key informants who generously shared their time, insights, and professional experiences. Their perspectives, drawn from across the media sector and related institutions, were essential in shaping the depth and credibility of the analysis. Appreciation is also extended to all survey respondents who participated in the study and contributed valuable evidence on governance practices and barriers within media organizations.

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the current context of Lebanon's media sector, all survey responses were collected anonymously, while key informant interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis with assurances of confidentiality. The openness and trust extended by participants made this research possible.

The author would also like to acknowledge the following individuals, listed in alphabetical order, for their valuable contributions through key informant interviews:

- **Abou Zeid, Norma** – Senior Advisor, Lebanese Ministry of Information
- **Asmar, Joudy** – Investigative and environmental journalist
- **Ghada Ballout Zeitoun** – Lebanese economic journalist and media figure
- **Bahnam, Layal** – Program manager, Maharat Foundation
- **Jouni, Ibtisam** – Central Administration of Statistics (CAS)
- **Koubeissi, Elissar** – Raseef22; Producer of *2030*
- **Mhanna, Ayman** – Samir Kassir Eyes
- **Moukalled, Diana** – Daraj Media
- **Moufarrej, Elsy** – Union of Journalists in Lebanon
- **Nesser, Valentine** - Journalist, founder of Silat wasel
- **Yaghi, Mariam** – Sharika Wa Laken
- **Anonymous media professional** (requesting anonymity)

Disclaimer

This study was made possible through funding from the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) via the British Embassy in Beirut.

Suggested Citation

EL MAISS Amale, Women on Boards in Lebanon's Media Sector: Governance Structures, Power Dynamics, and Pathways to Decision-Making, LLWB, Lebanon, 2025.

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

- Examine how women participate in governance and board-level decision-making in Lebanon's media sector.
- Understand how governance structures, power dynamics, and the current crisis shape women's access to these spaces.

Data and Methods

- Online survey of media professionals (n = 66).
- Ten semi-structured key informant interviews with senior media actors and experts.
- Desk review of official statistics and sectoral literature (2019-2025).[1]

Research Scope and Limitations

Governance and ownership in Lebanon's media sector are politically sensitive and frequently opaque, particularly in institutions characterized by concentrated family ownership or party-affiliated control. Participation in both the survey and in-depth interviews required repeated outreach, as some professionals were reluctant to discuss internal governance arrangements linked to politically connected owners or financiers. This hesitancy itself reflects the structural opacity

[1] Central Administration of Statistics & International Labour Organization. (2022). *Lebanon follow-up labour force survey: January 2022*. https://www.ilo.org/publications/lebanon-follow-labour-force-survey-january-2022; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

examined in this study. Findings should therefore be interpreted as indicative of recurring patterns rather than statistically representative of all media institutions.

Key Findings

- Women are highly visible in media work but largely absent from boards and governing bodies where strategic and financial power is exercised.
- Based on the survey findings, 65.2% of respondents report that their organization has a board or governing committee, 22.7% report no board, and 12.1% are unsure, indicating uneven governance structures and limited transparency.
- Around two-thirds of surveyed professionals report that a board or governing committee exists, but governance arrangements are often opaque, informal, and subordinate to owners and financiers.
- Where women are present on boards, they usually hold one or two seats with limited influence over financial or strategic decisions.
- Appointment practices are relationship-based and politically or familially driven, rather than transparent or merit-based.
- Lebanon's prolonged crisis since 2019 has further centralized decision-making, reduced governance space, and made women's participation more tokenistic.[2]

Implications and Way Forward

- The problem is not a lack of qualified women but governance systems that restrict access to decision-making.
- Improving transparency in board structures and appointment processes is a precondition for more women on boards.
- Private-sector advertisers, sponsors, and corporate partners can play a leverage role by conditioning funding and partnerships on alignment with the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)[3], particularly on gender-responsive governance, leadership representation, and accountability mechanisms.
- Donors, regulators, and media organizations can use incentives, governance standards, and protective workplace measures to expand women's access to board-level roles.
- Media organizations should institutionalize clear anti-harassment policies, independent reporting mechanisms, and enforceable accountability frameworks. Weak or absent protection systems - combined with cultures of silence and reputational shielding - were identified as structural barriers constraining women's progression into leadership.[4]
- Concentrated family ownership, party-affiliated control, and gendered newsroom cultures further limit women's advancement, indicating that reform must address both governance structures and institutional culture.

Women are visible across Lebanon's media sector, including in editorial and managerial roles, yet remain underrepresented in formal governance and board-level decision-making.[5] The study finds

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[2] World Bank. (2023). *Lebanon Economic Monitor: The normalization of Crisis is no road to stabilization*. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099027005152320346

[3] UN Women & UN Global Compact. (2010). *Women's empowerment principles (WEPs): equality means business*. United Nations. issues_doc/human_rights/Resources/WEP_EMB_Booklet.pdf

[4] Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation; Maharat Foundation. (2025). *Holistic safety for women journalists in Lebanon*. Holistic Safety for Women Journalists - Lebanon | Maharat Foundation

[5] Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural

that exclusion is driven primarily by informal appointment mechanisms, male-dominated professional networks, and political patronage structures rather than by lack of qualifications or ambition among women.
The survey was disseminated through targeted outreach to media professionals across Lebanon, including journalists, editors, and senior media staff working in television, radio, print, digital platforms, agencies, and production entities. Distribution relied on professional networks and direct individual contact rather than institutional-level solicitation. A total of 66 valid responses were collected. Respondents represented online/digital platforms (33.3%), print/press (18.2%), television (15.2%), radio (6.1%), agencies (7.6%), and production/advertising entities (3.0%), as well as mixed-format organizations.

Drawing on official statistics, sectoral literature, a 2025 survey of media professionals (n = 66), and ten key informant interviews, this report demonstrates that women's exclusion from media leadership is not a leadership pipeline problem, but a governance problem. Lebanon continues to produce a strong pool of qualified women in media, yet the transition from operational leadership to institutional authority remains structurally blocked. Due to the individual-level distribution strategy and the possibility of multiple respondents from the same organization, the survey reflects professional representation across subsectors rather than a count of unique media institutions.

The methodology combines a mixed-methods design, selected to capture both structural governance patterns (through desk review and survey data) and lived decision-making dynamics (through key informant interviews with senior media executives, board members, and sector experts), ensuring triangulation across institutional, organizational, and experiential evidence.

Survey findings indicate that while approximately two-thirds of respondents report the existence of a board or governing committee, governance arrangements are frequently unclear, non-transparent, or effectively subordinate to owners and financiers. A notable share of respondents were unsure whether such a body exists at all, underscoring the opacity surrounding governance structures. Where women are present, representation is typically limited to one or two seats, often without meaningful influence over financial or strategic decisions. Appointment practices remain largely relationship-driven, shaped by personal networks, political affiliations, or family ownership rather than transparent or merit-based processes. Key informant interviews further confirm that governance in Lebanese media is often inseparable from ownership, with boards, where they exist, mirroring ownership and financing interests rather than exercising independent oversight.

Freedom; World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Women in News (WIN). (2024). *Leadership mapping report 2024.* https://womeninnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ENGLISH_WIN-Leadership-Mapping-Report-2024.pdf

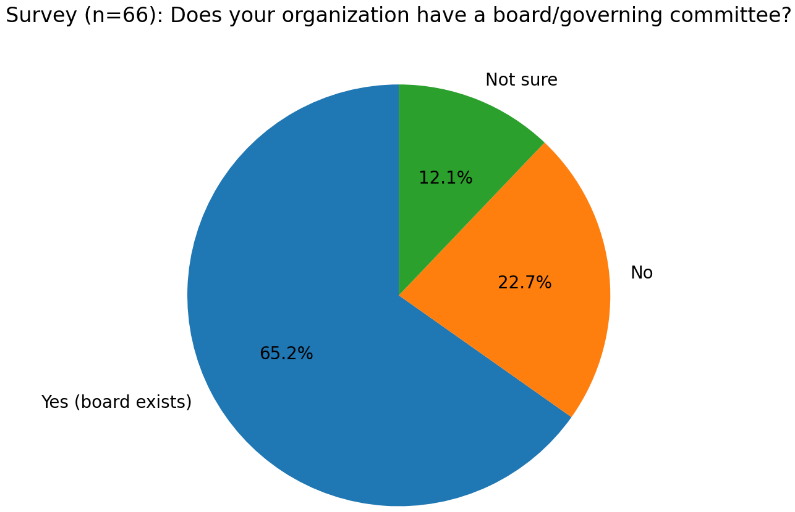

Figure 1. Existence of boards or governing committees (survey, n = 66).

Lebanon’s prolonged economic crisis since 2019 has further entrenched these dynamics. Financial collapse and institutional fragility have reinforced centralized, crisis-driven control, narrowed governance space, and reduced incentives for reform. In an environment of heightened economic stress, decision-making authority is increasingly concentrated within a small circle of owners and financiers, limiting opportunities for inclusive governance and diminishing the relevance of formal boards.

Key insights:

- Women’s underrepresentation on boards reflects structural exclusion rather than a lack of qualified candidates. Governance access is constrained by opaque appointment practices, owner-dominated authority, and weak institutionalization, despite the existence of a strong female talent pipeline. Governance dynamics are closely shaped by control over financial resources, including political patronage and donor dependency, which frequently influence board appointments and decision-making authority.[6]

- Key informant interviews indicate sectoral variation in governance schemes: television and large broadcast media are more likely to have formal boards, though often dominated by owners or financiers; radio stations and smaller outlets frequently operate with informal or centralized decision-making; digital media entities tend to rely on founder-led governance with minimal board structures; and media syndicates exhibit more formal governance on paper, but limited enforcement and weak gender inclusion in practice.

- Governance bodies often exist in form but not in function. In many institutions, board structures are opaque, mandates and membership are not publicly disclosed, and governance arrangements are sometimes unclear even to staff. Where boards do exist,

[6] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

they frequently operate as extensions of ownership and financing interests rather than as independent oversight mechanisms.

- Crisis conditions amplify gendered exclusion. Economic stress consolidates power within a narrow group, shrinking opportunities for inclusive governance and rendering women's participation more tokenistic and less influential.

The report concludes with actionable, context-sensitive recommendations targeting donors, policymakers, and media organizations. These focus on governance transparency, incentive-based reforms, institutional protections, and governance literacy, emphasizing feasible steps within Lebanon's political economy. Strengthening women's voice in media governance is not only a matter of gender equity; it is integral to enhancing media credibility, financial resilience, and public trust in a context of acute institutional fragility.

1. Introduction

Lebanon's media sector is widely recognized for its pluralism, professional talent, and historic role in shaping public discourse. Women are highly visible across this sector. They form the majority in journalism and communication classrooms and are strongly represented in newsrooms, increasingly taking on senior editorial positions. However, this visibility has not translated into proportional access to governance and board-level decision-making.[7] Media institutions in Lebanon remain largely governed by male-dominated networks and informal power arrangements, resulting in a stark gender gap at the highest decision-making levels.

This report examines women's representation on boards and governing bodies in Lebanon's media sector through a structural and institutional lens. Rather than focusing on individual women's leadership skills or ambitions, the analysis interrogates how governance authority is formed,

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[7] Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146 ; Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

exercised, and reproduced. Women's exclusion from decision-making is situated within broader dynamics of ownership concentration, informal appointment practices, political entanglements, and the ongoing economic crisis.[8] Four core research questions guide the study:

- **How are governance and board structures formed and exercised in Lebanese media institutions?**
- **What barriers prevent women from transitioning from leadership roles into formal decision-making authority?**
- **Which factors enable or facilitate women's access to governance roles?**
- **What policy and donor interventions are most likely to generate sustainable change in this area?**

The media sector occupies a strategic position in Lebanon's political and social landscape. Media institutions shape public discourse, influence political accountability, frame gender norms, and mediate public trust during periods of crisis. Governance structures within media organizations therefore carry implications that extend beyond internal management; they affect democratic representation, institutional credibility, and the visibility of women in decision-making spaces. Examining women's access to governance within media is particularly significant in Lebanon, where ownership concentration, political affiliation, and informal power networks strongly influence editorial and strategic control.[9]

The scope of analysis spans traditional and digital media organizations operating in Lebanon, including television, radio, print, and online platforms. The primary audience includes donors, policymakers, media executives, and civil society actors concerned with media development, governance reform, and gender equality. The objective is not to propose idealized governance models, but to identify feasible, context-sensitive pathways for reform grounded in Lebanon's political economy. In doing so, the study prioritizes actionable recommendations that account for local power dynamics and constraints, rather than aspirational targets divorced from on-the-ground realities.

2. Methodology

2.1 Methodological Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative evidence to capture both structural patterns of governance and the lived experiences of media professionals in Lebanon. This design enables an examination of how formal and informal governance arrangements shape women's access to decision-making authority within the media sector.

The quantitative component consisted of an online survey administered in early 2025 to media professionals operating across Lebanon. The survey was disseminated through targeted outreach to journalists, editors, and senior media staff across television, radio, print, digital platforms, agencies, and production entities, using professional networks and direct individual contact rather than institutional-level solicitation. A total of 66 valid responses were collected. Respondents represented online/digital platforms (33.3%), print/press (18.2%), television (15.2%), radio (6.1%),

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[8] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

[9] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

agencies (7.6%), production/advertising entities (3.0%), as well as mixed-format organizations. Due to the individual-level distribution strategy and the possibility of multiple respondents from the same organization, responses reflect professional representation across subsectors rather than a count of unique media institutions. Respondents self-identified their professional role, years of experience, and organizational context. The survey examined the existence and visibility of governance structures, board composition and gender representation, selection and appointment mechanisms, perceived barriers to leadership and governance access, organizational culture, and enabling factors for women's advancement. All numerical findings attributed to the survey are explicitly identified as such (survey n = 66).

The survey was disseminated through professional networks and targeted outreach within the media sector. Participation was voluntary. For the purposes of this study, a "board" or "governing committee" is defined broadly as any formal or informal body exercising recurring authority over strategic direction, financial oversight, senior appointments, or institutional accountability. This includes boards of directors, supervisory boards, steering committees, and owner-appointed advisory or governing groups. This inclusive definition reflects the reality that governance in Lebanon's media sector is often informal, personalized, and unevenly institutionalized. Participants were assured of anonymity. No identifying personal information was collected through the survey, and any optional follow-up contact details were stored separately and not used in the analysis.

The qualitative component comprised ten semi-structured key informant interviews conducted in 2025 with individuals holding senior or influential positions within the media and related ecosystems. Interviewees included veteran journalists, editors-in-chief, founders of independent media outlets, media rights advocates, and leaders within feminist civil society organizations. Interviews were conducted in person or via secure teleconferencing platforms and followed a semi-structured guide aligned with the study's research questions. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, allowing for deeper exploration of governance dynamics, power relationships, ownership structures, and institutional norms that could not be fully captured through the survey alone. All interviewees were anonymized, and quotations are presented without identifiers and used selectively to illustrate recurring structural patterns rather than individual opinions.

A comprehensive desk review complemented the primary data collection. This review integrated official statistics from the Central Administration of Statistics and the International Labour Organization, reports and datasets from United Nations agencies, peer-reviewed academic research, and recognized sectoral studies published between 2019 and 2025.[10] These sources provided essential context on Lebanon's demographic and labor market dynamics, the political economy of the media sector, gender disparities in leadership, and relevant policy and regulatory frameworks. Findings were triangulated across survey data, key informant interviews, and desk review sources to enhance internal consistency and analytical robustness. The desk review also incorporated sector-specific analyses and monitoring reports produced by the May Chidiac Foundation for Media, Maharat Foundation, SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation, Daraj, Sharika wa Laken, and Sifr, particularly where relevant to media governance, gender dynamics, funding structures, and freedom of expression.[11]

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[10] Central Administration of Statistics & International Labour Organization. (2022). *Lebanon follow-up labour force survey: January 2022*. https://www.ilo.org/publications/lebanon-follow-labour-force-survey-january-2022; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

[11] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/; Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146; Moubarak, N. (2024). *The*

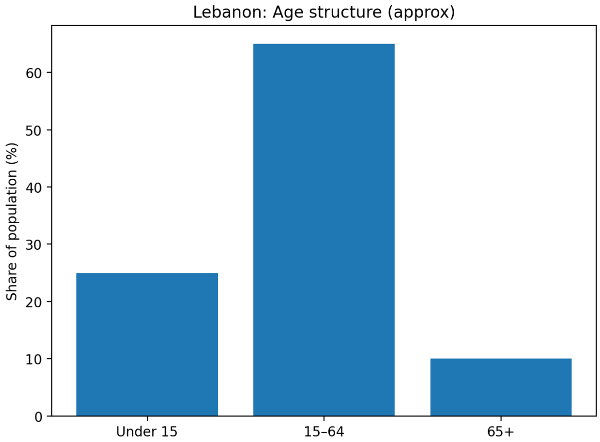

Figure 3. Age structure of the population in Lebanon. (latest available estimates)

Figure 3 presents the age structure of the population in Lebanon, providing demographic context relevant to labor market participation, leadership pipelines, and the longer-term governance dynamics shaping access to decision-making roles.

2.2 Limitations

Governance and ownership in Lebanon's media sector are politically sensitive and frequently opaque. Despite assurances of anonymity, participation in both the survey and in-depth interviews required repeated outreach, as several media professionals were hesitant to discuss internal governance arrangements linked to politically connected owners, funders, or power brokers. A number of potential participants declined involvement altogether due to concerns over reputational or professional risk. In addition, governance structures are often informal, undocumented, or fluid, limiting opportunities for external verification. These constraints are analytically relevant, as they reflect the very lack of transparency and institutionalization that this study seeks to examine rather than representing purely methodological shortcomings.

The original research design included focus group discussions to validate and expand survey findings. During implementation, confidentiality concerns and the sensitivity of discussing governance and ownership in group settings significantly reduced feasibility. The design was therefore adapted to prioritize one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which provided safer conditions for candid disclosure and richer insight into informal governance mechanisms and gendered experiences within media organizations.

The survey was disseminated to more than 250 media professionals across Lebanon through repeated outreach efforts and direct individual contact. Despite these efforts, 66 valid responses were obtained. Similarly, 25 key informant interview requests were issued, resulting in the interviews documented in the acknowledgments. Participation levels remained constrained despite assurances of full anonymity for survey respondents and the option of anonymity for interviewees.

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struggle of women journalists in Lebanon. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom; Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation; Maharat Foundation. (2025). *Holistic safety for women journalists in Lebanon*. Holistic Safety for Women Journalists - Lebanon | Maharat Foundation

This pattern of limited engagement reflects the sensitivity surrounding governance, ownership structures, and political affiliations within the media sector.

While the sample size is modest, the combination of quantitative survey data, qualitative interviews, and triangulation with secondary sources provides a credible basis for identifying prevalent patterns and structural dynamics. Findings should be interpreted as indicative of recurring trends within the sector rather than statistically representative of all media organizations operating in Lebanon.

3. Context: Gender, Media, and Political Economy in Lebanon

Understanding women's absence from media boards requires situating the issue within Lebanon's broader political economy and gender context. In recent years, overlapping economic, political, and social crises have profoundly reshaped the labour market and institutional landscape, deepening existing gender inequalities. The media sector both reflects and reinforces these wider dynamics.

In this report, *governance* refers to the formal and informal structures through which strategic authority, financial oversight, and decision-making power are exercised within media organizations. This includes ownership arrangements, boards of directors or governing committees, senior executive authority, and the formal and informal rules that shape accountability and control. Governance is analytically distinct from editorial leadership or day-to-day management, as it concerns influence over long-term strategy, resource allocation, and institutional direction. In Lebanon's media sector, governance structures are strongly shaped by ownership concentration, political affiliation, and crisis-driven informality, rendering access to governance positions a critical site of power.

3.1 Demographic Profile and Population Dynamics

Lebanon's demographic profile is difficult to measure precisely due to the absence of an official census since 1932 and the combined effects of displacement and crisis-driven emigration. Current estimates place the resident population at approximately 5.8–5.9 million as of mid-2025.[12] Women constitute a slight majority of residents (approximately 51–52 percent).[13] This gender balance reflects long-term demographic patterns as well as gender-differentiated migration dynamics, particularly the emigration of working-age men during the economic crisis.[14]

Lebanon is highly urbanized: more than four-fifths of the population resides in urban areas, with strong concentration in Greater Beirut and coastal cities.[15] Rural areas account for a smaller and gradually declining share, reflecting long-term rural-to-urban migration and uneven regional development. The country's age structure remains relatively young, with a large working-age cohort; however, prolonged economic contraction, large-scale emigration, and labor market exit have reduced effective workforce participation and weakened leadership pipelines.[16] Population

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[12] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2025). *World urbanization prospects 2025: Summary of results* (UN DESA/POP/2025/TR/No. 12). United Nations. https://desapublications.un.org/publications/world-urbanization-prospects-2025-summary-results

[16] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

dynamics over the past decade have been particularly volatile, shaped by large displacement flows and intensified outward migration since 2019.[17] While population totals remain contested due to methodological and political constraints, international agencies consistently identify emigration, displacement, and labor force exit as key factors reshaping Lebanon's demographic and employment structure, with differentiated impacts by gender and age.[18]

While demographic data does not directly measure media governance, it provides structural context for understanding leadership pipelines and gender representation in decision-making roles. A population in which women constitute a slight majority yet remain underrepresented in formal authority positions raises important questions about institutional access and power distribution.

3.2 Labour Force Participation and Gender Inequality

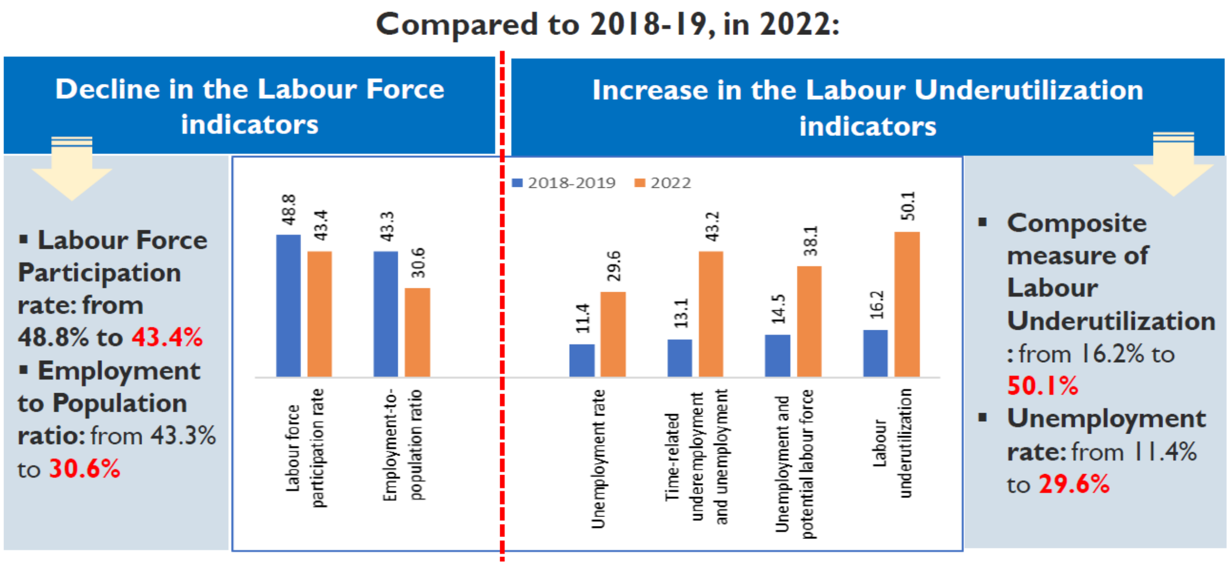

Figure 4. Labor Force Participation by Gender (CAS–ILO LFS 2022).

Lebanon's labor market exhibits a pronounced gender gap in participation. In 2022, overall labor force participation among adults aged 15+ stood at approximately 43%, with male participation around 66% compared to 22% for females (CAS–ILO LFS 2022). These structural disparities reflect long-standing inequalities in care responsibilities, occupational segregation, and access to stable employment.

Although these statistics are not media-specific, they shape the broader institutional environment within which media organizations operate. Limited female participation in formal employment constrains career continuity, seniority accumulation, and access to professional networks, all of which are critical for progression into governance roles. In sectors where decision-making already relies on informal networks, such structural inequalities further narrow women's pathways to board-level authority.

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[17] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/; World Bank. (2023). *Lebanon Economic Monitor: The normalization of crisis is no road to stabilization*. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099027005152320346

[18] Ibid.

3.3 Informality, Income Insecurity, and Migration Pressure

The economic collapse has also been accompanied by a sharp expansion in informal employment nationwide. According to the CAS–ILO Labour Force Survey (2022), informal employment increased from 54.9% in 2018–2019 to 62.4% in 2022. Employment within the informal sector itself rose from 35.2% to 48.3% over the same period.

While these figures are not media-specific, key informant interviews confirm parallel dynamics within the media sector. Many journalists and media professionals are now engaged on short-term, freelance, or project-based contracts rather than full-time employment, as media institutions reduce fixed costs and avoid long-term obligations.

This shift toward employment precarity has direct governance implications. Informal or contractual workers are less likely to accumulate institutional capital, seniority, and internal influence, reducing their proximity to strategic decision-making spaces. In a sector where board appointments are already informal and network-driven, professional precarity further narrows women's pathways to executive and governance roles.

3.4 Media Sector Structure and Political Economy

Lebanon's media sector is characterized by plurality, fragmentation, and politicization. According to national licensing and registry data compiled by Media Ownership Monitor Lebanon, the country hosts more than 130 registered media outlets across television, radio, print, and digital platforms.[19] Registration, however, does not equate to active operation or financial sustainability, particularly in the post-crisis context.
While national registries provide information on the number of licensed media outlets, they do not systematically document governance structures such as the existence, composition, or activity of boards. Based on survey findings, approximately two-thirds of respondents reported that their organization has a board or governing body; however, this evidence is indicative rather than representative of all registered outlets. Due to the individual-level nature of the survey and the possibility of multiple respondents from the same organization, the study does not aggregate absolute numbers of board members or women's representation at the board level across the sector. Key informant interviews further indicate that board activity varies considerably, with some boards functioning primarily in form rather than substance, but do not allow for systematic classification of boards as active or dormant.

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[19] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

Notably, nearly 90% of survey respondents report more than five years of professional experience in the media sector, including 36.4% with over 16 years of experience. Despite this seniority, 12% reported not knowing whether their organization has a board or governing body. This suggests that governance visibility and institutional transparency remain uneven even among experienced media professionals, reinforcing the opacity of governance arrangements in parts of the sector.

Not all media outlets in Lebanon are affiliated with professional syndicates or unions. Membership in such bodies is voluntary and varies by media type, with private television channels, digital media platforms, and donor-funded outlets frequently operating outside collective professional structures.[20] Professional bodies such as the Union of Journalists in Lebanon (UJEB) and related syndicates primarily play a representational and advocacy role for media workers, including journalists and editors.[21] While these bodies maintain internal leadership or executive committees, they do not exercise formal authority over media ownership, board appointments, or strategic and financial decision-making within media organizations, which remains largely concentrated at the level of owners and financiers.[22]

The vast majority of media outlets are privately owned. Apart from state-run Tele Liban and Radio Lebanon, most major television channels, radio stations, and newspapers are controlled by private actors, often with explicit political affiliations.[23] Ownership concentration among politically connected families and business elites has shaped editorial lines, funding structures, and governance arrangements.[24]
This ownership structure has direct implications for governance access, as appointment authority and strategic oversight are frequently concentrated within ownership circles rather than institutionalized through transparent or competitive nomination mechanisms.

Since 2019, the collapse of advertising revenues has severely undermined media sustainability. Media institutions have increasingly relied on political patronage, donor funding, and informal financing channels, reinforcing short-term survival strategies over institutional development.[25] Governance structures reflect this political economy: boards, where they exist, frequently function as extensions of ownership rather than independent oversight bodies, with strategic decision-

[20] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding; Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[21] Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146

[22] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding; Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[23] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[24] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding; Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[25] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

making authority concentrated among a narrow group of actors.[26] In such a context, boards often operate as extensions of ownership strategy rather than as independent oversight bodies, limiting the scope for diversity-oriented reform without broader institutional incentives or regulatory frameworks.

Lebanon's media ecosystem also includes professional syndicates and unions that represent journalists, editors, and media owners, whose role in governance is primarily representational rather than institutional. The main bodies include the Press Syndicate (Naqabet al-Sahafe), the Syndicate of Editors (Naqabet al-Moharririn), and the Union of Journalists. All three maintain formal governing boards or executive committees; however, women's representation remains uneven. At the time of data collection, women held 3 out of 18 seats on the Press Syndicate board and 3 out of 12 seats on the Editors' Syndicate board, based on publicly available information from the respective syndicates' official websites.[27] Women held 7 out of 9 seats on the governing board within the Union of Journalists, based on key informant interview evidence . This board exercises representative and professional functions rather than ownership-linked governance authority.

3.5 Gender Dynamics in Media Employment

Despite women's strong presence in media education (encompassing university programs, journalism schools, and professional media training) and entry-level roles, a classic "broken ladder" phenomenon is observed in career progression.[28] Women enter journalism and media in large numbers but face structural barriers to retention and advancement, especially at mid-career and senior levels.[29] They are more likely to occupy junior reporter, presenter, or content production roles, while men dominate technical fields, management, finance, and executive positions in media.[30] Numerous studies document that women in Lebanese media encounter a range of obstacles over time: precarious contracts and pay gaps, exclusion from the old-boy networks that often dictate promotions, and a hostile work environment that can include harassment or online trolling.[31] These factors contribute to higher attrition rates among women journalists, as many eventually leave the sector or stagnate in lower positions.[32] Notably, while many media organizations publicly endorse gender equality or have women-friendly policies on paper, these are

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[26] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding; Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[27] Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146; Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

[28] Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation; Maharat Foundation. (2025). *Holistic safety for women journalists in Lebanon*. Holistic Safety for Women Journalists - Lebanon | Maharat Foundation

[32] Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation

often not backed by enforcement or accountability mechanisms.[33] limiting their impact on actual decision-making outcomes.

Paradoxically, Lebanon excels in producing qualified female media professionals. Women consistently make up a clear majority of students in journalism and communication programs, and female tertiary education enrollment overall exceeds that of males.[34] In fact, Lebanon's female education advantage (with a gender parity index above 1.0 for higher education) suggests no shortage of skilled women entering the media field.[35] Furthermore, the country has fared relatively well compared to many Arab peers in terms of women rising to editorial leadership (e.g. as newsroom managers or editors-in-chief of publications).[36] Yet, this success in operational leadership has not been mirrored in governance or ownership roles. Women remain a minority among media executives, and even fewer have influence over boards or business decisions. The disconnect between educational/professional preparation and ultimate leadership outcomes highlights the limits of a meritocratic narrative. It's not a lack of talent or ambition holding women back, but rather structural exclusion at the top levels of institutions.[37]

3.6 Education, the Pipeline, and the Limits of Meritocracy

Education data reveals a strong and persistent female pipeline into media-related fields. Women constitute a clear majority of students enrolled in journalism and communication programs in Lebanese universities, and women's overall participation in tertiary education exceeds that of men, with a gender parity index above one.[38]

However, this educational advantage does not translate into proportional employment, leadership, or governance outcomes. While women dominate media classrooms, they represent a minority of working journalists and an even smaller share of senior executives and board members. This disconnect challenges meritocratic narratives and highlights structural exclusion at the institutional level rather than deficits in skills or qualifications.

Comparable patterns are observed in ICT and STEM fields, where women's educational participation exceeds workforce representation but remains constrained in technical and decision-making roles, reinforcing broader gendered power asymmetries.[39]

3.7 Women in Leadership and Governance

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[33] Chebaro, A. (2024). *Gender and media: Commitments of media organizations to gender equality*. Maharat Foundation. https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2589/gender-and-media-commitments-of-media-organizations-to-gender-equality.pdf

[34] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

[35] UN Women. (2024). *Gender statistical profile: Lebanon (June 2024)*. https://lebanon.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsp_june_2024.pdf

[36] World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Women in News (WIN). (2024). *Leadership mapping report 2024.* https://womeninnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ENGLISH_WIN-Leadership-Mapping-Report-2024.pdf

[37] Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

[38] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/; UNESCO. (2021, November 2). *Improving the image of women in Lebanese media remains a priority*. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/improving-image-women-lebanese-media-remains-priority

[39] Balesi, M. (2023, December 28). *"Too bossy": Understanding gender biases in STEM*. SMEX. https://smex.org/understanding-gender-biases-in-stem/

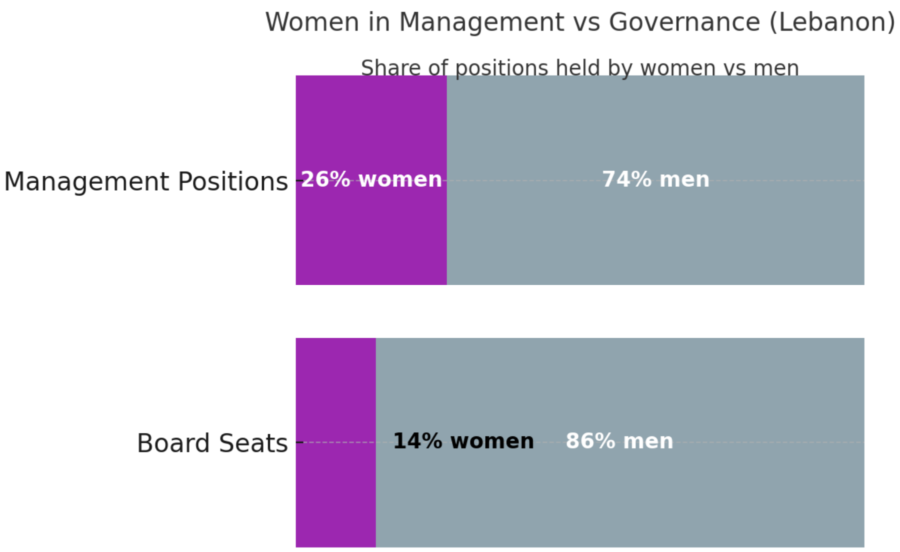

Figure 8. Women in management vs women on boards (desk review synthesis). Across sectors, women hold approximately 26–27 percent of managerial positions in Lebanon.[40] Representation drops sharply at board level, where women occupy roughly 14 percent of private-sector board seats. Although many firms report having at least one woman on their board, women are often the sole female member, which constrains substantive influence and voting power.[41]

Within the media sector, Lebanon compares relatively well to other countries in the Arab region in terms of women's presence in senior editorial roles.[42] Yet this visibility does not translate into ownership-linked governance or business management positions. Strategic and financial authority remains overwhelmingly male, reinforcing a persistent divide between editorial leadership and institutional control. According to the WAN-IFRA Leadership Mapping Report 2024,[43] women now hold about 30% of senior editorial leadership positions (e.g., editor-in-chief, editorial director) in the Arab region, up from about 21% in 2022. The same report shows that women hold approximately 15% of business leadership roles in the Arab region.[44]

Unlike the broader private sector, there is no publicly available, centralized dataset documenting women's representation in governance or board positions across Lebanon's media institutions.[45] Neither national statistical agencies nor sectoral regulatory bodies publish consolidated data on media board composition. Interview evidence further confirms that governance structures within media organizations are frequently opaque, ownership-linked, and informally structured, limiting public disclosure of leadership composition. As a result, sector-wide percentages comparable to national private-sector data are not available for media governance. Survey findings presented in

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[40] UN Women. (2024). *Gender statistical profile: Lebanon (June 2024)*. https://lebanon.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsp_june_2024.pdf

[41] Byblos Bank Group, Economic Research & Analysis Department. (2019). *Lebanon this week 575: Half of Lebanese firms have females on boards of directors*. https://www.byblosbank.com/common/economic-research-new/lebanon-this-week/lebanon-this-week-575/half-of-lebanese-firms-have-females-on-boards-of-directors

[42] World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), Women in News (WIN). (2024). *Leadership mapping report 2024.* https://womeninnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ENGLISH_WIN-Leadership-Mapping-Report-2024.pdf

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/; Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146

this study therefore provide indicative rather than comprehensive estimates of women's representation on media boards. Based on survey responses providing numerical board data, women accounted for 23.8% of reported board seats; however, this should not be interpreted as sector-wide representation due to the limited and self-reported nature of the data.

Participation in governance also entails heightened exposure to online abuse, hate speech, and reputational attacks, particularly in digital media environments. Reviews of platform policies and organizational safeguards suggest that protection mechanisms remain weak and unevenly enforced, increasing risks for women in visible leadership and governance roles and, in turn, discouraging sustained participation at decision-making levels.[46] Compared to emerging global norms, where women hold approximately 28.8% of senior leadership roles worldwide, according to the *World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2025*,[47] Lebanon's private-sector representation remains below these benchmarks, particularly at ownership-linked governance levels.

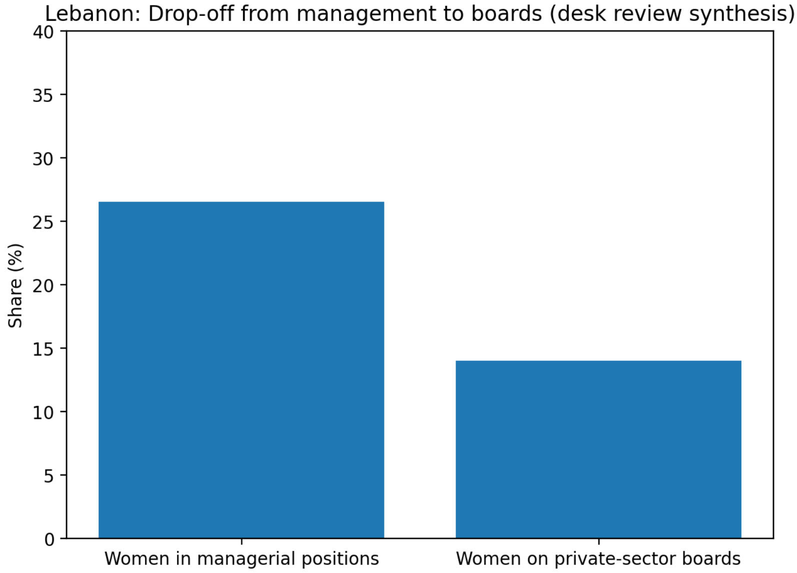

Figure 9. Women in Managerial Positions versus Women on Private-Sector Boards in Lebanon (%). (Desk Review Synthesis)

3.8 Policy and Legal Frameworks

Lebanon's policy environment includes several frameworks relevant to gender equality and media governance. The National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2022–2030) sets objectives on women's economic empowerment and participation in decision-making, supported by a multi-year action plan.[48] Lebanon has also adopted a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2024–2026), which recognizes the media as a key actor in shaping public discourse and social norms.[49]

However, media-specific legislation remains outdated. The Press Law (1962) and the Audiovisual Media Law (1994) do not include provisions on gender equality, governance transparency, or board

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[46] Ranking Digital Rights, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2023). *Hate speech policies of social media platforms and implications for media freedom*. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/documents/bo_filemanager/RDR-SKF-SM-Hate-Speech-Policies.pdf

[47] World Economic Forum. (2025). *Global gender gap report 2025*. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf?

[48] National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). (2023). *National strategy for women in Lebanon 2022–2030*. https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/National-Strategy-for-Women-in-Lebanon-2022-2030-I-EnglishI-Final.pdf

[49] National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). (2024). *National strategy for women in Lebanon: National action plan 2024–2026*. https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/National-Strategy-for-Women-in-Lebanon_National-Action-Plan-2024-2026.pdf

representation. While labour legislation formally prohibits discrimination, enforcement remains limited in practice. As a result, progress on gender equality in media governance continues to depend largely on voluntary initiatives and donor-supported programming rather than binding regulatory requirements.[50]

The absence of binding legal requirements regarding board composition, governance transparency, or gender representation in media institutions reinforces reliance on voluntary commitments rather than enforceable standards. This regulatory gap is central to understanding the persistence of gender imbalance in media governance structures.

3.9 Professional Syndicates and Representative Governance Bodies

Lebanon's media sector includes several professional representative bodies, notably the Press Syndicate, the Syndicate of Editors, and the Union of Journalists. These entities perform regulatory, professional, and advocacy functions and operate through elected governing boards or executive committees.

At the time of data collection, women held 3 out of 18 seats (16.7%) on the Press Syndicate board and 3 out of 12 seats (25%) on the Syndicate of Editors board.[51] Jointly, women accounted for 20% of seats across both bodies (6 out of 30 seats). In contrast, women held 7 out of 9 seats (77.8%) within the Union of Journalists, based on key informant interview evidence. However, unlike ownership-linked boards of media institutions, these bodies exercise representative and professional functions rather than direct authority over financial governance or strategic ownership decisions.

The distinction is analytically important. While professional syndicates demonstrate formal governance structures with publicly accessible board composition, ownership-linked governance within media outlets remains significantly less transparent.[52] As such, representation within syndicates does not necessarily translate into influence over institutional control, capital allocation, or strategic direction within media enterprises.

4. Governance Structures in Lebanese Media: Formation and Power Dynamics

Governance arrangements in Lebanon's media sector tend to be informal, personalized, and intertwined with ownership. The first research question asks how board structures are formed and exercised in media institutions. Survey and interview data reveal a pattern: formal boards or committees often exist on paper, but real power usually resides elsewhere. primarily with owners or tight-knit executive cliques.

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[50] Lebanon. (1962). *Press law*.; Lebanon. (1994). *Audiovisual Media Law.*

[51] Jarbouh, W., & Safieddine, K. (2022). *Journalists' socio-economic rights in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. https://www.skeyesmedia.org/en/News/Reports/19-07-2022/10146; Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

[52] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/; Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

4.1 Prevalence and Composition of Boards: According to the survey, a majority of media professionals report that their organization has some form of board of directors or governing committee. About 65.2% of respondents indicated that a board or committee exists, suggesting that in principle, two-thirds of media outlets have a governance body beyond day-to-day management. However, this leaves a significant minority where no board is in place. 22.7% said their organization has no board. implying that decision-making in those outlets is likely concentrated in the hands of an individual owner or a small management team. The remaining 12.1% of respondents were unsure whether a board exists at all. This uncertainty is telling: it indicates that even if a board formally exists, it may be so invisible or inactive that staff are not aware of it. Limited transparency about governance structures within organizations suggests that if boards do operate, they do so with little communication or accountability to the broader staff. In short, many boards exist in name but not necessarily as a visible, functional part of the institution's life.

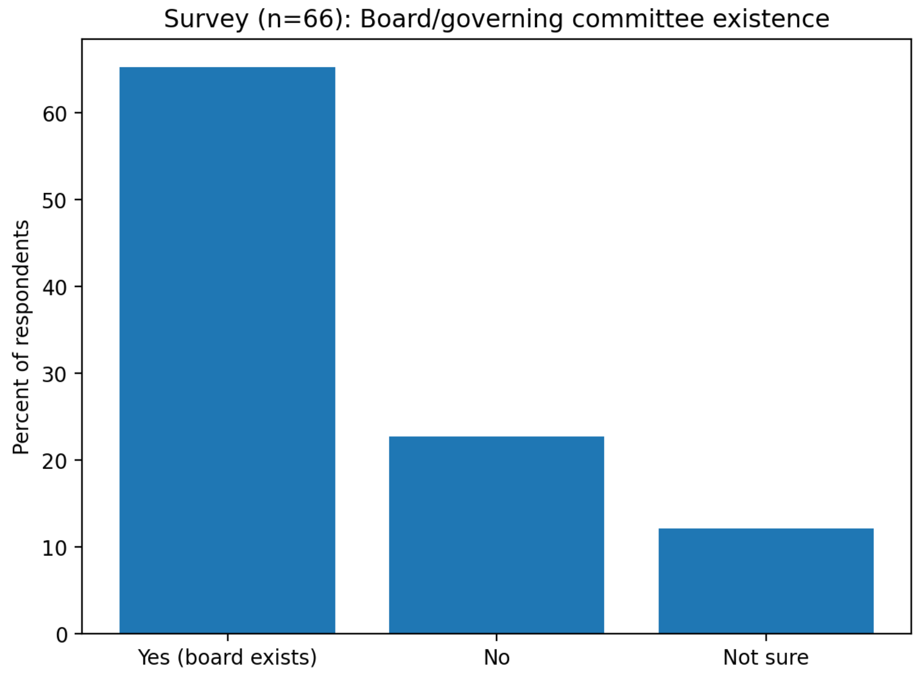

Figure 10. Awareness of governance structures among respondents (survey, n = 66).

Among those organizations that do have boards, the size and gender composition of these boards vary, but women's presence is generally limited. Based on survey responses providing numerical information on board composition, women account for 23.8% of reported board seats overall. Despite this aggregate figure, respondents and interviewees described many boards as having only "one or two female members at most." Fully gender-balanced boards were virtually nonexistent in the sample.[53] In fact, several respondents noted that if a woman is on the board, she is often the lone woman in that group; a token presence rather than part of a gender-diverse leadership team. Moreover, having women on a board does not automatically translate into influence: both survey comments and interviews emphasized that women board members are frequently sidelined to less strategic roles. For example, a woman may be given a seat to signal inclusivity or fulfill a public

[53] UN Women. (2024). *Gender statistical profile: Lebanon (June 2024)*. https://lebanon.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/gsp_june_2024.pdf

relations objective, while financial and strategic decisions continue to be shaped through informal networks dominated by male power brokers. This pattern aligns with regional findings indicating that nominal inclusion does not necessarily equate to substantive influence, particularly in contexts where boards function in a ceremonial or advisory capacity.

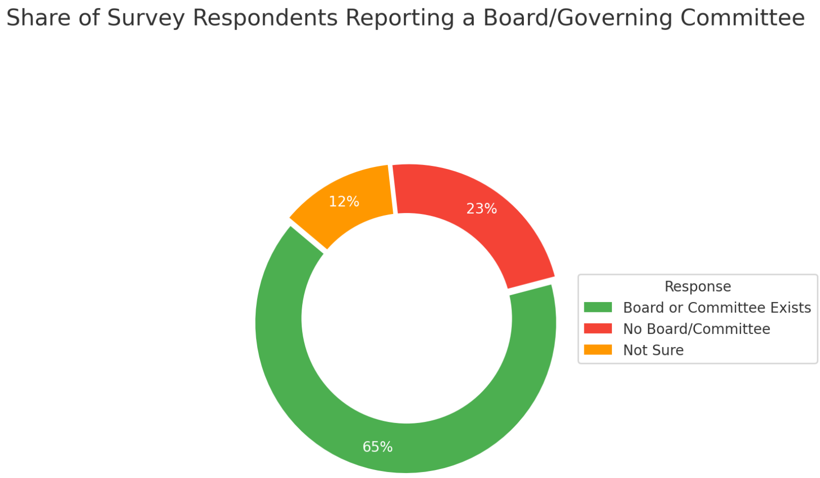

Figure 11. Share of Survey Respondents Reporting to a Board/Governing Committee. (Survey)

Survey respondents identified structural rather than capability-related barriers to women's access to governance roles. The most frequently cited obstacles were male-dominated professional networks (56.1%), gender stereotypes and bias (51.5%), and political or sectarian influence in appointments (47.0%). A further 34.8% pointed to lack of transparency in board selection processes. These findings reinforce the interpretation that exclusion operates through informal networks and opaque governance arrangements rather than through a shortage of qualified women.

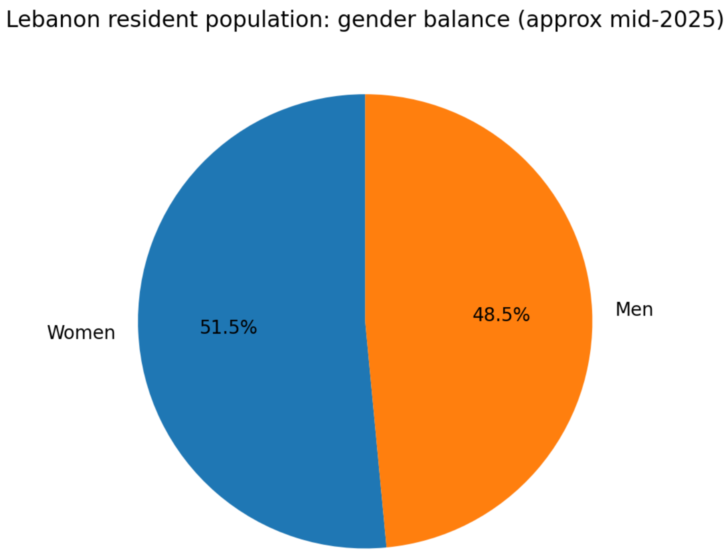

Figure 12. Gender composition of Lebanon's resident population. (latest available estimates)

4.2 Appointment Mechanisms and Informal Power: A critical aspect of how governance is exercised is *how board members are selected*. Evidence from the survey and key informant interviews indicates that board selection processes in Lebanese media are overwhelmingly informal and non-transparent. The survey asked respondents to identify how board members are typically chosen in their organization. The most common responses included direct appointments by owners or founding families, personal networks/referrals, and politically mediated nominations.[54]

Survey responses confirm the dominance of ownership-linked pathways in board selection. Half of respondents (50.0%) reported that board members are typically appointed directly by owners or founding families. By contrast, only 20.7% indicated election-based processes. Family ties or inheritance were explicitly cited by 17.2% of respondents, while 39.7% referred to selection based on external professional expertise. These patterns illustrate the centrality of ownership networks in shaping access to governance roles.

The predominance of owner-appointed pathways relative to election-based mechanisms underscores the concentration of governance authority within ownership circles rather than institutionalized nomination systems. In such a context, boards often operate as extensions of ownership strategy rather than as independent oversight bodies. This concentration of appointment authority limits the scope for diversity-oriented reform in the absence of broader institutional incentives, regulatory standards, or governance frameworks.

These findings were reinforced by interview evidence and are consistent with desk research on concentrated media ownership structures in Lebanon. Hardly any respondents reported formal election processes, open calls for qualified candidates, or transparent criteria for board appointments. Terms like *"nepotism," "cronyism,"* or *"friends and family"* were used by some interviewees to describe board composition. In practice, this means that to get on a media board in Lebanon, *who you know* (and your family or political connections) often matters far more than *what you know*. Such informal appointment practices naturally favor men, who dominate the traditional networks of media financiers, political patrons, and senior executives. As one interviewee put it, *"Decisions are made through personal relationships and closed-door deals. These spaces have historically been male domains. Women simply aren't part of the club."*

Key informant interviews underscored that governance in Lebanese media is effectively an extension of ownership. Even when a board exists, it often functions as an advisory panel with no real authority independent of the owner or majority shareholder. Several interviewees noted that owners often hand-pick board members (who may include relatives, loyal employees, or political allies) precisely to ensure the board will *not* challenge their decisions.[55] In this sense, formal governance structures are sometimes maintained only as façades to satisfy legal requirements or donor expectations, while behind the scenes the owner or CEO makes all major calls. This phenomenon isn't unique to the media. It reflects Lebanon's wider corporate culture, where family-owned businesses dominate. But its effect is pronounced in a sector as politicized as media, where owners are often high-profile political figures or businessmen with strong views on editorial direction.

For women, this reality means that standard pathways to board membership (like rising through the ranks or having professional expertise) are short-circuited. It is not a pipeline problem. Women attain senior roles in content production and management, but they encounter structural barriers at the governance level. As a result, boards end up replicating the existing power hierarchy: they

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[54] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

[55] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/; World Bank. (2023). *Lebanon Economic Monitor: The normalization of crisis is no road to stabilization*. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099027005152320346

are filled with insiders who are usually male and from the same political/sectarian circles or families as the owners. One interviewee bluntly stated, *"Governance here is ownership. If you're not part of the owner's inner circle, no degree of experience will get you onto the board."* This conflation of governance with ownership control is a defining feature of Lebanese media institutions and a key structural reason why women remain marginal in governance.

4.3 Visibility and Transparency of Governance:

Another striking finding is the opacity surrounding boards. As mentioned, 12% of surveyed media professionals did not know whether their company had a board (survey). This suggests that, in many organizations, boards—if they exist—operate at a remove from regular staff and day-to-day operations. They may meet infrequently or informally, and their composition or decisions are not communicated internally. This lack of visibility also translates into unclear growth and career pathways, as employees have little understanding of how leadership progression occurs, what criteria govern advancement, or whether board-level roles are attainable. The absence of internal transparency means staff, including potential women leaders, have no clear sense of how one might join a board or who holds decision-making authority. From a governance perspective, this opacity undermines accountability: when a board's role is invisible, it cannot function as a conduit for staff concerns or as an effective oversight mechanism. From a gender perspective, it reinforces exclusionary dynamics, as decisions remain concentrated among a narrow group, largely insulated from scrutiny or broader participation.

The survey indicated variation by type of media outlet. Independent digital media platforms—many of which are relatively new and donor-funded—were more likely to report the absence of a formal board or the presence of highly ad hoc governance arrangements, whereas larger legacy media organizations (such as long-established television stations or newspapers) more often reported having boards that closely mirror ownership structures.[56] In the former case, startups frequently operate through flat hierarchies or founder-led decision-making, sometimes supplemented by informal advisory networks. In the latter case, legacy outlets may maintain boards largely for corporate or legal formality; these boards are commonly family-led and embedded within long-standing political, regional, or familial networks, often comprising the owner, close relatives, and a small circle of trusted associates. Such arrangements are rarely independent or diverse. Across both models, women's representation remains limited: independent outlets may include women in operational leadership but lack formal governance structures through which women can access oversight roles, while legacy outlets may include a token woman on the board without conferring substantive decision-making authority.[57]

In summary, governance structures in Lebanese media are characterized by formality in appearance but informality in substance. Boards exist in many organizations, but their formation is dictated by ownership and personal networks. The next section will delve into how these governance patterns translate into specific barriers for women's advancement to board positions.

5. Barriers to Women's Access: Opaque Systems, Crisis, and Culture

The second research question examines the barriers that prevent women from moving from operational leadership into formal governance roles. The evidence points to a convergence of factors. structural, economic, and cultural. that collectively erect a glass ceiling atop the media

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[56] Ibid.; Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

[57] Moubarak, N. (2024). *The struggle of women journalists in Lebanon*. SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Samir Kassir Foundation. The Struggles of Women Journalists in Lebanon | | Reports | News | Skeyes Media | Center for Media and Cultural Freedom

sector. In Lebanon's context, informality itself is a gendered barrier, compounded by the shocks of crisis and persistent patriarchal norms.

5.1 Informal Governance and Network Exclusion: The informality of governance processes
The informality of governance processes emerged as the most significant structural barrier to women's inclusion on boards. Survey results clearly demonstrate that exclusion is rooted primarily in networked power structures rather than in women's qualifications.

When asked to identify the main barriers limiting women's access to leadership or board positions (n = 66), 56.1% of respondents cited male-dominated professional networks as a primary obstacle. Closely following, 51.5% identified gender stereotypes and bias, and 47.0% pointed to political or sectarian influence in appointments. A further 34.8% highlighted lack of transparency in board selection processes.

These findings confirm that governance exclusion operates through interconnected structural mechanisms: closed male networks, politicized patronage systems, and opaque appointment practices. By contrast, factors often framed as "pipeline issues" were cited far less frequently. Only 7.6% identified limited mentorship or training opportunities as a major barrier, and 10.6% referenced harassment or unsafe work environments. Work–life balance constraints were cited by 21.2%, suggesting that institutional power dynamics outweigh personal or logistical factors in shaping women's board access.

The data reinforces a central conclusion of this study: women's underrepresentation on media boards is not driven primarily by lack of capacity or ambition. It is structurally embedded in how governance authority is distributed and reproduced through informal networks and political patronage.

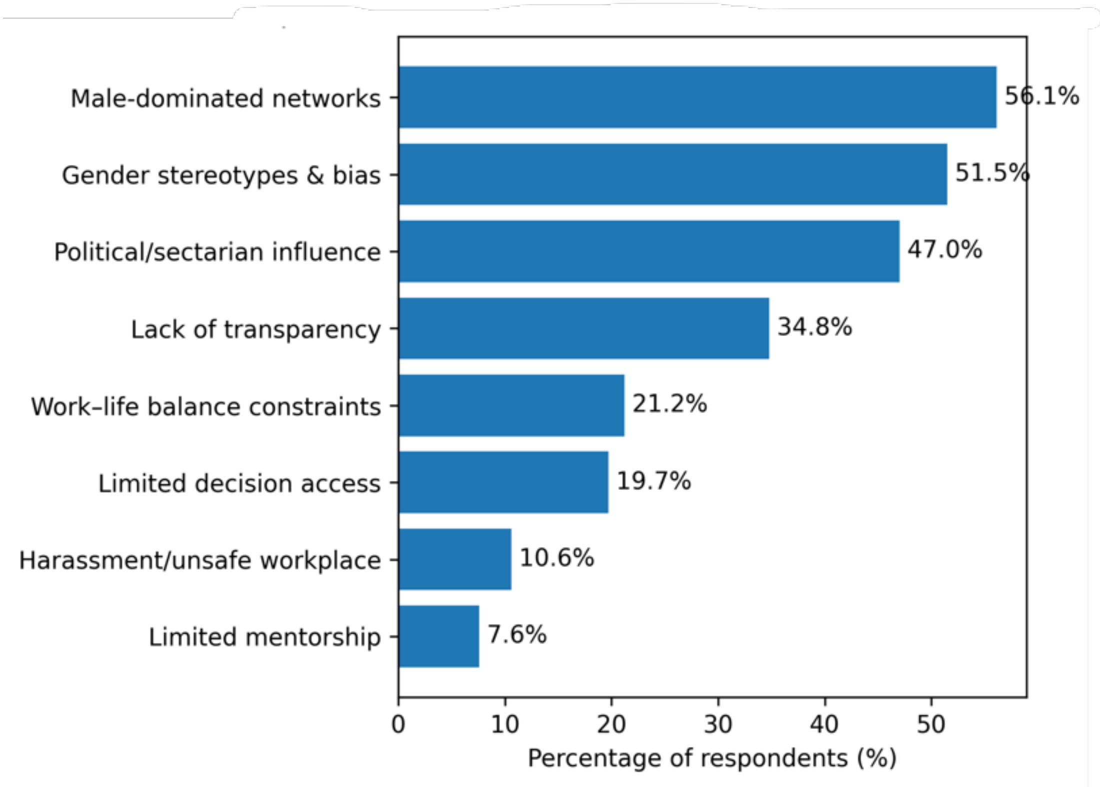

Figure 13. Main Barriers Limiting Women's Access to Media Board Positions (Survey, n = 66).

In practice, if board seats are filled by invitation only, and those invitations are extended within a closed circle of trust, women face a catch-22. Even highly competent women might not be part of those circles due to historical exclusion (they weren't in the cigar room with the political bosses or they don't share the familial ties that many male executives have cultivated). As one female media manager interviewed explained, *"It's not that they doubt our skills. It's that it never even occurs to them to include us. They choose from their buddies. We're invisible in that process."* This dynamic is self-perpetuating: because boards have been male-dominated, the social networks of current board members (from which future members are likely drawn) are also male-dominated, continually reproducing the exclusion.

Moreover, the informal, relationship-based mode of governance is inherently at odds with meritocratic inclusion. Without clear criteria or open competitions for governance roles, bias (conscious or unconscious) can run rampant. Those in power may assume women "are not interested" or "not suitable" for board roles simply because none are in their immediate circle, thus reinforcing a stereotype without ever testing it. Informality also often means no documentation or justification is needed for appointments. An owner can simply *decide* who to place on a board seat. In such scenarios, implicit biases can thrive unchecked. For example, a common narrative might be that a board member needs to be someone "trustworthy" or "who understands the business culture". phrases that can be code for someone from the same gender and background as the existing leadership. Women, no matter how qualified, become victims of these opaque filters.

5.2 Crisis, Consolidation of Power, and "Emergency" Thinking: Lebanon's ongoing economic and institutional crisis has created an environment where survival takes precedence over inclusivity. Over the past few years, many media outlets have downsized, merged roles, or operated in emergency mode just to keep broadcasting or publishing. According to survey respondents, more than two-thirds agreed that economic constraints and crisis conditions have limited women's access to leadership and governance roles (survey). When an organization is fighting for its life, there is a tendency to centralize decision-making in the hands of a few (usually the owner or core funders) and to sideline broader governance processes. Interviewees described how, since the crisis, some boards have effectively become dormant or were bypassed entirely, as owners took direct control of day-to-day operations to navigate financial hardship.[58] In such an atmosphere, any push for gender inclusion can be viewed as a low priority or even a risky "experiment." One male interviewee candidly noted that in a crisis, *"we revert to who we trust completely, and unfortunately that tends to mean the same men as always."* Crisis-driven retrenchment thus reinforces the existing power structure, which is male-dominated.

Another facet of this is the notion that "governance is a luxury" in tough times. If boards are already weak, a crisis can render them practically irrelevant, with decisions made via phone calls among top stakeholders. Women, who were already underrepresented, find even the limited formal spaces shrinking further. The survey and interviews highlighted that financial pressures often mean media organizations turn to political patrons or emergency donors for bailouts, and those actors typically impose their own people or conditions, again usually sidelining women. For instance, a struggling TV station might get a cash infusion from a politician who then effectively dictates management decisions; any semblance of board oversight goes out the window. These power consolidations under duress leave little room for newcomers, especially women who were not part of the original inner circle.

Crisis conditions also breed a mentality of risk aversion regarding leadership changes. Owners may feel it's "too risky" to hand over any decision-making to someone new or to shake up the composition of governing bodies when the business is unstable. Unfortunately, this often translates to hesitancy in promoting women to top roles, not necessarily out of direct sexism, but out of a

[58] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

conservative instinct to stick with the familiar faces (who are male). The outcome is that the crisis acts as a brake on progress: whereas one might think desperate times could open doors to fresh talent and ideas (including women's perspectives), the opposite appears true in Lebanon's media; the harder the times, the more closed the doors.

5.3 Cultural and Workplace Barriers: The "Broken Ladder" in Practice: Cultural attitudes and workplace environments in many media outlets create additional hurdles for women on the path to governance. While structural factors have been paramount, one cannot ignore that gender bias and harassment remain issues. Women in Lebanese media frequently operate in a male-centric culture that can undervalue their leadership potential. Several female respondents noted that they often have to work harder to prove themselves worthy of promotion, and even then might be passed over in favor of a less experienced male colleague. A phenomenon reported in various studies of Lebanese workplaces (and echoed by the CAS/ILO findings on gender inequality in the labor market).[59]

Crucially, the lack of formal succession planning in organizations (highlighted by the survey) hurts women's chances to ascend. The survey revealed that structured succession planning is largely absent in Lebanese media companies; leadership transitions tend to be reactive and driven by sudden events (political shifts, a founder's illness, etc.) rather than proactive grooming of talent. In such reactive transitions, women are often overlooked. If a director suddenly steps down, the replacement might be decided in a closed meeting and drawn from the same small circle. whereas a transparent succession pipeline might have identified a qualified woman as next in line. One outcome is that women who have been contributing at high levels operationally find there is no clear path to move up to board or owner-equivalent status (survey). This gap between women's operational leadership and governance authority was repeatedly mentioned as a frustration. Women feel they hit an invisible ceiling where their contributions plateau in influence.

Another set of barriers relates to workplace climate and retention. As described in the context section, many women in media face harassment (offline or online), intense public scrutiny (especially if they are high-profile), and a lack of institutional support to address these issues.[60] Interviewees emphasized that such factors lead some women to bow out of the media sector before reaching a point where they'd be in contention for board roles. In other words, the pipeline of potential women leaders is not just leaking. It's sometimes being actively pushed out by hostile conditions. For example, a talented female editor might decide to leave journalism in her 40s due to burnout from constant sexist abuse or disillusionment with the inability to break into the top echelon, thus removing herself from the pool of candidates who could serve on boards. Safety and retention are thus deeply linked to governance outcomes: without retaining women through the senior ranks, there will simply be fewer experienced women to tap for governance positions (even if structural opportunities open up).

Interviewees also brought up the notion that women are often brought into leadership in times of organizational crisis or image management, then sidelined when the situation stabilizes. For instance, a media outlet may elevate a woman to a prominent role to gain credibility (perhaps to impress donors or signal modern values) during a tough period, but once stability returns, the traditional power holders may push her out of key decision-making. This creates a cycle of tokenistic inclusion: women are used symbolically when convenient but not given enduring power. Such

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[59] Central Administration of Statistics & International Labour Organization. (2022). *Lebanon follow-up labour force survey: January 2022*. https://www.ilo.org/publications/lebanon-follow-labour-force-survey-january-2022

[60] Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation; Maharat Foundation. (2025). *Holistic safety for women journalists in Lebanon*. Holistic Safety for Women Journalists - Lebanon | Maharat Foundation

practices breed cynicism and further discourage capable women from seeking governance roles. Why step up if it's only to be a figurehead?

In summary, the barriers preventing women's full participation in media governance in Lebanon are deeply structural: the informality and opacity of board appointments, the crisis-fueled centralization of authority, and organizational cultures that fail to institutionalize gender equality or protect women professionals. Combined, these factors maintain the status quo of male-dominated governance. The next section will explore whether there are any countervailing forces or enabling factors that have helped women break through, even if only in limited ways.

6. Enabling Factors and Pathways for Women's Leadership

Despite the challenges outlined, there are factors and emerging trends that can help women advance towards decision-making roles. The third research question considers what enables women's access to governance roles. While the enabling factors are not as robust or widespread as the barriers, the study identified several supportive elements, from mentorship and networking initiatives to the existence of a strong talent pipeline that could be leveraged to promote greater inclusion of women in media governance.

6.1 Mentorship, Networks, and Capacity Building: Survey respondents pointed to various forms of professional support as key enablers for women's career advancement. The most commonly cited enablers included mentorship programs, participation in professional networks (especially those focusing on women in media), leadership training opportunities, and international exposure or fellowships . Women who had access to mentors, whether within their organization or through external networks like the Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB) or similar groups, reported that these relationships helped them build confidence, sharpen their leadership skills, and gain visibility. For example, a young female journalist being mentored by a seasoned editor might get the guidance needed to take on more strategic responsibilities, or at least to understand the unwritten rules of the game. Likewise, leadership workshops and training (often sponsored by international NGOs or media development programs) were noted as beneficial, providing women with knowledge about governance processes, financial management, and other board-relevant skills that they might not acquire in their routine jobs.

However, respondents overwhelmingly stressed that such capacity-building alone is not enough. Many women have received training or completed courses in leadership but still find no opening to apply these skills if governance remains a closed shop. *"We have no shortage of trained, capable women; we have a shortage of opportunity,"* one respondent wrote. Therefore, while mentorship and networks are valuable (and indeed necessary to prepare women for high roles), they must be coupled with actual institutional openings. One promising sign is the gradual formation of women's media networks and solidarity groups in Lebanon, which aim to collectively push for more inclusive practices. For instance, informal alliances of women journalists have begun sharing information on job openings and advocating for each other's inclusion in panels or committees. International exposure, such as attending global media conferences or exchange programs, was also mentioned as empowering, as it lets Lebanese women see examples of female media leaders elsewhere and bring back ideas to their own organizations.

6.2 A Strong Female Talent Pipeline: As discussed in the context section, Lebanon produces a steady stream of qualified women in media and related fields. This pool of educated, skilled women is itself a crucial enabling factor; it means that any organization seeking to improve gender diversity at the top has ample talent to draw from. The fact that women form the majority in journalism schools and are well represented at junior and mid-career levels creates an opportunity: the pipeline exists, so the focus can shift to removing barriers and creating channels for these women to advance. In interviews, several media experts highlighted that the argument of "no qualified women available" simply doesn't hold water in Lebanon's media sector. *"For every board seat that opens, there are dozens of Lebanese women with the experience and qualifications to fill it,"* one expert noted, *"if only the selection were based on merit and not patronage."* In essence, the excess of female talent is an untapped asset, an enabler waiting to be activated by structural changes.

There have been a few notable cases where women have attained high governance roles in media; these isolated successes offer insight into what enabling factors made them possible. Often, they involved a convergence of supportive conditions: the woman had a mentor or sponsor in the leadership, the organization had some external incentive to diversify (such as a progressive donor or a corporate partner encouraging gender balance), and the woman had built a strong reputation through international work or investigative journalism that gave her credibility and visibility. In such cases, the *individual* factors (talent, training, networks) coincided with an *institutional* opening. For example, an independent digital media platform that received international funding might appoint a woman to an advisory board to signal good governance. If that woman also happened to be highly competent and networked, she could turn a token appointment into a real platform for influence, thereby breaking the mold internally for others to follow.

Policy and normative frameworks also provide an enabling backdrop, albeit one that is not yet strongly enforced. Lebanon's National Strategy for Women (2022–2030) and its commitments under international frameworks (CEDAW, etc.) call for greater women's participation in decision-making, which can be used by advocates as leverage.[61] Additionally, global media development organizations and some donors now routinely include gender metrics or requirements in their programs. These external pressures and incentives are slowly nudging local media outlets to pay attention to gender balance. As an enabling factor, donor and civil society advocacy was mentioned by interviewees: initiatives like gender audits of media organizations, awards or recognition for women-friendly media companies, and public campaigns highlighting successful women in media all help create an atmosphere where including women in governance is seen as both necessary and positive. While such efforts are still nascent, they provide counter-pressure to the inertia.[62]

It's important to note, however, that enabling factors often need to work in tandem to overcome the deeply rooted barriers. A mentorship program can prepare a woman for leadership, but unless a retiring board member or a new project creates a vacancy, she might remain waiting. Similarly, a strong policy on paper (like a call for gender diversity) means little if informal practices ignore it. The next section (Discussion and Synthesis) will tie together how these enablers and barriers interact and set the stage for concrete recommendations on moving forward.

7. Discussion: From Evidence to Action

Synthesizing the findings across the desk review, survey, and interviews, a consistent narrative emerges: women's limited presence on media boards is not due to a lack of talent or interest but to institutional structures and power dynamics that gatekeep governance positions. Many of these structures are embedded within party-affiliated or sectarian ownership models that concentrate governance authority within politically aligned networks. The evidence dispels the myth that women are not ready or willing to lead. In fact, Lebanon's media has no shortage of experienced women. The issue is that the rules of the game (mostly unwritten) keep governance a male preserve. This insight carries an important implication for policy and donor action: efforts must

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[61] National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW). (2023). *National strategy for women in Lebanon 2022–2030*. https://nclw.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/National-Strategy-for-Women-in-Lebanon-2022-2030-I-EnglishI-Final.pdf

[62] UNESCO. (2021, November 2). *Improving the image of women in Lebanese media remains a priority*. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/improving-image-women-lebanese-media-remains-priority

focus on changing the rules and incentives of governance, rather than solely trying to "empower" women within a broken system.

Several key themes cut across the data:

- **Informality as Gatekeeper:** Non-codified, relationship-based decision-making is a fundamental obstacle. It operates like an invisible hand that perpetually tilts the playing field against women. Any meaningful change will require bringing more transparency and formality to governance processes (e.g., clear criteria for board appointments, term limits, and disclosure of board composition) so that the system is not purely dictated by personal whim.[63] Interviewees also noted that even formal mechanisms such as commercial registry access are effectively inaccessible in practice, reinforcing structural opacity around board composition.

- **Ownership and Control:** The entrenchment of owner-centric control means boards lack autonomy. Even well-qualified women who reach boards may find they have no real influence if the owner can override decisions. Addressing this might involve separating governance from day-to-day management through stronger regulations or norms and encouraging owners to see value in empowered boards. It's a delicate issue, since it touches on the political economy of media ownership, but any reform that ignores ownership dynamics would be incomplete.

- **Crisis as Opportunity (Missed):** The crisis has been largely a setback for inclusive governance, but it could also be reframed as a chance to rebuild differently. Media organizations that have survived the crisis could be encouraged (by donors or policy incentives) to institutionalize better governance now as part of their recovery. The convergence of donor interest in preserving independent media and the need for business sustainability creates a moment where introducing governance reforms (including gender criteria) is both timely and potentially palatable as a means of restoring credibility and resilience.[64]

- **Symbolic vs. Substantive Inclusion:** We see a recurring pattern of symbolic gestures a woman on a board here, a gender policy document there without substantive shifts in power. Bridging this gap will require accountability mechanisms: for instance, not just counting women in leadership, but evaluating whether those women have budget authority, voting power, and tenure to make a difference. It was noted that quota-based approaches, if done superficially, might actually reinforce tokenism. Several KIIs cautioned that women's appointments in family-controlled institutions may reflect kinship ties rather than institutional reform, raising concerns about symbolic inclusion without redistribution of decision-making power. Thus, solutions should emphasize *effective* inclusion (women in meaningful roles) over just numeric parity.

In essence, the findings point to a pressing need for governance reform as a gender equality strategy. This aligns with broader calls in Lebanon's policy circles: good governance and gender inclusion go hand in hand. Strengthening governance structures (transparency, formalization, accountability) will naturally create a more enabling environment for women to participate.

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[63] Global Media Registry, & Samir Kassir Foundation. (2024). *Media ownership monitor: Lebanon 2024*. https://lebanon.mom-gmr.org/

[64] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

Conversely, promoting women's leadership can be an entry point to improve overall governance quality.

In addition to structural governance opacity, KIIs underscored the role of concentrated family ownership, party-affiliated control, and patriarchal newsroom cultures in limiting women's advancement. Weak enforcement of anti-harassment policies and informal power networks further restrict women's access to leadership pathways. Addressing women's underrepresentation, therefore, requires not only transparency reforms but also institutional safeguards, accountability mechanisms, and cultural transformation within media organizations.

Beyond governance structures, interviewees emphasized that newsroom cultures and editorial practices often reproduce gender hierarchies through victim-framing, appearance-focused coverage, and false equivalence narratives between survivors and perpetrators. These patterns suggest that governance reform must extend beyond board composition to address the institutional norms shaping content production and editorial judgment.

International governance frameworks increasingly treat board diversity and transparency as material ESG (Environmental, Sustainable, and Governance) indicators, yet Lebanese media institutions rarely operationalize these metrics within their internal accountability systems. Translating evidence to action, the following section provides concrete recommendations. They are designed with Lebanon's challenging context in mind, aiming for progress that is incremental but realistic, and focusing on incentives rather than mandates in order to gain buy-in. The goal is to shift norms and practices gradually, such that women's exclusion is no longer the path of least resistance for media organizations. Instead, inclusive governance should become synonymous with a modern, credible media outlet in the Lebanese context.[65]

8. Policy and Strategic Recommendations

This section outlines actionable recommendations targeted at donors, policymakers, and media organizations to foster women's inclusion in media governance. The recommendations are grounded in the realities of Lebanon's political economy and draw directly from the challenges and opportunities identified in the study. The emphasis is on practical, context-sensitive measures that incentivize change rather than impose it, aligning gender inclusion with the broader goals of media sustainability and integrity.

8.1 Enhance Governance Transparency: A first step is to shine a light on governance structures. Lack of transparency emerged as a central barrier to women's access when no one knows how boards are composed or how decisions are made; it's easy for exclusionary practices to persist. Policymakers and supporting organizations should require basic governance disclosures as a condition of engagement or support. For example, media outlets could be asked to publicly disclose whether they have a board, who is on it (demographics, including gender, can be voluntary but encouraged), what the board's mandate is, and how members are selected. Such disclosure could be incentivized by making it a criterion for certain grants, awards, or partnerships. The idea is not to immediately enforce perfect governance but to create a norm of openness. When boards are visible, there is a subtle but real pressure to justify their composition and role. Interviewees noted that transparency is often seen as less threatening than direct gender quotas; owners might resist a mandate to appoint women, but they can more easily accept a rule that they must *report* their governance structure. Over time, that transparency allows stakeholders (journalists' syndicates, civil society, even audiences) to ask questions: "Why does this TV channel's board have no women?"

[65] World Economic Forum. (2025). *Global gender gap report 2025*. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2025.pdf?

Even if not enforced by law, the court of public opinion can have influence, especially as notions of corporate governance start to take root.

8.2 Link Funding to Governance Reforms: Donors play a pivotal role in Lebanon's media sector given the financial crisis. International donors, development agencies, and even private foundations supporting media could incorporate graduated governance benchmarks into their funding modalities. Instead of one-size-fits-all conditions, a nuanced approach would recognize the different starting points of various outlets. For large, established media houses, a requirement might be to formalize an advisory board or add independent members (with preference for women) as a step toward better governance. For small digital startups, it might be to institute at least a simple governing committee or to adopt internal policies for decision-making and diversity. The key is linking these steps to eligibility for funding tranches or capacity-building programs. This creates an incentive for reform: media organizations that take concrete steps to open up and formalize governance would gain access to more resources. Flexibility is crucial; a tiered framework can set different expectations based on organization size and context. A community radio station won't be expected to have a full board of directors but could be expected to have community representation and gender balance in its management committee to qualify for certain grants. Meanwhile, a national TV network could be urged to have a functioning board with committees (audit, editorial oversight, etc.) that include women in order to partner on major donor-funded projects. By tailoring expectations, donors avoid a blunt approach and instead foster an environment where incremental change is rewarded.

8.3 Incentivize Gender Inclusion over Token Quotas: While setting targets for women's representation can be useful, the concern echoed by interviewees is that quotas introduced without broader transparency and accountability can lead to tokenism. A man might appoint his daughter or a close female associate to a board just to tick the box, without actually empowering her. Therefore, the recommendation is to focus on incentive mechanisms that encourage genuine inclusion. For example, donors or media development programs could offer preferred access to opportunities (grants, trainings, regional exposure) for media outlets that demonstrate real steps toward gender-inclusive governance. This could involve having women in key committees (like finance or strategic planning), not just as figureheads. Another idea is to establish a recognition program or index akin to a "Gender Equality Seal" for media organizations highlighting those that meet certain criteria (e.g., at least 30% women on the board with meaningful roles, transparent recruitment, etc.).[66] This kind of positive competition can motivate change without the stigma some associate with imposed quotas. Importantly, any incentive program should include verification that women's roles are substantive. For instance, if a donor gives additional funding to an outlet that appoints women to its board, the donor should monitor that these women are actually participating in decision-making (minutes of meetings could be reviewed, or women board members could be part of implementing the donor-funded project). The message should be that diversity is good business and good development practice, rather than just a concession to external pressure.

8.4 Address Retention and Safety as Governance Issues: Stakeholders must recognize that the pipeline of women who could ascend to boards is being constricted not by lack of talent, but by attrition and push-out factors. Thus, ensuring women remain in the media workforce long enough to reach senior leadership is a governance concern. Media organizations, with encouragement from regulators and support from donors, should strengthen and enforce workplace protections: robust anti-harassment policies, safe channels to report abuse, and consequences for those who

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[66] UN Women & UN Global Compact. (2010). *Women's empowerment principles (WEPs): equality means business*. United Nations. issues_doc/human_rights/Resources/WEP_EMB_Booklet.pdf

perpetrate it.[67] Donors can make such policies a precondition for funding, and regulators (like the Ministry of Information or the National Commission for Women where relevant) can push for industry-wide adoption of codes of conduct. By protecting women and valuing their well-being, outlets not only retain talent but also signal that women are integral to the future of the institution. Additionally, providing flexibility (for example, flexible work arrangements or parental leave, which are often lacking in Lebanese media) would help more women stay and advance, which in turn increases the pool of those eligible for top roles. In the long run, women's long-term participation will strengthen the case for their inclusion in governance because they will be among the most experienced staff. This recommendation essentially frames workplace equality as part of governance reform. A media house that cannot retain its women will never have women to promote to the board. Conversely, one that prioritizes safety and equality is laying the groundwork for more balanced leadership.

8.5 Build Governance Literacy and Exposure: One gap identified is that even when women attain senior operational roles, they may not be familiar with the intricacies of board service simply because they've never been exposed to it (historically being excluded). To bridge this, governance literacy programs should be established for aspiring women leaders. These could take the form of workshops or fellowship programs that simulate board scenarios and explain fiduciary duties, strategic planning, and financial oversight. Crucially, these should not come across as implying women are *unprepared*; rather, they address a systemic exclusion by giving women the knowledge and confidence that many men accrue informally through mentorship into boards. Organizations like LLWB or academic institutions could partner with international media groups to run "Women in Media Leadership" courses that include governance modules. Additionally, mentorship and sponsorship need to be directed toward governance roles: for example, pairing senior women with current board members (male or female) in a mentorship arrangement, or creating a sponsor system where a board champion advocates for placing a qualified woman on a board (whether in the same organization or another). Interviewees highlighted that training alone is insufficient; it must be paired with access. Therefore, media coalitions could also organize an annual "board talent" showcase where women who have undergone governance training are presented to media owners in a forum, essentially marketing this pool of talent. The idea is to make the existence of board-ready women highly visible and harder to ignore.

8.6 Foster Coordination and Advocacy for Governance Reform: Fragmentation of efforts was noted as an issue. Different donors and NGOs have various gender and media programs, but they are not always aligned. A coordinated platform or working group that brings together media support organizations, gender equality advocates, and possibly enlightened media owners could push collectively for better governance standards. This could result in developing a set of voluntary guidelines or a charter for gender-inclusive governance in media. Even if not enforceable by law, having key players endorse such standards can gradually influence norms (much like corporate social responsibility codes have done in other sectors). Coordination also helps avoid duplication; for instance, one donor's program could focus on training women for boards while another focuses on policy advocacy; if they communicate, the trained women could be channeled into opportunities created by the advocacy. In policy terms, stakeholders could explore modernizing Lebanon's outdated media laws (from 1962 and 1994) to include provisions encouraging diversity in media leadership.[68] Though passing new laws may be difficult in the short term, even a policy dialogue on these topics keeps the issue alive. The ecosystem approach, treating media development, good

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[67] Maharat Foundation. (2023). *Breaking the silence: Violence against women journalists in Lebanon*. Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics | Maharat Foundation; Maharat Foundation. (2025). *Holistic safety for women journalists in Lebanon*. Holistic Safety for Women Journalists - Lebanon | Maharat Foundation

[68] Lebanon. (1962). *Press law*.; Lebanon. (1994). *Audiovisual Media Law.*

governance, and gender equality as intertwined, is likely to yield more sustainable results than isolated interventions.

Finally, the recommendations can be summarized by linking the identified barriers to corresponding actions and responsible actors, as shown in the matrix below:

Structural Barrier	**Impact on Women's Board Access**	**Actionable Recommendation**	**Responsible Stakeholders**
Relationship-based governance practices	Excludes women from informal decision spaces dominated by male networks	Require public disclosure of governance structures and appointment processes (transparency as norm)	Ministry of Information; Donors
Owner-centric control of boards	Boards are limited to advisory or symbolic roles under owner's shadow	Introduce independent advisory boards or broaden boards with defined mandates and term limits	Media Owners; Media Regulators
Token or symbolic inclusion of women	Women gain visibility but without real influence	Tie donor funding eligibility to evidence that women in leadership have substantive decision-making authority	Donors; Foundations
Crisis-driven centralization of power	Governance space shrinks; reform efforts sidelined	Use incentive-based funding to reward incremental governance formalization post-crisis	Donors (Media development programs)
Lack of institutional protection and retention	Women drop out before reaching senior leadership (pipeline attrition)	Mandate anti-harassment and safety protocols as part of media outlet standards (linked to funding or licensing)	Regulators; Media Associations
Limited exposure to board processes (for women)	Women lack readiness or confidence for governance roles	Implement governance training & sponsorship programs to prepare women and	Civil Society (LLWB, etc.); Donors; Media orgs.

Structural Barrier	Impact on Women's Board Access	Actionable Recommendation	Responsible Stakeholders
		connect them to board opportunities	

These measures, taken together, form a multi-pronged strategy. They tackle both the supply side (ensuring women are prepared and available to lead) and the demand side (creating conditions that encourage institutions to embrace women's leadership). Crucially, they move beyond symbolic gestures aiming instead to change the incentive structure so that inclusive, transparent governance is seen as beneficial (or even necessary) for a media outlet's success and support.

9. Conclusion

This study set out to examine women's access to board-level decision-making in Lebanon's media sector and to identify pathways for reform. Across all sources of evidence national statistics, sector analyses, survey data, and personal testimonies a consistent conclusion emerges: the underrepresentation of women on media boards is not due to a lack of qualified women or a failure in women's ambition. It is a reflection of how power is structured and exercised in Lebanese media organizations. Governance systems remain largely informal, opaque, and tightly controlled by entrenched ownership and political networks, effectively locking women out of the highest decision-making circles.

Lebanon clearly has no shortage of talented women in media. Women constitute a large share of graduates in higher education and are highly visible across media professions, including journalism and editorial roles.[69] In many newsrooms, women hold senior editorial positions and drive content. Yet these achievements have not translated into institutional power. The crucial transition from leading coverage or operations to having a seat at the table where strategy and finance are decided remains out of reach for most women. This is not because women are "not ready" or unwilling; it is because the criteria and processes that grant access to those tables are systematically disadvantageous.

Publicly available information indicates that several prominent Lebanese media outlets were historically established as family-owned or founder-led institutions, with governance structures closely tied to ownership control. Interview evidence suggests that succession and strategic decision-making in some legacy institutions remain strongly influenced by ownership networks, reinforcing concentrated control overboard composition and limiting pathways for merit-based advancement into governance roles.

The protracted national crisis since 2019 has, if anything, reinforced the exclusionary status quo. Facing financial collapse, media institutions have often doubled down on centralized control, with owners tightening their grip. In such conditions, governance reforms are frequently deemed secondary, and gender inclusion is treated as a luxury or a box to tick for appearances.[70] However, as this report argues, that mindset is short-sighted. Weak, insular governance is not only a gender issue. It undermines media organizations' resilience, credibility, and adaptability at a time when these qualities are desperately needed. A board that is merely a rubber stamp for an all-powerful owner cannot effectively strategize for financial survival or uphold ethical standards. And a leadership team that excludes diverse perspectives (like those of women, who make up half the audience and talent pool) is likely to have blind spots in decision-making.

One striking finding is the disconnect between rhetorical support for gender equality and the reality of governance. Many media outlets publicly endorse principles of equality and boast of women in their ranks, yet their governance remains male-dominated and opaque. Women may have a public-facing role or lead departments, giving an impression of progress, but still lack influence over budgets, investments, and high-level policy, the true levers of power.[71] This separation of visibility and authority is a hallmark of Lebanon's media sector today. Notably, board composition, transparency of appointments, and leadership diversity are rarely treated as material governance

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[69] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. (2024). *World population prospects 2024: Summary of results*. United Nations. https://population.un.org/wpp/

[70] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

[71] Chebaro, A. (2024). *Gender and media: Commitments of media organizations to gender equality*. Maharat Foundation. https://maharatfoundation.org/media/2589/gender-and-media-commitments-of-media-organizations-to-gender-equality.pdf

issues within environmental, social, and governance (ESG) frameworks or internal accountability systems. As a result, gender inclusion remains peripheral rather than structurally integrated into institutional performance metrics. Bridging that gap will require intentional efforts and a recognition that empowering women at the top is integrally linked to strengthening institutions.

The policy implications of these findings are clear. Programs aimed at advancing women in media must move beyond individual capacity-building in isolation. Training, mentorship, and networking for women are important, but they will not suffice if the institutional doors remain closed. Thus, reforms must focus on changing the rules of the game: mandating or incentivizing transparency, formalizing how decisions are made, and holding organizations accountable for who gets to sit in governance roles. In the Lebanese context, approaches that emphasize incentives and gradual change rather than blunt mandates appear more feasible. For instance, linking donor support to concrete governance improvements (as suggested in the recommendations) can make inclusion a condition for accessing much-needed resources, thereby nudging organizations towards better practice without encountering as much resistance as a legal quota might.

For donors and international partners, the message is to align support for media viability with support for governance reform. If donors pour funds into content production or emergency salary payments but bypass the governance structures, they risk propping up a model that perpetuates women's exclusion and poor decision-making habits.[72] Instead, funding agreements and procurement frameworks can be crafted to include governance milestones, even simple ones such as forming a basic board, disclosing governance arrangements, or including women in project steering committees, thereby using external assistance to catalyze internal change. Similarly, technical assistance can be offered to help media outlets implement governance changes they might otherwise find daunting (for example, how to run a transparent board nomination process).

Ultimately, advancing women's participation in media governance is not only about fairness or representation (though those are important in their own right). It is about ensuring the future sustainability and integrity of Lebanese media. Inclusive governance is better governance: diverse leadership teams draw on a wider range of perspectives, are more attuned to audience needs, and tend to be more innovative and ethical. Conversely, homogeneous, and opaque leadership bodies are prone to groupthink, clientelism, and loss of public trust. At a time when Lebanon's media sector is struggling to survive multiple crises, it cannot afford to exclude the very people who could help revitalize it. Women's voices in governance are part of the solution to rebuilding a media sector that is credible, resilient, and in tune with the society it serves.

In conclusion, breaking the glass ceiling in Lebanon's media boards will require concerted efforts to rewrite the governance playbook. This report provides a roadmap of where to start: make governance visible, tie progress to incentives, protect and prepare the talented women waiting in the wings, and insist that inclusion is linked with institutional strength. By moving beyond symbolic inclusion to actual power-sharing, Lebanese media can set a precedent for other sectors as well, demonstrating that even in a challenging environment, change is possible with the right mix of pressure and support. The stakes are high not just for gender equality, but for the quality and independence of media in Lebanon's democracy. The hope is that the insights and recommendations herein contribute to tangible steps forward, so that in the coming years we will see more women not just in the newsroom, but in the boardroom, helping to steer Lebanese media through whatever lies ahead.

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[72] Dagher, G., Zoughaib, S., & Atallah, S. (2023). *Follow the money: The informal channels of Lebanese media funding*. The Policy Initiative. https://www.thepolicyinitiative.org/article/details/307/follow-the-money-the-informal-channels-of-lebanese-media-funding

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11. Annexes

Annex 1. Survey Questionnaire – Women on Boards in Lebanon’s Media Sector

Purpose:

This survey aims to explore gender diversity, governance, and women’s participation in leadership positions within Lebanon’s media sector.

Your responses are completely anonymous and will help inform research and policy recommendations to promote inclusion and gender equity in media leadership.
Estimated time: 6–8 minutes.

The study is led by Dr. Amale El Maiss, PhD in Economics, on behalf of the Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB).

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution!

A. Organizational and Role Details

1. Type of media organization:
   ❒ Television ❒ Radio ❒ Print/Press ❒ Online/Digital Platform ❒ Production/Advertising ❒ Other (please specify)
2. Ownership type:
   ❒ Public ❒ Private ❒ NGO/Community-based
3. Position in the organization:
   ❒ Board member ❒ Senior manager/editor ❒ Mid-level professional ❒ Entry-level ❒ Freelancer ❒ Other
4. Gender:
   ❒ Female ❒ Male ❒ Prefer not to say
5. Age group:
   ❒ 20–29 ❒ 30–39 ❒ 40–49 ❒ 50+
6. Years of experience in the media sector:
   ❒ Less than 5 ❒ 5–10 ❒ 11–15 ❒ 16+

B. Board Composition and Structure (Mapping)

7. Does your organization have a board or governing committee?
   ❒ Yes ❒ No ❒ Not sure
8. If yes, approximately how many members are on the board, and how many are women?
   Total members: ___ Women members: ___
9. Of the women on the board, how many hold the following leadership positions?
   Board Chair or Vice Chair: ___
   Head of Finance or Audit Committee: ___
   Head of Strategy or Planning Committee: ___
   N/A (No women on the board)
10. How are board members typically selected in your organization? (Select all that apply)
   ❒ Election by shareholders/members
   ❒ Appointment by owners/founding families
   ❒ Promotion based on internal seniority
   ❒ Based on external professional merit/expertise

❒ Family ownership ties/inheritance

❒ Other (please specify)

C. Organizational Fairness, Diversity, and Policies

11. Women and men have equal opportunities to reach board-level positions.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
12. Board recruitment in my organization is transparent and merit-based.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
13. Women's opinions carry equal weight in board or management decisions.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
14. Leadership succession in my organization considers gender balance.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
15. My organization promotes gender equality through clear internal policies (e.g., anti-harassment, non-discrimination).
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
16. Which of the following support systems are available to staff in your organization? (Select all that apply)

    ❒ Formal mentorship or sponsorship program for female staff

    ❒ Flexible working hours or remote work options

    ❒ Subsidized or on-site childcare

    ❒ Extended parental leave for both mothers and fathers

    ❒ None of the above
17. Has your organization adopted any target, goal, or quota for female representation on its board or senior management?

    ❒ Yes, for the Board of Directors

    ❒ Yes, for Senior Management

    ❒ No, but planning to adopt one

    ❒ No, and no plans to adopt one

D. Perceived Value of Diversity and Barriers

18. Gender diversity improves the overall quality of decision-making in my organization.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
19. Women's participation in leadership contributes to innovation and creativity.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
20. Diverse leadership enhances the organization's reputation and credibility.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
21. Including women in strategic or financial decision-making strengthens organizational performance.
 1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree

22. Economic or funding constraints affect women's ability to access leadership roles.
    1 Strongly Disagree – 5 Strongly Agree
23. What are the main barriers limiting women's access to leadership or board positions in the media sector? (Select up to three)
    - ❒ Lack of transparency in appointments
    - ❒ Male-dominated professional networks
    - ❒ Work–life balance constraints
    - ❒ Limited mentorship or training opportunities
    - ❒ Gender stereotypes and bias
    - ❒ Harassment or unsafe work environments
    - ❒ Limited access to decision-making spaces
    - ❒ Other (please specify)
24. Which factors most support women's participation in leadership and board positions? (Select up to three)
    - ❒ Mentorship and leadership training
    - ❒ Networking and professional associations
    - ❒ Supportive organizational culture
    - ❒ Gender quotas or policy incentives
    - ❒ Visibility and media recognition
    - ❒ Flexible work arrangements
    - ❒ Other (please specify)

E. Open Feedback and Optional Follow-Up

25. In your opinion, what changes would most effectively increase women's representation on boards and leadership roles in Lebanon's media sector?
    (Open-ended response)
26. Would you be interested in joining a focus group discussion as part of this study?
    ❒ Yes ❒ No

If yes, please share the following details (optional):
Full Name: ___________
Position: ___________
Organization: ___________
Mobile Number or Email: ___________

Thank you for your participation.
Your input will help advance gender diversity and inclusive governance within Lebanon's media sector.

Annex 2. Key Informant Interview Guide – Women on Boards in Lebanon's Media Sector

1. Can you briefly describe your current role and career path in the media sector?
2. Has your organization ever had women on its board or in executive leadership? If yes, in what roles?
3. How are board members typically selected in your organization or in the media sector more broadly? *(Formal? Owner decision? Family ties? Networks?)*
4. How represented are women on boards today in Lebanon's media sector?
(Any difference between TV/radio/print / digital?)
5. What are the main challenges women face when trying to reach decision-making or board-level roles?
6. Do economic or organizational constraints limit women's chances of promotion or board access? How?
7. Are there any gender-related policies or support systems (anti-harassment, quotas, mentorship)? Have they been effective?
8. How does your organization approach leadership succession and gender balance?
9. In your experience, how does women's presence in leadership affect:
- Credibility
- Decision-making quality
- Responsiveness to public needs
10. What helps women succeed in reaching leadership roles?
(Mentorship, visibility, family business connection, political support…)
11. What practical steps would increase women's leadership representation in Lebanon's media sector?
12. Any story or insight related to these topics that you want to share?