

GENDER BALANCE IN THE NORTH MACEDONIAN MAYORIAL CANDIDATES – LOCAL ELECTIONS 2021

Ceneta Telak Durmishi

International Balkan University, North Macedonia, telak.ceneta@gmail.com

Snezana Bilic

International Balkan University, North Macedonia, snezana.bilic@gmail.com

Abstract: All the interested sides in North Macedonia for the local elections 2021 have failed to offer equal representation to women among their mayoral candidates. There is a quota requirement for the less represented gender on candidate lists for the political parties and alliances in this country. This quota requires that at least 40 percent of the candidate list to be comprised of the less represented gender. Currently, only six mayors are female. For the local elections in October 2021 only just 8.31 percent of candidates for mayors are women (25 of 299 candidates); 45 percent of candidates for municipal councils are women.

This article draws on research findings and interventions undertaken by Northern Macedonian law for gender equality possibilities to raise issues relating to gender equality, women's political representation and municipal gender mainstreaming and service delivery in relation to the October 2021 local government elections in North Macedonia. We will include an analysis of political party lists in terms of women's representation, the gender mainstreaming in a sample of political party manifestos and an analysis of gender mainstreaming in a sample of municipal integrated development plans.

In accordance to this, the paper contains a secondary analysis of the politics, based on information of existing results that are being run by the political parties. Conclusions and recommendations are based on the current gender attendance in the country as well as a comparative analysis of the existing parties in the politics.

Keywords: gender equality, local elections, political parties, North Macedonia

1. INTRODUCTION

The political pendulum in North Macedonia keeps swinging, and this time it was left to right. If the previous local elections in 2017 displayed a complete change on the political scene in favor of the social democrats, in 2021 it was the other way around. The conservative VMRO-DPMNE achieved a resounding victory in the October 2021 local elections, by winning almost every major city in the country, as well as the electoral "crown jewel" – the city of Skopje. (Necev, Markovic, 2021)

The elections held on October 17, 2021 in order to elect councilors and mayors in 80 municipalities in Macedonia and in the city of Skopje. The second round of local elections is scheduled for October 31. The elections were called on August 6, 2021 by Parliament Speaker Talat Xhaferi. According to the SEC calendar, the deadline for submitting candidacies for councilor lists and mayors was September 11, 2021. The election campaign lasted from September 27 to October 15. In the first round, mayors were elected in 34 municipalities, and in 46 municipalities and the City of Skopje there will be a second round. In the first round, VMRO-DPMNE won in 22 municipalities, SDSM won in 9, and DUI in 3 municipalities.

Biometric voter identification was introduced in North Macedonia for the first time in these elections, and while the step was generally welcomed as a fraud-prevention measure, the timeline for its nationwide implementation lacked any pilot project or comprehensive testing. On election day itself, frequent problems with the biometric identification devices were noted. The opening and voting process was positively assessed across the country, but there were issues such as group voting, as well as procedural errors during the counting and tabulation. Amendments to election legislation had broad political support but were adopted only a month before the election with no public debate or consultation, which is not in line with international good practice. The election administration met most legal deadlines and made efforts to adapt to several late amendments. However, its capacity and ability to carry out its work independently was strained by a lack of permanent staff and vacancies in key positions. Despite an active and generally peaceful election campaign, issue-based debates were overshadowed by increasingly negative rhetoric, which particularly targeted women candidates. Gender equality and women's rights were largely absent from party campaigns, in which women also remained under-represented. Observers also noted isolated cases of candidate intimidation, as well as allegations of pressure on candidates to withdraw and vote-buying.

Election legislation stipulates that all media outlets, including online media, cover the elections in a fair, balanced and unbiased manner. However, the stringent regulation of news programmes by the public broadcaster during the campaign undermines its editorial independence. Paid media advertising during the campaign is funded directly and

exclusively from the state budget, and its distribution provided a significant advantage to some parliamentary parties, which is not in line with international good practice. (source : DIK)

An equal and fair participation of women and men in political debate is a fundamental to democracy. At a time where many European legislations have adopted policies that directly promote women candidates, often through voluntary or mandatory quota systems, more women have decided to run for office. For instance, in the 2014 European Parliament elections, women won 37% seats, a 2% increase since 2009 elections, 6 points more than in 2004.

2. RESEARCH AND METHODS

The Draft Law on Gender Equality aims to further mainstream gender equality awareness and activities within the majority of public institutions, including the Assembly and the executive, at both central and local levels. A number of gender equality bodies established by the current Equal Opportunities Law have been retained. At the same time, the Draft Law introduces several new bodies that should, if established properly and with the requisite resources and training, help enhance the effectiveness of gender equality activities in the public and private spheres. While this is a welcome step in principle, the relevant provisions of the Draft Law should further clarify the role and competences of new bodies. Further clarity on certain terminology used, as well as the scope of the Draft Law and competences of the already existing gender equality bodies would provide greater legal certainty. (Opinion on the Draft Law on Gender Equality (in English) [2021/07/01])

Out of a total of 298 candidates who will be competing for mayoral seats in the country's 81 municipalities, only 25, or less than nine per cent, are women, the data shows. All the main parties and blocs for the elections have opted once again to favour men as candidates.

The main ruling Social Democrats, who over the past few years have boasted about promoting gender equality within their own ranks, have nominated a total of 68 mayoral candidates. But only five of them are women.

The main opposition party, the right-wing VMRO DPMNE, is offering even less representation for women, with only three female candidates out of a total of 62 mayoral contenders.

Of the ethnic Albanian parties, the Democratic Union for Integration, DUI, has only one female candidate, the current mayor of the town of Tetovo, Teuta Arifi, out of a total of 19 mayoral candidacies.

Two ethnic Albanian opposition parties, Alliance for Albanians and Alternativa, are entering the race with 15 candidates, all male and without any female candidate. The same is true for the BESA party, which supports the government, and is fielding 11 male candidates.

The only two political forces with a somewhat more equitable gender balance are the centrist bloc consisting of Democratic Renewal of Macedonia, DOM, the Liberal Democrats, LDP, and the far-left party Levica.

The DOM and LDP have nominated five women out of a total of 17 candidates, while Levica has nominated two women out of eight candidates.

Meanwhile, of the 27 candidates who were running as independents, without the official endorsement of a political party, only two are female.

All in all, there are 81 municipalities in the country, but in just 17 of them the voters were able to choose a female candidate.

The prize at the elections was the capital Skopje, which this time will see 12 contestants running for mayor. Two of them were women, seeking to challenge the incumbent Social Democratic mayor, Petre Silegov, who were running for the office for a second time.

One of the female candidates for the capital of Skopje was Danela Arsovska, who comes from the business sector and is currently has won the elections and she is the mayor of capital Skopje.. Although formally she was running as an independent candidate, she was supported from the opposition VMRO DPMNE party.

When it comes to candidates for municipal councils, the situation is rather different and much more gender-balanced. Out of a total of 1,131 candidates, 522 or just above 46 per cent of them are female. This is partly because when it comes to municipal council polls, there is a legal requirement that political parties ensure that at least 40 per cent of their candidates are women.

Mayoral seats were also dominated by men at the last elections in 2017, when only six women were elected as mayors.

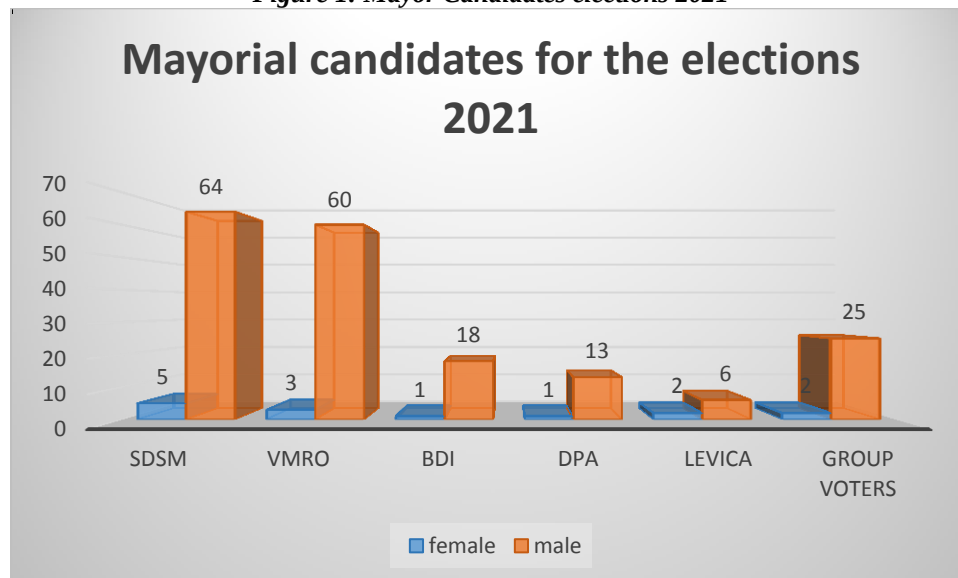
In the last elections we have a situation in where we have realized a really expected situations regarding the gender balance in this last local elections.

Table 1: Mayoral candidates for the local elections 2021

Mayoral candidates for the local elections 2021		
	Female	Male
General	25	274
SDSM	5	64
VMRO	3	60
BDI	1	18
DPA	1	13
Levica	2	6
Group Voters	2	25

Source: DIK

Figure 1: Mayor Candidates elections 2021



Source:DIK

This Research has shown that when a man enters public life, media usually don't pay attention to the fact that he is a man. When a woman runs for office, her gender is almost always a focus of debate. Research has also highlighted that women politicians are proportionally less visible than men in news coverage, and that where they are present media tend to portray them in a biased way, using stereotypes or discriminating against them. As a consequence, unbalanced and unfair media coverage of gender during elections can be expected to impact the public's understanding of electoral stakes and influence gender balance in the result of electoral competitions. This study explores how male and female politicians are equally presented during elections and to what extent the representation of gender during elections influences voters' decisions. It consists of a review of existing research reports and an overview of current practices in the North Macedonia. The study provides an evidence-based approach to assessing whether existing legal instruments offer an appropriate framework to promoting gender equality in relation with elections, and the national implementation of those instruments is effective and delivers any results. The study takes into account the evolution of previous elections and adopts a broad definition of gender equality during elections.

3. CONCLUSION

In the period from the last local elections in 2017 to the elections 2021 several new laws and amendments to the existing one were adopted. The changes are related to the state election bodies, political campaign financing, campaign participants, as well as the legal provisions of the Law on Audiovisual Media Services and the adoption of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. The Electoral Code in 2021 was amended twice, in April and September 2021. The changes regulated the way of voting with and without the application of technical equipment and the manner of determining the identity of the voter in the voting procedure with a fingerprint. In the local elections, individually or in a coalition, 24 political entities appear as submitters of candidate lists for mayors. Characteristic of these elections is the large discrepancy between male and female candidates. The most candidacies were submitted by the coalition led by SDSM - 69 of which 5 women. From the larger parties, VMRO-DPMNE

nominated with its coalition 63 candidates of which 3 women. DUI has nominated 19 candidates for mayors, of which only one is a woman. The Besa movement nominated 11 candidates from none of whom is a woman, while the DPA nominated 14 candidates, one of whom is woman. The Coalition Alliance for Albanians and Alternative is running with 15 candidates, without a single female candidate, while the Coalition "Move Resolutely" for change "has 18 candidates, of which 5 are women. The left plays with eight of them two women, Integra - Macedonian Conservative Party presents with 10 candidates of which one woman, Permanent Macedonian Radical Union (TMRO) performs with nine of which two are women candidates, Political Party Democrats, workers and independents, with six candidates without a single female candidate, and the party Macedonian Era Third / Macedonian Independent Lists with seven candidates, one of whom is a woman.

Democratic Party of Turks on Macedonia is running with 5 male candidates, and the Bosniak Democratic Union party with four male candidates. Party of United Democrats of Macedonia - PODEM has three male candidates, while the party Rodina Macedonia has two male and one female candidates.

Movement for National Unity of the Turks - DNET, Movement for Democracy, rights and freedom and the Civic Option for Macedonia - GROM, of which all men. A total of 25 candidacies for mayors were submitted by a group of voters, two of whom are women. Out of a total of 299 candidates for mayor, only 25 are women (ie 8.41% of the total number of participants). The situation is different with the candidates for councilors where out of a total of 10,635 candidates for councilors, 45% are women, largely as a result of the requirement that every third candidate on the proposed lists be of the underrepresented gender.

Although all the analyses and laws lead us to conclude that there is a growing awareness about the issues of gender equality in the field of politics, there is still little confusion when taking in consideration all the statistics that took place during last elections of women candidates. As gender equality is a cross-cutting issue, the enlisted instruments are in most states to be implemented across several sectors which may hinder prompt and proper implementation. Furthermore, there is few data available on the impact of the gender-biased media coverage of candidates on the outcome of the elections. The existing instruments and accompanying guidelines provide adequate recommendations on how to remedy the gender bias in media generally; however, none have specifically focused on gender equality coverage of elections. Therefore, while it is duly acknowledged that there is a gender dimension to political pluralism and diversity of content, this fact still needs to be brought to the attention of all stakeholders in civil society in the context of elections, with specific issues such as gender balance statements, angle from which the story is told, pluralism of sources, gender portrayal, etc.

REFERENCES

- Bystrom, D., Banwart, M.C., Kaid, L.L., & Robertson, T. (2006). Gender and Campaign Communication: TV Ads, Web Sites, and Media Coverage
- (2008). Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Equitable Portrayal Code
- Center for American Women and Politics and Political parity, Research inventory : American Women and Politics, August 2012.
- Name it. Change it. Research on appearance coverage of women and campaign simulation, Women media center and She should run, 2013. Name it. Change it, Where voters saw most sexist treatment of women candidates in the media, 2016
- <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/24/women-scarce-among-north-macedonia-mayoral-candidates/>
- <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/501307>
- https://www.google.com/search?q=gender+on+local+elections&sxsrf=AOaemvIYTE5iEYvpJe6vFBYpoJiwpWf_jg%3A1638547795572&ei=U0GqYfaftuMxc8P3J-NuAM&ved=0ahUKEwi2lbWagsj0AhVbRvEDHdxPAzcQ4dUDCA0&uact=5&oq=gender+on+local+elections&gs_lcp=Cgnd3Mtd2l6EAMyCAghEBYQHRAeMgUIIRCSAzIFCCEQkgMyBQghEJIDMgUIIRCSAzIFCCEQkgM6BAgjECc6BggjECcQEzoFCAAQxAI6BAGAEAM6AggmOgQIABAEogQIABATogUIABDLAToGCAAQFhAeOggIABAWEAoQHjoFCCEQoAFKBAhBGABQAFj-LmDcMGgBcAJ4AIABhQGIAC8WkgEEMi4yNjgBAKABAcABAQ&sclient=gws-wiz
- <https://rm.coe.int/gender-equality-and-elections-/16807c0e23>
- <https://candidatelist.sec.mk/Dashboard>
- <https://www.kas.de/documents/281657/281706/The+Republic+of+North+Macedonia%E2%80%99s+2021+Local+Elections+Handbook+MKD+version.pdf/192ef519-05e3-be25-befad27a96dcb8ac?version=1.0&t=1634218048011>