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ALL ABOUT POLITICS IN LEBANON, WITH A FOCUS ON ELECTIONS!

## US ELECTIONS: LESSON LEARNED FOR LEBANON PART II

BY IBRAHIM JOUHARI

Part I of this series explored how the ease and openness of the electoral process positively impacted the turnout and overall legitimacy of elections. However, it is equally important to examine the importance of increasing the involvement and participation of youth, women, and other marginalized groups in the electoral process. Their vote is crucial to strengthen democratic, liberal, and institutional ideals and stem the rising tide of populism and authoritarianism. Therefore, Part 2 of this series will explore the different methods to increase the political participation of youth, women, and minorities in the electoral process, emphasizing how to reach them through social media. Meanwhile, keeping in line with the basic premises of this series of articles, I will discuss how this issue was tackled during the US elections and try to apply the lessons learned to Lebanon! here are many ways for political parties to increase their chances in an election. They might energize their base, enlarge their coalition and alliances, launch a media blitz, overspend your opponents. But one of the most effective ways is to increase the youth vote. They are energetic,bring new votes that haven't voted before and upend the prevailing status quo. To accomplish that,involvement,issues and aspirations must be a main pillar during the electoral process and debated on their preferred social media platforms.



### IBRAHIM JOUHARI

Ibrahim Jouhari is a Senior Analyst in the International Affairs Unit of the Former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Saad Hariri. In this role, Mr. Jouhari offers his expertise and knowledge on international issues and acts as a liaison to the international diplomatic corps, think tanks, and NGOs.

### **Politician participation and turnout:**

In the 2020 US election, youth and women played an immense role in increasing the turnout of marginalized groups and ignored areas[1]. Indeed, the state of Georgia was vital to ensure the victory of President Biden, allowing the Democrats to control the Senate by winning the two open seats in the state! In a tough state for Democrats, these stunning victories were only possible due to the astonishing grass root and well-organized youth, women, and minority empowerment, get out the votes, and increasing turnout campaign lead by Stacy Abrams[2]. Former President Barack Obama called Georgia “a testament to the tireless and often unheralded work of grassroots organizing” and credited Abrams with “resilient, visionary leadership.”[3]

The plan implemented by Ms. Abrams revolved around thousands of “organizers, volunteers, canvassers & tireless groups” who helped rebuild the state’s Democratic Party.[4] Ms. Abrams started by launching grassroots and local organizations focused on youth, women, and minorities, encouraging them to get involved in the electoral process as volunteers, activists, party monitors, and even local candidates. These efforts strengthened the Democratic party’s brand, reach, and popularity in Georgia and reconnecting with these new untapped voters, keeping them involved in the electoral process, listening to their ideas and their top issues and causes (like progressive liberal topics, green energy, LGBTQ...). Additionally, the campaign utilized media platforms (social media in particular) that are favored and heavily used by youth, actively working with them to build the necessary political infrastructure in preparation for the elections. Indeed, elections are not won in a fortnight; Ms. Abrams’s efforts have been a decade in the making!

**"IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT INCREASING YOUTH, WOMEN, AND MINORITY PARTICIPATION DOES NOT BENEFIT A SINGLE PARTY OR ONE SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. ALTHOUGH MANY YOUNG VOTERS VOTED FOR DEMOCRATS, PRESIDENT TRUMP INCREASED HIS VOTE BY A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER, RECEIVING THE VOTES OF MANY YOUNG PEOPLE AND SEVERAL MINORITY GROUPS LIKE THE CUBAN AMERICANS IN FLORIDA. THEREFORE, THE VOTES OF YOUTH, WOMEN, AND MINORITIES REFLECT SOCIETY AS A WHOLE AND THE ENTIRE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, BUT WITH A SLIGHT PROGRESSIVE SLANT"**



## Lebanon:

How to apply this in Lebanon? As previously mentioned, one of the easiest ways to increase their participation in the political process in general, especially in elections, is to include them as candidates, managing the elections (campaign managers, officers, party monitors, social media practitioners). This would also create a positive feedback loop, as it is youth and women who are the most capable of using their knowledge, networks, and know-how to increase the turnout and the participation of their peers[6]!!

Therefore, Ms. Abrams grassroots strategies are the way forward. Local organizations focused on youth, women, and minorities should be built, encourage these groups to get involved in the electoral process as volunteers, activists, party monitors, and even local candidates. Civil society or alternative parties are the most equipped to do that. However, that does not mean that most youth will vote for civil society. Some will vote for traditional parties because of family, geographical ties, or political ideology. Nevertheless, the increase of youth, women, and minority participation is a significant advantage and a positive development for society. Such an increase in turnout will strengthen democracies and their ability to resist populism and extreme politics (both on the right and the left) and even diminish sectarian tensions and polarization.

*In the case of Lebanon, the main issues and aspirations of youth, women, and minority groups should be championed and debated by political parties and candidates, using the media platforms favored by these groups[9]. Thus, any political party serious about running in the election and winning must identify these issues, formulate a realistic and possible plan with specific action points, and straightforward implementation, staying away from empty electoral programs filled with forgotten promises.*

## Reaching out:

However, it is not enough to get youth involved in politics. There is also a need to engage with them, discuss their top issues, and offer them concrete solutions using their preferred media platforms. The effectiveness of old media (paper, radio, and even TV) for advertisement is diminishing. Targeted social media ads have become the norm and the most effective way to reach audiences. Indeed, in the 2016 and 2020 US elections, Trump was able to energize his base and get his message across to voters that might support him, using ultra-specific social media targeting (the whole Cambridge analytical debacle[7]).

Meanwhile, President Biden won because he identified what mattered most for Americans in specific geographical areas, and he hammered that message incessantly. For many, it was COVID and how bad Trump was at handling it. But the Biden campaign did not stop there, it formulated and distributed clear messages to his supporters, with a specific set of plans, realistic solutions, and implementation that could solve their most immediate concerns



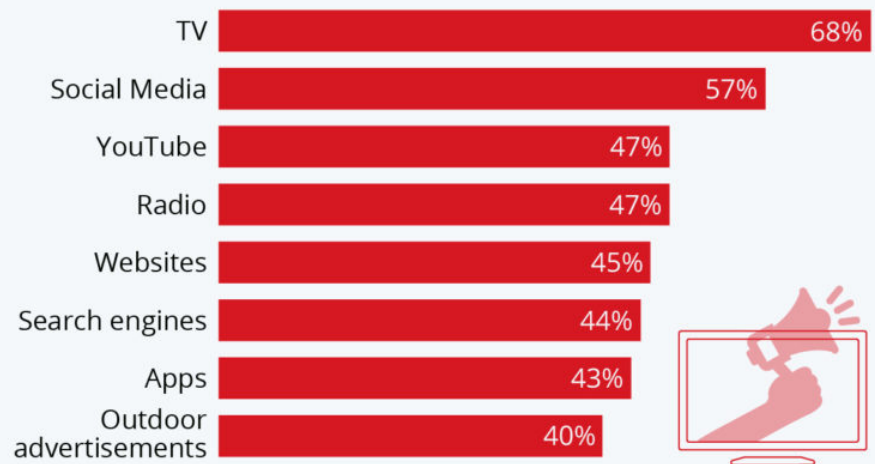
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Then specific media platforms to reach youth, women, and minorities must be identified and used to transmit these positions. It is essential to keep in mind that communications need to be tailored to the audience in this modern age. There are no silver bullets and magical all-encompassing solutions, TV is no longer the undisputed king on the hill, but you can't reach older generations without it. Similarly, social media is highly effective, especially with the younger generation[10], but it cannot compete with face-to-face outreach campaigns! Elections and communications are complex processes that need strategizing and pro activity, based on clear and accurate data!

Nevertheless, youth are a critical demographic in any election. Therefore, to increase the size of political parties' base and attract new supporters and voters, it is imperative for all political actors, especially civil societies, to harness the power of social media, professionally, effectively, and goal-oriented! It is the age of micro, if not individual media targeting. Additionally, face-to-face outreach is even more important, as it is one of the most effective and successful methods to reach and energize young voters[11]! Especially when the interlocutor appears authentic and comes from 'trusted' sources that the voters already know. Indeed, reluctant voters "can be inspired by repeated and well-organized get-out-the-vote efforts that rely either on door-to-door visits or on live phone calls[12]." That is key, a few ads and posts boost will not make a difference. The whole process must be strategized, the different targeted areas categorized, and the audience precisely identified, with various media components include TV, social media.

## TV Still the Top Medium for Ads in the U.S.

Share of U.S. respondents who reported having seen ads through the following channels in the previous four weeks



25,000 U.S. adults surveyed in 2020  
Source: Statista Global Consumer Survey



statista

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as discussed in Part 1 of this series, if you make it easy to vote, people will vote. But it is also imperative to move a step further and apply even more efforts to get youth, women, and other marginalized groups involved and interested in the elections. Their vote is crucial to strengthen democratic, liberal, and institutional principles while slowing the rising tide of populism and authoritarianism. And to accomplish that goal, political communication, especially during elections, must evolve and embrace the constantly changing technology and media platforms! In short, political actors need to find the top issues of these groups, develop specific solutions, formulate a plan to implement them, and then keep hammering this message using specific and carefully chosen media platforms.

## REFERENCES

1] <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/half-youth-voted-2020-11-point-increase-2016>

[2] <https://www.ft.com/content/8af50180-bbab-4595-a32b-fe9af205f1ce>

[3] <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-race-and-ethnicity-stacey-abrams-georgia-voting-rights-af71ec062882dc8552fa9ccde97873ed>

[4] <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/us/politics/stacey-abrams-georgia.html>

[5] <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turnout-in-2020-spiked-among-both-democratic-and-republican-voting-groups-new-census-data-shows/>

[6] The issue of turnout and how to increase it was fully explored in part 1 of this series.

[7] <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/04/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-scandal-fallout.html>

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[9] <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/political-outreach-youth-was-effective-2018-midterms>

[10] <https://thearabweekly.com/social-media-use-youth-rising-across-middle-east>

[11] <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1024167.pdf>

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