

Media Monitoring

Media Coverage of Women Candidates
and Women's Issues During the 2015
Election Period in Myanmar

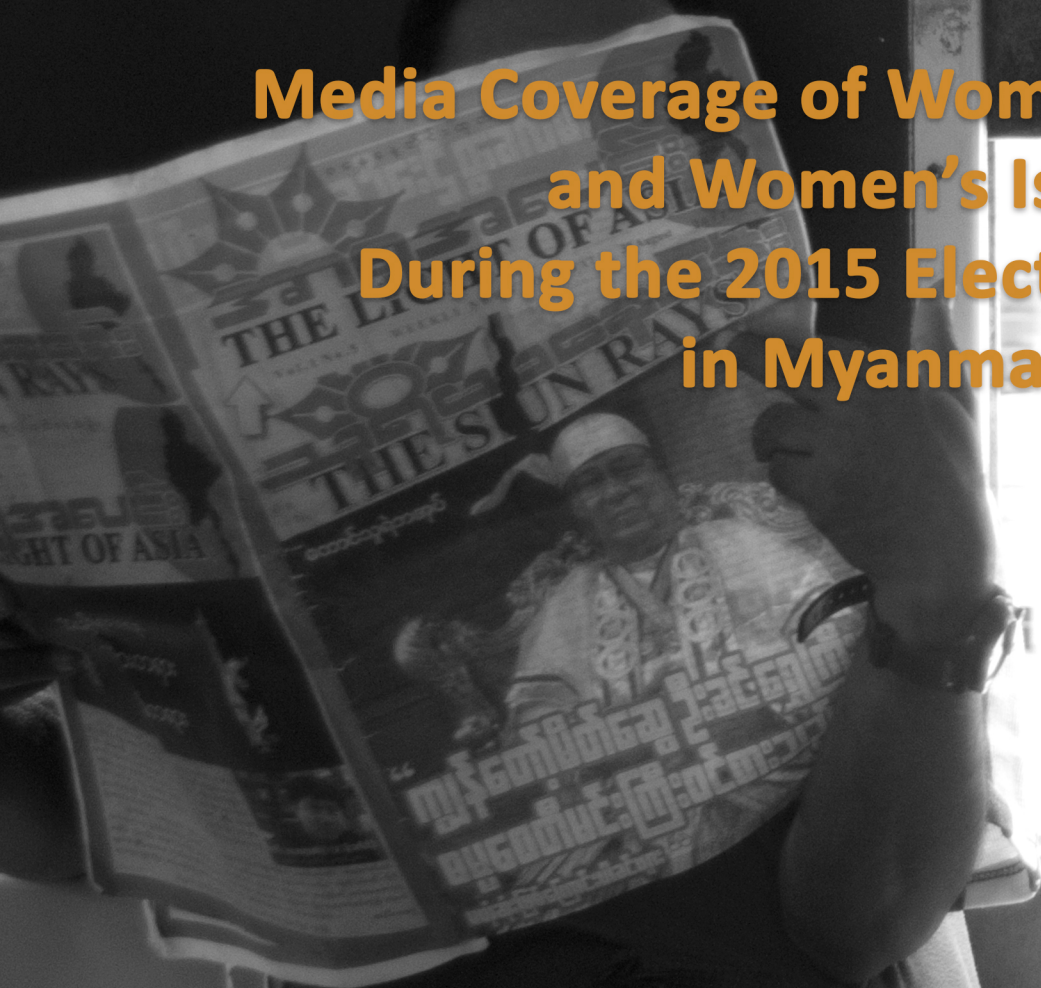


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Media Monitoring

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Gender Equality Network
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Media Monitoring: Media Coverage of Women Candidates and Women's Issues During the 2015 Election Period in Myanmar

The following research analyses data collected from news media coverage during the recent pre and post-election period in Myanmar, from mid-August to the end of December in 2015 ('the election period'). Due to staff resources, this study only analysed print media. Altogether, 24 news journals and newspapers were used in this analysis; of which all were private (independent or non-state) and locally-published media sources.

It should be noted that the present data set was collected from August to December of 2015 and not all local news journals available in Myanmar were included in the data collection. Those journals selected for analysis were the most readily available to the Gender Equality Network (GEN) staff conducting this research. Therefore, data outcomes should not be generalised to make a conclusions based entirely on this data analysis alone. This research draws valid and credible conclusions only for that particular period, based on analysis of the local media journals listed below.

Table 1

Name of News Media (from which data were collected)	
1. Weekly Eleven	13. Popular
2. The Myanmar Herald	14. Reporter
3. 7 days News	15. Kumudra
4. The Yangon Times	16. For the People
5. Tomorrow	17. Myanmar Review
6. Friday Times	18. News Week
7. The Irrawaddy	19. The Flower News
8. Pyi Myanmar	20. The Voice
9. For the Enlightenment of the Public	21. Myanmar Post
10. True News	22. The Messenger
11. News Watch	23. First Weekly
12. The People's Watch	24. The People's Age



Overall, a total of 4362 stories concerning the election were published across the 24 news journals between August and December 2015. The present data analysis examined gender diversity, both in terms of the persons featured in media pieces, as well as the parties or groups they represented. The sample was taken daily and weekly depending on the frequency of the publication, and all the articles had been published in Myanmar language. The timeframe made it possible to draw recurring election themes in order to characterise the portrayal of women candidates across a number of months. This research sought to analyse the coverage of women candidates in the media, their experiences and issues that they may have faced during the election period. In this research, this theme will henceforth be referred to as '**women's issues**'.

The data from the print media was condensed, formatted and coded according to different categories, including the date of issue, name of the journal, news headline, main spokespeople or persons mentioned, and their respective comments.

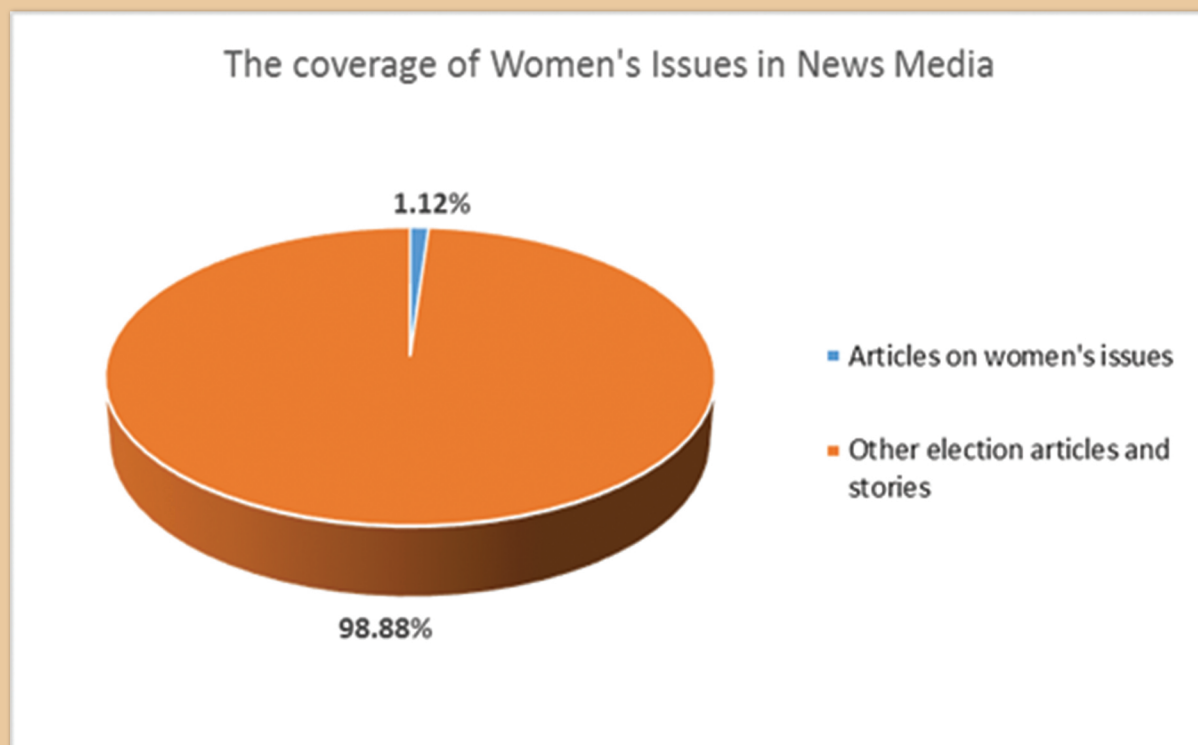
It should be noted that the amount of local media coverage given to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during the election, pre- and post-election was exceptionally high, due to the historical significance of her running freely in the election. However, the topics addressed in this coverage were generally extremely broad, and very little was concerned with women's issues, as opposed to her general leadership and the overall peace process in Myanmar, for instance. For the purpose of this study, media coverage of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was deliberately not considered in the analysis process, in order to gain a better understanding of the experiences of 'everyday' candidates and coverage of women's issues.

Analysis of this data will contribute to understanding patterns in media coverage of women and men candidates during the 2015 election period and the overall coverage of women candidates in local and national news media during that period. The analysis below also examines the frequency and coverage of gender-related issues in news media, including how these issues were portrayed, and whom the media opted to cover in their reporting of election news, and concludes with recommendations for raising the profile of women in the media; both during election periods and more generally.



Coverage of Women's Issues in News Media

Figure 1



In total, election-related news stories, reports and articles from the local news media outlets (listed in Table 1) numbered 4362. Of these, as shown in Figure 1 above, only one 49 articles highlighted women's issues; equating to 1.12% of the total. Analysis of the data, the following page will continue to indicate that discussion of women's issues in news media during this time predominantly came from women candidates and women spokespersons from Non-Governmental Organisations, International Non-Governmental Organisations and Networks that were working on gender issues and women's rights.



Voices of Women's Issues in News Media

Figure 2

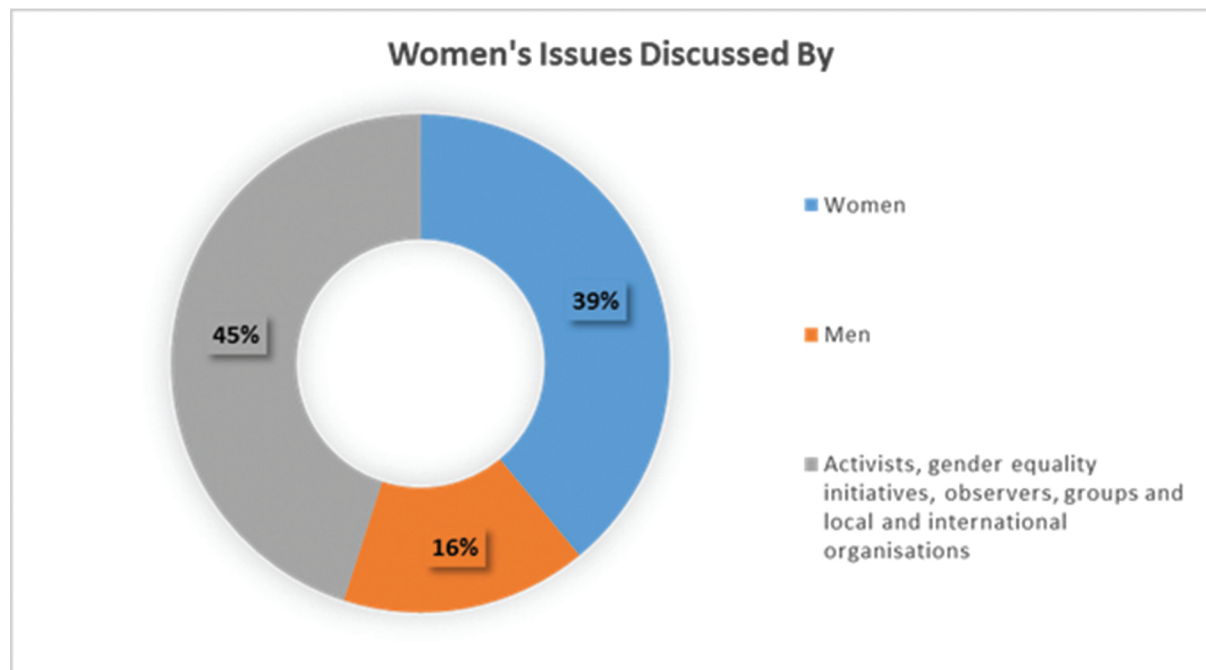


Figure 2 shows that 39% of the 1.12% of women's issues coverage in news media cited or referred to women candidates and decision-makers, compared to 16% by men. Decision-makers included chairpersons from parties and official spoke persons. The remaining 45% represented local and international non-government organisations, non-profit organisations, and other groups working for women and gender-related issues.

Based on Figures 1 and 2 above, it can be inferred that there is an exceptionally small space in print media coverage for women's issues. Similarly, women candidates, themselves, rarely mentioned gender-related challenges and issues in the process of the election, with male candidates even less likely to discuss these. Indeed, women candidates and decision-makers speaking about women's issues only accounted for around 19 articles in the entire research sample, reflecting the low priority that this had in the media.

Of the mentions of women's issues during the election period, this analysis found out that the majority of topics covered in local news media were on the increased participation of women candidates in the election, their challenges and obstacles during their respective election campaigns, whether these candidates ultimately won or lose in their constituencies, women's participation in the new government and their role as MPs in the future, impediments to women's participation as candidates in the election, and ethnic women candidates and their challenges.

Media Coverage by Gender of Candidates

Figure 3

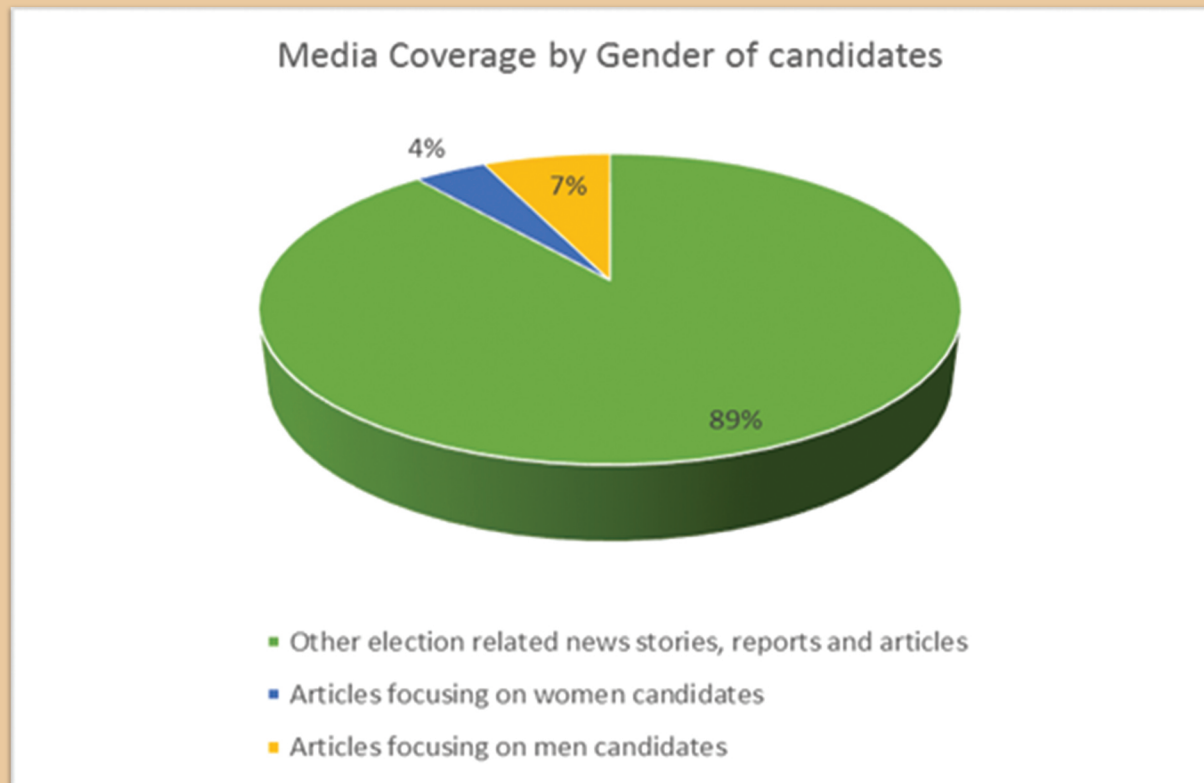


Figure 3 shows media coverage during the election period by gender of the candidates. The coverage of the candidates was mainly male dominated, with coverage of male candidates receiving a 7% share of the total coverage by gender, whereas the coverage women candidates received a 4% share.



Women Candidates in News Media

Figure 4

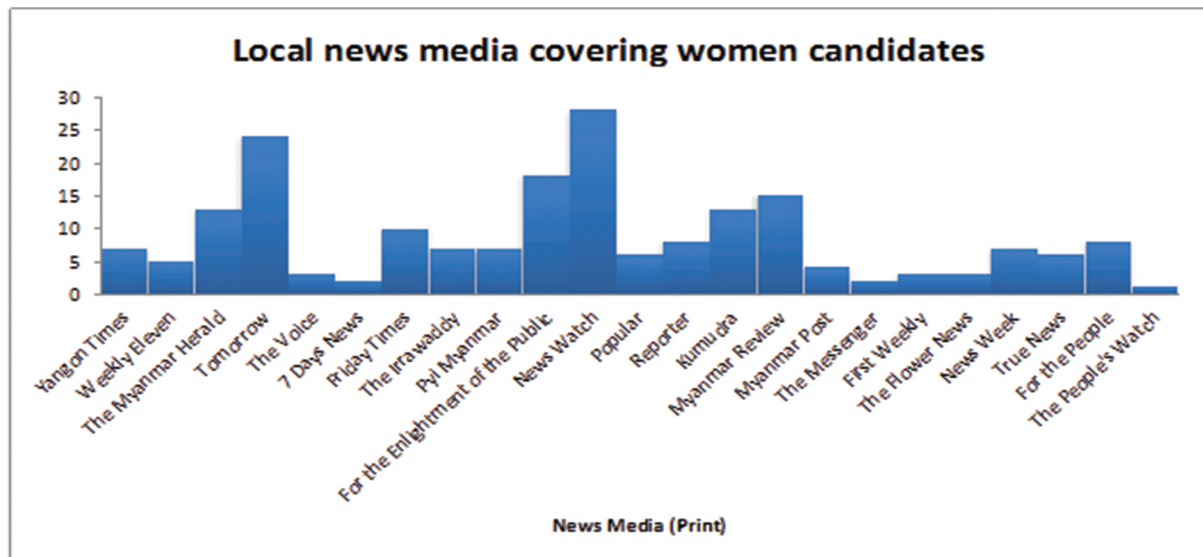


Figure 4 shows the overall coverage of women candidates and women's issues during the election period by news outlet. According to the graph, News Watch journal contributed the highest number of stories about women candidates and women's issues.

Tomorrow news also dedicated the second-largest percentage of their stories to women's issues and candidates during this period, with For the Enlightenment of the Public ranked third.

Analysis of the present data found that among women candidates, some women candidates were presented more frequently than other women candidates. For example, Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin stood out as an often-featured candidate followed by Daw Zin Mar Aung, Daw Lei Lei Win Swe, Daw Yu Yu Khaing, Dr. Thet Thet Khaing, Daw Sandar Min, Naw Hla Hla Soe and Daw Thandar, in descending order of coverage frequency.

It is important to consider the personal and professional backgrounds of these women candidates, the parties they represent, their level of their existing public-oriented personalities, their histories of being more or less forthright in bringing opinions into the public domain, their political standpoints, their engagement with particular issues and such. The above factors appeared to be determinants for their frequency of representation by the news media.



Party Representation

Figure 5

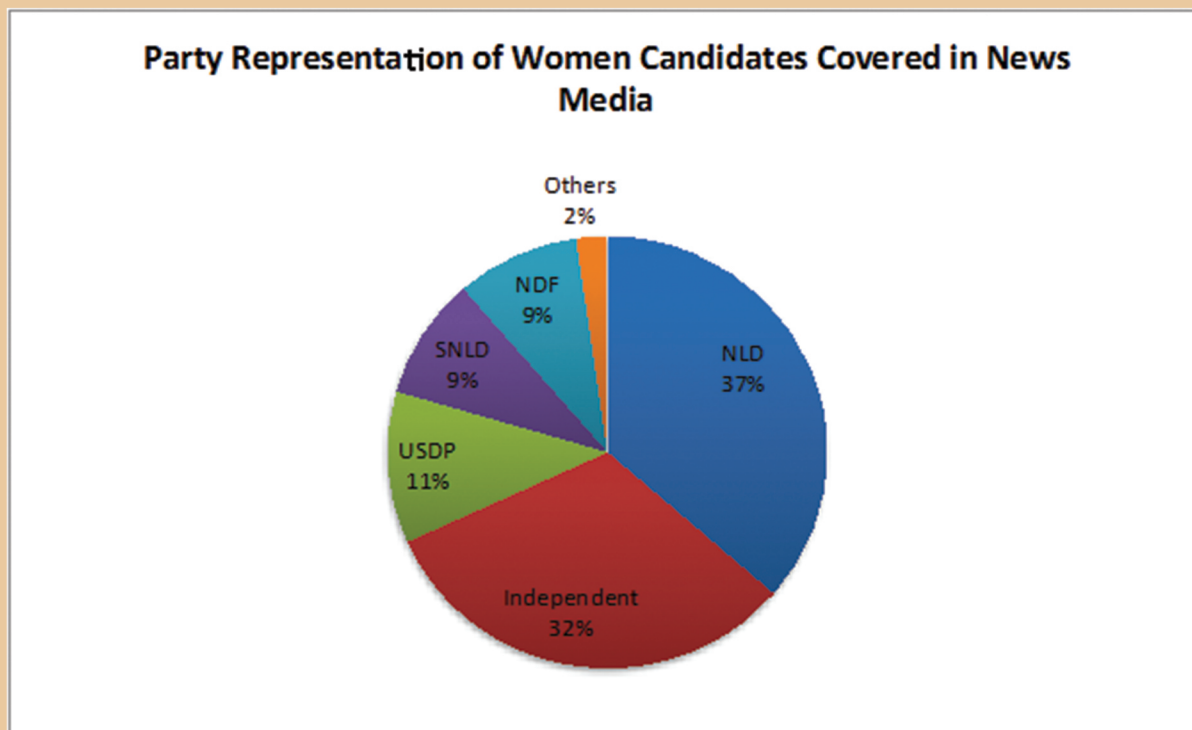


Figure 5 shows the parties represented by women candidates in local news media during the election period. The NLD had the highest representation, comprising 37% of coverage of women candidates in local news media, followed by independent candidates (combined), USDP, SNLD and NDF, and other ethnic parties.

Conclusions

The monitoring and analysis of media election coverage in the present sample indicated that issues relating to women and gender were generally of little importance in the media during the time period studied. The number of women politicians and candidates, and their respective coverage, was also low compared to men. It can be assumed that this lower coverage of women candidates was because of the smaller number of women participating in the election; however, further research is required to establish a causal link between the number of women participating in the election as candidates and the amount of media coverage on women candidates.

Nevertheless, the present data analysis may indicate that the inadequacy of reporting on women candidates and the marginalisation of women's issues in the local news media is symptomatic of the treatment of gender equality as of lesser importance in Myanmar society. Similarly, the data indicates that, when covered by media outlets, both women and men were not forthcoming with raising women's issues; instead focusing on the fact that women were candidates in the election, in the rare cases where news media covered these stories. Instead, women's issues were much more likely to be voiced by activists, those in gender equality initiatives, observers, groups and local and international organisations.

The data also suggests that women were rarely used as news sources or as party spokespeople. Furthermore, the tendency of journalists was to focus more on the leaders of political parties and people in the highest ranks of the parties, who were predominantly men, and who tended to dominate the highest ranks of these parties. In particular, the comments on issues of policy were mainly from men. Another notable aspect of the election coverage by the media was its extreme concentration on the major political player, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and her NLD party as the news coverage on the former personality was approximately 500 frequencies across different news media, striking as the individual who was covered most during the election. While coverage of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, herself, was outside the scope of this research, it could be argued that this put other women candidates and minority parties at a disadvantage as far as coverage was concerned, with the media being dominated by her personality and party.

Overall, the data illustrates that very little attention was been paid to women's issues in news coverage, including in expressing women candidates' voices, as spokespeople and as candidates. More male candidates' voices appeared in the final articles that were published during this time. The contents of the election media covered were mostly generalised news, focussing on the process of the election, campaigns, voting instructions and transparency concerns, rather than gender-related topics.



Limitations

It should be noted that this data analysis merely serves to give an overall understanding of the gendered media landscape during the 2015 election period, and was primarily commissioned for the Gender Equality Network (GEN) as a baseline for future research on elections. Data was entered on an ad hoc basis by GEN research staff through months that saw other work assignments of varying priority, and staff resources were often limited, particularly in terms of (wo)manpower. Therefore, the data entering process was handled gradually, as opposed to a regular, day-by-day process during the election period. However, the GEN Coordination Unit made every possible effort to collect full records of the 24 print media published during this time and the collection of media pieces was not hampered, overall, by these limitations.

Furthermore, it was outside the scope of this study to incorporate news from electronic news media sources, such as websites and social media pages of news outlets. These electronic sources may, in fact, include more pieces relating to women and women's issues, and this would be an area of suggested further research.

During the election period, both media – and, anecdotally, the public – focused more on ensuring a free and fair election, as well as the challenges confronting the previous government. Much attention was also given to concerns about voting fraud around the country, and this also gained coverage outside Myanmar. Therefore, the overall news on election reported less on individual candidates and, as a result, the sample of articles of this nature was small to begin with.



Recommendations

To improve the coverage of women's issues and women candidates in future elections in Myanmar, efforts should be made to encourage media practitioners to view women candidates and politicians as valuable news sources. Hand in hand with this; women candidates and politicians should be more active in engaging with media and invest time into learning how to work effectively with the media to ensure that their voices and opinions are heard.

Given the media's favouring of predominantly-male party leaders and spokespersons on policy issues and, given the very low number of female politicians in Myanmar, there should also be strong initiatives by men to ensure that women's issues are voiced and that women are encouraged and supported to run for office. In this way, the general public and media can become more supportive of women's political representation and, over time, a cultural shift can occur.

It is important to understand the way in which the media operates in Myanmar, as well as its selection of subject matter, to ensure adequate coverage of women and women's issues. The results of this media monitoring study will help to improve reporting on women's issues by drawing attention to the gaps that existed during the 2015 election period. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help to determine further steps required to improve and increase the coverage of women candidates in future elections, and the general coverage of women's issues reporting in the media in Myanmar. It is, indeed, helpful to recognise the problem in order to find effective solutions to it.





Gender Equality Network
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