
IRAQ'S WOMEN CANDIDATES FACE SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

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Several women candidates in the Iraqi elections next month have been targeted by online smear campaigns.

The circulation of derogatory videos and comments comes less than week since campaigning for the April election began, prompting activists to call for government action.

Member of parliament Antithar Al Shammari was dropped as a candidate from Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi's electoral list on Thursday after a salacious video purportedly featuring her was circulated online.

Mrs Al Shammari said the video was fake and urged the public to "not question the dignity of Iraqi women".

Corrupt politicians are wrongfully accusing me by publishing fake videos to tarnish my image. I am begging you to not listen or take notice of these rumours, she said in an appeal to the public on Facebook.

Other images circulated online showed posters of women candidates being subjected to vulgar acts.

Hanna Edward, an Iraqi womens rights advocate in Baghdad, told The National that female candidates were being subjected to vicious attacks.

The attacks are conducted for political gains □ they are discriminatory and are steered to ruin their images and to pressure them to step down, she said.

The country had not witnessed anything like this in previous rounds of elections, she said.

After the toppling of dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003, womens groups called for a quota in parliament, originally seeking 40 per cent of seats but managing to get only about a quarter.

Ms Edward said women made up 28 per cent of the nearly 7,000 candidates competing for 329 seats in the general election next month — Iraq's fourth since 2003.

She said women were hoping that this election would bring them a greater role in government, with many of the candidates from academic and respectable backgrounds.

I ask this question: if a woman is portrayed in this horrific way, what happened to the images of corrupt political men? Mrs Edward said, referring to rampant corruption in the male-dominated political sphere.

Saraw Abdul Wahid, another woman MP, told reporters on Thursday that women politicians were being targeted by defamation.

I am calling on the ministry of communications and civil societies to monitor and control the abuse we are getting on social media and to stand against the politicisation and defamation of women, Ms Wahid said.

Mr Al Abadi, who is seeking another term in office, had called for last month for greater female participation in the government.

Current laws and legislation grant women broad powers to participate in Iraqs political process, Mr Al Abadi said, and added, this should be taken advantage of.

Rasha Al Aqeedi, a researcher at the Al Mesbar Studies and Research Centre in Dubai, told The National that the attacks are part of a dominating misogynistic culture.

The act of shaming is justified [in the country] and the woman is always at fault. In Iraq we see it on the streets when a woman is behind the wheel, in the bureaucracy when a woman is a successful manager, and in politics, of course, she said.

<https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/iraq-s-women-candidates-face-smear-campaigns-1.723263>

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