Student Elections and Peer Pressure

An Article by
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Student elections, around the world, are exposed to the reality of their societies. They are part of the political process of their countries. This is where the university is very well-known as a micro-society, and it is an obligation for universities to engage students, as an educational process, in this democratic exercise, especially in Lebanon where the age of vote is 21.

In Lebanon, the political system is based on sectarianism, where every community/religion has its own representatives and political parties in the power, although we have one of the best democratic representative systems in the region, which is a consensual and inclusive parliament.

While practicing this exercise, students are exposed to many problems when it comes to communication and decision-taking. This is not surprising as it is indeed part of the game, where students live their micro citizenship in the democratic elections by competing in order to reach "power". However, that isn't in any way the best process and outcome of such an experience, as this occurs with a violation of their rights, violence as peer pressure and corruption.

Choosing a representative should be based on freedom as it is part of expressing self in this context.

Experiences say a lot about the voters who do not feel free in many cases, where their choice becomes granted even in their mind. This might have come from the whole process, the way voters treat their representatives during their time in power and after their mandate has ended, which is in general, unfortunately, a non-treating.

Student councils in Lebanese universities are still dedicated in the minds of people to social activities. Students get diluted in thinking of the candidates as potential people in charge of specific social events, getting one big real aspect masked in the image the candidates try to show in order to collect votes, which is the political affiliation to a party and the process of making it grow and propagate.

On the day of elections, a majority of students seem they don't make up their minds based on the candidates' action plans, but rather on their personal connections and what stories they already know about their communities of the past years. This is all to question the freedom of choice. If that same student happens to choose again based on the actual political statuses of the represented communities in the elections, would their choice be the same?

When it comes to peer pressure, it seems it has the biggest role in directing students towards choosing their candidates. Pressure is not limited to the people at the university, but it extends to friends, family and even media. The candidate or the voter is surrounded by an enormous number and never-ending pressure examples in order to get him vote as if his vote is going to save the whole world or to have an impact on the world peace. Never ending examples related to clientelism is part of the day-to-day stories of the students' elections: starting from helping in paying tuition fees, giving them previous such as academic courses, exams, study notes, pressure on the their mother or father in their jobs, recharging dollars for their mobile phone, inviting them to

dinners and gatherings, create rumors and spreading them about their personal lives, threating them with violence, and much more. A service like this one, it doesn't matter on what scale, but what matters for the political parties is to get the votes they want in order to win!

Other than the peer pressure, corruption is also found in student elections. Lebanese citizens face a lot of economic problems. Poor societies are more likely to deal with corruption. Whether we accept it or not, the Lebanese government doesn't control corruption. Like we said before, universities are a micro-society. The same applies to universities. What is the impact of corruption on students' voting behavior? Students will have less confidence in the ability of the upcoming students' representative to solve problems and they are less likely to vote. A fraud, whether big or small may be enough to change the result. That is exactly what every candidate's team relies on. In the majority of cases each political party nominates a student representative. They use their position and authority to shape the elections results and guarantee their win by manipulating students, giving them money. They abuse their power for their own private gain. Unfortunately, students that accept to receive a certain amount of money to vote for a specific candidate think about the short-term benefits of the money they receive. And this tragic process goes on and on.

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