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Missing: Vital Voices of Lebanese Women in Politics

Abir Chebaro

Abir Chebaro is a gender consultant and activist who has been advocating for women's rights for over 20 years. During her career, Abir was appointed Gender Advisor to the Prime Minister, Vice President of the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), and Advisor to the Minister of State for Women's Affairs. Her most recent publications include a policy brief entitled The Gendered Dimension of COVID19 in Lebanon, a policy paper on Montherhood Penalty, reports on Violence Against Women in Politics and Observation of the 2022 Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon from a Gender Perspective.

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Introduction

The idea of democracy derives from the ideas of individual autonomy and equality. It is the sole form of government that is consistent with human rights. Democracy embraces men and women's universal right to seek or aspire to leadership through elections and supports women's equal access to the realm of politics.

Several international conventions and frameworks protect democracy and the participation of women in democratic systems. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures" (United Nations, n.d.). Specific to gender, both the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (art. 3) and Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) reaffirm women's right to participate equally in politics.

Even though the right to vote was granted to women in Lebanon in 1952 and irrespective of the existence of a vigorous feminist movement in the country, Lebanese women continue to be disproportionately underrepresented in public and political life at all levels of decision-making due to robust structural barriers. In the absence of a clear governmental roadmap to empower women in leadership and in decision-making and the slackening of political parties to support their female members, some civil society organizations have attempted to address gaps in equal leadership by providing support to aspiring female political candidates. However, these efforts have not been able to overcome the challenges women face in running for office. What are the persisting obstacles prevalent to women's leadership and how has women's political participation evolved?

This paper provides an overview of Lebanese women's participation in political decision-making through a case study of women's participation in the parliamentary elections of 2022 from a gender perspective. The paper asks, why are the vital voices of Lebanese women still missing in politics? What progress has been made? Who are the gatekeepers? How can we accelerate equality and improve women's political participation?

Battle for Independence and Political Rights

Lebanese women have been at the frontlines of all critical moments in Lebanese history. They mobilized against Turkish occupation and French colonialism in 1943 and have participated in the civil war as peace activists and fighters (Al Jazeera English, 2010).

As agents of support and resilience through their civic and relief work, they have advocated for peace within their local communities, they have resisted occupation, and they were at the frontlines fueling the October 2019 revolution (Wilson et al., 2019) and supporting the uprising after the August 4 explosion. Nevertheless, their presence remains limited in official spaces and has not taken root in the practice of Lebanese politics as women are stereotyped, sidelined, and obstructed from active political participation. They have never been at the negotiation table (Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon, 2012) nor have they participated in any political or peace accord (Sfeir, 2019). This structural paralysis has historical roots in the elitist patriarchal sectarian family system that places women as second-class citizens to their male counterparts. This system, which Suad Joseph names as political familism, keeps women firmly out of formal political spaces and leaves them under the power of their male family members and the wider kin system (Joseph, 2011). Coupled with a legal system that reinforces women's second-class status, women face structural barriers when accessing finance, accessing public and media platforms, and leadership positions. Women also face extreme inequalities in the face of the personal status codes, which also keep women tied to their male kin, who have control over issues related to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. In the realm of politics, gender roles and imposter syndrome imposed by a culture of stigma and violence putting women under more scrutiny than their male counterpart (Komath, 2014).

Lebanon's first feminist movements have historically been attributed to the rise of Arab reformers and women's rights advocates during the *Nahda*, the period of "Arab Cultural Renaissance" that took place during the 19th century. "The pioneers of the *Nahda* regarded women's inferior status as the basic cause for the backwardness of Arab and Islamic societies, and unanimously affirmed that there will be no renaissance for Arabs and Muslims without the renaissance of Arab women" (Traboulsi, 2003).

While many of these pioneers were men, women slowly began to enter the public sphere, where they campaigned for women's educational rights and established prominent literary salons, where men and women sat together and discussed politics. While these literary salons and women's magazines were dominated by elite women, the work of women writers soon challenged these socioeconomic hierarchies. The works of May Ziyadeh, Labiba Hashim, Malaka Saad, and Anbara Salam, to mention a few pioneer women challenged the distinction between the "public" and "private" worlds and questioned the traditionally male-dominated public. They broke the constraints of the private domain by openly identifying as the authors of such "radical" pieces and occasionally releasing their images for all to see (Khater, 2001).

Arab women began to demand additional rights and roles, challenging the domesticity of being only home caregivers. At the community level, educated women created their own groups or as branches of men's organizations, pushing farther into the public realm, challenging stereotypical norms and gender roles. These groups began as charity socio-cultural organizations and evolved to organize against Turkish occupation (The Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action [CeSSRA], n.d.) and, subsequently, French colonization in 1943 (Daou, 2015). Under the French mandate period of the mid- to late 1930s, however, women continued to be marginalized in politics. At that time, three political parties emerged in Lebanon. Both the Najjada and the Phalanges were men-only political parties while the Syrian Nationalist Party of Antun Sa'ada, despite inviting women to join, had just a few women members (Kingston, 2011) for several political and social reasons.

Following the independence of Lebanon in 1943, the first wave of feminist groups organized around the issue of women's political rights, including universal suffrage. These feminists based their claims on their involvement in the fight for national independence alongside men, as well as on emerging international laws at that time. They lobbied for a law proposal to grant Lebanese women political rights. The proposal was rejected by the parliament in 1944 (CeSSRA, n.d.). The parliamentary committee examining the proposal justified its rejection by reaffirming traditional gender roles and prejudice about women in politics.

When the first electoral law denied women political rights in 1950 (Parliament of Lebanon, 1950), it sparked the first rallies and organized collective action among women's rights

advocates. As a result, several women's unions developed in 1951, albeit along sectarian lines: a Christian union, *Jam'iyat al-tadamon al-Nisa'i* (Women's Solidarity Association), and a Muslim union of organizations, *Ittīhad al-Nisa'i al-Loubnani* (Union of Lebanese Women). They succeeded in gaining the right to vote for educated women under electoral law of 1952.

In 1952, the Lebanese Council of Women (LCW) was established, bringing the two unions together to advocate for political rights for all Lebanese women as the electoral law of 1952 discriminated against women and did not give equal rights to vote and run for parliamentary elections (Parliament of Lebanon, 1952, Article 21). The efforts of LCW succeeded in 1953. Following the issuance of Decree No. 6 on 4 November 1952 to amend the Law on the Election of Members of parliament of 10 August 1950 (Parliament of Lebanon, 1952), women were given the rights to vote and run for parliament in the 1953 parliamentary elections; although voting was compulsory and punishable by a fine for men, it was optional for women (Parliament of Lebanon, 1952, Article 23).

Since then, a few women pioneers from outside the traditionally influential families, have run for elections but lost. In 1962, Mirna Boustani was the first woman to win a parliamentary seat by acclamation, albeit only following her father's death, as she replaced him. For the following 49 years, there were no women elected to parliament as the mandate of the parliament of 1972, which did not include any woman member, was extended to 1992 due to civil war (Parliament of Lebanon, 2022).

In 1991, Nayla Moawad was appointed to fill in the parliamentary seat of her husband following his assassination. In 1992, only six women ran in parliamentary elections, with a mere three winning seats. The very low representation of women in parliament persists today, as only 19 women have been elected to parliament since 1953 to date. Seven of them were elected more than once. Eight out of those female members of parliament (MPs) are direct family members of political leaders as shown in Table 1. They have reinforced and reproduced oppressive patriarchal structures in their political activities to comply with their political affiliations (Geha & Karam, 2021). They have not supported many progressive laws to empower women and girls, such as setting a minimum legal age of marriage, decriminalizing abortion, penalizing marital rape, and amending the law on violence against women to align with the

demands of the feminist movement. Of the very few who did propose laws to advance women's rights, these were rarely supported by their own political blocks. Their long and repeated incumbency, paired with their unsatisfying feminist performance and lack of feminist and human rights backgrounds ruled out their chances of being considered role models to look up to and discouraged young women to run.

Table 1

Women Parliamentarians by Years of Election, District, and Relationship to Political Leaders

Name	Election year	Times elected/ appointed	District	Sect	Relationship to political leader
Mirna Al Boustani	1963	1	Chouf	Maronite	Daughter
Nayla Moawad	1991- 1992 -1996 -2000 -2005	5	Zghorta	Maronite	Widow
Maha El Khoury Assaad	1992	1	Jbeil	Maronite	None
Nohad Said	1996	1	Jbeil	Maronite	Widow
Bahia Hariri	1992 -1996 -2000 -2005 -2009 -2018	6	Saida	Sunni	Sister/ Aunt
Ghinwa Jalloul	2000- 2005	2	Beirut III	Sunni	None
Sethrida Geagea	2005-2009- 2018- 2022	4	Bchare	Maronite	Wife
Gilberte Zouein	2005- 2009	2	Kesrwan	Maronite	None
Solange Gemayel	2005	1	Beirut I	Maronite	Widow
Nayla Tueni	2009	1	Beirut I	Greek Orthodox	Daughter
Rola Tabsh	2018	1	Beirut II	Sunni	None
Dima Jammali	2018	1	Tripoli	Sunni	Daughter
Paula Yacoubian	2018- 2022	2	Beirut I	Armenian Orthodox	None
Inaya Ezzeddine	2018- 2022	2	Tyr	Shiite	None
Ghada Ayoub	2022	1	Jezzine	Maronite	None
Najat Aoun	2022	1	Chouf	Maronite	None
Halima Kaakour	2022	1	Chouf	Sunni	None
Nada Boustani	2022	1	Kesrwan	Maronite	None
Cynthia Zarazir	2022	1	Beirut I	Minorities	None

WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS BY YEARS OF ELECTION, DISTRICT, SECT AND RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICAL LEADERS

Note. Table produced by author based on compiled data.

Women in Politics

Political Familism

In Lebanon, political leadership is transmitted along paternal lines for both men and women (Joseph, 2011; Sharif, 2017). This norm is more pronounced among women who face very high glass ceilings in all realms of politics, inhibiting until very recently independent candidates to reach political decision-making posts. For this reason, Lebanon's elections have reproduced the same political sectarian parties and family elites, in a system known as political familism. For example, the first woman parliamentarian, Mirna El Boustani, was only "elected" because she was allowed to claim the position of her father, who had died. This was the start of

a long and persistent pattern of women's political inheritance in the absence of a male kin member, either due to the man's death or because he was too young to fill the position. Thus, women's reproductive roles are mirrored in their assigned roles in politics: They are in politics to reproduce the same political families, to mother the heir, sponsor and mentor him. Women from political families safeguarded the family's political business' interests by winning seats, reserving them to their sons and keeping the network of alliances. Their role ends when they hand over the seat to the male successor.

Evidently, in 1991, Nayla Moawad was appointed to the parliament following the assassination of her husband, the late President Rene Moawad. She stayed in office until her son could run for the seat in 2009. The same context applies to Solange Gemayel, who ran and won in 2005 but later endorsed her son Nadim Gemayel in the 2009 elections. Nouhad Souaid was elected in 1996, while her son Dr. Fares Souaid won a seat in the parliament in 2000. Bahia Hariri, sister of late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and aunt of former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, served in office from 1992 to 2022 (Dagher, 2021). Dima Jamali, elected in 2018, is the daughter of Rachid Jamali, Mayor of the municipality of Tripoli and one of its prominent political figures. Sethrida Geagea, wife of Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces party, has been in office since 2005 (Table 1). Women not directly related to one of the historical political-elite kin systems were similarly supported by the *za'im*, the male political sectarian patriarch or leader of a group, even if they were not public personalities or members of his party. Examples include Ghinwa Jalloul, Rola Tabsh, and Ghada Ayyoub. As shown in Table 2, no matter how high or low the numbers of women candidates are, most of the winners were from political families until the 2022 elections, that saw the return of only one family-related MP, Sethrida Geagea.

In the 2022 elections, 50% of women winners were affiliated to traditional political parties. The other 50% are affiliated to emerging political parties led by women. Paula Yacoubian, heading a list in Beirut I, won with another candidate, Cynthia Zarazir. Dr Najat Aoun is member of Takkadom party, headed by Laury Haytayan. Halime El Kakour is a member of LNA party, headed by Zeina El Helou.

Culturally, women are stereotypically seen as weak, untrustworthy, and lacking in leadership, which is believed to be a masculine attribute (Ro, 2021), thus "naturally"

disqualifying them from participating in politics. Thus, women in politics were and are constructed as a "disgrace" to men: As one old Lebanese proverb states, "If you want to humiliate a man, make him face a woman."

Table 2

Distribution of Women Candidates and Winners Between 1960–2022

YEAR	FEMALE CANDIDATES	TOTAL CANDIDATES	ELECTED WOMEN MPS	% WOMEN CANDIDATES	% WOMEN ELECTED OUT OF WOMEN CANDIDATES
1960	2	279	*1	0.72%	50.00%
1964	1	274	0	0.36%	0.00%
1968	2	262	0	0.76%	0.00%
1972	3	366	0	0.82%	0.00%
1992	6	408	3	1.47%	50.00%
1996	10	599	3	1.67%	30.00%
2000	15	545	3	2.75%	20.00%
2005	16	484	6	3.31%	37.50%
2009	13	702	4	1.85%	30.77%
2018	86	597	6	14.41%	6.98%
2022	118	718	8	16.43%	6.78%

DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN AS CANDIDATES AND WINNERS DURING ELECTORAL CYCLES 1960-2022

Note. Table produced by author. Source: Ministry of Interior and Municipalities & The Monthly (2020) (*By acclamation)

Second-Class Citizens: Women's Legal and Socioeconomic Rights in Lebanon

The 1925 Nationality Law

"Citizenship is not gender neutral" affirms Suad Joseph (Jansen, 2005). Joseph argues that cultural differences have disproportionally disenfranchised women in Lebanon. These are manifest in what she calls "the care/control paradigm" and codified by the law to subjugate women and to give the patrilineal superiority.

Dating back to the French Mandate, the Citizenship law of 1925, which is still in effect today, discriminates against women as it does not allow them to pass on Lebanese citizenship to their children, even if they were born in Lebanon, while a Lebanese men can (Legal Decree No.

15). Moreover, the "naturalized" wife can run as candidate and participate in the voting process as per Article 5 of the 44/2017 electoral law enjoying equal citizenship (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017). This undermines the status of Lebanese women as equal citizens and constitutes a serious violation of women's fundamental freedoms and rights as nationality is a precondition to exercising fundamental political rights. Recognizing this, in its Electoral Observation Mission in 2018, the EU recommended the government of Lebanon to eliminate such discriminatory provisions against women, in line with international obligations to which Lebanon is bound (European Union Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Lebanon, 2018).

Personal Status Codes

> Under Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution (amend. 2004):
>
> The State respects all religions and creeds and safeguards the freedom of exercising the religious rites under its protection, without disturbing the public order. It also guarantees the respect of the system of personal status and religious interests of the people, regardless of their different creeds.

This article of the Constitution is the legal foundation for personal status laws, which do not give equality to women. It thus violates the guarantees for equality between citizens in Article 7 of the Constitution, as many issues that commonly affect women fall within the legal spheres governed by these personal legal systems.

In the absence of a national civil personal status code, the plural sectarian personal status codes discriminate against women regarding marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance. They do not only discriminate between men and women, but they discriminate as well between women of different sects and sometimes between women of the same sect, according to their place in the family. This often affects issues of inheritance, which can impact women's economic status and therefore their access to finance, a major impediment to women's political participation.

Women continue as well to be discriminated against because of the automatic transfer of their voter registration, once married, to their husband's place of registration, which denies them their individual choice. Instead, women should be given the right to choose whether to keep their registration place or change it to their husband's registry, as this inevitably affects their political rights as their voting district changes.

Economic Laws

Women's economic dependence and the high cost of the electoral campaigns also affects their political participation (Lu, 2020). Despite some legal reforms in the field of employment, women remain disadvantaged in the labor market, which is characterized by strong occupational segregation and the persistence of a gender wage gap. Although the number of Lebanese women graduating from universities is higher than the number of men, their economic activity remains low; this was only worsened by the economic crisis that has plagued the country since 2019 (Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics [CAS] et al., 2020).

In a recent labor force study conducted by Lebanon's Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), it was noted that women's labor force participation has significantly worsened over the last several years:

- The national labor force participation rate of women dropped to 22.2%.
- 27% of employed women are considered low pay workers,
- Female unemployment rates augmented to 32.7%,
- The overall share of women in managerial positions recorded a drop of about two percentage points to 26.7% in January 2022, down from 28.9% in 2018-2019 (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022).

With the worsening economic and financial crisis, women not only lost their jobs, but their wealth, and are experiencing higher rates of poverty and dependency (UNESCWA, 2021).

Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a serious challenge, especially in a context of socio-economic crisis aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, for women in Lebanon. GBV also has serious ramifications for women in the political sphere (Chebaro, 2021a). The prevalence of violence against women in politics (VAWP) is becoming more frequent, reflecting the worsening situation of GBV in Lebanon. VAWP is recognized as a barrier to women's political empowerment. Leading to increased self-censorship, VAWP has devastating effects (Di Meco & Brechenmacher, 2020) on women: It impedes democracy and human rights (UN Women & OHCHR, 2018). VAWP has become especially worrisome as more women are confronted with demeaning, sexualized content in the media and online (Maharat Foundation et al., 2022), as

well as in the parliament (Tlaiss, 2022), all while living in a country where "honor crimes" are still prevalent. Unsurprisingly, passing new legislation and amending existing laws has proven to be problematic: Historically, attempts to pass a violence against women law face heavy resistance from male parliamentarians and Lebanese men more broadly. In particular, male politicians who choose to champion such GBV legislation often face retribution from their constituencies and their political parties, making it harder for women's rights and gender equality advocates to find allies in government (Sanín, 2020).

The Revolution is Female

The political context after the October 2019 uprising motivated more male and female candidates to run for parliamentary elections. The democratization processes in which women actively engaged in during the October 17th Revolution (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom [WILPF], 2022) helped bring more women and youth into informal political spaces, endowing women with greater responsibilities and rights in traditionally male-dominated areas. This was especially true, given that the Revolution was leaderless. Women improved their ability to organize, share their experiences, and establish links with activists across Lebanon across confessional barriers. They founded and led new secular political groups and organizations, such as alternative syndicates, unions, and media platforms to defy the old patriarchal systems dominated by traditional politicians. This contextual shift created an impetus for more female candidates to run (Geha, 2020a).

The patriarchal practice of male supremacy in deciding who and how to run is expressed explicitly in the number of lists that did not have any female candidate and in the ineffective passive presence of female candidates on the lists (Allam, 2022). For example, although during the 2018 elections Akkar had an all-female candidates list (UNDP, 2018), there were no women on that list in the 2022 elections. According to some female activists and potential candidates (Soweidan, 2022), discriminatory norms and power-sharing practices were reproduced in the candidate selection process, even among political groups formed during or because of the Revolution, contradicting the inclusive slogans and feminist participatory processes of the Revolution. Some women activists were considered to have less chances than men to win due to their family status and their children's sexual orientation and were therefore internally

stigmatized and excluded (Allam, 2022). Unfortunately, this signaled the loss of much of the momentum gained during the Revolution for women's and youth participation in politics.

Stereotypes and Traditional Gender Roles

The pervasiveness of patriarchal attitudes and ingrained traditional and cultural stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, at work, and in society seriously preventing women from enjoying their human rights, including their political rights (UN General Assembly, 1979), and are hindering the full realization of women's potential.

Back in 1944, the parliamentary committee examining the law proposal on granting women political rights justified its rejection by highlighting women's vulnerability and need for protection from men, while reaffirming women's caregiving roles, claiming that:

> Giving women these rights are contrary to history, culture, religion, values, traditions, and civilization, and most importantly, it is contrary to the nature of women, because political matters have hardship, complexity, and danger, and this is contrary to their nature of women as being cute and fragile creatures. Women's political participation will lead to increased youth unemployment, to the disintegration of the family, the corruption of the house, and therefore the disintegration of the country and the corruption of its state.

The same excuses and patriarchal discourses still resonate in the Parliament today. While discussing the Governmental Statement in the parliament, the Prime Minister Najib Mikati echoed sexist and misogynistic comments justifying the lack of women ministers by relegating them to traditional gender roles as mothers, sisters, and wives (Sharbaji, 2021), a biased perception he frequently reaffirms (National News Agency, 2020). The applause and laughter of most members of the parliament in response to the Prime Minister's statement reflects the sexist perception of women's rights and needs as a joke or mockery. Only one female MP confronted him regarding his comments, asking to show his appreciation to women by appointing them to decision-making roles in politics (Sharbaji, 2021).

Relatedly, Deputy Speaker Elie Ferzli dismissed discussing the law on a women's quota proposed by MP Inaya Izzeddine, which he classified as "less important and complicated" than other issues on the meeting's agenda. This is not the first time the parliament has refused to

discuss a woman's quota: Many proposals have been dismissed since 2005 as "men fear to lose their power and authority when women are empowered" (Barakat, 2022).

This is in line with the misconception that "equality is necessarily zero sum game," and that empowering women is detrimental to men's career opportunities, as they must lose their stature for women to gain a seat at the table. Zero-sum bias frequently discourages males from partaking in the discourse of gender equality as they believe that they will no longer be able to thrive in the presence of women (Roy et al., 2020). This commonly held belief might explain why inequality is still prevailing, despite the prevailing harms of gender inequality on society (Brown et al., 2022) and despite all the efforts of feminist movements and civil society organizations to raise awareness about the benefits of gender equality to men, women, democracy and development.

In the absence of any Temporary Special Measure, especially a reserved-seat gender quota, and under the present electoral law, women face hardship and a high ceiling to succeed in winning seats although 54.4% of the 118 female candidates reached the electoral threshold (Lebanese Republic Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 2022a).

Supporting Women's Political Engagement: Civil Society

With a shattered official governmental sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to have a dynamic role. For the past decades, some NGOs have been supporting women's political engagement through programs that focus on enabling women to run for office (Geha, 2019). However, building women's individual capacities will not result in structural change in political structures and processes, or in socio-cultural norms more broadly. What those programs offer have profited individual women but have not been able to overcome the structural barriers to women's representation in politics. The programs were most likely aligned to international organizations and donors' requirements for fundings rather than toward a comprehensive and strategic localized plan (Ammar, 2018). Although many alumnae of those programs run as candidates, none of them has been successful to reach the parliament. However, NGOs have been successful in raising awareness, particularly through social media, about women's political representation and participation.

To support change, the agenda of women's political participation should be localized to cater for the national local needs. Women's organizations voices should be amplified in strategic political spaces to inform gender responsive policy making. This should include investments in strategic communications campaigns, building strong transformative feminist leading movement, high level political advocacy and engagement with members of parliament, government, and political parties, both men and women. Civil society should also play its oversight role to hold parties and government accountable for their commitments to advance gender equality.

Women Candidates

Women in the Cabinet

Fifty-one years after acquiring political rights in 1953, the first two female ministers were appointed in 2004. One of them is Leila El Solh, daughter of late Prime Minister Riad El Solh and the other was Wafa Dikah Hamzeh . Later, some women who had family or kinship relations with political leaders were appointed to the cabinet, such as Nayla Moawad, Bahia Hariri, and Violette Safadi.

Since 1943, only nine of the 77 Lebanese government cabinets have included women (Table 3), with a total of 19 women ministers out of a total of 1,072 ministers (Table 4). In 2023, women remain underrepresented in the government, with only one female minister out of 24, totaling a mere 4.17 percent of the actual government. Without any regulations to enforce women's participation in appointed and elected leadership positions, their participation is related to the whim of "male leaders." For these low political participation rates, the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index ranked Lebanon as 112 out of 156 countries in relation to women's political empowerment in their 2021 report (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Table 3

Women Ministers in Lebanese Governments (1953–2022)

Cabinet of	Prime Minister	Minister
2004	Omar Karameh	Wafaa Dika
		Laila Solh
2005	Fouad Seniora	Navla Moawad
2008	Fouad Seniora	Bahia Hariri
2009	Saad Hariri	Mona Afaich
		Rayya El Hassan
2014	Tammam Salam	Alice Shabtini
2016	Saad Hariri	Inaya Ezzeddine
2019	Saad Hariri	May Chidiac
		Violette Safadi
		Nada Boustani
		Rayya El Hassan
2020	Hassan Diab	Zeina Akar
		Ghada Chreim
		Manal Abdel Samad
		Marie Claude Najem
		Vartine Ohanian
		Lamia Yammine
2021	Najib Mikati	Najla Riachi

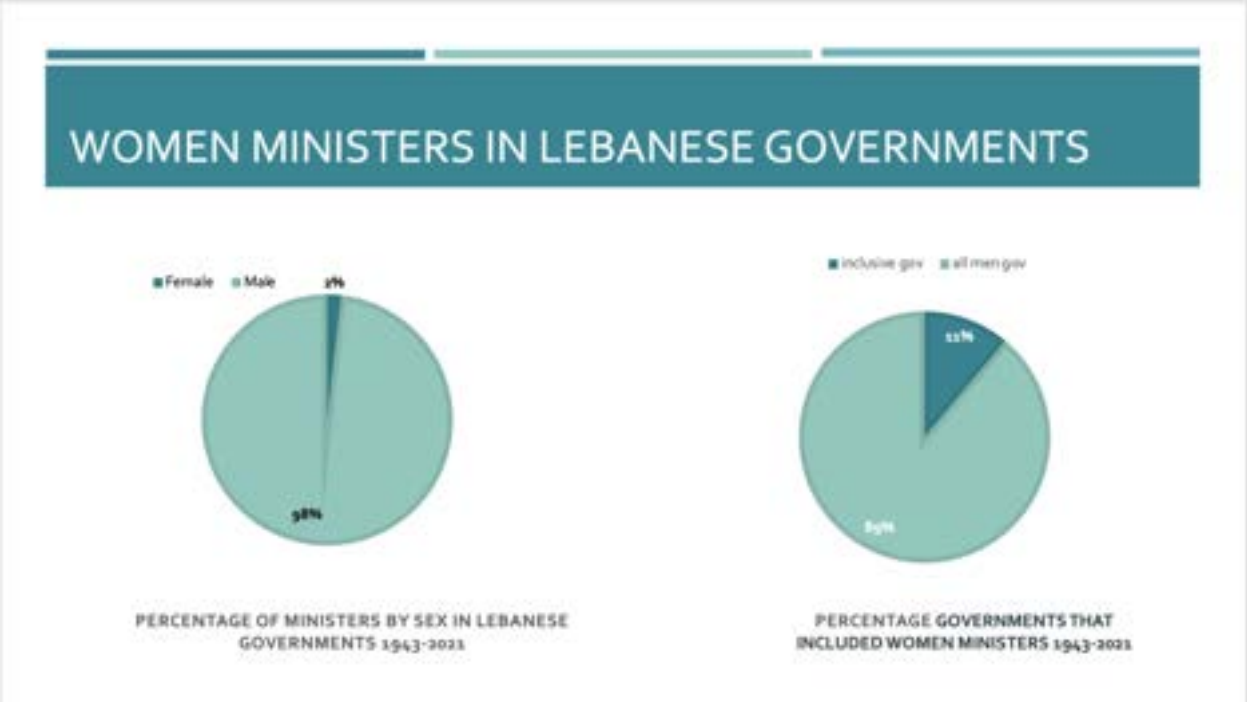
WOMEN MINISTERS IN LEBANESE GOVERNMENTS (1953-2021)

Note. Table prepared by author based on decrees of government formation (compiled data)

The political familism is explicit as well in the institutional marginalization of feminist voices. This is evidenced most recently through the conversion of the appointment of the president of the National Commission for Lebanese Women, which functions as Lebanon's national women's machinery and is the highest governmental entity in charge of gender equality, into a traditional appointment of the President's wife (First Lady) and most recently his daughter, irrespective of merit (Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon, 2017). This cements the patriarchal and patronizing hierarchy of dealing with women's issues in the government that has emphasized state feminism (Geha, 2020b). In addition to the lack of political will, the siloed approach to gender equality in the government, focuses on formal equality and not on the progress to achieve de facto equality in many sectors. It places the focus on women while ignoring the real structural barriers (Maharat News, 2020).

Table 4

Ministers in Lebanese Governments: Distributed by Sex and Inclusive Governments



Note. Table prepared by author based on decrees and UNDP- LEAP

Women in Municipal Government

Women are also underrepresented in local governments, with just 5.4 percent of Lebanon's municipal councilors and 1.9 percent of mayors being female (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2022a). Of note is that 10 years after women got the right to run and vote for parliament, a law was passed that enabled women to run and vote in local governments in 1963. As a result, Therese Eid was elected as the first woman mayor in Mazraat El Dahr Municipality in Chouf. No elections were held subsequently until 1998 due to war. In 2017, the municipality law was amended to enable women whose registry have been removed to their husbands' district after marriage, to run but not to vote in their native district.[1] This law has not been implemented yet as the last municipal elections were held in 2016.

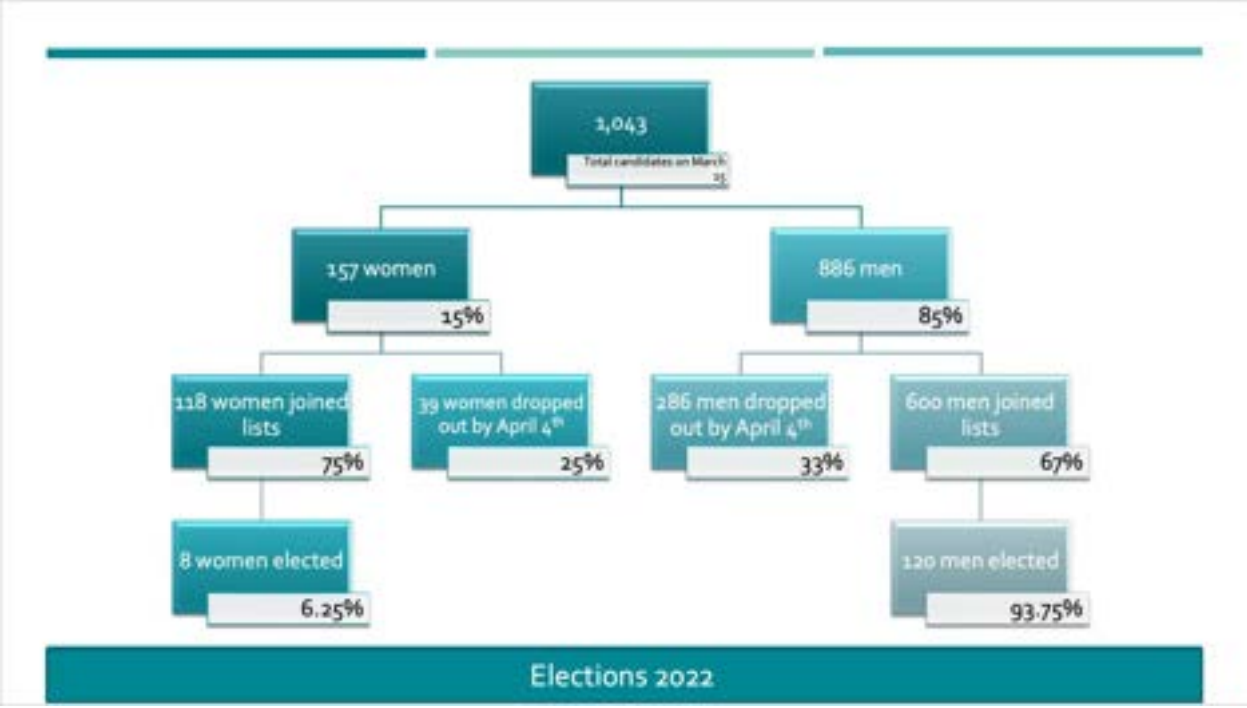
[1] Amending Clause 2 of Article 25 of Law No. 665 of 12/29/1997. For more information, see: http://www.legiliban.ul.edu.lb/Law.aspx?lawId=274019

Parliamentary Elections

The total number of female candidates rose from 86 to 118 between 2018 and 2022 but the relative increase was only 2% (as the number of male candidates rose as well). This increase in candidacy failed to be significant and conductive to higher representation (Tables 2 and 5). However, it broke down the political familism in women's representation.

Table 5

Candidates' Distribution by Sex and Electoral Status

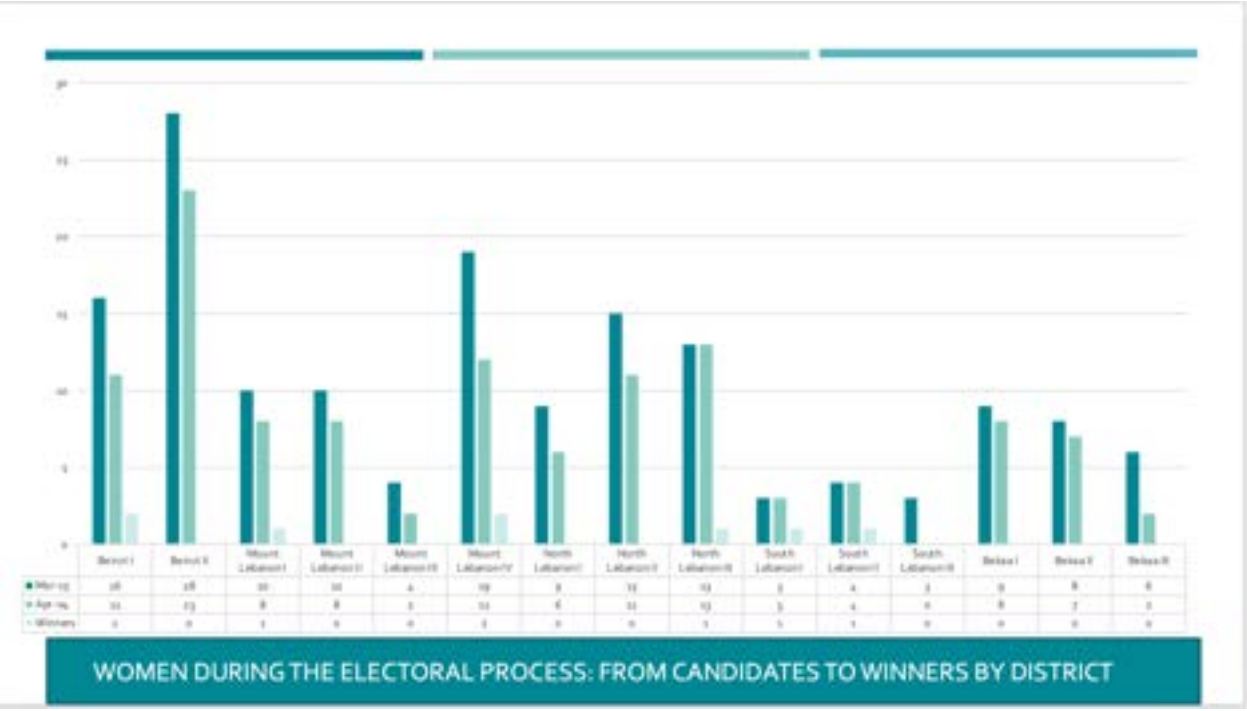


Note. Table prepared by author (compiled data). Source: Ministry of Interior and Municipalities Election Website

Despite the record number of 157 female candidates (15% of all candidates) running for parliament in 2022 (MOIM, 2022a), 37% of electoral lists did not include any woman candidates (MOIM, 2022b), a step backwards from the 2018 elections, which included one list of all female candidates (MOIM, 2022a, b). In Beirut II, 90% of electoral lists had at least a woman candidate, while there were no women on the electoral lists of South Lebanon III (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6

Number of Women Running for Elections by Status and Electoral Districts



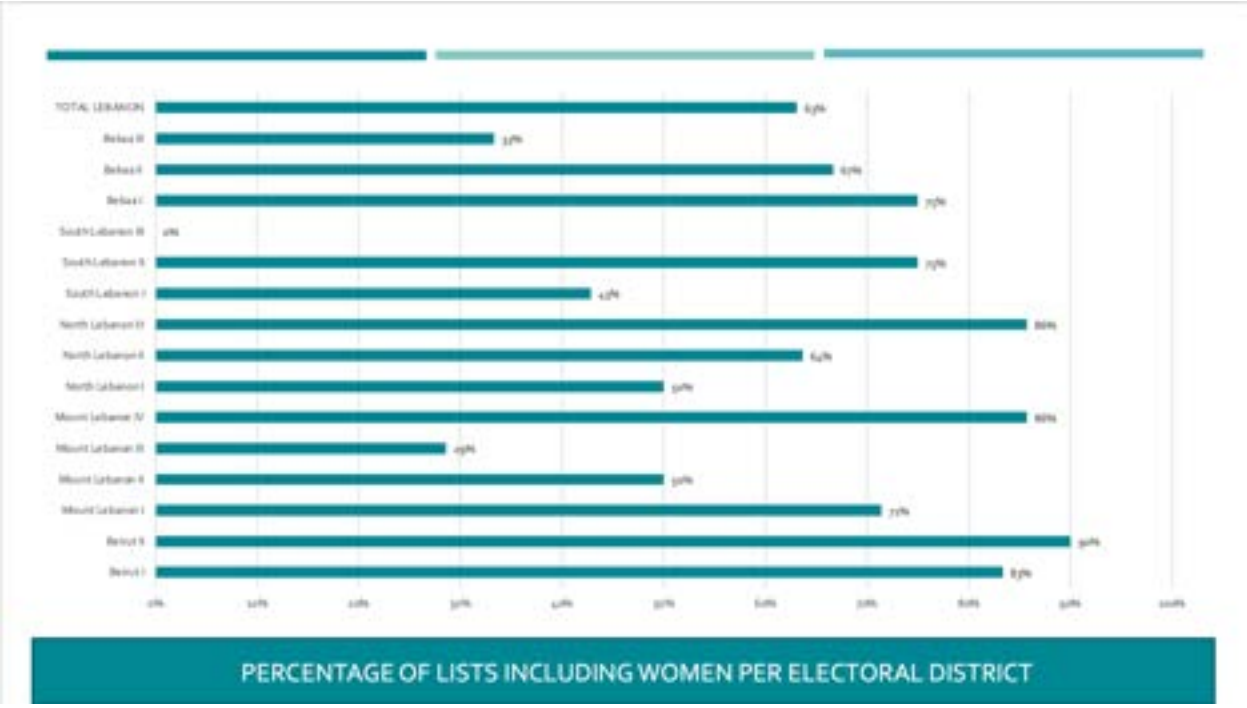
Note. Table prepared by author based on compilation of data from Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM), 2022

Out of 118 women candidates who were able to join lists in 2022, only 8 women were elected (MOIMc, 2022), a meager 1.56% increase from 2018 where six women were members of the parliament (Table 2).

With a mere 6.25% of women in Parliament, Lebanon was ranked 171 by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) according to its "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments" (IPU, 2022b). As such, Lebanon remains in the lowest 5th percentile of countries in this classification.

Table 7

Percentage of Lists Including Women per Electoral District



Note. Table prepared by author based on compilation of data from MOIM (2022)

Many factors influence the failure of female candidates in the electoral process. The sectarian quota, the preferential vote, media, and VAWP, all of which will be discussed in-depth later on, are among the most prominent. Importantly, it is worth noting that a popular trend emerged where parties would put a woman candidate on their lists, without adopting a feminist platform, simply for the visibility this would give them among specific voter groups. This trend has largely led to the abuse of women's presence on lists to "purple wash" the list—in other words, to make it appear more gender equitable when in reality, it is not. Worse, women in these positions were often "allowed" to run again seats that were virtually unwinnable (Hitch & Calderwood, 2022).

Even when women make it to parliament, they still face barriers and glass ceilings entrenched by the "old boys club" culture of the parliamentary structure in Lebanon. This patriarchal culture perpetuates the exclusion of women from decision-making positions, and work on domesticizing the "rebellion," or the women who refuse to be subjugated. VAWP highlights the ways that the domestication of "rebellious" women occurs, through the use demeaning comments, interrupting and silencing women MPs and ministers, and male MPs

commenting that women are uncapable of expressing their opinions or properly representing their constituencies (Chebaro, 2021b).

The institutional marginalization of women extends to the status of the "Committee of the Woman and Child," which is classified as a secondary committee by the Parliament (Ferzli, 2022). It is the only committee chaired by a woman, with nine male MPs out of 12 members in 2022. Women MPs were denied the opportunity to preside over any of the 15 other committees, including environment, energy, and finance, even though some are renowned international experts in those fields (Aoun Saliba, 2022).

Barriers to Women's Political Participation

Electoral Law: System and Quotas

While many legal proposals to introduce a gender quota were rejected by the parliament, the electoral law provides for a sectarian quota that reserves seats in electoral districts to represent specific sects. The 128 parliamentary seats are divided equally between Muslims and Christians (Middle East Eye, 2021). This law is in contradiction with Article 7 of the constitution, which stipulates that:

> All Lebanese are equal before the law. They equally enjoy civil and political rights and assume obligations and public duties without any distinction among them. (Lebanese Constitution, amend. 2004)

Reserving seats and restricting representation in specific districts for specific sects is contradictory to the democratic principle of equality and reinforces the principle of discrimination by restricting the enjoyment and exercise of fundamental human rights in politics a select group of citizens (UN General Assembly, 1979).

Although the electoral law was amended in 2017 to change the electoral system from majoritarian pluralistic to a more democratic proportionate system that allows for better representation of marginalized and minority groups (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017*).* The high voters' ceiling and the preferential vote made it harder for women to join lists and to win (Dagher, 2021). The preferential vote promotes the sectarian polarization of voters. Although civil society attempted to engage voters by calling for the end of the sectarian system, as well as greater gender equality and civil rights, the dominant personal political identity is a sectarian

(Alsaqqaf et al., 2021) and family identity rather than any other identity. Accordingly, many voters cast their ballots based on this political identity rather than on their gender identity that has never been a priority for most Lebanese female voters.

This might justify part of why women did not get high preferential votes although the female registered voters exceeded the number of male registered voters with 2,022,387 women (51%) out of 3,967,507 total registered voters (Directorate General of Civil Status, 2022).

This was compounded by the continued widespread resistance to gender quotas and other temporary special measures to support women's political empowerment (Al Marsad, 2017). In the absence of any pre-arrangement of the electoral roll, the preferential vote reinforces individualism, and reduces the voter's choice from the entire list to one of its members regardless of the political and programmatic dimension of the list. This translates into individual competition within the list thus striking its unity, giving advantage to politically and financially influential figures, and reducing the chances of women winning (UN Women & LADE, 2021).

The district (constituency) size also causes considerable disparities in the ratio of voters to seats, which violates the concept of equality of the vote, especially that these are related to the electoral expenditure ceiling (Lebanese Parliament, 2017). Furthermore, election legislation does not specify the criterion for awarding a certain number of representatives to each district, which is contrary to international best practices and supports sectarian gerrymandering to safeguard incumbent political parties.

As a result, recent elections have shown significant discrepancies in the number of votes required to obtain a seat. While in some districts candidates won with some 79 votes (MOIM, 2022d), others, many of them are women, lost even though they had secured thousands of votes either because their lists did not reach the "votes threshold," or because of the sectarian quota, or because the number of seats won by their lists had been filled (MOIM, 2022e). In fact, 64 of the 118 female candidates (54.24%) reached the voting threshold but only eight of them won (6.8%) (MOIM, 2022f).

Electoral Expenditures

Strengthening financing regulations of electoral campaigns, which benefit from high electoral expenditure ceiling (MOIM Supervisory Commission for Elections, 2022; Fayyad, 2022), and increasing the capacity of the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE) to implement them are needed to support a level playing field for women and other independent candidates. By default, Article 62 of the electoral law (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017) favors the country's wealthy and institutionalized traditional political parties and has gendered implications, as women are the poorest strata of Lebanese society (Salti & Mezher, 2020). Legal provisions also allow candidates and related institutions to provide "charitable" and material benefits, including cash, to voters. This support is not considered by law as a form of patronage as long as the institution has been established at least three years prior to the election (MOIM, 2022g). This provision has proven to be skewed toward the benefit of primarily men (Maharat Foundation & LADE, 2022). While the charity and social foundations are deeply culturally entrenched, practically, providing services and socio-economic support, especially in times of crisis, is an effective lobbying strategy to drive electoral support and consolidate patronage networks (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002).

Incumbency

Another major barrier to electing more women is long incumbency. The electoral law does not restrict the number of terms that a lawmaker can be elected. Limiting the number of mandates will create new vacancies and possibilities for lawmaker turnout, as well as greater opportunities for women and youth to engage in political life. Today, only 53 MPs are newly elected, while 75 are returning parliamentarians (LebanonOn, 2022) who have profited from an "incumbency advantage." (Fiva & Røhr, 2018).

In their campaigns, incumbents stress their own knowledge, expertise, connections, and their ability to provide benefits to their districts, all of which are advantages incumbents have that maintain clientelist relations between voters and party leadership. Voters, in turn, concentrate on such elements while ignoring the policies and positions of new candidates (Druckman et al., 2020).

Few women benefit from the "incumbency advantage" as the number of women in parliament and in politics in general, was very low over the years in Lebanon. Out of the eight elected women in 2022, three are incumbents and one MP, Nada Boustani, was an ex-minister.

Gatekeepers

Relatedly, political authoritarianism, a patriarchal and sexist culture that gives preference to men, a mandated sectarian quota, some religious shari'a mandates (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2022), and family interference (Barsakhian, 2022) all act as gatekeepers preventing women from becoming active political agents in Lebanon. As such, many districts have never had a female representative throughout the years (see Table 1). During the parliamentary elections of 2022, women ran as candidates in all districts, however, they withdrew completely from South III (MOIM, 2022b) after failing to join any list (Table 6) as Hizballah, a religious party with a dominating presence in this district, has mandated that women cannot run for elections and have issued religious instructions to vote for specific male candidates (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2022). Many women voters reported that they were pressured to vote for certain candidates and were not allowed to make free choices (Chebaro et al., 2022).

Many women candidates also expressed experiencing pressure from political parties, extended family, and society more broadly to withdraw from elections (Chebaro et al., 2022). In some cases, this escalated into some families disavowing the candidacy of their women members and disowning them in a very violent and humiliating manner (Chebaro, 2022a).

The nomination procedure is also affected by the perceptions that women are less "politically attractive" candidates than men. A strikingly large number of women and men still believe that men are better leaders and decision-makers. In a UNDP survey conducted ahead of the 2022 elections, 45% of women and 56% men respondents thought men were more competent in politics and in leading public institutions, while only 5% of women thought women were more capable (Madanyat, 2021). These perceptions might have roots in prevailing patriarchal misinterpretations of some religious edicts that deny women leadership positions (Alsaqqaf et al, 2021).

Moreover, research on 105 countries found that female representation is reduced by half in national parliaments in states involved in conflict compared to states that are not, as

patriarchal hierarchies and values are strengthened in militarized contexts (Alsaqqaf et al., 2021). This is widely due to held belief that men are "warriors" and women are "pacifists," with gendered features influencing their policy decisions. In Lebanon, a country that has crumbled under the heightened unrest and continuous sectarian and political conflict, following 30 years of war and massive gender-based crimes, women have been domesticated and dominated through sexual violence and antiquated values (Legal Action Worldwide & UN Women, 2021). They have been disadvantaged owing to stereotypes and assumptions that portray women as weak, vulnerable, and in need of protection, and therefore less inclined to take decisions and make strong policies especially in times of crisis. These are still strongly engrained and implicit biases affecting the perception of women and the candidates' selection criteria by both voters and political leaders, which consequently distorts the participation of women in the decision-making process. Although many awareness campaigns by different stakeholders have been unceasingly conducted to raise awareness, change perceptions, and engage more male leaders, the progress is still very minimal.

Political Parties

Political parties are subjected to the provisions of the 1909 Ottoman law of non-governmental organizations amended by the Legislative Decree 153/1983 on Associations and Political Parties. This law does not provide for a transparent democratic mechanism to guarantee equality of the party's members, as each association or party is responsible for drafting its own bylaws. In Lebanon, most traditional political parties have a hierarchical organization with women's committees or sections that marginalize women from mainstream political decision-making. This segregation contributes to the stereotyping of women and emphasizes their gender identity rather than their political activism. People expect them to only represent women and to perform the stereotypical gender roles. This led to many prominent women activists leaving their parties and establishing their own organizations and parties. Wadad Chaktura, for example, resigned from the Organization of Communist Action (OCA) in 1976 to establish the *Rassemblement Democratique des Femmes Libanaises* (Democratic rally of Lebanese women) (RDFL), and Linda Mattar became active in the League of Women's Rights (LWR) (Kingston, 2011).

To comply with the increasing pressure from international donors and civil organizations, some parties had only checked the box of gender equality by adopting an internal quota and fielding women "glass cliff candidates": These are candidates who are forced to run for seats that are largely unwinnable and, therefore, are merely representative in their inclusion. The few candidates who received preferential votes were backed by their party leader.

The political context after October 2019, however, offered new opportunities to shift away from the traditional hierarchical hypermasculine political parties to establish new rules and norms that break the pattern of women's exclusion (Brechenmacher et al., 2020). In nascent parties that have a more horizontal organization and more progressive and liberal approach to gender equality, women take diverse functions. Their leading political rather than gender identity is emphasized. Voters perceived them as capable to address different needs and represent a broader spectrum of voters irrespective of their gender. In facts, out of the eight elected women MPs, four are members of emerging parties.

Eligibility Age to Run for Office and to Vote

In Lebanon, the age at which citizens are eligible to run for parliamentary office (25 years old) does not coincide with the legal voting age (21 years old) nor with the legal majority age which is 18 (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017). Despite an initial move taken in 2009 by the parliament, which passed a constitutional bill lowering the voting age to 18, the necessary executive processes for the implementation of this constitutional amendment have not been taken (Al Jazeera, 2009).

Globally, the average parliament has 29.6% of MPs under 45 years old (IPU, 2022c) while it is only 17.19% in Lebanon (IPU, 2023). The average age of Lebanese parliamentarians is 52 years old, with 49 years old being the average for women parliamentarians, the youngest woman being 39 years old (LBC Lebanon, 2022). In fact, the Electoral Law 44/2017 continues to be age biased. In Article 99-5, it stipulates that "If two candidates have equal percentages of preferential votes, the older candidate shall be placed higher on the list" (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017).

This is a detriment to youth in Lebanon, and especially young women in the country, who have been participating in informal politics vis-à-vis civil society. They are driving change on

issues like climate change, racial and social justice, and gender equality. They are leading social movements and therefore their involvement in formal politics is especially crucial at a transformational time as voters and candidates.

However, they bear the twin burden of being young and female. Stereotypes and preconceptions about young people's competence and credibility, particularly young women, result in their exclusion as inexperienced and unqualified to participate in politics (UN Women, 2018). Importantly, the UN and the IPU has issued a call to action in Lebanon to support young women in politics who face the numerous challenges to ensure inclusive participation and representation. They have addressed "parliaments, governments, political parties, international organizations, civil society, and media to galvanize momentum for young women's political participation, recognize and understand specific challenges faced by young women in engaging in political leadership, share experiences and build capacity, and identify strategic solutions (United Nations Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth & IPU, 2020).

Privacy of Voting and Access

Pre-printed ballots enhance the independence, transparency, and secrecy of votes, and, therefore, lower traditional pressures from families and communities on voting practices, something that women historically suffer from (Ballington et al., 2016). Even though the electoral law in Lebanon has attempted to strengthen voter privacy, the polling staff were not well trained. This created an environment where candidates, or agents affiliated with candidates, infiltrated polling places by pretending to "assist" polling staff (Al-Modon, 2022). During election day, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) recorded countless violations of voting privacy and secrecy, including footage of some voters being escorted to voting booths under the pretext of "dependency (Ici Beyrouth, 2022).

Voting rights in Lebanon are particularly difficult for people with disabilities and specific needs, including elderly, pregnant, and lactating women, as most polling stations in Lebanon are not equipped to support their needs (European Union Election Observation Mission to Lebanon, 2022). In its 2022 report *Parliamentary Elections Observation Report from a Gender Perspective*, LADE reported that some 90% of women voters surveyed at exit-polls said they experienced difficulties reaching polling stations (Chebaro et al., 2022).

According to Sylvana Lakkis, president of the Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD), instead of enhancing accessibility during elections, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) tasked security and civil defense personnel with lifting people upstairs. This made many feel embarrassed and humiliated, and led to major health consequences for some. It was also stated that some political volunteers attempted to sway the votes of those being carried upstairs (Chebaro, 2022b). It is worth noting that an estimated 10-15% of the Lebanese population has physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental disabilities and that Lebanon has the greatest number of elderly people in the Middle East—10% of the population is over 65, most of whom are women (Combaz, 2018). Moreover, ballot stations are segregated by gender and confession in most districts. These were at a higher risk of infringement of voting secrecy and contributed to establishing voting trends, allowing diminished protection against vote-buying attempts (European Union Election Observation Mission to Lebanon, 2022).

Media

Gender inequalities in society are frequently reflected in the media, with stereotypical depictions and unfair treatment of men and women. Gender censoring thus remains a stark reality. As per the IPU (1994) recommendations, to correct current gender imbalances in political life, the media should strive to be inclusive and represent all members of society, avoid portraying women in a negative or diminishing way, and should emphasize the importance of women's roles in economic and social life, as well as in the development process in general.

The EU Election Observation Mission to Lebanon 2022 noted that “the media failed to provide equal visibility and balanced coverage” (European Union Election Observation Mission to Lebanon, 2022) in the absence of any action by the Supervisory Commission on Elections (SCE), which is mandated by the electoral law (articles 71(8c) & 72(4)) to safeguard the equitable media appearance of candidates (Parliament of Lebanon, 2017).

According to Maharat Foundations, women have disproportionate access to media. Despite making up 16.43% of the total candidates, female candidates did not receive equal television exposure as male candidates (Maharat Foundation & Madanyat, 2022). Monitoring data suggests that just 5% of the news reported relates to female candidates, while the remaining 95% is assigned to male candidates. However, due to a special program dedicated for

women-only candidates, women's involvement in political debate programs increased to 18% compared to 82% for males. Whereas social media can serve as an important alternative to the expensive traditional media platforms, women candidates similarly faced high levels of online smearing such as degrading comments, threats and insults of a sexual nature, and incitement to violence that silenced some of them (Maharat Foundation & Madanyat, 2022).

Male candidates were predominantly voicing their opinions in the media, indicating that only a fraction of social reality is conveyed. Underrepresentation of women's voices means silencing and excluding women from being heard on matters that are equally important and of concern to them (Gender Links, 2017). Instead, media frequently focuses on women's personal lives and their physical appearances. This turns away voters from creating positive public opinion on women's participation in political and public life and exposes women to higher rates of violence and prejudice (AceProject, 2023).

Recommendations

> To reach equality in participation and decision-making in public life, it is necessary to implement international and national commitments and norms, including through temporary special measures, create more enabling environments and institutional systems, reduce violence against women in political life and strengthen the voices of women, who face multiple forms of discrimination.
>
> Antonio Guterres (UN Secretary-General, 2020)

Based on Lebanon's ratification of the CEDAW and its state commitment to the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, including SDG 5 on Gender Equality, Lebanese authorities are invited to review the legal framework from a gender lens to eliminate discrimination while setting time bound targets (UN General Assembly, 2005).

To enhance the political participation of women, the government and parliament should:

- Take sustained measures, including temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1 of the CEDAW Convention and the CEDAW Committee's general recommendation 25 (UN General Assembly, 1999) to accelerate an increase in the representation of women in elected and appointed bodies in all areas of public life. These

might include reforming the electoral law to include measures to stipulate gender diversity in the formation of the lists and at least 33% reserved seats for women.

- Amend the electoral law to include provisions for waiving the candidacy fees for women candidates (OHCHR, 2022) or their reimbursement in case of withdrawal within the period mentioned in the electoral calendar (UNDP, 2018).
- Protect women by passing a law to penalize violence against women in politics (VAWP) and approve a code of conduct for the parliament as per IPU recommendations (IPU, 2019).
- Amend personal status codes so that women and men are treated equally with respect to marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights (Human Rights Council, 2021).
- Amend the nationality law to give women equal rights to confer their Lebanese citizenship to their children and spouses (Human Rights Council, 2021).
- Reform the legal framework to give women the right to choose after marriage whether to keep their place of registration or to move to their husband's (European Union Election Observation Mission to the Republic of Lebanon, 2018).
- Support the adoption of a gender code of ethics for media institutions to avoid sexism, to use gender sensitive language, to contest discriminatory practices such as objectifying women, gender stereotyping, and mansplaining during women's appearances on media programming, and to provide women with balanced media appearance opportunities as active political actors (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012).
- Adopt a new law to monitor the internal conduct of political parties to promote gender equality (UNDP, 2018).
- Issue executive decrees to implement the alignment of majority and eligibility voting age as per the law passed by the Parliament in 2009. The intersectionality of young age and gender is proved to have better outcomes on equality.
- Pass a law transcribing the constitutional provision to establish the principle of separation of powers (Lebanese Constitution, amend. 1995). This can contribute to better

governance and higher chances for more political actors to be involved in the political process, including women and youth, especially since some ministers are simultaneously parliamentarians, and thus occupy more than one decision-making seat.

- Monitor the impact of legislation, policies, and programs on women and on their political participation.
- The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities should guarantee people with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women equal voting rights by making polling stations accessible to preserve human dignity and avoid undue influence by accompanying persons.

To enhance the political participation of women, the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE) should:

- Intensify voter education campaigns to target specifically first-time voters, women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable voters.
- Cap the ceiling for paid advertisements in private media to open slots for unpaid participation of less wealthy candidates (usually women) to achieve balanced media appearance of candidates (Electoral law articles 71 & 72).
- Respect impactful and equitable gender representation to mainstream gender into SCE's work and reports as mandated by the electoral law.

To enhance the political participation of women, political parties should:

- Put in place transparent and competitive processes for the selection of the party's candidates to internal posts with decision-making power.
- Adopt internal women's quota for party's lists (National Democratic Institute [NDI], 2022).
- Nominate women for winnable seats.
- Provide women with equal resources and support during the electoral campaign.

Lastly, international and regional donor institutions and countries should move away from a universalist approach to "women's issues" and "feminism" toward a pluralistic approach that considers the particularity of each country and its context. This will help NGOs and even governmental agencies shift from outputs to outcomes and thus move into concrete steps to

resolve the structural barriers and to build a strong feminist transformative leading movement to influence the political context.

Conclusion

> Gender is not only about numbers. It is about the meaningful consideration of the gender differentiated impacts of our work and what we hope to achieve.
>
> Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations (United Nations, 2020)

While not every woman elected to parliament or another legislative body will prioritize women's problems or rights, women's representation is clearly an important factor in the development of inclusive, responsive, and transparent democracies (Pepera, 2018). Repealing discriminatory laws, taking special measures such as implementing a women's quota to guarantee equal representation, supporting women's economic inclusion, addressing violence against women and girls, and making space for the intergenerational transition are five transformative steps acclaimed by the UN to support achieve the SDGs (Guterres, 2021).

Increasing young women's participation in policy and decision-making processes has the catalytic potential to help countries and populations to prevent, mitigate, and recover from crisis and conflict, something Lebanon is in dire need of (UN Women, 2018).

Finally, as the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (2021) has said:

> Gender equality is a question of power. We still live in a male-dominated world with a male-dominated culture. A few women leaders are not enough. It is when we have many women in power that we transform power itself.

All stakeholders, men, and women need to summon the political will to recommit to the agenda of women's political empowerment. It is about time we make women's political participation and engagement a norm by changing the status quo, implementing transformative and reformative feminist strategy, and creating momentum.

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