

# Navigating Politics Under Patriarchy:

## TOOLS, STORIES, RECOMMENDATIONS



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# Acknowledgements

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# List of Abbreviations

<b>AiW</b>	Arab Institute for Women
<b>LAU</b>	Lebanese American University
<b>LGBTQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning and Others
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>VAW-P</b>	Violence Against Women in Politics

# About this Toolkit

## Purpose

This toolkit aims to equip politically active women with the required tools and skills to successfully navigate election cycles as candidates, voters, political campaigners and party participants. An essential ingredient in women's navigation of politics is their **mutual sharing of experiences to learn from each other, and from successful male allyship stories that they have encountered in their political circles, and that have supported their meaningful political participation.** This toolkit aims to be a first step in this collaborative process.

This toolkit aims:

To highlight violence against women in politics (VAW-P) as a significant deterrent to women's meaningful political participation in the Lebanese context, and a form of backlash against women's quest for equality and justice.

To serve as a go-to guide to support women's meaningful participation in politics in Lebanon, with its provision of first-hand accounts of backlash, and sharing of counter-backlash tactics and examples of meaningful male allyship.



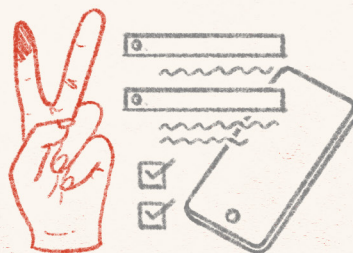
The toolkit balances theoretical concepts and framings with exercises and reflection boxes. It aims to bridge theory and the lived realities of politically active women in Lebanon, depicting the backlash experienced by these women, their tactics to counter it, as well as successful male allyship stories that have supported their meaningful political participation.

## Methodology

This toolkit relies on a three-pronged methodology.



One tool is a thorough literature review covering the Lebanese political system, and women's political participation throughout the country's history.



The second tool is a set of interviews, and subsequent follow-up calls with women politicians and political activists, as well as with allies – men political activists.



The third prong is a set of focus group discussions, whereby the Arab Institute of Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) convened a diverse group of prominent politically-active women in the country to share their experience in March and May 2022.

## Who is this toolkit for?

The toolkit targets politically active women in Lebanon, namely experienced and seasoned political activists, and former parliamentary (and municipal) candidates; as well as younger women interested in participating in formal and institutional politics, women active in recently-founded political groups, and women hoping to be candidates, and who are considering running for a political position in the future. The toolkit aims to help these women **address violence against women in politics** by giving them an overview of **other women's experiences** of backlash and violence in the political sphere and providing key definitions and concepts.

This toolkit will also be important to anyone whose work aims to support women's political empowerment in Lebanon. Legislators, policymakers, young scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations, and activists can all benefit from the experiences of women political candidates and political party members that are documented in this toolkit.



## What will toolkit users learn?

1. How a **Backlash** framework can help us better understand the violence facing women in politics.
2. The types of violence that women face in politics.
3. How the Lebanese political system sidelines women from political decision-making.
4. **First-hand experiences of backlash** faced by women political candidates and political party members.
5. The **strategies and tactics** that women political candidates and political party members have used in the past to **deal with backlash and to counter it**.
6. **Stories and best practices of meaningful allyship** from male political activists, depicting successful ways to support women's political participation.
7. **Recommendations** for further empowering women in politics in Lebanon.

# Context

Over 25 years after committing to the landmark Beijing Platform for Action (1995), Lebanon still lags in one of its critical areas – women in positions of power and decision-making. Women in Lebanon are under-represented in the civil service, corporate boardrooms, elected office, and most strikingly in decision-making positions in political parties. Lebanon is ranked 144 out of 146 countries for Political Empowerment according to the World Economic Forum 2023 Global Gender Gap Report.

Despite being among the first Arab countries to grant women the right to vote and run for parliament in 1953, women didn't enter parliament until 1963, when the daughter of the late Emile Bustani, Myrna Bustani, was the first woman to serve in the Lebanese parliament succeeding her father following his death. As of 2021, only 17 women had been elected to parliament, and following the 2022 elections women occupied just 6 per cent of parliamentary positions – the highest in Lebanon's history – and 4 per cent of ministerial positions. Women have been appointed in only 9 out of 77 Lebanese government cabinets since 1943.

1952

Literate women are granted the right to vote in elections (suffrage).

1953

Literate women are granted the right to vote and run for parliamentary elections.

Emilie Fares Ibrahim becomes the first woman candidate for the parliamentary elections.



EMILIE FARES IBRAHIM

1957

All women and men are granted the right to vote.

1963

Myrna Bustani is the first woman to be successfully elected to parliament.

Women were granted the right to vote and to run as candidates in the municipal elections.



MYRNA BUSTANI

1991

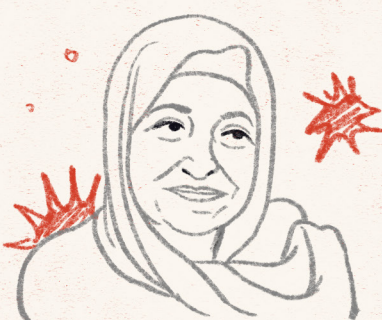
1 woman (Nayla Moawad ) is elected to parliament.

1992

3 women are elected to parliament



NAYLA MOAWAD



BAHIA HARIRI



MAHA KHOURY ASAAD

1996

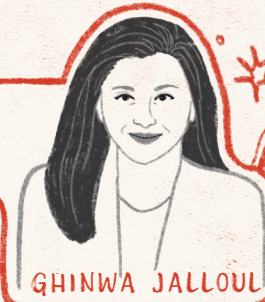
3 women (Nayla Moawad, Bahya Hariri, and Nouhad Souaid) are elected to parliament.

2000

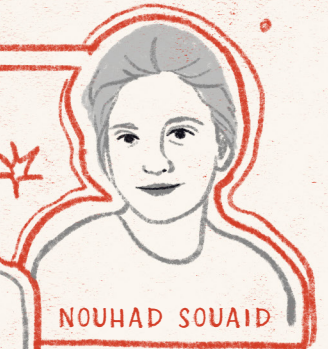
3 women (Nayla Moawad, Bahya Hariri and Ghinwa Jalloul) are elected to parliament.

2004

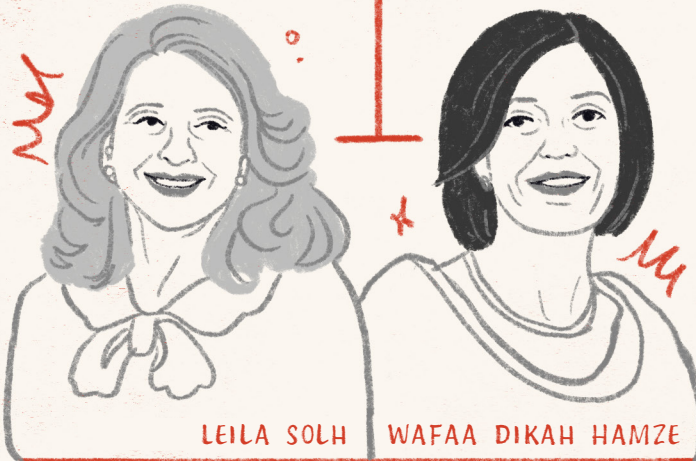
2 women (Leila Solh and Wafaa Dikah Hamze) are appointed as ministers, for the first time.



GHINWA JALLOUL



NOUHAD SOUAIID



LEILA SOLH

WAFAA DIKAH HAMZE

2005

6 women (Bahya Hariri, Nayla Moawad, Ghinwa Jalloul, Gilberte Zoueïn, Sethrida Geagea, and Solange Gemayel) are elected to parliament in the first parliamentary elections taking place after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and the withdrawal of the Syrian troops. This was the highest number of women MPs entering parliament to date.



GILBERTE ZOUËIN



SETHRIDA GEAGEA



SOLANGE GEMAYEL

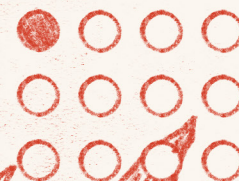
2005

1 woman (Nayla Moawad ) is appointed Minister.



ARDA EKMEKJI

The Boutros Commission's draft law proposes a 30% quota for women's participation in parliament. One woman, Arda Ekmekji – was selected to be on the Boutros Commission out of the 12 members.

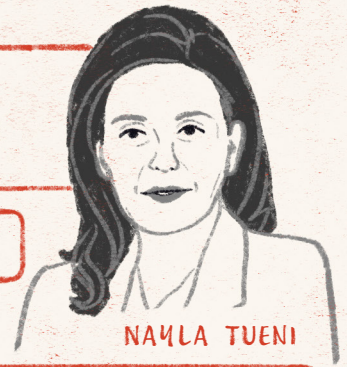


2008

1 woman (Bahya Hariri) is appointed Minister.

2009

4 women (Bahia Hariri, Gilberte Zouein, Sethrida Geagea and Nayla Tueni) are elected to parliament. The number of women in parliament dropped from 6 in 2005, to 4 in 2009.

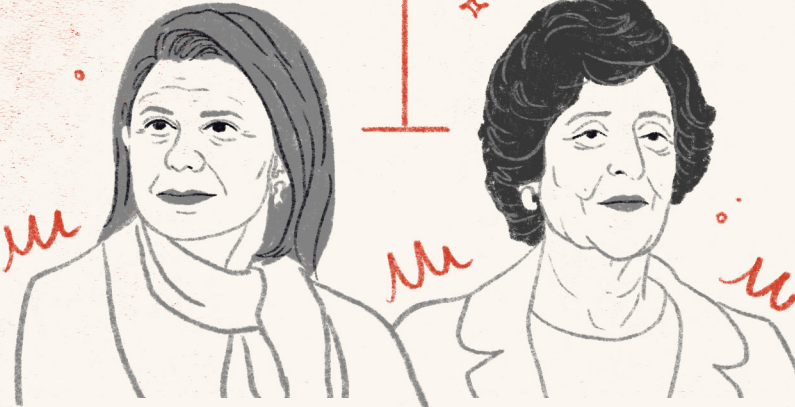


NAYLA TUENI

Raya Haffar El Hassan and Mona Ofeich appointed Ministers.

2010

The then minister of Interior and Municipalities Ziyad Baroud proposes two draft laws for a women quota in the Municipal elections. The first law establishes a 30% quota for women on candidate lists, while the second dedicates 20% of seats for women in the council. The laws did not make it to the general parliamentary session to be voted on.



RAYA HAFFAR EL HASSAN

MONA OFEICH

2011

Minister of Interior and Municipalities Marwan Charbel proposes a new electoral law dedicating a 30% quota for women in parliament. The quota clause was rejected.



ALICE SHABTINI

2014

1 woman (Alice Shabtini) is appointed Minister.

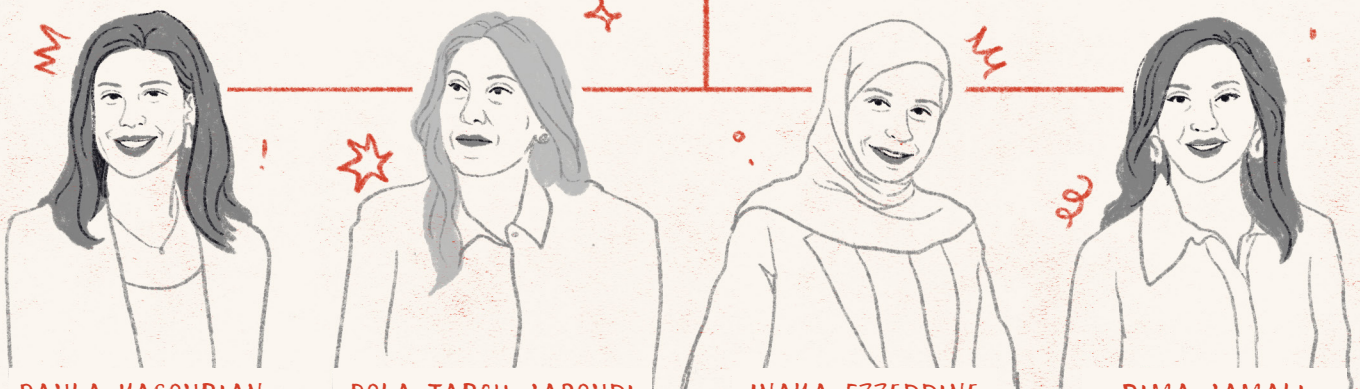
2016

1 woman (Inaya Ezzeddine) is appointed Minister.

2018

113 women ran for the parliamentary elections – less than 15% of the total of candidates. Only 86 out of the 113 were selected on electoral lists.<sup>1</sup>

6 women (Paula Yacoubian, Rola Tabsh Jaroudi, Bahia Hariri, Sethrida Geagea, Inaya Ezzeddine, and Dima Jamali) are elected to parliament.



PAULA YACOUBIAN

ROLA TABSH JAROUDI

INAYA EZZEDDINE

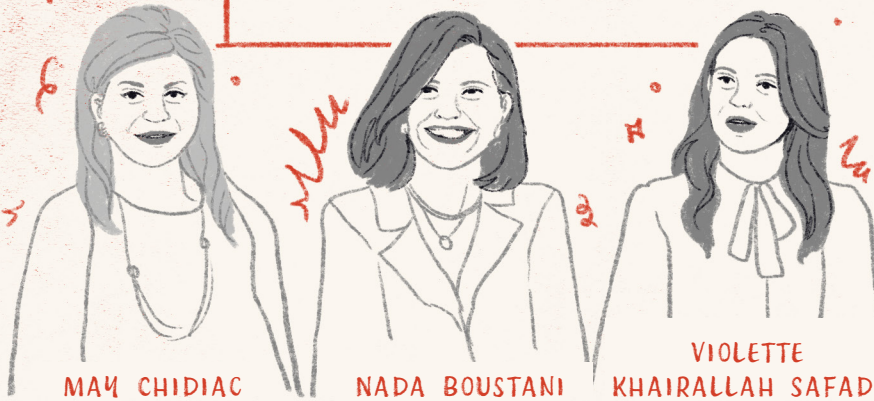
DIMA JAMALI

<sup>1</sup> Only half of the women who made it on the lists (43) received more than 227 preferential votes, while only two received 10,000 preferential votes.

2019

4 women (Nada Boustani, May Chidiac, Raya Haffar El Hassan, and Violette Khairallah Safadi) are appointed Ministers.

Raya Haffar El Hassan becomes the first woman Minister of Interior and Municipalities in Lebanon and the Arab world.



MAY CHIDIAC

NADA BOUSTANI

VIOLETTE  
KHAIRALLAH SAFADI

2020

For the first time, 30% of ministers in the newly appointed government are women, with 6 women ministers out of 20, marking the cabinet with the highest number of women ministers to date.

2021

1 woman (Najla Riachi) is appointed Minister.

NGO Fifty-Fifty proposes a draft law to allocate 26 seats in parliament for women in the 2022 parliamentary elections.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women proposes a draft law to allocate 24 seats in parliament for women.

MP Inaya Ezzeddine adopted Fifty-Fifty's quota proposal but MPs refused to discuss it.



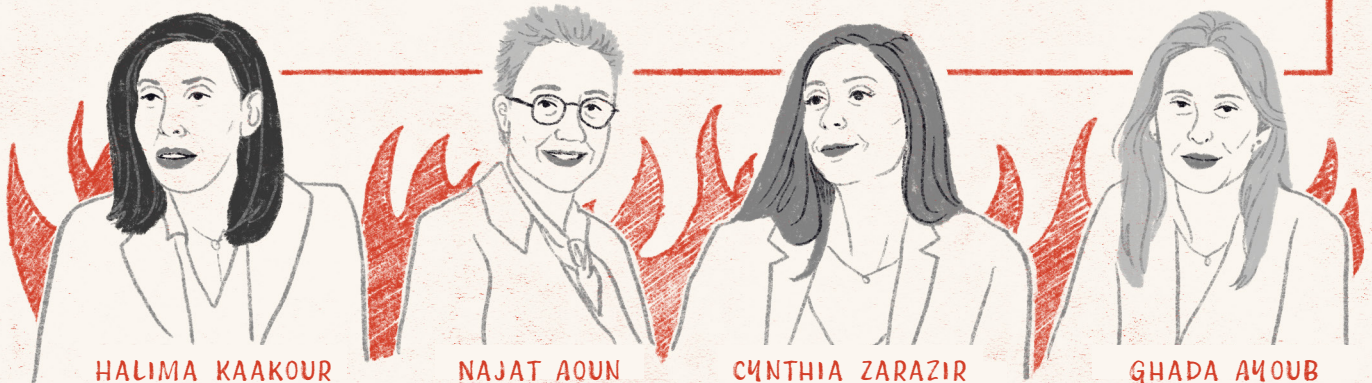
NAJLA RIACHI

2022

157 women run for the parliamentary elections – only 15% of the total candidates.

8 women (Halima Kaakour, Najat Aoun, Paula Yacoubian, Cynthia Zarazir, Inaya Ezzeddine, Nada Boustani, Sethrida Geagea, and Ghada Ayoub) women won seats in parliament, 4 of whom are among the opposition "Change MPs".

Women make 6% of the Lebanese parliament today, the highest in its history.



HALIMA KAAKOUR

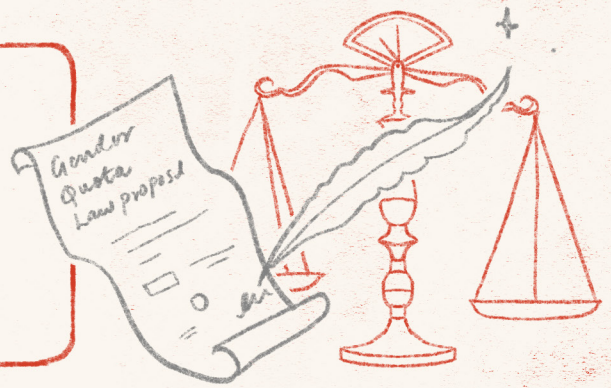
NAJAT AOUN

CYNTHIA ZARAZIR

GHADA AYOUB

7 December 2023

10 MPs (out of 128) from across political parties signed a gender quota law proposal for municipal council elections (the signed law proposal will be introduced to the agenda of the relevant parliamentary committees for further discussion and approval, before being submitted for endorsement during the plenary parliamentary sessions).



For decades, women have been largely unable to crack the political glass ceiling in Lebanon because of the country's patriarchal sectarian system. This system can be broken down into foundational blocks: sectarian personal status laws, patrilineal citizenship, and a kinship system prevalent in all spheres of life (see Section 3 for more details). These in turn are indications of an ambivalent and contradictory relationship that Lebanese women have with the state. Women are full citizens by law, with political rights such as the right to vote. However, by relegating personal status matters to sectarian courts—notorious for invariably upholding patriarchal bias—the Lebanese state abstains from assuming its full responsibility towards women.

The overwhelming political and sectarian denominations, patriarchal culture, and the partitioning of power among elites have diminished women's political participation. With few avenues for challenging the system, the participation of women remains very limited, individualistic, and unrecognized in many instances. Although resistance to women's political participation in Lebanon is rooted in structural issues, the absence of women's quotas in government positions, and in parliamentary and municipal elections further contributes to women's oppression in the Lebanese political life.

This web of sectarian, familial, and patriarchal entanglements not only obstruct women's access to pathways of political participation, but also compounds their vulnerability to violence, increasingly dissuading their involvement in political activity. As a result, women in Lebanon are excluded from the political scene which remains the reserve of the traditional, gate-keeping "male guard".

In addition, Lebanese political parties have not been hospitable institutions for women. Not only is female membership low, but women have been excluded from leadership positions. Their issues are tucked away into "women's sectors", and promoting women's equality is consistently pushed down priority lists, subordinated under parties' broader political and sectarian goals. The space available for the participation of non-traditional or non-partisan individuals, especially women, remains marred with overarching challenges, with few opportunities available to increase access to positions of power.

Women fielded on electoral lists and appointed to cabinets are picked by political leaders and gatekeepers based on sectarian quotas. They are therefore expected to follow their party's agenda. Most of these women are closely connected to strong political figures — husbands, fathers, or brothers. Thus, the overwhelming majority of women who do make it to parliament do not carry a feminist agenda, and have not led any fights for laws that safeguard women's rights.

That said, up to now, explicit physical violence against women political figures has not been a common feature of Lebanese politics. Yet, the influx of young women into parliament in May 2022 revealed an array of new hostile practices directed at these women; many of whom were from alternative political groups without any affiliations to traditional political figures. Though not always explicit or visible, this violence manifests in public and private spheres, online and offline, and through different forms.

Whether due to their direct exclusion from patriarchal bodies and structures, or because of both covert and overt forms of violence, it remains almost impossible for women to participate in politics in Lebanon.

## Political Parties Exercise

Historically, of the three political parties that emerged in Lebanon during the French Mandate period, two – Najjada and Phalanges – restricted membership to men. The third – the Syrian Social Nationalist Party – had just a few women members, despite officially encouraging women to join.

Reflect on women's situation within your political party – or the one you're most aligned with – is there a "women's sector" within that party, or are gender and women's issues mainstreamed, with women having equal access to critical positions of power and leadership?

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What are the activities of the women's sector? Do these activities reinforce gender stereotypes? Or does the sector lobby for feminist/women's rights legislation?

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What is the percentage of women in your political party's leadership?

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# Concepts and Definitions

Two frameworks are useful for analysing violence against women in politics (VAW-P):

- 1 **backlash**, which is a key determinant of women’s success in politics globally;
- 2 and **sextarianism**, a notion specific to the Lebanese context and the foundations of the Lebanese state, and one that is necessary to unpack before delving into the types of violence against women in politics in Lebanon.

## Backlash

Backlash is a vital framework for understanding the mechanics of violence against women in politics because it takes a holistic view of the situation facing women beyond the political field. It highlights the economic, social, and legal position of women as **collective determinants** of women’s success in the political arena. Backlash does not merely focus on reactions to particular legislations or gains – such as women’s parliamentary quota, or against a single female candidate. Instead, it analyses the structural reasons underpinning these **reactions to** and **outcry against** women political candidates and women’s political participation more broadly.

Backlash against women’s rights is defined in Susan Faludi’s (1991) foundational work as a “*recurring phenomenon that returns every time women begin to make some headway toward equality, a seemingly inevitable early frost to the culture’s brief flowerings of feminism*”. According to this definition, backlash is not an organised movement or a “conspiracy, with a council, dispatching agents from some central control room”, but rather part of a larger “reaction to women’s progress”.

Growing bodies of literature unpacking this classical definition argue that it emphasises its systemic character, which “has consequences for how backlash works, namely pervasively” (Haas and Binard, 2022). In simpler terms, backlash is not uniform. It is structural and can operate directly and indirectly across public and private discourse. It can bring together seemingly opposite actors, including self-identified “feminist” groups alongside stringent conservatives – see below table:

## Backlash Framing

Source: Adapted from Table 1. in Edström (2024), p.73

Type of Backlash	Aims	Likely protagonists
Defensive reactions	Restorative / reversal	Aggrieved privileged groups. e.g., Men’s Rights activists
Apprehensive reactions	Pre-emptive / delay-cancel	Elites with broader interests in status quo and growing profits
Proactive strategies	Revolutionary / simpler future	Fundamentalist/con religious Ethno-nationalist/fascist right
Opportunistic alliances	Instrumental / utilise crises	Populist authoritarian leaders, politicians, and movements

## BACKLASH IN THE ARAB REGION

Although Faludi's influential and classical definition came out of and focused primarily on the United States, the concept of backlash, and more specifically anti-feminist backlash has become popular around the world. But while the concept has not been thoroughly explored in Arab contexts, recent research conducted at the Arab Institute for Women (AiW) on backlash in Lebanon (2023) has found that the multiple definitions of backlash produced primarily by feminists in the Global North remain incompatible with the violence and exclusion that women in many parts of the Arab region face. In contrast to mainstream literature that defines backlash mostly as a violent or hostile **reaction** to progress made within or by the women's movement, the hostility experienced by women in Lebanon cannot be confined to a response and cannot be adequately framed as such. It is rather structural; embedded in the very systems that make up families, communities, and the state; and is pervasive, thus permeating all spheres.

So, how does backlash **work**? And **how can it help our analysis** of women's low political participation rates in Lebanon?



### Shataranj - Chess Game (Backlash Players and Sites)

#### Instructions:

1. Refer to the chess board on the [next page](#).
2. Name your "players"/"pieces"
3. Explore how they contest to reshape the spaces/sites of "the body", "the family" and "the nation".

**Equipment needed:** Flip chart, paper, coloured pens, post-it notes

#### Steps:

1. Prepare and focus on the left-hand side – or the "Backlash Sites".
2. Prepare a large flipchart with the rows and columns.
3. Discuss how to describe the main Backlash protagonists (chess pieces) in your setting and write them down under the categories (Pawns, Knights, Rooks, etc.).
4. For different types of chessmen (Backlash protagonist groups) discuss "how they play" (i.e., their apparent strategies) to capture and reshape the relevant sites of Body, Family, and Nation. Write this down on sticky notes to place them on the squares of the board, this makes it easier to move around.
5. Discuss how the chessmen engage in the different sites and how there may be connections and mutually supportive (or conflicting) moves. You could draw some of these connections between the moves.

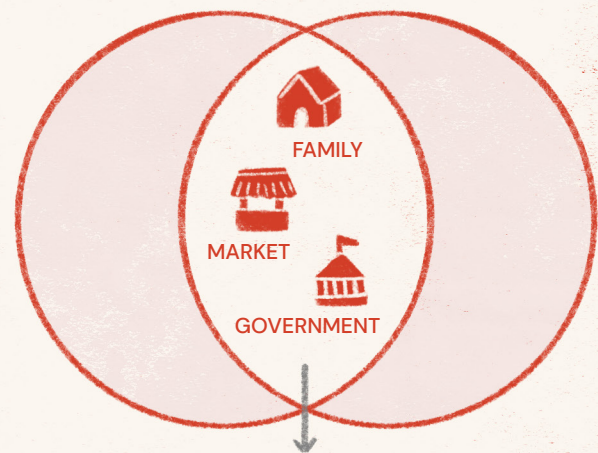
Sites of Backlash Players	Body	Family	Nation	Nation	Nation	Sites of Gender Justice Players
<b>PAWNS</b> Men's rights groups, Manosphere comms						<b>PRO-FEMINISTS GROUPS</b>
<b>KING &amp; QUEEN</b> Aspiring autocrats, Populist leaders						<b>PROGRESS LEADERS</b>
<b>BISHOP/MULLAH</b> Faith power brokers, Fundamentalists						<b>THOUGHT LEADERS</b>
<b>KNIGHT</b> Ethno-nationalists, Fascists, Militarists						<b>PEACEMAKERS</b>
<b>ROOK/TOWER</b> Hyper-capitalists, Wealthy elites						<b>FEMINIST FUNDERS</b>
Site fixes	Body	Family	Nation	Nation	Body	Site disruptions



## Sextarianism as a Structural Dimension of Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P)

This toolkit approaches violence against women in politics in Lebanon through the **sextarian framework** and frames the violence as a product of the structural dimensions specific to the Lebanese context and state. Women’s weak political participation and the violence they are exposed to and endure when they do participate, is a symptom of structural flaws in the very way society is constructed, and in power relations within familial structures. Maya Mikdashi’s sextarianism framework (2018) is particularly helpful in understanding these structural flaws and power relations. It explains how sect and sex co-organise social and political life in Lebanon, how they’re mutually constitutive modes of political difference, and how the Lebanese state sovereignty emerges from the management of those modes of difference.

Violence against women in politics through The Sextarian Framework



Outcomes for women: Exclusion from politics, weak participation, violence in politics

These flaws and power relations are exemplified by the **sextarian citizenship, patrilineal census registration**, and a **kinship hierarchy** that dominates all spheres of life (families, the market, and governmental institutions). These power dynamics at play result in a monopoly and abuse of power which essentially deter women from running for public decision-making positions and exacerbate their vulnerability.

### PATRILINEAL CENSUS REGISTRATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

Region of origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
*The region of origin is identified as the place of birth of the male ancestor at the time of the last official census in 1932.*

Kinship/Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Sect/Personal Status: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: \_\_\_\_\_

Census registration and organisation is a process that clearly highlights the ways sex and sect coordinate to cement women’s status within the Lebanese political order. Census documents are organised by family, such that individuals from the same extended patriarchal family carry the same registration number. The four metrics that govern the registration and organisation of males and females in local census offices are: **Region of origin, kinship and/or marital status, sect/personal status, and sex**. These four metrics determine which folder an individual’s census information is placed in, and importantly, the mechanisms for this information to change in relation to various life events such as religious conversion, marriage, birth, death, or divorce.

## Patriarchal Metrics Exercise

الاسم والشهرة	إسم الأب	إسم الأم	تاريخ الولادة	للذهب	رقم القيد	ملاحظة
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	17/1/1986	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	22/10/1987	شيعي	000	نقلت بالزواج من سجل الريحان رقم 188 تاريخ 30/11/2015
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	20/3/1988	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	21/5/1989	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	19/9/1989	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	18/11/1989	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	9/11/1992	شيعي	000	
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	27/7/1994	شيعي	000	بلوغ السن
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	18/2/1995	شيعي	000	نقلت بالزواج من سجل جوييا رقم 307 تاريخ 8/10/2015
عبد الله العبد	عبد	عبد	28/2/1995	شيعي	000	نقلت بالزواج من سجل نعله رقم 34 تاريخ 2/10/2015

Image source [linked here](#).

Looking at the image above, reflect on your situation by identifying the following:

The room (region) where you are located: \_\_\_\_\_

The box where you are located: \_\_\_\_\_

The folder where you are located: \_\_\_\_\_

The record where you are located: \_\_\_\_\_

Consider the ramifications of your location on your prospects and future chances of attaining a leadership or decision-making position in your political group/party.

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Citizens are disaggregated according to sect and placed as extended patriarchal families into separate folders, and it's based on this shared sectarian folder that extended patriarchal family serial numbers are issued (Mikdashi, 2018). However, because serial numbers are based on extended patriarchal families, female citizens cannot be considered heads of families. Female citizens are registered strictly in relation to male citizens, as wives or daughters, while male citizens form the nodal points around which legal, bureaucratic, and kinship relations develop, extend, and contract (Mikdashi, 2018).

Mikdashi explains that when a female citizen gets married, she is removed from her family serial number and added to that of her husband. **Women thus can only be added or subtracted from these “patriarchally-organised databases” of extended families, but they cannot be “non-patriarchally incorporated individuals”.** When a female citizen is married, she automatically adopts her husband's serial number and thus inherits his local district and sect, and is counted as being from his region, and hence votes in that region. The couple's children will be automatically incorporated into the serial number of their father. This suggests women are mere appendages of men, with limited agency and ability to be legal guardians of their children, and to develop their own political clout in their own districts if they choose to.

## Family Census Exercise

بيانات  
عن سجن

الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الداخلية والبلديات  
المديرية العامة للأحوال الشخصية

لا

معدله	اسم الام وشهنتها	اسم الاب	الاسم والشهرة
١٥	ملاي	كريم	شاهه الراعي
١٧	الراعي	هو زينة	طارق تروقات
١٢	ملاي	شاهه	احمد الراعي
١٤	ملاي	شاهه	يحيى الراعي
١٨	ملاي	شاهه	علي الراعي

Photograph of a Lebanese family census form, showing information on the family members of the author (Nay El Rahi), including the author's siblings' names. Photograph by Nay El Rahi.

Consider this image and then look at the most recent family census document you have. Note if you or your sisters are crossed in red (moved to their husbands' region and folder). Reflect on your (or your sisters') experience in the latest elections – where did you/they vote? Did you/they have a hard time figuring out their electoral district? Were your/their names registered? If you are to run for a seat in parliament under the current electoral law, in which district would you have to run? What would this mean in terms of growing your political clout and tapping into your network? More importantly, how would your experience be different than that of your brother or husband?

## KINSHIP HIERARCHY

Family hierarchies are embedded within state registries, but families' powerful influence is not limited to the state in Lebanon. Rather, familial structures and kinship are fundamental organising and mobilising powers within Lebanese society. Three notions are especially key to understanding both the Lebanese state and society: **patriarchal connectivity**, the **kin contract**, and **political familism** (Joseph, 1993, 2001, and 2005).

**Patriarchal connectivity** is a cornerstone of Lebanese political and social life. It has its roots in connective selfhood (Joseph, 1993). **Connective selfhood** describes the fluid construct of self among Arab families which is defined in relation to others and considers intimate others as extensions of the self. It is a dominant of male and female relationships in Arab families that centres familial relations over the individual. Although modelled in and by familial relationships, **connectivity** extends across significant connections and relationships in Lebanese society via idiomatic kinship, so non-kin persons can evoke the legitimacy and expectations of kin relationships in all spheres. "Coupled with patriarchy, connectivity organizes selves with fluid boundaries in a gendered and aged hierarchy, in a culture that valorizes kin idioms in all relations" (Joseph, 1993).

## Connectivity in Patriarchy Exercise

Consider the following article by Suad Joseph – Joseph, S. (1994). Brother/Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love, and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon. *American Ethnologist*, 21, 50–73, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1994.21.1.02a00030>

Under the section titled “*psychodynamic processes: connectivity and love in patriarchy in Lebanon*”, on p. 55, read the passage starting with “*I use connectivity*”, and ending with “*their emotions, desires, attitudes, and identities*”; and on p. 56, the passage starting with “*Connective relationships were considered loving when (...)*,” and ending with “*They were to share, care, and commit to each other.*”

In light of the passages above, map out the significant relationships in your own families. Reflect on the dynamics between the elders and juniors on the one hand, and between the men and women on the other. Write these down in bullet form.

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Reflect on your relationship with your siblings – with special attention to your relationship(s) with your brother(s). Compare and contrast with the above excerpt and write the patterns you observe in bullet form.

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Reflect on your prospects and chances of running for elections in the two cases:

If you share your family's political affiliation:

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If your political affiliation is not aligned with that of your family:

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### **Patriarchal Kinship Exercise**

From the same article, on p. 50, starting with the first line of the article "*The Yusifs were a working-class family living in the urban neighborhood of Camp Trad,*" and ending with the line "*she indicated that she would like a husband like Hanna,*" on p. 51.

On p. 58, read the passage that starts with "*It is, I argue,*" and ends with "*not so explicitly mandated and supported.*"

In light of those two passages, reflect on the number of times you – or women in your family – were forced into decisions, actions, or behaviours – in the name of familial love and affection.

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## Violence Against Women in Politics

**Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P)** is defined as “any act, or threat, of physical, sexual, or psychological violence that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights and a range of human rights” (UN Women 2021). VAW-P is used interchangeably with terms like “discrimination”, “abuse”, and “harassment”, and often leads to a significant decrease in women’s participation in political affairs (e.g., voting and candidacy). It thus jeopardises women’s political rights, hinders their free and effective participation, and disproportionately decreases the opportunities for their political involvement, as compared to men – specifically in the Lebanese context.

### TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS (VAW-P)

According to [a report by UN Women on preventing violence against women in politics](#), VAW-P appears in multiple ways. The types of violence typically faced by women in politics are divided into physical, sexual, and psychological violence:



**Physical violence** includes “assassinations, kidnappings, and beatings”.



**Sexual violence** includes “sexual harassment, unwanted advances, sexual assault, rape, sexualised threats, and altered pornographic sexualised images”.



**Psychological violence** includes “threats, character assassination, stalking, online abuse, as well as economic violence such as denial of salary or political financing, property theft, or damage”.

However, recent research coming out of several countries in the Global South following electoral milestones, reveal more nuanced forms of violence against women in politics. A report produced by local non-governmental organisations Madanyat and the Maharat Foundation on VAW-P in Lebanon, titled “Breaking the Silence of Violence Against Women in Politics” adds four more types of VAW-P based on Lebanese women’s experiences in the recent parliamentary elections in May 2022:



**Online violence** manifested through “rumors, fake news, defamatory videos, photos and insults”.



**Social violence** resulting from discussing and shedding light on non-traditional topics and taboos such as LGBTQ+ and thus faced by physical, sexual, or psychological intimidation.



**Economic violence** which includes women being denied access to campaign resources in comparison to male counterparts. Many women are denied equal access to resources during electoral campaigns; they thus start off with limited budgets and often finance their own campaigns. A study conducted by UN Women showed that 97 per cent of candidates faced financial challenges that they considered affected their chances of winning. Disproportionately, their male counterparts enjoy a pool of resources, and staunch support by traditional parties’ leaders, such as dedicated media spots, campaigning visits, trained agents, and electronic and social media teams.



**Legal discrimination** includes the obstacles the Lebanese law places on women in politics. The first is the change of registry to the husband’s registry after marriage. Another is the non-existence of steps that ensure women’s protection and equality within political participation.

# Backlash Tactics

This section highlights the backlash tactics experienced by women political activists in Lebanon. In March 2022, the AiW convened a select group of politically-active women to discuss and unpack the different forms of hostility, violence, and backlash that they have endured. This section also cites experiences and statements of women political activists from a study<sup>2</sup> by the AiW-LAU and UN Women on Women's Political Participation in Lebanon.



\* The names of the women and men who participated in the focus group discussions and interviews have been anonymised.

## Structural Impediments



*"Not only in traditional parties, even the new "alternative" parties, the dominant thinking is that they won't put women on the frontline."*

As previously discussed, political and social structures are major drivers of backlash and of the violence that women in politics endure in Lebanon. Women in politics are constantly forced to work within the structures of the patriarchal sextarian system. They continuously feel this shadow imposing, restricting, and countering their every move. Even when it looks like they have made it to decision-making circles, they still find themselves up against seemingly invisible barriers, often needing the support of usually higher ranking, male figure.

Hala, a former elections candidate and participant in AiW's convening session explains:



*"They often put us in a difficult position, let's say if tomorrow there's an invitation to an orphanage, they ask us (the women) to go. But if I want to discuss the economic situation for example, I have to be supported from someone "above". Even parties are biased; informal networks are much stronger than formal networks within parties."*

Another participant, Sarah says:



*"For example, in the discussions of the alliances and the rosters for the 2022 parliamentary elections, women were the weaker group, and hence women were the first to be eliminated (...) if someone is to be removed from a proposed list, it's always invariably the woman candidate."*

The existing structures in political parties and collectives are modelled and forged by men's alliances. Consequently, these collectives often lack adequate spaces and mechanisms to ensure a level playing field between men and women members. In most political parties and circles in Lebanon thus far, women have been unable to truly take up their space; the genesis of the space itself is not designed

<sup>2</sup> Mourad, J. (2022). *Women's Political Participation in Lebanon: Comparison between the 2018 and the 2022 parliamentary elections* [Unpublished report]. The Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and UN Women Lebanon.

to receive them, and only intends to intercept their potential and expertise. Indeed, male-dominated political practice appears to be a primary mode of operation within the Lebanese system. Not only do safe spaces for women, particularly feminists, to practice politics, hardly exist in Lebanon despite feminist efforts, this reality has been normalised and the women calling it out silenced and gaslighted (El Rahi, 2022).

One of our participants, Dunia, highlights:



*"A woman is not an independent entity herself and does not have the power to run wherever she wants."*

## Dismissing Women's Political Aspirations

*"Your husband should come take you away."*



Most participants in the AiW's convening session relate to experiences of how gendered assumptions and discrimination manifest in seemingly harmless conversations with male comrades, and often the media. Women are exclusively and constantly asked about their household and children, as opposed to their careers, political activism, or aspirations. This discourse is rooted in a stereotypical approach to women – one that is often grounded in sex-based fallacies that are insidiously transformed into harmful stereotypes about women's abilities. These stereotypes, in turn, serve to sideline and exclude them. This discourse is also reinforced by a common practice among the male-dominated political oligarchy in Lebanon to publicly demean women politicians during televised debates, making blatantly sexist and belittling comments referring to their families, sex lives, and looks.

Maha elaborates on how men in parties *will often market that women are emotional and do not know how to work*. Women political activists often receive clear messages that they "do not belong", and are dismissed and belittled when they show willingness to take up decision-making positions.

A recent unpublished study, conducted by the UN Women in 2022 on Women's Political Participation in Lebanon cites some of the more obvious statements that are intended to belittle women's political career and dampen their ambitions. These comments, labelled as "Demotivating Words" in the study, were addressed to women candidates after they shared their decision to run for the 2022 Parliamentary Elections.

*"Because you're a woman, you won't be able to do it."*



*"You will ruin our family's reputation."*



*"A woman is going to lead us? That's absurd."*



*"This is 'men's work' and nobody will ever elect you."*



This type of statements contributes to silencing women from engaging in political debate for fear of being targeted and/or shamed. Similar statements are perpetuated by high-ranking male politicians and journalists, both in public – parliamentary sessions and television shows – and in private conversations. This insidious practice is furthered by the country's political elite against women politicians across their affiliations. So, hearing it coming from lower-ranking political activists is no surprise.



## Denying Access to Decision-Making

*"This is a gathering of men! You can't come".*



Networking activities, framing politics as the "old men's club", as well as the abusive power dynamics within political circles, all intentionally and actively exclude women candidates from partaking in decision-making, especially when they introduce new ways of thinking that challenge the patriarchal status quo. There is a striking absence of transparency in decision-making circles, or "the small and exclusive group of men who ultimately take the decisions".

Roula describes:



*"You sleep on a decision and wake up on a whole new different one."*

Mira frames this practice as an "erasure" of previous discussions, whereby decisions are often made irrespective of the party's executive body, completely disregarding their input, and all the effort and time put in by all the members who previously deliberated on the matter.

## Parachuting Selected Women into Political Parties

One of the underlying patriarchal premises of political parties is the perception of politics as an exclusive male enterprise. Women's presence and engagement within parties are thus viewed as a novelty or exception. This patriarchal model sometimes engenders a scarcity mentality whereby women in political groups or parties are conditioned to believe that the spots reserved for them are limited, resulting in a politics of competition as opposed to solidarity among women. This tendency is reinforced by practices carried out by men with decision-making power within the parties, particularly in critical moments like parliamentary or municipal elections. Often, the (male) leadership of the party decides – without any participatory decision-making – to field women with considerably less or even no experience compared to other seasoned women party members who are waiting for their chance to run. According to the participants in AiW's convening session, this practice of "parachuting" women from outside the party to represent it during elections is deployed by leading figures in the party to embellish their political image as "gender-sensitive" and "supportive of women", while keeping the status-quo intact and keeping the experienced women within the party at bay.

Other tactics mentioned during AiW's convening session included the continuous and consistent rejection of the quota proposal by the (male) leadership of most traditional parties despite it being a persistent request of the women within these parties (El Rahi, 2023).



# Counter-backlash Tactics and Allyship

This section features some of the tactics that the women activists from AiW's convening session deployed to counter the backlash/violence within their parties, as well as examples of good practices and successful male allyship in support of women's meaningful political participation. The examples and practices of allyship were collected from two sources – the women activists convened at AiW who shared tactics that male allies used which they found particularly helpful, and from six prominent male activists who have shown support for meaningful political participation of their fellow women activists.

## Counter-Backlash Tactics



**Exposing and reporting harassers/abusers/perpetrators of blatant sexism and discrimination, to encourage other (younger or less experienced) women to break the cycle of shame and silence** and find allies who help in countering violent behaviour. Though openly exposing these men can be difficult and puts women in a vulnerable position, there is no possibility of pattern disruption when women remain silent. This also applies to exposing instances of “parachuting” candidates and exclusion of women from decision-making.

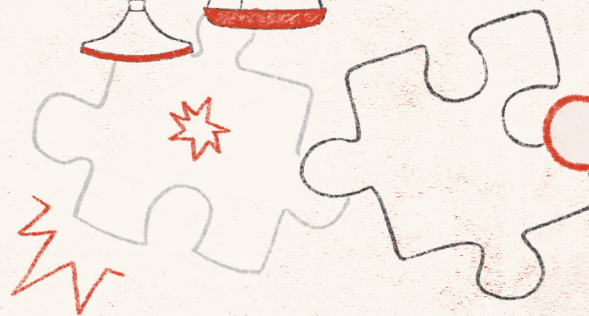
**Participating in conversations, workshops, and trainings about VAW-P.** Access to resources has proven to enable women in political groups and parties to become better equipped with the correct and adequate tools, and consequently become more empowered and more aware of all the subtle ways in which VAW-P can manifest. This creates a chain of events, prompting more inclusivity and providing more spaces for women to connect and collaborate across parties and groups.



**Lobbying for a quota proposal which guarantees women's representation in parliament,** by applying pressure from within parties and groups on the respective parties' leadership.



**Collaborating with different non-governmental and governmental entities to broker for unified demands and concerns more resonantly.** This allows for a cohesive approach as one entity on its own cannot create impact.



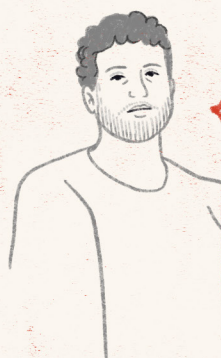
## Good Practices and Examples of Male Allyship

The testimonies of good practices and examples of successful male allyship from the perspective of the women who were convened by the AiW are:

1. Providing mentorship, particularly giving advice based on past experiences in politics, and who to network with.
2. Helping their women peers to network and forge new connections; particularly involving them in events and introducing them to key contacts.
3. Actively joining the team within the party that is lobbying for a quota and being vocal about their advocacy for women's leadership in their circles.
4. Ensuring that women feel comfortable, not marginalised or silenced within the political party or organisation – namely when it comes to demanding that women candidates receive the same treatment as them – this is particularly relevant to male candidates in elections.
5. Deliberately speaking about women candidates in a positive light, and highlighting their attributes, particularly in decision-making circles. Men in decision-making positions within political parties, and/or parties' male candidates encouraging people to give preferential votes to women on their lists. Using social media to voice support and empowerment of their women peers on the list.
6. Providing emotional support for women in their political circles.
7. Providing financial support to candidates irrespective of their gender.

From the perspective of the men interviewed by the AiW, all six pointed out that key tools that helped them develop genuine allyship was learning from and listening to their women peers' experiences, and being exposed to feminists who pointed out discrimination and called out sexist behaviour in their political circles, at home and within their immediate community. The allies interviewed expressed that actively listening to their women peers and holding space for them to express themselves was instrumental for them to acquire a deeper understanding of the privileges and power dynamics at play.

Imad, expresses it as follows:



*"I strongly believe that being open to hearing the concerns and viewpoints of women, and feminist women in particular has been instrumental in helping me become a better ally. It is only through actively listening and learning that we can begin to understand the challenges that women face in society and work towards finding meaningful solutions. It is not enough to simply rely on our own understanding of women's rights and feminism, but rather we must be willing to engage in ongoing dialogue and education."*

He follows up on the significance of intentionally listening while remaining open and collectively working together as tools for meaningful change.

Christopher agrees with the significance of listening, empathy, and self-awareness as:



*"...important tools that men should use to become more aware of their own privilege and biases, to become better allies to women... everything starts at home, however, although customs and upbringing are extremely important tools that can aid counteracting unequal power dynamics, it does not stop there."*

Samer shared that watching his own mother be a feminist, actively dismantling stereotypes by working and raising her kids entirely on her own, led him to become a feminist. Although his mother did not necessarily label herself a "feminist", she taught him how to become one by fully coming into her own power, amidst being discriminated against in a deeply conservative and patriarchal society. He also shared how vital it is for no one to be left behind, this includes women of all nationalities residing in Lebanon and consequently the importance of inclusivity and intersectional feminism. Feminists such as Jumana Merhi and Manar Zaiter have taught him a lot about the importance of feminism, and have tremendously inspired the path he is currently on.

Omar also stressed the importance of women advocates as one of the main tools that helped him become more cognisant:



*"Exposure to skilful women leaders who could articulate certain points and perspectives on gender equality, as well as books on the experiences of women who struggled against discrimination, and friends - men and women- who fought for human rights."*

Tamer, describes his own experience. For him, knowledge-sharing through international gender workshops and local listening sessions with feminist peers were an integral part of him developing an understanding and assessment of women's situations and the status quo. Tamer also stresses institutionalising this awareness:



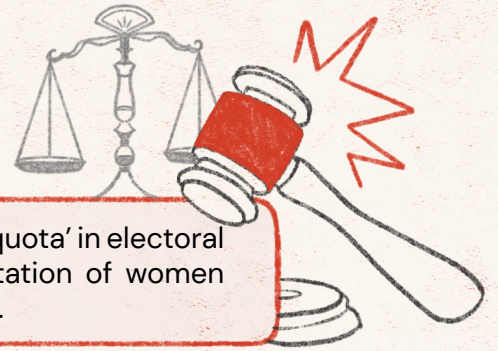
*"Written bylaws in political organisations are just as important as common practices. By codifying principles of equality and inclusivity in our bylaws, we can ensure that these values are upheld and promoted within our organization, not just talked about. At the same time, we must also work to actively promote feminist discourse within the organization, so that we can build a strong foundation for a safe and inclusive environment for women to actively participate."*

He understands that privileges come with responsibilities, therefore using his platform to advocate for feminist political discourse in his own political organisation is a crucial tool in his allyship toolbox.

The allies interviewed all stressed the need to challenge toxic masculinity. Christopher discusses the need to call out sexist comments and violence. Similarly, Tamer notes the multiple aspects of male allyship of women - cultural, legal, and practical - and explains further:



- **Cultural:** Pushing religious and political bodies to support rather than oppress women during their political participation.



- **Legal:** Rethinking and redrafting the 'quota' in electoral processes towards better representation of women on local, national, and regional scales.



- **Practical:** Surveilling and holding accountable any activist who participated or practiced any kind of violence against women in politics, and/or oppressed women from reaching leadership position based on gender.

Indeed, the initial recognition of one's own blind spots and the way individuals unconsciously condone unjust, harmful, and abusive behaviour is pivotal, if real impact is to be made. While it is vital that male allies create equal opportunities for women to engage in political action, Samer states:



*"We must also be careful to avoid situations in which women are pressured to participate simply because of their gender. This type of peer pressure is in itself a form of patriarchal practice."*

**Some of the ways in which the allies transmute their acquired tools into successful allyship are:**

- Pushing and advocating for women's candidacy in political groups
- Encouraging women candidates to run for board or decision-making positions, and appointing women in leadership roles
- Acknowledging women's work publicly and giving them credit for achievements in public fora
- Recruiting more women for roles that are typically assigned to men
- Including women in the decision-making process, at all stages, and institutionalising a participatory decision-making process
- Supporting and working towards gender balance and equity, particularly on women's rights, representation and participation in the political field
- Monitoring and advocating against all types of violence and misrepresentation against women candidates during, pre, and post electoral phases – and making sure acts of violence are made public, and their perpetrator(s) shamed
- Highlighting and publishing stories and voices of female journalists and activists
- Intentionally refraining from reproducing harmful narratives, stereotypes, and assumptions about women and men
- Working on being inclusive of all women of all nationalities and pushing against racist narratives, so no one is left behind

- Publishing gender-sensitive reports and mainstreaming gender in public and private institutions as well as in civil society organisations.
- Committing to ensuring a representation quota for women in all elected bodies
- Vocally advocating against gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination and consistently prioritising these issues
- Including a higher percentage of women as speakers in parties' and organisations' conferences compared to men

**Regular practices that allies choose to proactively do to make sure that women are represented in leadership in their political circles and organisations include:**

- Setting quotas when needed
- Listening more, speaking and interjecting less
- Motivating women colleagues to share their ideas and express themselves
- Consolidating equity by creating a supportive and inclusive work environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and supported
- Establishing a code of conduct on advocating towards women's political rights, especially in media work
- Ensuring equal opportunities for leadership roles: mentorship programs, leadership training and professional development opportunities for women in organisations
- Challenging gender bias / discrimination by encouraging and supporting women leaders to overcome their unconscious biases and to be aware of how gender stereotypes may impact their decision-making
- Training journalists and media professionals on gender-sensitive reporting and women's media representation
- Addressing systemic barriers that may prevent women from advancing to leadership positions, such as lack of flexible work arrangements, maternity leave policies, and pay equity
- Promoting women's achievements in leadership positions to encourage gender diversity and to inspire other women to pursue leadership roles
- Actively making sure that women are growing and thriving within their organisation and are part of the senior management team

Allies can truly aid women when there is first and foremost an awareness that goes beyond one's own positionality. The allies interviewed for this toolkit agreed on the importance of challenging one's own biases, and understanding where we have sustained the structures that have been failing marginalised persons and women, and intentionally working on disrupting these systems. It is therefore an ongoing process that asks both women and men to persistently question embedded false narratives that massively influence our beliefs and perceptions of women.

# Recommendations and Key Take-aways

This concluding section is a culmination of take-away messages and recommendations that the AiW team put together as a result of the year-long work on this toolkit, and the interviews conducted with men and women political activists in Lebanon.

## Key Take-aways

- The sectarian political system and its patriarchal nature and core are the primary drivers of women's low political participation in Lebanon. **Learning how the patriarchal system manifests, and most importantly realising that patriarchy does not operate in a political or contextual vacuum is crucial for its dismantlement.**
- The violence facing women in politics in Lebanon is intrinsically tied to the sectarian state and other relevant structural drivers on the one hand, and on the other to an overarching wave of backlash that women face when attempting to venture into the public and political realms.
- Two frameworks are useful to analyse VAW-P: **backlash**, which is a key determinant of women's success in politics globally; and **sectarianism**, a notion that is specific to the Lebanese context and the foundations of the Lebanese state, and one that is necessary to unpack before delving into the types of violence women face in politics.
- VAW-P as a by-product of these structures deters women's participation and thus significantly decreases their representation in parliament and other decision-making institutions.
- Violence can be physical, sexual, social, economic, or psychological, all of which contribute to the marginalisation of women, and to their exclusion not only from the political realm, but also from the public sphere in general.
- An overwhelming majority of female political activists and candidates reported receiving derogatory comments from men on social media. An alarming 88 per cent of them experienced cyberbullying, online abuse, and were the target of taunting memes and visuals.
- Men in politics who wish to become allies need to learn from and listen to women's experiences for real foundational support and allyship.
- Women's participation in politics is imperative to achieve an inclusive democratic system.
- Solidarity, inclusivity, and collaborations are vital for a meaningful disruption of the patriarchy. Coordination among different sectors of society enables this change.

## Recommendations

- Observe and monitor elections to limit potential breaches and ensure a fair election process.
- Implement gender-positive legislative reforms that support women's participation in politics.
- Pass laws in parliament and within political parties that criminalise VAW-P.
- Forge cooperation between civil society groups and government institutions to lobby for laws and regulations more effectively.
- Work with trusted and multiple stakeholders and civil society actors to make an impact.
- Integrate resources on gender and politics, and more importantly on the dynamics of the Lebanese sectarian political system within educational systems.

# Appendix

## Male Allyship Interview Questions

1. Tell us about a situation where you successfully practiced allyship with women in your political group (or organization). It could be support you've showed or given a woman colleague/peer running for a leadership position; or spoke up publicly against harassment or sexist practices/behaviour.

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2. Do you do this regularly? Is there any practice that you proactively and intentionally do to make sure women are represented in leadership in your organization/political circle?

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3. What do you think men in your position (i.e. men who are heard in political spaces, and/or occupying leadership positions and considerable space in the organization/political group) can do to encourage good practices of male allyship of women, and to mainstream meaningful feminist allyship (or allyship of women) in politics and leadership?

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4. What are some other valuable tools that have helped you become more aware and assisted you in embodying true allyship?

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