

## **Policy Mapping**

### **Women's Political Participation**

## 1. Timeline

Date	Events
1952	Literate women are granted the right to vote in elections (suffrage).
1953	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literate women are granted the right to vote and run for parliamentary elections.</li> <li>Emilie Ibrahim becomes the first woman candidate for the parliamentary elections.</li> </ul>
1957	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All women and men are granted the right to vote (universal suffrage).</li> </ul>
1963	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mirna Boustany is the first woman to be successfully elected to parliament.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Women were granted the right to vote and to run as candidates in the municipal elections.</li> </ul>
1991	1 woman (Nayla Moawad) is elected to parliament
1992	3 women (Nayla Moawad, Bahia Hariri and Maha Khoury Asaad) are elected to parliament. <sup>2</sup>
1996	3 women (Nayla Moawad, Bahia Hariri and Nouhad Souaid) are elected to parliament.
2000	3 women (Nayla Moawad, Bahia Hariri and Ghinwa Jalloul) are elected to parliament.
2004	2 women (Leila Solh and Wafaa Hamza) are appointed as ministers, for the first time.
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 women (Bahia Hariri, Nayla Moawad, Ghinwa Jalloul, Gilberte Zouein, Sethrida Geagea and Solange Gemayel) are elected to parliament in the first parliamentary elections taking place after the assassination of PM Rafic Hariri and the withdrawal of the Syrian troops. This has been the highest number of women MPs entering parliament to date.</li> <li>1 woman (Nayla Moawad) is appointed Minister.</li> <li>The Boutros Commission's draft law<sup>3</sup> 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.</li> </ul>
2008	1 woman (Bahia Hariri) is appointed Minister.

<sup>1</sup> Mirna Boustani is the daughter of late Emile Boustani. She took over her father's seat after his death in 1963

<sup>2</sup> Two of the three women who won – Nayla Moawad and Bahia Hariri - were closely connected to strong political figures. Nayla Moawad is the wife of late president Rene Moawad who was assassinated in 1989; Bahia Hariri is the sister of then Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri.

<sup>3</sup> In 2005, the Lebanese government, headed by former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, established the National Commission for Electoral Law (NCEL), otherwise known as the "Boutros Commission." This commission, headed by Fouad Boutros, and composed of politicians and legal experts, was delegated to draft a new parliamentary electoral law, and in 2006, the commission submitted its draft proposal to the government. This draft adopted a hybrid "majoritarian/proportional" system, as a substitute to the bloc majoritarian electoral law, and entailed several substantial reforms in accordance with international standards. Yet, the commission's draft proposal was not adopted, and a proportional electoral law was not implemented until the 2018 elections.

2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 women (Bahia Hariri, Gilberte Zouein<sup>4</sup>, Sethrida Geagea<sup>5</sup> and Nayla Tueini<sup>6</sup>) are elected to parliament. The number of women in parliament dropped from six in 2005 to 4 in 2009.</li> <li>• 2 women (Rayya El Hassan and Mona Ofeich) are appointed Ministers.</li> </ul>
2010	The 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.
2011	The 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.
2014	1 woman (Alice Shabtini) is appointed Minister.
2016	1 woman – (Inaya Ezzeldine) <sup>7</sup> is appointed Minister.
2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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>8</sup></li> <li>• 6 women (Paula Yacoubian, Rola Tabsh Jaroudi, Bahia Hariri, Sethrida Geagea, Inaya Ezzedine, Dima Jamali) are elected to parliament.</li> </ul>
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 women (Nada Boustani, May Chidiac, Raya Haffar Al Hassan and Violette Khairallah Safadi) are appointed Ministers.</li> <li>• Raya Haffar Al Hassan becomes the first woman Minister of Interior and Municipalities in Lebanon and the Arab World.</li> </ul>
2020	For the first time, 30% of ministers in the newly appointed government are women, with 6 out of 20 ministerial positions held by women, marking the highest level of female representation in government to date.
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 woman (Najla Riachi) is appointed Minister.</li> <li>• NGO Fifty -Fifty proposes a draft law to allocate 26 seats in parliament for women in the 2022 parliamentary elections.</li> <li>• The National commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) proposes a draft law to allocate 24 seats in parliament for women.</li> <li>• MP Inaya Ezzedin adopted Fifty-Fifty’s quota proposal, but MPs refused to discuss it.</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> Gilberte Zouein is the daughter of late MP and minister Maurice Zouein.

<sup>5</sup> Settrida Geagea is the wife of Samir Geagea - leader of the right-wing, Christian, militia-turned-party “Lebanese Forces”.

<sup>6</sup> Nayla Tueini is the daughter of journalist, former editor and publisher of prominent Lebanese daily AnNahar, and politician assassinated months after being elected MP in 2005 – Gebran Tueini, and granddaughter of veteran journalist and former minister Ghassan Tueini.

<sup>7</sup> Inaya Ezzeldine was appointed by the president of the Amal movement and head of parliament, Nabih Berri

<sup>8</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.

2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 157 women ran for the parliamentary elections – only 15% of the total number of candidates.</li> <li>• 8 (Halima Kaakour, Najat Aoun, Paula Yacoubian, Cynthia Zarazeer, Inaya Ezzedine, Nada Boustany, Sethrida Geagea, Ghada Ayoub) women won seats in parliament, 4 of whom are among the opposition “Change MPs”.</li> <li>• Women make 6% of the Lebanese parliament today, the highest in the country’s history.</li> </ul>
7 December 2023	10 MPs (out of 128) from across political parties signed a gender quota law proposal for municipal council elections. The draft bill will be placed on the agenda of the relevant parliamentary committees for discussion and approval before being submitted for endorsement during a plenary parliamentary session.

## 2. 2024 General Contextual Updates

This is a general update on the situation in Lebanon between December 2023 and November 2024, prefacing each of the three policy mappings for 2024. Note that specific paragraphs addressing each thematic area, the civil marriage and personal status laws, violence against women (domestic violence and sexual harassment), and Women’s political participation have been included in this section under their respective themes.

Between October 2023 and September 2024, the occupying Israeli forces pulverized Lebanon’s southern border towns detonating houses, killing journalists and civilians, and targeting medical first aid providers and ambulances. September 2024 marked the start of the expansion of the Israeli aggression into Lebanon. On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September, Israel detonated thousands of electronic pagers, radios, and communication devices simultaneously across Lebanon, in an unprecedented mass terrorist attack killing over 30, and maiming nearly 3000, including 200 critically.<sup>9</sup> For context, people carrying pagers include civilian personnel working in Hezbollah-affiliated schools, medical, and youth centres.

The escalation continued as Israel launched hundreds of air attacks in southern and eastern Lebanon on September 22, killing around 500 people and injuring nearly 1645 in one day. Resultantly, thousands fled the south of the country towards Beirut and the North, jamming main highways, locked in their cars for at least ten hours amid intense shelling. Israel expanded its operations to include areas of the Bekaa Valley, along Lebanon’s eastern border. Escalation continued through the months of September, October and November 2025. Israel dropped thousands of bunker buster bombs on residential neighborhoods in Beirut’s southern suburb, on multiple occasions; and attempted to invade the border towns of South Lebanon, leaving the wholesale decimation of tens of villages in their wake.

According to the ministry of Health, the number of casualties, between October 8, 2023 and November 28, 2024, had reached 3,670 martyrs and another 15,413 injured<sup>10</sup>. Noteworthy that a

<sup>9</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2024). *Exploding pagers and radios: A terrifying violation of international law, say UN experts*. Retrieved November 28, 2024 from

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon (MOPH) (2024). Retrieved November 30, 2024 from

ceasefire deal was reached and officially took effect on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2024. As of November 1, 2025, thousands of breaches from the Israeli side had been reported. Official numbers from November 2024 reveal that over 1.2 million Lebanese have been forcibly displaced, evacuating the South, Bekaa and the southern suburbs of Beirut in waves since September 22, to central Beirut, the North governorate, and Mount Lebanon, and settling in public schools and institutions turned makeshift shelters.

Based on a combination of data from national surveys, databases, consultations with women, and field monitoring, the UN Women issued a “Gender Alert” in September 2024, highlighting the disproportionate impact that women and girls in Lebanon - particularly women-headed households, widows and women with disabilities - endured as a result of the war. According to the Gender Alert estimates, among the thousands of families that have been displaced, nearly 12,000 are women-headed.<sup>11</sup>

The most significant issues disproportionately impacting women and girls throughout the war appear to be access to food, access to menstrual hygiene products, and heightened exposure to sexual and domestic violence, as well as human trafficking and survival sex.

The Alert points to an estimate of 50,000 of the displaced to be women and girls in reproductive age, and hence need immediate access to products of hygiene and well-being. Hunger and access to food also figured as a challenge facing women-headed households. Though this is a long-standing issue with roots in pre-war times, women and girls in war-affected areas faced limited access to food due to unequal control over resources, limited autonomy in household decision-making, and restrictive, discriminatory norms curtailing their freedoms. Noteworthy that more women-headed households in Lebanon were not able to meet many basic needs compared to men-headed households, particularly during the war<sup>12</sup>.

Lower pre-war income also limits women heads of households’ chances to access decent shelter given the sharp rental fees.

However, the most vicious aspect of women and girls’ reality during the war remains their intensified risk and exposure to domestic violence, sexual harassment and exploitation, as well as trafficking and forced prostitution. The UN Women Gender Alert traced the classic situation of women and girls’ heightened risk to domestic violence in war, to the increase in stress, job loss, and the challenging access to legal protection and services. The limited privacy and scarce resources that feature life in temporary shelters in emergencies inevitably lead to more disputes, including gender-based violence.

Further, the report rightfully points to the classic scenario of sexual exploitation and abuse in aid delivery sites, listing survival sex, forced prostitution, and child marriage as “negative coping

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<sup>11</sup> Estimate from the Gender Alert is drawn based on displacement figures and demographic structures. This number does not account for the women who became heads of households as a result of the war.

UN Women (2024) *Gender Alert: When Crises Strike, Gender Inequalities are often Exacerbated: The Urgent Needs of Crisis Affected Women and Girls in Lebanon*. Retrieved January 10, 2025 from <https://lebanon.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/09/gender-alert-when-crises-strike-gender-inequalities-are-often-exacerbated-the-urgent-needs-of-crisis-affected-women-and-girls-in-lebanon>

<sup>12</sup> The data in the UN Women Gender Alert, link above, is based on different reports and surveys, referenced in the Alert.

mechanisms” with the increased exploitation of vulnerable communities in emergencies. Among these communities are migrant workers and refugee women who are likely to become victims of human trafficking into/across Lebanon.

Indeed, anecdotal evidence that the AiW informally collected through individual communication with women working in the field, provide confirmations on all those counts. Domestic violence was prevalent in shelters, coupled with the absence of all means of reporting it and the weak presence of Internal Security Forces officers on site; cases of sexual harassment and human trafficking were also observed. Crucially, cases of transactional sex where landlords were soliciting sexual favors from women head of households in exchange for shelter.

The Lebanese often joke about having seen tragedy of all shapes and forms, that the only predicament that has not yet befallen them is an asteroid striking Beirut. Indeed, the pre-genocide situation in Lebanon resembled a downward spiral, in which the more they struggled for their basic rights and hold onto shreds of their dignity, the deeper they sink into dysfunctionality, criminal negligence, heartbreak, and impunity. This brutal war unfolded against the backdrop of longstanding structural challenges, including an oligarchic governance that oversaw a financial and economic collapse and the severe devaluation of the local currency in 2019, and maintained an attitude of deliberate neglect vis-à-vis these crises, and the resulting disintegration of the services infrastructure. This systematic impoverishment of the vast majority of the population – highlighted by the banks’ confiscation of people’s decades of savings, was followed by a massive explosion in the capital’s port that decimated half of the city in 2020, resulting in a mass exodus of the Lebanese. A World Bank report on poverty in Lebanon released in May 2024 shows that poverty has more than tripled over the past decade in the country, reaching a whopping 44% of the total population by 2022.<sup>13</sup> The report not only shows that 1 out of 3 Lebanese was poverty stricken in 2022, it also points to an even deeper fall with the poverty gap rising from 3% in 2012 to 9.4% in 2022.

Due to the extreme vulnerability of the country’s infrastructure, civil society organizations, and particularly women’s rights NGOs collected funds to provide critical services for women like emergency cash assistance, shelter, and psycho-social support; shared calls for donations, and disseminated information on critical available services, such shelters, emergency numbers, and medications. This is a typical pattern that unfolds during crises in Lebanon, in which CSOs step in to fill glaring gaps left by the weak governmental preparedness.

In 2023 the Lebanese parliament convened to discuss the 2024 state budget. The draft budget, consisting of 96 articles, underwent review but was still under heavy criticism. Expectedly, think tanks and budgetary experts pointed to the budget’s neglect of reforms, crucial to pull the country out of a financial meltdown that has been gutting the public sector for years, and the absence of provisions aimed at rejuvenating Lebanon’s broken social contract<sup>14</sup>. Significant debate among economic experts revolved around the budget’s heavy reliance on regressive indirect taxes like VAT and custom fees to generate desperate income to significantly boost state

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<sup>13</sup> World Bank (2024) *Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment 2024: Weathering a Protracted Crisis*. Retrieved December 3, 2024 from <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099052224104516741/pdf/P1766511325da10a71ab6b1ae97816dd20c.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> The Policy Initiative (2024) *Lebanon’s 2024 Draft Budget: Blindly Curbing the Fiscal Debt*. Retrieved November 24, 2024 from [The Policy Initiative - Lebanon’s 2024 Draft Budget: Blindly curbing the fiscal deficit.](#)

revenues, exacerbating the situation of the country's poorest citizens. The Policy Initiative think tank reported that the budget "disproportionately burdens middle and lower-income households compared to affluent ones"<sup>15</sup> by lowering the threshold for businesses to pay VAT and offering tax exemptions for big businesses<sup>16</sup>.

It is worth mentioning here the status of the policy sphere, marked by a complete paralysis on the level of institutional politics: a 32-month presidential vacuum, a stalled parliament, a caretaker government that only started convening as the war expanded into Lebanon, and municipal elections that were supposed to take place in May 2022, but were postponed three times to May 2025. Not even a full-scale war on the country could engender serious deliberations around a potential presidential candidate. The Lebanese presidency is still vacant, with the speaker of parliament and the caretaker prime minister leading the negotiations for a ceasefire on behalf of the country.

Pre-war 2024 also saw an escalation in the discrimination against, and forced deportations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as an intensifying racist rhetoric about them<sup>17</sup>. Since the beginning of 2024 until May, reports began circulating that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Directorate of General Security (GSO) have resumed raids and deportations against Syrian refugee communities, with international and local NGOs documenting several deportations in the first few months of 2024<sup>18</sup>. While Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 [Refugee Convention](#), the state is still bound by the customary international law principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the deportation of any person who faces the risk of persecution in their home country<sup>19</sup>.

Refugee-led NGO Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR) stated that while last year's LAF-led deportations dropped Syrians off at the border, enabling many to re-enter with the help of smugglers, this year, several deportees have been dropped off in Damascus instead<sup>20</sup>.

On a relevant note, in 2023, authorities in Lebanon escalated their scapegoating of marginalized communities such as the Syrian refugees, and the queer communities, to divert attention from the pressing unattended crises, and to frame them as the enemies of an imagined, hetero-patriarchal, conservative model of a Lebanese family. The summer of 2023 witnessed an alarming escalation against the LGBTIQ community, in parallel with worsening economic conditions. In July 2023, 9 MPs proposed a law to decriminalize homosexuality<sup>21</sup>; in response, they were subjected to online harassment campaigns resulting in one MP to withdraw their signature<sup>22</sup>. Following this, a wave of hate and violence was unleashed against the LGBTIQ community by prominent

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> N. Khechen. "Fragile Sanctuary: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Face Abuse and Deportation". May 29, 2024. *TIMEP* <https://timep.org/2024/05/29/fragile-sanctuary-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-face-abuse-and-deportation/>

<sup>18</sup> H.Davis "Detained, Deported, Disappeared: Assad's critics face "nightmares" in Lebanon". February 9, 2024. *Syria Direct*. [Detained, deported, disappeared: Assad's critics face 'nightmare' in Lebanon](https://syriadirect.org/detained-deported-disappeared-assad-critics-face-nightmare-in-lebanon/)

<sup>19</sup>It is helpful to note however, that Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world; the refugee crisis in Lebanon impacted, and continues to impact the country.

<sup>20</sup> Davis (2024)

<sup>21</sup> مسألة "المثلية الجنسية" تعود الى الواجهة: مشروع قانون لعدم تجريمها تقدّم به عدد من النواب - مركز بيروت للاخبار *Beirutnewscenter*. <https://www.beirutnewscenter.com/935582/>

<sup>22</sup> *Lebanon: Attack on Freedoms Targets LGBTI People | Human Rights Watch*. (2023, September 5). <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/09/05/lebanon-attack-freedoms-targets-lgbti-people>

politicians inciting violence against LGBTIQ individuals. Many politicians, lawyers, organizations, and celebrities followed suit in a wave of crackdown on the queer community.

For context, Lebanon has yet to repeal Article 534 of the country's Penal Code, which criminalizes 'unnatural sex'. Article 534 is Lebanon's most publicly debated regulation on sexuality. A legacy of the French colonial era, this article does not explicitly criminalize homosexuality, but has historically been used by state actors to persecute queer communities. In the summer of 2023, two proposed bills explicitly penalising homosexuality were put forward. Further, the country's minister of culture decided to ban the movie "Barbie" because it "promotes homosexuality and transgenderism."<sup>23</sup>

This wave of escalating queer hate continued and resulted in the inception of several organizations and groups that advocate for the criminalization of same-sex relationships and the protection of the Lebanese family against "western ideas that aim to corrupt the youth and dismantle the family"<sup>24</sup>. It is worth noting that these groups also instrumentalise the atrocities unfolding in Gaza to legitimize their view on the moral corruption of international organizations and conventions<sup>25</sup>.

Following this slew of troubling remarks and decisions, an extremist Christian group attacked a queer friendly bar in Beirut while a drag show was ongoing in August 2023, physically assaulting some of the attendees, while state security forces stood as bystanders<sup>26</sup>. While this marked an alarming escalation in the anti-queer sentiment<sup>27</sup>, another even more vicious attack followed. In September 2023, a group of men attacked a protest organized by a number of civil society organizations calling for the protection of personal and political freedoms. Noteworthy that this escalating aggression comes after an intensified vilification campaign against the community of organizers, accusing them of "promoting deviancy", led by political and religious figures. Expectedly, the assault was unfolding under the eyes of abjectly failing security forces who, once again, acted as mere bystanders and arrested no one<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Christou, W. (2023, August 9). Lebanese minister to ban "Barbie" for "contradicting" values. <https://www.newarab.com/>; The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanese-minister-ban-barbie-contradicting-values>

<sup>24</sup> هيئة علماء المسلمين في لبنان. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/muslimolama/posts/%D8%A8%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AD%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%89%D9%88%D9%8E%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%92%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%A4%D9%92%D9%85%D9%90%D9%86%D9%8F%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8E-%D9%88%D9%8E%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%92%D9%85%D9%8F%D8%A4%D9%92%D9%85%D9%90%D9%86%D9%8E%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8F-%D8%A8%D9%8E%D8%B9%D9%92%D8%B6%D9%8F%D9%87%D9%8F%D9%85%D9%92-%D8%A3%D9%8E%D9%88%D9%92/5544401402354755/>

<sup>25</sup> حملة حماية الأسرة والمجتمع—حسم. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story\\_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849)  
حملة حماية الأسرة والمجتمع—حسم. (n.d.). Retrieved February 20, 2024, from [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story\\_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php/?story_fbid=326481010356492&id=100089837865849)  
[inbow-raid-from-incitement-to-action/](#)

<sup>27</sup> For more details, the full account from the assault can be found here: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1694718766972891256>

<sup>28</sup> Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression. (2023, October 10). The Coalition to Defend Freedom of Expression in Lebanon Demands Investigation into the Assault on the Freedoms Protest. *Legal Agenda*. <https://english.legal-agenda.com/the-coalition-to-defend-freedom-of-expression-in-lebanon-demands-investigation-into-the-assault-on-the-freedoms-protest/>

Zooming in on the women’s political participation policy area in 2024, it is safe to say that with the escalation of the war, civil society organizations and media platforms working on political and electoral reform broadly, and women’s political participation and rights particularly have all tailored their material to focus on issues like Israel’s breaches of international law (Seeds for Legal Initiatives, KAFA), the violence that women endure and their voices in conflict and war (Seeds, Maharat, Abaad, Fe-Male, and KAFA), as well as the hardships that women journalists bear while covering the war, focusing on Lebanese journalists lost to the Israeli war, and those who are working under fire (Fe-Male, Maharat).

Given all of this, and as a result of the ensuing disappointments, frustrations, and growing aggression, the avenues for collective action of survival or resistance or countering backlash are minimal. Namely, the brutal escalation of the Israeli war on Lebanon between September and November 2024 left people across the country trapped in a paralyzing survival mode in which the only priority they can afford to address is their immediate safety and that of their family. Crucially, AiW’s chosen policy areas (political participation, violence against women, and personal status laws), all tied to a wider umbrella of gender, are usually easily dismissed and deemed irrelevant by decision-making entities, especially in a state of institutional paralysis. In this otherwise overwhelmingly stagnating stasis, there were a few events/achievements that marked both the policy and civic spaces in the three policy areas, delineated under the updates sections in each of the three mappings.

### 3. The Issue

The reality of women’s political participation (WPP) in Lebanon is grim. Though legislation does not actively prevent women from participating in politics, traditions, customs, and informal societal rules and norms still stand in their way. According to UN Women’s map of women in politics for 2024, Lebanon ranks 181 out of 184 countries, with only one woman was appointed as minister.<sup>29</sup> In the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report for 2024, Lebanon ranked 142 out of 146 countries in political participation<sup>30</sup>.

As of 2022 – date of the most recent parliamentary elections, women occupy only 6% of parliamentary positions and 4% of ministerial positions. Lebanese women’s political participation ranks among the lowest in the world and is also among the lowest in the MENA region. Georgia Dagher (2021) notes that since women were legally granted the right to run for political office in 1953, only 17 women had been elected to the parliament as of 2021. In 2022, 8 women were elected.

Despite recording the highest percentage of registered women candidates of all elections with 15%, the last two parliamentary elections (2018 and 2022) resulted in less than 5% of parliamentary seats allocated to women and 6% of the seats respectively.<sup>31, 32</sup> Also, only four

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<sup>29</sup> <https://unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Poster-Women-political-leaders-2024-en.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

<sup>31</sup> UN Women (2018, May 23). *Record number of women on the ballot in Lebanon’s first parliamentary elections since 2009.* <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/5/news-record-number-of-women-on-the-ballot-in-lebanon>.

<sup>32</sup> Tavana, Daniel L. and Christiana Parreira (2019). *Lebanon’s 2018 Election: New Measures and the Resilience of the Status Quo.* Lebanon Support. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/lebanon%E2%80%99s-2018-election-new-measures-and-resilience-status-quo>.

women were appointed to the ministerial cabinet in 2019,<sup>33</sup> and six to the government in 2020.<sup>34</sup> However, the women fielded on electoral lists and appointed to cabinet are often picked by political leaders and gatekeepers based on sectarian quotas and are hence expected to follow their sectarian party's agenda. Most importantly, most of these women are closely connected to strong political figures: husbands, fathers, or brothers. Until the 2022 parliamentary elections, it is important to also note that none of the women who made it to parliament thus far carried a feminist agenda or led a fight to propose a law that safeguards women's rights. In the 2022 parliamentary elections, however, four out of the eight women who won seats in parliament ran on electoral lists that were non-partisan and independent from traditional political parties. These women, along with other parliamentarians, have formed a coalition of 12 members, dubbed the "Change MPs"<sup>35</sup> Their agenda, they have suggested, and as explained later, is essentially to challenge the traditionally tight and unchallenged grip of sectarian political parties on decision-making. It is noteworthy that these MPs do not share a collective feminist agenda.

Historically in Lebanon, women have been largely unable to crack the political glass ceiling in the country because of its patriarchal sectarian system, which "naturally discriminate[s] against women, as its only function is to reproduce political elites—political families and sectarian parties."<sup>36</sup> The "patriarchal sectarian system" can be broken down into several aspects: a sectarian governance system, the grip of religious institutions on personal status laws, the patrilineal citizenship, and a kinship system prevalent in all spheres of life (families, the market, and governmental institutions). These aspects are in turn indications of an ambivalent and contradictory relationship that Lebanese women have with the state. While women are full citizens by law, with political rights such as the right to vote; by relegating personal status matters to sectarian courts—notorious for invariably upholding a patriarchal bias—the Lebanese state abstains from assuming its full responsibility towards them.

**Although resistance to women's political participation in Lebanon is rooted in structural issues, discussions around pathways to redress it have long centered on the absence of women's quotas in government positions and parliamentary and municipal elections. Hence, the aim of the AiW's policy map on women's political participation is to document the arduous struggle between the government, political parties, and women's rights activists and organizations over the parliamentary quota. The battle for the quota exemplifies the struggles of Lebanese for equal rights and recognition.**

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<sup>33</sup> The Guardian (2010). *Women made up less than 10% of the cabinet then. For more: "Arab world's first female interior minister hails point of pride for women.* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/arab-world-first-female-interior-minister-hails-point-of-pride-for-women-raya-al-hassan>.

<sup>34</sup> This cabinet was commended for improving the gender ratio to 30% (6 women out of 24).

<sup>35</sup> This term was coined by media and civil society institutions and groups, following the 2022 parliamentary elections which resulted in the success of 12 candidates, most of whom were running for the first time, and against the dominant political parties. Their candidacy was framed as "independent" from, and outside of the sectarian oligarchic rule, and their win dubbed as one for the October 17<sup>th</sup> revolution, although the 12 candidates did not share a distinct political platform or have unified takes on many of the country's contentious issues. It wasn't long before splits and splinters in the bloc of 12 started showing, with some of them aligning with the some of the dominant sectarian parties.

<sup>36</sup> Dagher, G. (2021, March). *Women's Participation and Representation in Lebanese Politics: Electoral Performance, Challenges, and the Road Ahead.* The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. [https://lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1617105491-women\\_participation.pdf](https://lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1617105491-women_participation.pdf).

Although Lebanon did not place any reservations on Article 7 of CEDAW<sup>37</sup> and despite the multiple quota proposals put forward by women's groups, electoral reform advocates and pioneering legislators, successive Lebanese governments have failed to take a single step toward implementing a parliamentary quota. The struggle for a women's parliamentary quota formally kicked off in Lebanon, in 2005, when the National Commission for Electoral Law, later known as the Boutros Commission,<sup>38</sup> stipulated a women's quota on electoral party lists (as opposed to quotas on parliamentary seats). The Commission argued that quotas for electoral party lists would not only address the low number of women candidates running for elections but would also ensure that "the electoral system is not burdened with new reserved quotas on parliamentary seats, in addition to those already set aside for sects and regions."<sup>39</sup> To that end, the Commission proposed that 30% of all political party electoral lists be composed of women. The proposal, which was submitted to the cabinet as part of a draft electoral law in 2006, was rejected.

Crucially, although the Commission's proposal was unsuccessful, it did establish 30% as the political ceiling for future women's quota proposals. For example, former Minister of Interior, Ziad Baroud, submitted several women's quota proposals ahead of the 2010 municipal elections. The first proposal sought to establish a 30% women's quota on party lists.<sup>40</sup> The second proposal, submitted on January 29, 2010, to the cabinet, sought to establish a 20% women's quota on municipal councils. However, neither proposal was successful.<sup>41</sup> In 2008, renowned electoral expert and researcher, Kamal Feghali, supported by various women's rights and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), helped develop two proposals for a women's parliamentary quota. Again, neither was successful.<sup>42</sup>

In 2011, the Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER), spearheaded by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), proposed a draft electoral law entailing substantial reforms. The proposal slightly increased the ceiling established by the Boutros Commission for women's quotas from 30% to 33.33% and added a novel suggestion to ensure a minimum of one woman for every three men on each list. In this proposal, the CCER stipulated that their suggested quota system should be implemented for "four electoral cycles only" on the grounds that the quota is "a temporary positive measure" to enhance women's political participation. None of the political parties represented in parliament adopted this proposal despite lip service.

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<sup>37</sup>Article 4 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states: "Adoption by State Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination". In a General Recommendation in 1988, the CEDAW committee clarified the meaning of "temporary special measures", calling on State Parties to take special measures such as 'preferential treatment or quota systems' to advance women's integration into political life. The Fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing in 1995 further developed the concept of "temporary special measures" and called in its Platform for Action for "the equal mobilization of men and women on the level of decision- and policy-making (...) and setting aside quotas to ensure a minimum female representation of 30 per cent."

<sup>38</sup> Refer to footnote 3.

<sup>39</sup> Hussein, W. (2017, February 16). *The 'Female Quota' in Lebanon: A Temporary Solution to a Chronic Political Problem*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2017/02/17/female-quota-lebanon-temporary-solution-chronic-political-problem>.

<sup>40</sup> Mahdawi, D. (2010, January 16). *Baroud to champion 30 percent women's quota in politics*. The Daily Star. [dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2010/Jan-16/55908-baroud-to-champion-30-percent-womens-quota-in-politics.ashx](http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2010/Jan-16/55908-baroud-to-champion-30-percent-womens-quota-in-politics.ashx).

<sup>41</sup> Helou, M. (2009). Women quota in Lebanon: A false promise? *Al-Raida*, 126-127, pp. 58–65.

<sup>42</sup> Hussein, 2017

In anticipation for the upcoming 2022 parliamentary elections, several political parties and the Prime Minister Najib Mikati, proposed different women's quota laws.<sup>43</sup> The NGO Fifty-Fifty that focuses on women's political participation converged with fifty other organizations and 12 experts to draft a law for women's parliamentary quota. The law stipulates two main points: a minimum of 26 (out of 128) seats in parliament dedicated for women and at least 40% of candidates on every political party's candidate reserved for women. The proposal, which was adopted by Inaya Ezzedine, a Member of Parliament affiliated to the Amal Movement parliamentary bloc,<sup>44</sup> was utterly dismissed in the joint parliamentary committees' session on October 7, 2021. Ironically, MPs Ali Hassan Khalil and Qabalan Qabalan, who belong to the same parliamentary bloc as Ezzedine, were the ones most staunchly opposed to a discussion about the quota.<sup>45</sup> Upon bringing up the quota issue, MPs decided not to discuss it and promptly moved on to the next item on the agenda "in less than a minute,"<sup>46</sup> under the pretext of being short on time. It is worth noting here that only eight parliamentarians were ready to sign the proposed bill, according to Fifty-Fifty.

Alongside Fifty-Fifty's proposal, in 2021, the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW)<sup>47</sup> proposed a draft law for a women's quota. The law establishes 26 seats in parliament for women divided equally between Christians and Muslims. This proposal, as explained by NCLW executive board member Randa Abboud, is "very pragmatic and does not greatly disturb traditional political parties' political fears, thus increasing the quota's chances of approval."<sup>48</sup> According to the proposal, women candidates will compete with solely women candidates on other electoral lists on a majoritarian and not on a proportional basis. Thus, women with greater votes win a seat in parliament. The objective of this strategy is to appease political parties' fears of diluting preferential votes of their heavy-weight candidates, which could result in their inability to reach the threshold required to win a seat. Thus, the NCLW's proposed solution was to prevent women candidates from running against male candidates, placing them in competition only with other women. At minimum, this proposal incorporates the fears of the political elites, while giving women a feasible share of power in Lebanon's confessional system.

The results of the May 2022 parliamentary elections—conducted based on the 2018 electoral law<sup>49</sup>—represent a precedent and a challenge to the traditional political parties' grip on parliament. In total, 13 "Change MPs" who do not belong to traditional sectarian political parties and who ran against partisan lists in their respective districts made it to parliament. While 8

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<sup>43</sup> Shibani, A. (2021, August 27). *Fiftyfifty demands gender quota for parliamentary elections in Lebanon*. Beirut-today <https://beirut-today.com/2021/08/27/fiftyfifty-demands-gender-quota-for-parliamentary-elections-in-lebanon/>.

<sup>44</sup> The Amal Movement is a Shi'ite party founded in 1974. It is the largest Shi'a party in parliament, and it is currently led by the Speaker of the Parliament of Lebanon since 1992 Nabih Berri. After the 2022 parliamentary election, the Amal Movement has won 14 seats in parliament.

<sup>45</sup> Megaphone News [@megaphone\_news]. (2021, October 7). *MP Inaya Ezzedine withdrew from the joint committees session on Thursday after its members flatly dismissed her proposal to impose a #woman's quota in the upcoming parliamentary #elections* [Tweet]. Twitter. [https://twitter.com/megaphone\\_news/status/1446119635942658052](https://twitter.com/megaphone_news/status/1446119635942658052).

<sup>46</sup> From an interview with MP Ezzedine conducted for this policy mapping; July 2022.

<sup>47</sup> The NCLW is the National Women Machinery and is as an official institution affiliated to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. The president of the NCLW is usually a woman appointed by the President of the Republic. For the 2016-2022, the president of NCLW is the president's daughter Claudine Aoun.

<sup>48</sup> "05/10/2021 - عيد عن الكوتا النسائية الكوتا عن عيد" YouTube. MTV Lebanon News, October 5, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKUd7HApZHU>.

<sup>49</sup> This law introduced a system of proportional representation. It divided Lebanon's 26 qadas into 15 electoral districts and granted the expatriates the right to vote in their respective countries of residence. This law also established the preferential vote, whereby voters are required to vote for a list of candidates and cast a "preferential vote" for one candidate from that list.

women in total reached parliament, only 4 out of the “Change MPs” are women themselves. Indeed, in the absence of a quota system, it remains difficult for women to secure parliamentary seats in significant numbers, although some recently elected MPs who challenge traditional Lebanese political norms with a feminist-leaning agenda are gaining increasing popular support.

On the municipal level, 10 Members of Parliament from across political parties signed a gender quota law proposal for municipal council elections in December 2023. The law proposal was developed by legal and electoral experts and Fifty Fifty organization with the technical support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and shared with all political parties and blocs. However, the law is still not approved. 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<sup>50</sup>. As usual and expected however, the municipal elections that was scheduled for May 2024 – following two rounds of rescheduling – was postponed yet again, for the third time, to May 2025.

#### **4. Type of Contestation**

Among the six types of backlash identified by Flood et al. (2018), those affecting women’s political participation in Lebanon include the dominant political parties’ deliberate lack of bureaucratic follow-through, characterized by inaction and active stalling in the discussion of various women’s quota proposals. This type of backlash manifestation can easily be seen in the context of women’s political participation in municipal elections. The municipal elections which were meant to take place around the same time as the parliamentary elections in May 2022, were postponed. The first round of postponement – which rescheduled the elections for May 2023, was claimed to be related to logistical concerns and the ministries’ inability to organize both elections at the same time. In April of 2023, the parliament voted to extend the terms of municipal councils and other local authorities for another year, thus delaying elections a second time. With a government barely operating in a limited caretaker capacity, lawmakers framed this delay as a “technical extension” until May 2024, as funding for organizing elections had not yet been secured by the state. In April 2024, the excuse was the war in South Lebanon, and the verdict was postponing for a third time to May 2025. These delays hinder women’s groups’ advocacy for a quota since the elections have been a long-awaited milestone that women’s groups advocating for a quota anticipated, especially that out of 1,050 municipalities, only 10 are run by women. Similarly, no discussions on the quota have been reported in parliament or in parliamentary committees in the timeframe between April and December 2023.

Another type of backlash that can be observed in this context is co-option and subversion of the quota, particularly by parties that falsely promise to lobby for the quota, only to dismiss it in the relevant parliamentary session. This could be an attempt to silence any possible opposition or unrest within the party and to pre-empt any media pressure that might negatively affect their image particularly in the lead-up of elections.

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<sup>50</sup> *Signing of the Gender Quota Law Proposal*. (n.d.). UNDP. Retrieved February 28, 2024, from <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/press-releases/signing-gender-quota-law-proposal>

Following Htun and Weldon's typology<sup>51</sup>, backlash on the level of women's political participation in Lebanon is characterized by doctrinal and status politics.

Relative to doctrinal politics, the entwinement between politics and sectarianism, as well as the dominance of the sectarian political system, define in great part the resistance against women's participation. Lebanon is a constitutional republic with an elected representative parliament and is defined as a consociational democracy. Consociational democracy is a power-sharing system where the major religious sects partition political power through compromise to maintain peace and stability.<sup>52</sup> The Lebanese constitution mandates the partition of power in public offices, parliament, and government on a confessional basis among the four major sects (Maronite Christians, Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze).<sup>53</sup>

When it comes to electoral politics, dominant political parties use fearmongering to ensure that their electorates vote against their sectarian rivals out of fear of the dominance of a sect over all the others. Each of these dominant sectarian parties fields one or two heavy-weight candidates in each district that are guaranteed to win seats in parliament. When probed about fielding women on electoral lists, several political leaders explicitly confessed that the preference is constantly for "strong" male candidates who can guarantee a bulk of preferential votes enabling the party to reach the threshold needed to win a seat. Fielding women seems to be counter-productive to successful sectarian fear-mongering tactics—a rampant approach to electoral politics in Lebanon.

Concerning status politics, the battle to uproot patriarchal and paternalistic values—manifested in the old guards' grip on the political system—remains feminists' biggest challenge to ensuring women's active political participation. The confessional governing system in Lebanon that reserves certain political positions to certain sectarian groups also serves as a barrier to women's quota<sup>54</sup>. As hinted to earlier, in the example of the Boutros Commission's proposed electoral law and women's quota, women's national-level quotas in particular "threaten" the established sectarian quotas. The same argument is often used to combat proposals for municipal-level quotas.<sup>55</sup> Opposition to the women's quota also stems from various sectarian groups that believe

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<sup>51</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/abs/when-do-governments-promote-womens-rights-a-framework-for-the-comparative-analysis-of-sex-equality-policy/SB6328280597AE81DAA4A76EB7B44563>

<sup>52</sup> As defined in Jabbara, Joseph G., Jabbara, Nancy W. 'Consociational Democracy in Lebanon: a flawed system of governance'. In *Governance and Developing Countries*, 71-89. Leiden: Brill. 2002

<sup>53</sup> Article 95 of the Constitution states that "The Chamber of Deputies that is elected on the basis of equality between Muslims and Christians shall take the appropriate measures to bring about the abolition of political confessionalism according to a transitional plan. A National Committee shall be formed and shall be headed by the President of the Republic; it includes, in addition to the President of the Chamber of Deputies and the Prime Minister, leading political intellectual and social figures. The task of this Committee shall be study and propose the means to ensure the abolition of confessionalism, propose them to the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of Ministers, and to follow up the execution of the transitional plan. During the transitional phase: a. The sectarian groups shall be represented in a just and equitable manner in the formation of the Cabinet. b. The principle of confessional representation in public service jobs, in the judiciary, in the military and security institutions, and in public and mixed agencies shall be cancelled in accordance with the requirements of national reconciliation; they shall be replaced by the principle of expertise and competence. However, Grade One posts and their equivalents shall be except from this rule, and the posts shall be distributed equally between Christians and Muslims without reserving any particular job for any sectarian group but rather applying the principles of expertise and competence". This article has not been implemented to this date.

<sup>54</sup> Confessionalism is the power sharing measures among sects whereby the highest political and governmental positions are shared among the different sectarian communities proportionally to their assumed demographic distribution.

<sup>55</sup> Baydoun, A.C. (2009). Women in Power and decision-making Positions: Conditions and Restraints. *Al-Raida*, 126-127, pp. 53–57.

women should not participate in politics or that “forcing” women to participate in politics threatens “traditional values” of certain communities.<sup>56</sup> Further, some political parties oppose a women’s quota because “they feel women have no interest in running for office or engaging in the clientelism that is considered necessary by politicians”<sup>57</sup> (Atkinson et al., 2020). Many political parties equally opposed women’s quotas on party candidate lists because “they feared that voters would view women as unqualified candidates and any votes for women would dilute preferential votes.”<sup>58</sup>

Finally, opposition to the women’s quota also originates from within the various women’s rights groups and organizations in Lebanon. The competing relationship between different organizations sometimes hinders the advancement of women’s political rights. At many instances, these organizations fail at converging on one unified vision for women’s political empowerment. Some of these groups insist on lobbying for representation in parliaments, governments, and decision-making institutions alongside political parties that have revealed, time and again, their misogynistic attitudes, and that have protected and celebrated war criminals.<sup>59</sup> Many feminist collectives and activists on the other hand have a drastically different diagnosis of the women’s predicament and of the obstacles that hinder their full political participation. They are critical of the structure and make-up of the political structures in which women are expected to participate and argue that the quantitative approach to women’s political participation is tokenistic and reductive. Their critique starts with how these institutions are constructed. They find that sectarian quotas consolidate political familism and paternalistic authority where the sects’ fathers and gatekeepers pick candidates based on their networks, meaning their sons, sons-in-laws or brothers. Hence, the product of these constructs—be it a man or a woman—is inherently anti-feminist.

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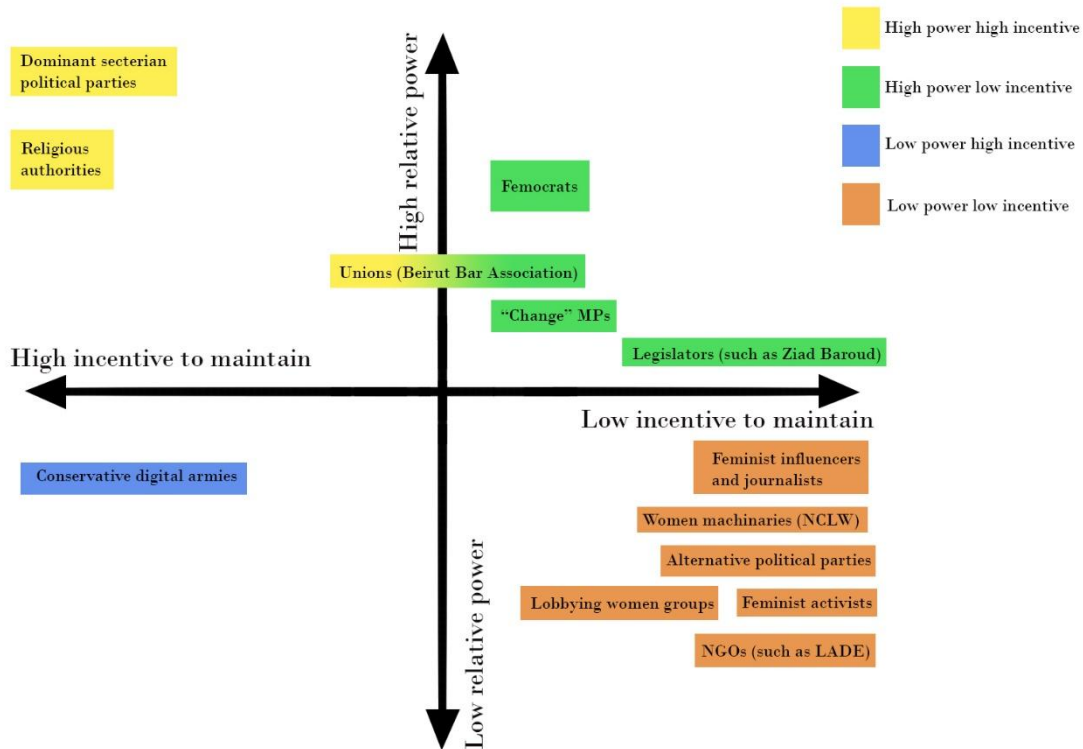
<sup>56</sup> Helou, M. (2009). Women quota in Lebanon: A false promise? *Al-Raida*, 126-127, pp. 58–65.

<sup>57</sup> Atkinson, V., Reiter, E., & Zobairi, A. (2020). *Identity and Politics in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities for Coalition-Building and Inclusion* [Report]. International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES]. p.39.

<sup>58</sup> Atkinson, V., Reiter, E., & Zobairi, A. (2020). *Identity and Politics in Lebanon: Challenges and Opportunities for Coalition-Building and Inclusion* [Report]. International Foundation for Electoral Systems [IFES]. [https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes\\_identity\\_and\\_politics\\_in\\_lebanon\\_october\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_identity_and_politics_in_lebanon_october_2020.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> The main leaders of the political parties present in parliament were leaders of militias during the Lebanese Civil War. However, these leaders were not held accountable for the war crimes committed by them and their militias during the war. In fact, in 1991 the Lebanese Parliament passed the Amnesty Law, granting amnesty for all crimes that were committed during the Civil War except crimes committed against political leaders, religious figures, and foreign diplomats. Therefore, the atrocities committed were non-prosecutable, and perpetrators of human rights violations were protected and became MPs.

## 5. Actors



## 6. Drivers

The political rights of women have long been a source of contention for the political elite in Lebanon. Notwithstanding traditional gender roles and women’s severely curtailed legal rights as a result of personal status and citizenship laws, low political participation of women is a manifestation of a complex patriarchal matrix that has subdued women since the inception of the Lebanese state. Joseph (1993, 2005, and 2011) theorized and discussed at length some of the notions that underlie the Lebanese state-building project. Three notions are fundamental to adequately introduce it: **Patriarchal connectivity**, the **kin contract**, and **political familism**.<sup>60</sup>

**Patriarchal connectivity**, Joseph contends, is a cornerstone of this matrix. It finds its roots in connective selfhood (Joseph, 1993). **Connective selfhood** describes the fluid construct of self among Arab families that defines itself in relation to others and considers intimate others as extensions of itself. It refers to a culturally normative pattern of male and female relationships in Arab families that center-stages familial relations, and links kin and non-kin dynamics in historically, culturally, socially, politically, and economically specific contexts. Although

<sup>60</sup> For elaborate discussions on these notions, see Joseph, Suad. Gender and relationality among Arab families in Lebanon. *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 3 (1993): 465–482; and Joseph, Suad. Political Familism in Lebanon. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 636 (2011): 150-163.

modeled in and by familial relationships, connectivity extends throughout significant connections and relationships in the Lebanese society, via idiomatic kinship, so non-kin persons could evoke the legitimacy and expectations of kin relationships in all spheres. “Coupled with patriarchy, connectivity organizes the selves with fluid boundaries in a gendered and aged hierarchy, in a culture that valorizes kin idioms in all relations” (Joseph, 1993). Because of this family-embedded patriarchy, men and elders are entitled to direct the lives of women and juniors and have legally recognized rights and responsibilities in relation to them. Resultantly, kin groups and extended families are recognized as legitimate political actors in Lebanon and as a haven that the Lebanese turn to for protection and resources under a weak incapacitated state. Under a frail state, kin became the anchor of security for Lebanese citizens who used idiomatic kinship in all realms of life: the market, the workplace, and politics.

This gave rise to the “**kin contract**” (Joseph, 2005). This is the formal and informal understanding that membership in families precedes and preempts membership in the state, and that families can legitimately claim prior loyalty of their members, over and above the state. State actors, political leaders, and militias thus turned to families to mobilize and organize the population; mobilized their own kin, and deferred to the citizens’ kin in matters of relevance to the state, and the law. In this configuration, the political leader is seen as a family member and as an honorary family patriarch, which has paved the way for all leaders to present themselves as the senior patriarchs of the extended political family, calling for the loyalty, deference, and service due to them as heads of families. This arrangement has multiple consequences: it validates the patriarchal extended kinship as a venue of social and political control, which is the most significant deterrent to Lebanese women’s positioning as full citizens; it confirmed the state’s legitimation of the primacy of kin; and justified the state’s mobilization of religion to sanctify extended kinship. Joseph argues that the kin contract is based in the care/control paradigm (Joseph, 2005). Members receive care from the extended kin but have to accept the presumptions of patriarchal control in return.

This partly explains why most political parties in Lebanon are most often based in family allegiances, and why and how political leadership continued through familial lines - usually passed down from father to son and occasionally to wives or daughters. As discussed above, in the last four decades, women in Lebanon stepped into political positions either after their husbands’ death, or in support of their brothers, or while waiting for their sons to mature.

This is how the phenomenon known as “political familism”<sup>61</sup> developed, positioning women in Lebanon as “second class citizens.”<sup>62</sup>

**Political familism** highlights the heavy reliance of Lebanon’s political system, in particular its confessional nature, on the “deployment of family institutions, ideologies, and idioms, practices and relationships by citizens to activate their needs and demands in relation to the state...and by the state/state actors to mobilize practical and moral grounds for governance based on a civic myth of kinship and a public discourse that privileges family.”<sup>63</sup> This system reifies and perpetuates normative gender roles wherein women are constructed as dependents on their male

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph, S. (2010). Gender and Citizenship in the Arab World. *Al-Raida*, 129-130 (Spring/Summer), pp. 8–18.

<sup>62</sup> Salameh, R. (2014). Gender politics in Lebanon and the limits of legal reformism (En-Ar). *Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support*. DOI: 10.28943/CSR.001.007.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph, S. (2010). Gender and Citizenship in the Arab World. *Al-Raida*, 129-130 (Spring/Summer), pp. 8–18.

family members and husbands, who are ideologically constructed as the “protectors” and “leaders” of their families. As such, women are ideologically and materially locked out of positions of political power, among other rights.

The trilogy of patriarchal connectivity, the kin contract, and political familism, which centers the family in Lebanon’s political dynamics and tensions, is instrumental in unpacking the country’s political puzzle and understanding the position of women within it. It also contributes to understanding the heteronormative power dynamics and make-up of families, the flowing of these dynamics into wider communities, and how the care-control paradigm is embedded in the political realm in Lebanon. Women’s quotas challenge these dynamics and disrupt the flow of family-based patriarchy traveling from the domestic to the governmental/ political. This patriarchal and heteronormative system is upheld by oppressive legal structures such as the sectarian personal status laws<sup>64</sup> that ensure the subjugation of women within the family.

## 7. Spaces

First, **social media platforms** represent a common and accessible space for all actors involved: Civil society organizations, feminist activists, women’s groups, and policymakers. X and Facebook particularly have been major fora for activists to voice their demands through hashtags, videos, and other posts supporting their cause. Orchestrated digital armies of dominant political parties, and of religious conservative forces are also rampant in these fora.

Second, **workshops and awareness campaigns** mainly led by expert organizations on electoral reform have put women’s rights on the table of negotiations, thus partially shaping the discourse of the media and forcing most political parties to incorporate it in their agenda. NGOs such as the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) held regular workshops on women’s political empowerment, the latest of which has been on August 31, 2021, where a discussion took place on the challenges women might face in the 2022 elections. In the lead-up to the 2018 elections, LADE initiated the “National Alliance to Support the Political Participation of Women in Lebanon,” a coalition of over 100 non-governmental organizations, women’s groups, and activists that served to lobby political leaders to incorporate a 30% women’s quota in the electoral law. The coalition, coordinated with the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), built considerable momentum within activists’ circles and media fora, but was not taken seriously by policymakers.

Third, **NGOs working on social and political reform** are coming together to form vocal coalitions with unified messages to policymakers. Though these coalitions and spaces do not lobby for women’s rights per se, their approach mainstreams gender and women’s political rights in the overall vision for change and reform. In 2021, LADE, Maharat,<sup>65</sup> the Lebanese Union for

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<sup>64</sup> There are eighteen officially recognized religious sects and fifteen different personal status laws in Lebanon, governing marriage, divorce, child custody, alimony and inheritance. Not only do these laws enshrine the privilege of men over women in several issues, they also differentiate among women of different sects, stripping them of their ability to make unified claims to authorities. The Lebanese state still had constitutional power to offer a secular alternative, and devise an optional civil personal status law for all citizens, despite recognizing the legislative and judicial prerogatives of religious communities in personal status matters. But instead of offering this alternative to its citizens, the state elevated sectarian family law to public law, thus legalizing the preferential treatment of men

<sup>65</sup> A leading organization in the field of media development and training, advocating for the freedom of expression and opinion.

People with Physical Disabilities, and the Lebanese Transparency Association united in a press conference over the need for fair and transparent elections where the rights of voters and candidates are fully respected. As well, between 2019 and 2022, Adyan Foundation<sup>66</sup> organized the “Youth Leaders for Non-Sectarian Politics: The Youth Mock Parliament” to equip young adults with the necessary skills to run for elections.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, the local NGO Fifty-Fifty<sup>68</sup>, conducted training sessions in the Bekaa and Baalbak/Hermel region, in Mount-Lebanon (2), and in the South for women who want to run for municipal elections in 2023 under the project “Revolution of Women in Politics and Municipalities”. The training sessions covered several topics mainly the law of municipalities and electoral alliances, social media, transparency and fighting corruption, local development, communication and media, and the political and personal picture, and were followed by support sessions. Further, the organization organized a meeting to discuss women’s quota law for municipal elections in collaboration with donor organizations such as USAID, the EU in Lebanon, and UNDP. They also organized an event on the importance of women’s participation in local politics in collaboration with the French, Finnish, and British embassies and UN Women during the event candidates shared their experiences and projects they intend to work on in their local areas. Fifty-Fifty also organized many awareness sessions for men and women in different regions (Akkar, Tripoli, Chouf, Zahle, Falougha) to discuss the importance of equality and women’s participation in municipal elections. Additionally, Fifty Fifty and the “National Alliance for Quota Establishment” visited different parliamentary blocks along with experts to lobby for their proposed quota law. Different stakeholders participated including MPs, UNDP, UN Women, and other civil society actors.

Additionally, Fifty-Fifty had previously converged with fifty other organizations and 12 experts to draft a law for women’s parliamentary quota back in 2021. The law did not pass but the association persevered in convening politicians and current members of parliament on the one hand, and women candidates and feminist organizations on the other. Fifty-fifty organized several such convenings across the country in the past year (2023). Further, they launched a call for candidates and organized rallies in different regions throughout the country targeting women, to encourage them to run for elections and build their capacity for that endeavor. Their initiative managed to recruit 400 women across all political backgrounds, selected based on political experience and engagement in their localities.

In terms of knowledge production and documentation, local organizations Maharat – working on media freedoms and ethics, and Madanyat – working on equipping women with the needed skills to engage in politics, partnered with UN Women to produce reports resulting from monitoring gender dynamics on the media in the lead up to the municipal elections. The reports aim to identify, monitor, and analyze the different forms of violence and barriers women candidates to

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<sup>66</sup> Adyan is a Civil Society Organization established on August 6, 2006. Adyan is inclusive of all religions and beliefs and works on a positive approach towards diversity and on the interaction between religions and the public sphere. Through their work, Adyan seeks to contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism and advancing freedom of religion and belief. Adyan works through homegrown solutions in education, research, policy-making, media, and community engagement networks.

<sup>67</sup> Adyan Foundation (2022). *Youth Leaders for Non-Sectarian Politics: The Youth Mock Parliament*. <https://adyanfoundation.org/project/youth-leaders-for-non-sectarian-politics-in-lebanon-the-youth-mock-parliament/>.

<sup>68</sup> Fiftyfifty is a Lebanese NGO founded in 2019. It involves women and men and aims at promoting gender equality in private and public sectors, focusing mainly on political decision-making positions.

municipal elections face at different stages of this process. 44 journalists across platforms were surveyed to assess their understanding of the violence directed at women political activists, and a roundtable with 18 of them was organized to share findings and discuss recommendations. Among the notable findings are the high percentages of journalists who are aware of the discrimination against women political activists (57% are aware of the difference in media treatment between men and women candidates); and of the violence that women in politics are subjected to (61% have witnessed violence against women in the public sphere). Most importantly, over 90% committed to allocating equal space for men and women politicians and experts in their coverage.

In a parallel effort, several local civil society organizations – namely KAFA (a feminist organization working on dismantling structures oppressing women in Lebanon), the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), working on electoral reform and elections’ monitoring, Maharat, Madanyat, the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union (LPHU), and the AiW among others, convened and created a consortium to work specifically on violence against women in politics between 2022 and 2024. Four of the consortium members had set up respective reporting applications enabling women – candidates, voters, bystanders – to report the violence they are subjected to or witness throughout the election period. KAFA’s application is dedicated to receiving reports of violent incidents as they happened due to the organization’s capacity to intervene through their links to the internal security forces. LPHU’s application is dedicated to any complaints related to discrimination or violence against women with disabilities (whether they were voters or candidates). LADE’s application is dedicated to any breaches or violations of the electoral law and/or the integrity of the electoral process, and Maharat’s application is dedicated to any discrimination against women voters and/or candidates in the media.

The consortium planned to launch its collaboration and announce the availability of the reporting apps in the lead-up to the municipal elections, however, the delays prompted the organizations to reframe their work and center it around women in politics and leadership in general, regardless of whether the elections do take place or not.

In 2024, the consortium launched its apps, with a series of videos explaining reporting mechanisms. Additionally, multiple organizations persisted in conducting talks and awareness sessions and producing audio-visual material on women’s political participation, featuring Lebanese women political activists and showcasing their contributions. Throughout 2024, the organization Seeds for Legal Initiatives’ initiative "Power of Your Voice" raised awareness about safe civic spaces across all Lebanon and amplified women's voices to drive change, as part of a wider program titled “Shifting Mindsets and Fighting Structural Discrimination against Women in Lebanon” project. Further, throughout 2024, Seeds for Legal Initiatives, along with other local organizations worked with women from selected political parties in Lebanon to explicitly address the challenges that women face in the Lebanese political sphere, under the umbrella of a program titled “Changing from Within: Advancing Women’s Political Participation”.

It is also worth pointing to the study released by Samir Kassir Foundation – a media research center and watchdog - in January 2024, on the situation of women journalists in Lebanon. Based

on 70 interviews with women journalists either working in or covering Lebanon, the study unpacks the multifaceted challenges confronting women journalists in terms of their labor rights - salaries, promotions, and vacation entitlements. Importantly, the report unveils the distressing spectrum of harassment and assault they face, ranging from sexual harassment to being denied leadership roles, enduring exploitation through continuous work without breaks, and encountering patriarchal abuses of power that impede their ability to perform professionally. The numbers reveal the catastrophic toll that harassment has on women journalists' careers: 70% reported that they had been sexually harassed, 95.7% confirmed that a woman colleague they know was sexually harassed, and 97.7% reported repeated harassment.

Fourth, **television talk shows on mainstream media channels also present a space for debates.** The past decade has seen a rise in the debate-based talk show genre on Lebanese televisions. These shows typically invite representatives of political parties to debate with representatives of alternative political parties and/or civil society organizations contending issues such as the lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, and women's political participation and the quota. These discussions usually intensify in the year preceding parliamentary elections (2017-2018), and (2021-2022), and offer audiences crucial information and knowledge on women's rights, often highlighting the different forms of backlash against these rights. Furthermore, women were hosted on several episodes of a show titled "Beirut Al Yawm" or "Beirut Today"<sup>69</sup>, they discussed the importance of the participation of women in municipal elections in their local areas.

Fifth, on several occasions and increasingly in the past five years, **feminist activists and organizations** have been protesting for different intersectional causes, including women's political participation. The latest and most prominent of all movements has been the October 17, 2019 revolution. The various systems of inequality that shape women's intersectional realities in Lebanon were equally, simultaneously, and explicitly attacked during the October 17 protests. Feminist chants tied patriarchy to the multiple exploitative apparatuses, including sectarianism, clientelism, religious personal status courts, capitalism, and the banks.<sup>70</sup> Women protested along with men and held women-only demonstrations, such as the remarkable coming together of mothers from the neighborhoods of Chiyah and Ain El Remmene—the cradle of the Lebanese civil war and a historical sectarian demarcation line—to reaffirm solidarity, after a night of politically motivated tensions between old rivals on November 27, 2019.<sup>71</sup>

Sixth, in 2022, the AiW in collaboration with the Academy of Continuing Education (ACE) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) conducted a "three-month training, funded by the Finnish Embassy that aimed to equip women with the necessary skills to run for parliamentary or municipal elections."<sup>72</sup> Most recently, in May 2024, the AiW also created a collaborative mentorship space, with the support of the Embassy of Canada to Lebanon as well as the UN

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<sup>69</sup> Beirut Al Yawm is a show aired on a mainstream Lebanese channel called MTV Lebanon, it consists of a daily political roundup with guests in order to discuss the latest news in the country.

<sup>70</sup>Some examples include: "(She is) Out to bring down the—patriarchal, sectarian, racist, capitalist – regime," "Our revolution is feminist," and "Our struggles are many, our anger is one".

<sup>71</sup> For a thorough discussion on this, see the chapters of Sara Mourad and Myriam Sfeir in Jeffrey G. Karam and Rima Majed (eds), *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris and Bloomsbury, 2022).

<sup>72</sup> The Arab Institute for Women (2022, July 6). *Closing Event: Supporting Political Participation of Targeted Women in Lebanon*. <https://aiw.lau.edu.lb/news-events/activities/closing-event-supporting-politic.php>.

Women. The space convened ten politically-active Lebanese women and ten women ambassadors/ UN representatives as mentors in a two-way informal event to share experiences, network, and facilitate collaboration opportunities.

Seventh, **feminist student clubs at several university campuses**, including the Lebanese American University and the American University of Beirut have often served as crucial entry points that civil society organizations and women's rights groups used to promote issues such as women's political participation and the quota. In the lead-up to the 2022 parliamentary elections, these clubs frequently organized talks, debates, and discussion circles, hosting feminists and electoral experts to discuss issues of relevance to elections and women's political rights.

Eighth, with the advent of 13 "Change MPs" to parliament as a result of the 2022 parliamentary elections, **the parliament** could potentially become a forum for debate on issues around women's rights, and particularly the quota. As such, the 13 MPs are supposedly closely connected to the grassroots and to their constituents and are keen on bringing about novel and more participatory political practices. They are hence expected to lobby for legislations and draft laws related to the quota system, among other issues that could potentially take society a step closer towards gender justice.

Ninth, the emergence of new political parties: the relatively new discourse that is different than the mainstream political discourse, with a notable cross-sectarian membership. These groups have the potential to advance an alternative political agenda centered on fundamental rights and freedoms.

## 8. Events

The dismissal of MP Inaya Ezzedine's proposal for a women's parliamentary quota in October 2021, is an incident worth analyzing. On October 7, 2021, Amal Movement's MP Inaya Ezzedine (refer to footnote 7) walked out of a joint parliamentary committee session after its MP members refused to discuss her proposal to introduce a quota. Ezzedine withdrew from the session because the deputies—including fellow Amal MPs—refused to even discuss the quota while paying daily lip service to women's participation in politics. Upon storming out of parliament, Ezzedine held a press conference and publicly shamed the MPs for their dismissal of the proposal. Ezzedine's statement and the joint committees' dismissal of the quota triggered a wave of condemnations through statements and online posts from civil society, NGOs, experts, and journalists who had advocated for the quota. Importantly, NGO Fifty-Fifty and the civil coalition issued a statement clearly condemning the decision to drop the draft law. All quota proposals, including that of the NCLW, were successively dropped.

As repeatedly mentioned, 8 women made it to parliament as a result of the May 2022 elections.<sup>73</sup> In the absence of a quota, it remains challenging for women to win considerable seats—or at least 30% of seats in parliament. While it is true that none of the 8 hold an explicitly feminist agenda and that the women did not reach parliament with a common vision, it is expected from

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<sup>73</sup> El Chamaa, M. (2022). *Meet the eight women elected to Parliament in 2022*. L'Orient Today. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1300011/-25.html>

the four women “Change MPs” to challenge the patriarchal status quo. This yet remains an ambitious aspiration amid the sectarian and political divisions in the country.

Although backlash in the form of explicit physical violence against women politicians is not a common trend in Lebanese politics, the advent of young women – who are not affiliated with any political figure - from alternative political groups to parliament revealed an array of hostile practices that could be directed at women in parliament. In a Facebook post, Lebanese MP Cynthia Zarazir (one of the four women “Change MPs”) revealed repeated incidents of sexual harassment she was subjected to by her male peers in the parliament. Zarazir took to Facebook to talk about a number of incidents that showed "disrespect" and "harassment" by her male peers over the last few months.

In addition to her Facebook post, Zarazir described the verbal harassment she was subjected to by fellow MPs and journalists following a parliamentary session. Zarazir was subjected to a slew of hostile and demeaning practices including having her last name mocked and compared to an Arabic word that means cockroaches, being assigned a filthy office in parliament filled with condoms and issues of PlayBoy magazine<sup>74</sup>, and being denied a parking spot. Zarazir’s speaking up prompted substantial support from online commentators and triggered discussions on the obstacles blocking women’s full participation in politics.

In June 2023, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), one of the country’s dominant sectarian parties, announced a quota for women of 33% in its internal electoral law. The party elections that followed this decision brought about an interesting result whereby 4 out of the 8 elected members (50%) of the leadership council were women. This is indeed a creditable move, but it is still worth noting that this party operates like a patriarchal family business – its leadership passed down from Walid Jumblatt (PSP President from 1977 to 2023) to his son Taymour Jumblatt (PSP President as of 2023), and its women candidates to parliamentary elections over the years never exceeded one. Similarly, the Kataeb Party – another major sectarian political party in Lebanon - instated a 20% quota for women in its internal electoral law. The political bureau elections that followed the announcement of the quota resulted in 5 elected women to the party’s 22-member bureau.

In October 2023, Maya Zaghrini gained a spot on the 13-member Executive Council of the Lebanese Forces (political party) and was also appointed as the party’s representative of the Mount Lebanon district. Noteworthy that 2 of the 8 women who won seats in the Lebanese parliament after the 2022 elections are affiliated with the Lebanese Forces.

To analyze this, at least three factors need to be taken into account. The first is related to the Lebanese political parties’ need to modernize their structures and catch up with global trends, in an attempt to look more relevant and up-to-date. This is especially pertinent given that two of the parties in question – the PSP and the Kataeb - are archaic and have not undergone any significant re-structuring since their founding, over eight decades ago. The second factor that comes into this analysis is these parties’ need to shore up political support – or at least acceptance – among the younger sectors of their electorates and bases. In 2019, these parties – namely the Lebanese Forces and the PSP – endured a major blow as a result of the months long uprising that took over

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<sup>74</sup> Magazine known for its pornographic content.

the country. The backlash that politicians affiliated with these parties received as a result of their incompetent and corrupt governance, and complicity in the current devastation of the country, could have given rise to a decision to facelift said parties' structures. By this logic, the parties' instating of the internal gender quotas could be an attempt to market their image among the young sectors of their communities, and appeal to their sympathizers who might have lost interest, as progressive and dynamic political players that are willing and able to change and evolve.

Lastly, while internal gender quotas are mostly cosmetic changes that do not necessarily translate to significant and enduring change on the level of attitudes and norms towards women and gender within the party, something needs to be said about the character, political career, and trajectory of some of the women who advocated relentlessly for this move, and who now hold decision-making positions.

Some of these women do not only have substantial history and experience within their respective parties under their belt; but have also been continuously exposed to and inspired by other women – namely feminist – in similar positions in global political fora, and within Lebanese feminist civil society.



Sahar Ghoussoub سحر @SG... · 26 Jul

“Since I stepped into Parliament I have been:

- Catcalled by MPs with macho attitude.
- I was given a filthy office where I found playboy magazines and used condoms.
- I was bullied over my family name
- I was not allocated a parking space.”

@CynthiaZarazir



Cynthia Zarazir

8m · 🌐

منذ دخولي إلى المجلس النيابي لم ألقَ أي احترام يدل على أن من سأواجه معهم لـ 4 سنوات هم بشر أولاً وأناس محترمين ثانياً، وهنا بعض الشواهد على رفعة أخلاقهم: - "تلطيش" نواب السلطة الذين تتفوق ذكوريتهم على رجوليتهم. - تسليمي مكتب قذر لأجد مجلات البلاي بوي والواقيات الذكورية المستخدمة فيه في أرضه وجواريره. - التنفر على اسم عائلتي. - عدم منحي موقف للسيارة! هؤلاء يتعاملون مع نائب منتخب بهذا الشكل، فكيف سيعاملون الناس الذين لا صوت لهم!



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## 9. Tactics

Simply put, the political system in Lebanon discourages power sharing with women. As discussed above, the ruling class has relied on confessional considerations and sectarian fearmongering as the cornerstone of its hold on power. Mobilizing the people for elections happens on narrow sectarian basis amid the absence of a clear agenda for candidates. As a result, the role of women, which becomes secondary, is diminished and voters elect on confessional considerations amid the sectarian struggles in the country. As such, the levels of power used in the tactics of policymakers can be divided into three main levels: hidden, visible and invisible.

To understand hidden and visible power in the context of the women's quota in Lebanon, the latest development—which is the dropping of the quota proposal—best embodies the tactics used by backlash perpetrators and opposition actors to bring down political reform. Parliamentarians

in the joint committee session refused to discuss the law due to the limited time they had (hidden power), thus excluding the proposal from the final decision-making process. As a result, the law was quickly dropped (**the visible power**), and negotiations proceeded with no reference to a women's quota. Together, both levels of power tactics were used to feed the interests of the ruling class and to tighten their grip on parliament. The excuse of time came in handy to spare them justification for their direct opposition of the proposal.

The “invisible power” is vested in the reproduction of the same traditional norms and values in the Lebanese community. This form of power reinforces patriarchal social constructs and political familism, thus excluding women from the reform process. An important tactic for oppositional actors includes co-opting the feminist rhetoric that debates the feminist utility of a women's quota. In other words, does putting women in positions of power equate to feminist policies? Of course not, especially in Lebanon where political familism constrains most women politicians to simply reiterating their political party's ideologies even if they are against women's interests or anti-feminist.

A 2017 YouTube awareness video by the UNDP titled “Quota Controversies” tackles this very issue. It argues that based on women's marginalized status within Lebanese society, they should receive protection measure that can help eliminate the current power imbalances especially in relation to political positions.<sup>75</sup> A similar rhetorical strategy used by opposition actors claims that a women's political quota undercuts the merit-based system of politics in Lebanon, an issue that the video discusses. Of course, this argument completely obscures structural inequalities and ignores the very patriarchal-sectarian framework on which Lebanon's political system is based.

## 10. Countertactics

Today, the main drivers of the women's quota and broader efforts to increase women's political participation can be traced to the 2019 revolution and the hopes it inspired for addressing systemic discrimination against various marginalized groups, particularly women.

Similarly, the devastating economic collapse that started in 2020 amid deliberate governmental inaction, coupled with the difficulties of COVID-19, have created a critical moment for feminist and women's rights organizations to mobilize. As the Charter of Demands by Feminist Activists and Women's Rights Organizations in Lebanon has noted<sup>76</sup>, women must have equal access to positions with decision-making power to ensure some semblance of diversity among the political class.<sup>77</sup> Recognizing that simply having women in political power does not mean that feminist demands will be met, the Charter insists that the overall absence of women in politics is a primary concern of feminist groups and women's rights organizations.

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<sup>75</sup> UNDP Lebanon. (2017, March 7). *Quota Controversies* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v1o4\\_IQ\\_nY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9v1o4_IQ_nY).

<sup>76</sup> A charter signed by feminist activists and women's rights organizations in Lebanon. The charter demands immediate humanitarian assistance that recognizes and addresses existing gender inequalities and seeks to ensure that the needs of all, including women and girls, are met and that the process is transparent, neutral, and accountable.

<sup>77</sup> UN Women (2020, August 27). *Charter of Demands by Feminist Activists and Women's Rights organizations in Lebanon*. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/2020/08/cso%20lebanon%20charter/updates/charter%20of%20demands%20english%20149.pdf?la=en&vs=4201>.

These calls for a women's parliamentary quota also draw from the historical legacy of civil society campaigning for this right. Specifically, women's rights NGOs have long received financial support from various foreign governments and international development organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, to develop social media and political campaigns promoting the adoption of a women's quota in government, especially a parliamentary quota.<sup>78</sup> In particular, the NCLW has received significant international support to lead the campaigns in favor of a women's quota. At a minimum, the NCLW is often involved in such campaigns, even if the campaign begins with a particular women's rights NGO, as they are the formal liaison between feminist civil society and the Lebanese government.

Further, with the election of the "Change MPs", the coalitions they can build inside parliament, in addition to the relationships they have with grassroots movements, will both help in advancing the feminist agenda. With enough popular support, pressure on the government and on other opposing parties in parliament will help in creating new power dynamics and pressure groups which are hard to bypass.

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<sup>78</sup> Nassif, G. (2020, March 4). *Women's political participation in Lebanon and the limits of aid-driven empowerment* [Report]. Lebanon Support. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/women-s-political-participation-lebanon-and-limits-aid-driven-empowerment-enar>.