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Department of Social Sciences

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Why Do Lebanese Women Remain Underrepresented in Politics?

by

Tatiana Geagea

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Senior Study Repository Form

Student Name ID Email	Tatiana Geagea 201805403 tatiana.geagea01@lau.edu
Senior Study title	Why Do Lebanese Women Remain Underrepresented in Politics?
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Supervising faculty name	Dr. Marwan Rowayheb
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Advisor Approval

Name:

Marwan Rowayheb

Signature:

Marwan Rowayheb 17/6/2021

Date:

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Name: Tatiana Geagea

Signature: Tatiana E. Geagea

Date: 9/05/2021

I. Abstract

Lebanese women have struggled with social injustices on a daily basis for decades. They have been underrepresented in the political arena and kept out of the decision-making process. However, they were able to increase their participation in other areas of society such as civil movements and the workforce. As such, this study focused on understanding the reason behind this underrepresentation by analyzing women's behavior. It hypothesized that the sectarian structure of the Lebanese political system has hindered women's representation. A comparative analysis was conducted focusing on women's activities in the October 17 revolution, the labor force, the civil society, and the political sector. After extensive research and interpretation, the findings corresponded with the hypothesis suggested where it was concluded that the main cause that lays behind women's underrepresentation is related to sectarianism.

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Abbreviations page

NGO(s): Non-Governmental Organizations

UAE: United Arab Emirates

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

LLWR: League of Women's Rights

AMEWS: Association for Middle East Women Studies

UN: United Nations

1. Introduction

Whether one believes that God, Brahma, or a holy trinity created men, all men are created to be equal. All people are human and should be treated equally regardless of any differences they might have. Gender is nothing but a socially constructed concept that refers to predetermined characteristics related to being male or female. It is the product of what society perceives to be as feminine and masculine and differs from one culture to another according to the norms, beliefs, and values. As such, achieving gender equality is everyone's responsibility, women and men, girls, and boys. Putting an end to the various discrimination forms that women and girls are subject to is a basic human right. In Lebanon, society has continuously suffered from gender inequality all throughout history. Despite that this gap has been in decline in recent years, Lebanese women still face strong discriminatory acts. They have been considered as the inferior gender and treated as second class citizens. In their everyday life, women have been subject to various forms of violence as well, such as physical, verbal, and psychological. Furthermore, the threats of sexual harassment have accompanied women wherever they go regardless of their age, physical appearance, professional status, or background. Gender inequality has also reached the workplace, where women have suffered from a pay gap that has acted as a vital discouragement (Harb & Rouhana, 2020). In addition, although Lebanese women have gained suffrage ever since 1952, they have remained largely kept out of politics. Executive and legislative powers are distributed according to a power sharing formula among religious communities in accordance with the Taif Agreement of 1989 (International Alert, 2011). These powers have been often given to male figures. Moreover, there are up to fifteen distinct personal status laws, each for one of the recognized religious sects. As a result, Lebanese citizens are treated differently in cases of marriage, divorce, custody of children and other personal affairs. However, the fundamental

problem regarding this system of personal status law is its discriminatory force on women. Males have been taken to be the head of the family and the decision makers, while women were given the motherly nurturing role. This division has also affected political power, where the feminine perspective has been abolished from the decision-making process. Furthermore, many religious communities tend to regard women as minors. They are put under the control of the male figures in the family, either their father, brother, or husband, and have to obey their word. All these events are just the tip of the iceberg of what seems to be an endless battle of social injustices rooted in gender inequality.

However, despite these struggles, women have been able to increase their representation in less formal areas of the public sector. They have largely taken part in social movements and uprisings. As well, they have become entrepreneurs and successful in their work. In addition, they took part in university elections, activists movements and NGOs.

Consequently, this study aims to answer the following research question: Why are Lebanese women still underrepresented in the political system despite their high educational levels, increased participation in the labor force, leading role in uprisings, and active involvement in civil society?

This question is critical in order to understand the lack of representation of women from political power. Lebanese women have been very active in the public sector institutions. They have held a key role in the latest protests that erupted in October 2019. Moreover, many women have become entrepreneurs and occupied managerial positions in the work force. In addition, females today make up more than half of the student population in comparison with men. More so, they have achieved higher educational levels and were able to complete advanced degrees. Several Lebanese NGOs have been founded by women and accomplished great milestones in protecting women's

rights. Yet, they still suffer from low representation when it comes to being involved in the government and shaping public policies. Which is why this topic is important as it offers us a possible explanation on what could be hindering women's participation in politics. It allows us to understand why women are still marginalized in the cabinet, parliament and political parties.

Furthermore, this research hypothesizes that the political system that relies on sectarian lines have, in turn, resulted in a sect-embedded society which has kept women out of politics. Women have showed that they enjoy the necessary motivation and capabilities to become part of the political system. Therefore, the formerly common mindset that women lack the motivation, interest or will to be involved in the government does not accurately describe reality. Rather, it only serves as an excuse to distract us from the real problem. Therefore, women empowerment programs do not match the struggles that women face in real life. Through their active and hard work, such as in the October 17 revolution, they have demonstrated that they are willing to hold political power, if given the chance.

As for the research methodology, this paper will rely on comparative analysis. Women's activities will be divided into two major groups. The former will include women's participation in society's institutions outside of politics. The focus will be shed specifically on the October 17 revolution, female entrepreneurial leadership, and their role in civil society such as in NGOs, student elections, and activist movements. The latter group will include women's representation in the Lebanese political system. The activities of women in both these areas will be analyzed and compared while concentrating on the variable between them, which is sectarianism. Publications, journals, and news articles will be collected in order to gather the relevant qualitative data that serve in analyzing these movements. After that, a detailed interpretation of the relation between

sectarianism and women's behaviors in these two groups will be conducted. Finally, a conclusion will be made in an attempt to find a possible answer for the research question stated above.

2. Literature review

In the literature, great effort has been devoted to studying Lebanese women's status in regard to politics. Some scholars believe that the underrepresentation of women is due to the hereditary nature of Lebanese politics that is centered around male figures. Others argue that the reasons behind this discrimination are due to the mentality of the Lebanese society and the patriarchal dominancy. On the other hand, some researchers have attributed the underrepresentation of women to the quota system that does not ensure their participation. However, there are still no agreement among researchers on the principal factor that led women to advance in various sectors except for the political one.

2.1 Patriarchy

Many scholars seem to agree that a major obstacle facing women's advancement in the political arena is the patriarchal system that has contributed to shaping the behavior of women and predetermined their role in the society. In their journal article "Women's Rights and Call to Shifting Paradigms from Under Representation into Empowerment: The Case of Lebanon", Diab and Awada argues that, although women have attained comparably higher educational levels than men, they still face gender discrimination rooted in the patriarchal mentality (Diab & Awada, 2016). They believe that Lebanese culture has promoted gender inequality. As a result, women have become subject to different types of violence. This has led women to be underpaid and to suffer from lack of representation and participation in politics. Similarly, in her article "Women's

Grassroots Mobilization in Lebanon: A Firsthand Account”, Arslan believes that women have refrained from getting involved in politics because it is considered as a man’s domain (Arslan, 2020). The traditions present in the society have resulted in psychological barriers that deepened gender inequalities. It has led the enforcement of statements such as “Why Women? Did men perish?” that acted against women’s participation in politics. Moreover, according to Sharif, in their article “The Origin of Women’s Segregation in Lebanon’s Political Life, Between Patriarchy and Consociational Democracy”, the root causes that lead to women’s underrepresentation in politics is directly related to the patriarchal structure of Lebanese political parties (Sharif, 2017). The rights of the citizens are protected by the religious leaders which appoint males as the heads of families. As a result, male have grown to be more privileged, with more access to positions of power. Whereas women have been kept out of leadership positions, as “there are enough men in the family”. All these academics agree that the patriarchal nature of Lebanese society plays a critical role in the underrepresentation of women in politics.

2.2 Hereditary politics

On the other hand, several academics believe that women’s participation in politics has been negatively affected by the hereditary politics. In their article “Gender Politics in Lebanon and the Limits of Legal Reformism”, Salameh believes that political seats and positions are inherited on the basis of male kinship (Salameh 2014). As personal status laws are governed by religions, they have made men the heads of the family, and have treated women as second-class citizens. Therefore, political recruitment was established on the basis of family ties and women have become incapable of reaching governmental positions unless there is no male heir in their family. Likewise, in their journal article “Political Familism in Lebanon”, Joseph argues that most of the political parties in Lebanon are based upon family allegiances (Joseph, 2011). They state that an

important number of women joined the parliament due to family ties. They have either followed their alive or dead husbands, or through the support of their. Examples are Nayla Mowadad, Bahia Hariri, Sethrida Geagea. Males were considered as guardians of women, and laws protected male rights over females'. As well, according to Khoury, in their journal article "Women's Political Participation in Lebanon", the weakness of the Lebanese state lies within the primacy of kinship and familial ties (Khoury, 2013). Individuals in Lebanon are often identified by the family registration number that is passed on from generation to the other through the male figures of the family. This concept is as well reinforced in the political arena. Even so, the majority of women that have entered the parliament has done so through their kinship ties. All these authors have concluded that political familism in Lebanon and the prevalence of kinship ties that is centered around male figures play a major role in the underrepresentation on women.

2.3 Quota system

Other researchers argue that the reason behind women's underrepresentation in politics is due to the inefficient quota system that is recognized in Lebanon. In their article "Parliamentary Presence Sticking Point for Lebanon's Women", Alami states that the Lebanese quota system contributes to complicating women's political roles (Alami, 2015). Moreover, some of the political parties totally rejected the adoption of a quota system that aims to increase the numbers of women in governmental positions. In parallel, according to Hussein, in their article "The 'Female Quota' in Lebanon: A Temporary Solution to a Chronic Political Problem", Lebanese authorities have failed to adopt positive measures that empower women's political representation in the government (Hussein, 2017). Women have been continually marginalized and denied their political rights. Moreover, the electoral law does not include any gender quota that favor's women's political representation. Similarly, in their journal article "The Proposed Gender Quota

in Lebanon: Legal Crisis or Democratic Transformation?”, El Makari believes that the principal reason behind women’s underrepresentation is the lack of interest of the Lebanese legislator to adopt an efficient quota system that aims to strengthen women’s political representation (El Makari, 2009). They argue that the electoral law should be amended to encourage women’s participation in the political processes. All these authors seem to believe that the current quota system acts as a demotivator for women’s political participation.

2.4 Gaps and limitations

Although these academics offer great contribution to the literature in regard to women’s representation in politics, their research remain limited in some areas. First, the recent exponential participation of women in political movements have added to the evidence that support women’s empowerment. Thus, the existent research has become outdated and is in need of new studies that consist of more recent data. Furthermore, the methodologies used in these studies present some limitations. Focusing only on the presence of women in politics and overlooking the active role that they play outside of politics is not enough to explain their underrepresentation. Therefore, more attention should be shed on women’s activities in areas such as the labor force, civil society, and the public sector. As such, this study will attempt to close these gaps by comparing the roles of women in between these two areas. It will contribute to the literature by studying the variable that exists between the political sector and other areas of society, which has led to the difference in the levels of participation.

3. Analysis of women's activities

The purpose of the following section is to highlight a number of achievements that Lebanese women have accomplished throughout the years in some institutions of Lebanese society. It will include the active role that women adopted during the October 17 revolution. Moreover, it will mention some of the managerial positions that they were able to hold in the business world. As well, a quick overview of their participation in the civil society and the university elections will be made. Next, a brief description of women's representation in the Lebanese sectarian political system will be conducted. This will show the willingness, motivation and capability of women to become successful. These analyses will allow us to compare the activities of women between two sectors, where one is secular and the other is sectarian. It will help in understanding why women have been able to succeed in one part of society but fail in the other.

3.1 October Revolution

On October 17, 2019, Lebanon witnessed the eruption of a non-sectarian revolution that called for better standards of living. The protests expanded all over the country and conquered some important historical locations such as Riad Al Soleh square in Beirut. This event was mainly due to the corruption of the ruling elite that were not implementing any projects that advance the general welfare. Nevertheless, the economic condition of the Lebanese population was deteriorating, without any reform attempts by the government. The leadership role that women adopted during this revolution should come to no surprise. Ever since the beginning of the protests, women have centered themselves on the frontlines. Moreover, as the protests expanded and reached a larger audience, women formed human barriers between the forces and the protestors when violence threats erupted. There were also footages of women dancing in the protests, raising flags, and chanting to anthems. They were the decision-makers of the revolution and adopted a

very mature role in how the events unfolded. They were determined to make their voices be heard. They did not allow tear gas, violence, and fights to prevent them from taking the streets each day and call for their demands. Fear did not hold them back, as they were determined on bringing change to their home country. They stood against the government's sectarianism and corruption and called for a change in the ruling class. In addition, they demonstrated for better employment opportunities and improved social services (Khalil, 2019).

As well, women fought for equality. Females have been subject to males' superiority, deriving from personal status laws that are under the control of religion. As such, females are still denied from the most basic human right: equality. Moreover, women's role has been very focused on maintaining a peaceful aspect of the revolution and decreasing the tensions between the male demonstrators and the armed forces. Such nonviolent nature of the uprising gave a chance for families to take the streets with their children. As a result, kids were educated on how to become an active patriotic individual. They gained the opportunity to become part of a historical moment that will forever be remembered.

One iconic moment at the start of the revolution was when a woman named "Malak Alaywe" karate kicked an armed security guard in the abdominal after he was threatening to throw fire on the demonstrators. Similarly, a picture of a courageous woman defending herself against the thugs of Hezbollah spread all over the media. They were inducing fights by throwing stones and bottles on the demonstrators. This moment remained the symbol of the bravery of women in the revolution. Another story revolves around "Lara", the woman's whose husband bled to death between her hands (Abou Zaher, 2020). He was shot by a soldier of the Army Intelligence. Lara vowed that she would keep fighting until her last breath. Furthermore, when the protestors attempted to set foot in the parliament, pictures of women climbing the cement barriers and

barbered wires were recorded. The presence of females in the protests was prevailing. Women came from different backgrounds, there was young and old women, mothers, daughters, grandmothers, females in wheelchairs and pregnant. Moreover, women from all religions and social classes took part of the demonstration, including but not limited to Christians, Muslims, lawyers, doctors, and artists. Even more, women who were unable to personally take part of the street demonstrations volunteered to provide meal boxes to the protestors. Some elderly even offered their houses as a place of comfort for people, so they can nap, shower, and eat.

The courageous and bold role that women adopted in the revolution has been critical. Women constituted close to half of the protests population which is an exceptional rate in comparison with the female participation in the Middle East and Arab countries revolutions (UN Women, 2019). They were able to both participate and organize the protests across all Lebanon. They put their own lives at risks without hesitating, calling for a better tomorrow. They organized peaceful and civil marches during several weekends, in which they laid out their demands for the government, such as in Beirut, Tripoli and Jal Al-Dib. In some instances, such as in Baalbek, white roses were distributed among the protestors as sign for peace. In addition, many female professionals set up tents in the squares of the protests and carried out different informative discussions. Topics included political reforms agendas, reforms regarding the economic crisis, gas and oil, secularism, and environmental subjects. As well, they organized candlelit vigils during several nights in which the peaceful character of the protests prevailed (Hall, 2019). In addition, yoga classes sessions were regularly held by female instructors in the mornings to provide a mental break for the protestors and allow them to meditate. Similarly, public self-defense sessions were conducted in order to teach women the tactics they should use in case of a physical attack. At the end of each day, they would clean the streets, pick up all the garbage and leave the place as good as new. Some

women also took shelter in the public places, they refused to go back home even to sleep and insisted to continue the strike until their demands are met. Women in the diaspora also participated in the demonstrations, either by sending support and donations from abroad, or by returning home and protesting in person.

3.2 Entrepreneurial Leadership

Women have been subject to various forms of obstacles that have prevented them from reaching high positions in the business world. Despite the fact that women have completed high educational levels, they are still unable to work with their degrees. They have suffered from gender discrimination behaviors that kept them out of the workforce for years. Sexism, stereotypes, pay gap, sexual harassment and other discriminatory attitudes have been forced upon women when trying to have a job themselves. The stereotypes embedded in the Lebanese society did not allow females to show their full potentials. Gender biased attitudes have led men to be paid more than females, even when holding the same job position. Although these prejudices about the role of women are in a decline over the last few decades, women are still believed to be less suited for managerial positions than men. Moreover, the gender pay gap that women has suffered from continuously has acted as a demotivator for females to join the labor force. In addition, when women were successful in getting a job, they have been often given less important responsibilities than their male colleagues. Rarely have women been able to participate in important meetings and take part of the decision-making process of the company they work in. As well, they have suffered from sexual harassment in the workplace, especially by their male bosses. Moreover, women have been considered vulnerable and emotional, and thus unable to participate in professional conferences, negotiate and handle other leading responsibilities. All these barriers

and more have limited women to accepting humble mid-level jobs away from leadership positions. They have reinforced of what is known as “glass ceiling”.

However, despite these massive difficulties that Lebanese women have been facing when joining the labor force, they were able to increase their participation rate drastically over the last few years. Moreover, they have been successful in adopting managerial positions and leading industries in the business arena.

Many Lebanese women are considered to be among the most successful Arab businesswoman in the Middle East. According to Forbes Middle East, eight Lebanese have been included in the Middle East’s 100 power businesswomen for the year 2020, eleven in 2018 and thirteen in 2017 (Forbes Middle East, 2020). One brilliant women is Elissar Farah Antonios who is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Citibank UAE. She is the first woman to ever hold this position. As well, she was appointed the head of the MENA cluster in 2019. During her career, Antonios has showed an excellent understanding of the economic drivers, challenges, and opportunities of the region. Another example of powerful women is Caroline Fattal Fakhoury. Fakhoury has become the senior Vice President and a board member of the Fattal group. She considers the advancement of women in the Middle East as a priority which is why she launched the social enterprise “Stand For Women”. Through this venture, she raised awareness on the necessity of women joining the workforce and becoming independent. In addition, Randa Al Assaad managed to become the CEO of an architecture and engineer enterprise called Arif and Bintoak (Arabian Business, 2020). As well, Mona Bawarshi was able to become the CEO of Gezairi Transport and successfully take over the family business and keep it in the lead (The BusinessYear, 2018). In addition, Hala Fadel is the co-founder of Leap Ventures and holds a very essential part in managing the company. She is also the founder and chair of MIT Enterprise Forum for the Pan Arab region that has worked on

promoting entrepreneurship and providing investments for startup businesses. Another brilliant name has been Ingie Chalhoub, a fashion designer who became the founder as well as the manager of Etoile Group (The CEO Magazine, 2020). Furthermore, Joumana Chelala was appointed the Deputy Head-Consumer Banking Manager and Deputy General Manager at Byblos Bank in Lebanon. Dr. Nadia Cheaib, a successful scientist and entrepreneur, has become the founder and the chairwoman of ClinGroup, which had made a critical impact on the health sector in the MENA region (Insights Success, 2020). Moreover, Elsa Aoun was able to launch “Ounousa” the first Magazine that target women in the Middle East in the Arabic language (Berytech, 2019). Many years later, she initiated Sohati and Loolia websites, where she reached millions of followers from the region. As well, Christelle Saghbini was appointed the chairwoman and the managing director of the French multinational pharmaceutical company Sanofi in Egypt. Dr. Leila Hoteit is a partner and a Managing Director in the Boston Consulting Group in the Middle East.

These women have been successful in breaking the barriers and not only entering the business world but become leading figures as well. These names are just a small example of the achievements that Lebanese women are capable of. Through their education, knowledge, experience, and skills, they have been able to reach high positions and become managers, founders, directors, and CEOs. At the same time, they were perfectly able to find a balance between their family and their work and excel in both.

3.3 Civil society

Lebanese women have been always calling for change. Until today, Lebanese laws still differentiate between male and female. They protect and punish individuals differently, based on their gender and marital status. After decades of being discriminated against and

underprivileged, women gathered themselves and stood up for their rights. Moreover, Lebanon has witnessed four waves of feminism where women have laid out different demands and agendas according to their struggles (Civil Society Knowledge Centre, 2019). They first started demanding equal access to educational opportunities as men. Later on, they fought for their political rights, such as suffrage, and the end of all forms of violence against women. The third wave of feminism focused on gender equality and the fourth was focused on women's sexual and bodily rights. During this period, many social movements were formed by women who were struggling for equality from all around Lebanon. They reflect Lebanon's history of discrimination and gender struggles. Various NGOs were organized that work all year long on ensuring women's safety and protecting their rights. They have penetrated into the society and became an important place for women to let their voices be heard. One example of an NGO is Kafa, an Arabic word which has literal translation to "enough". It has been founded by two Lebanese activists women, Ghada Jabbour and Zoya Jureidini (Donor Direct Action, 2021). This NGO is secular and aims at achieving equality between genders and securing a safe space for females to live in. It has contributed to the passage of Lebanon's law on family violence, law 293, that punishes families and protects victims. As well, it has offered shelter and protection for thousands of women across Lebanon.

Furthermore, many women have excelled in their activist journey, where they were part of several movements and NGOs that, in turn, protect the Lebanese woman. For instance, Hayat Mirshad have been dedicating her work life to ensure that all females have access to justice, protection, and human rights (Hmirshad, 2020). Throughout her career, Mirshad has led several gender equality campaigns, as well she has initiated various movements in which she promotes the abolishment of a patriarchal society. In addition, she is a cofounder of the Lebanese feminist

NGO “Fe-Male”, and she was appointed the head of commination and campaigning of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering. Another accomplished and well-respected woman is Linda Matar. She is one the first female activists and considered to be among the most influential Lebanese figures. Matar has devoted most of her life to fight for women’s rights in Lebanon and the Arab world. She was president of both the League of Lebanese Women’s Rights (LLWR) as well as the Lebanese Council of Women (World Association For Sustainable Development, 2021). She has also participated in more than fifty different conferences around the world that promoted justice for women.

Academically, several Lebanese women have contributed to the literature that focuses on gender and women studies. Suad Joseph is one figure that has appeared among scholars worldwide that focused their research on women studies. As well, Joseph is the founder of the Middle East Association for Middle East’s Women Studies (AMEWS) which is an organization that gathers researchers with interest based on women and gender, as well as organizing educational workshops and conferences (Dr. Suad Joseph, 2012). She is also the founder of the Middle East Section of the American Anthropological Association which brings together the historians of the Middle East. In addition, Joseph has published more than one hundred articles in books and journals, some of which were mentioned in the literature review of this paper. Among her publications, several articles have examined and analyzed women’s social status in Lebanon. Similarly, Joumana Haddad has been a well-recognized author, journalist, and women’s rights activist. She is the founder of *Jasad*, which is a quarterly Arabic language magazine that focuses on body language. As well, she has founded the Joumana Haddad Freedom Center which is a secular organization that looks at promoting the human rights and freedoms of individuals (Joumana Haddad Freedoms Center, 2019). In addition, Haddad has launched the first International

Feminism Festival in the Middle East that highlights women's status in the region and the history of feminism. Until now, she has published up to 15 books that were translated to many languages and sold worldwide.

Even in university student elections, females have underscored great accomplishments. Looking at the Lebanese American University latest elections of 2020-2021, fifteen out of the thirty students elected in both campuses were females (Student Council Elections 2020, 2020). Similarly, during the 2019-2021 elections, sixteen out of the twenty-nine students elected were females. University elections are not held on sectarian lines, rather they are independent from any religious affiliations. This illustrates how much females are willing to have a role in the decision-making process. They conducted great campaigns and showed excellent leadership skills. Among these students is Nagham Abou Zeid, who was able to win her seat independently of any political parties. As soon as she got in power, Abou Zeid, along with her colleagues, launched a discrimination and harassment campaign that aims at making LAU a safer place for all genders, sexualities, nationalities, and ethnicities.

3.4 Political representation

Although women in Lebanon gained their right to vote halfway through the twentieth century, they are still largely absent from the political arena. Rather, state employees have been dominated by male figures, like most of the Arab region. Only a relatively small number of Lebanese women have been able to enter Lebanese politics. As well, this has been often possible due to family kinship ties with powerful male figures. For instance, several Lebanese female politicians have been able to attain their position because of their husband, brother, or father. This is not to say that these women do not deserve such high positions, however, most of them would not have been able to do so on their own. In the current Lebanese parliament that was elected in

2018, only six out of the one hundred twenty-eight members are females. Their names go as follows: Paula Yaacoubian, Rola Jaroudi, Dima Jamali, Sethrida Geagea, Bahia Hariri and Inaya Ezzedine. This rounds up to only 4.68% of the total number of seats. Regarding the cabinet, female number is regarded as a new record for Lebanon, where six out of the twenty cabinet ministers of Hassan Diab are female. As for the previous elections that were held in 2009, only four parliamentary members were female or 3.12%. These figures scientifically prove the lack of representation of Lebanese women in politics. Women do not enjoy equal chances such as men to gain seats in the government. As a consequence, public policy making have been dominated by male opinions, with bare representation of women's demands and concerns. There is a visible lack of a female perspective in policies and laws that are issued by the government (Nassif, 2020). Moreover, Lebanese political parties have not made such effort to ameliorate this situation. The number of women in political parties remain low. In addition, only few parties have proposed internal quotas to increase the female participation in their blocs.

Treated as minors, women's voices remain unheard. They are unable to protect their basic rights. As well, they do not have someone that represents them and defend their concerns. Moreover, according to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report of 2020, Lebanon ranked 145 out of 153 (World Economic Forum, 2020). The Gender Gap Index is a measure of a country's gender equality based upon the gap that exist between males and females. Lebanon's score translates to it being one of the highest countries in the world that suffers from a gender gap. In addition, as personal affairs are within the control of religions, the legal structure of the state has placed women as second-class citizens. Thus, the Constitution is no longer held responsible for ensuring their equal rights. Therefore, Lebanese women have been limited to enjoying a minor role in the decision-making process of the country.

4. Why do women remain outside of politics?

When one examines the participation of women in the labor force, protests, and civil society, they would expect to see similar results in politics. However, the reality could not be more far off. Despite all the struggles that women have faced on a daily basis, they were still able to pave their way into the public sector and take leadership. They have been able to succeed in the labor force, public uprisings, and civil movements. All of these sectors are secular, and independent from religion. However, their numbers in the government have remained relatively low. Until today, political parties, elections, and governmental seats are still male dominated. The Lebanese government is built on sectarian divisions. The distribution of seats in the parliament and the cabinet is based on the proportions of religious communities. As well, the President of Lebanon is assigned to a Maronite, the Prime Minister is Sunni and Speaker of the Parliament belongs to the Shia community. The principal variable among these two groups is sectarianism. Women have excelled in areas where sectarianism is absent and fell behind in areas where sectarianism is present.

The 17 of October revolution, which took place independently from any religious lines, has given the chance for women to take part in the informal political processes of the country. They showed excellent leadership skills where they were put on the frontlines and guided the whole uprising all over Lebanon. Moreover, women have excessively participated in university elections that do not take place on sectarian lines. They have run campaigns, organized programs and attained leadership positions in student councils. They gained the power to influence change in their university and worked accordingly. In addition, they were able to demand student's rights and pressure the faculty for change. Similarly, they headed NGOs that raised awareness and conducted

mobilization efforts to protect women's rights. As well, they ran activist movements in Lebanon as well as the Arab region, in an attempt to make the Arab world a safer place for females. Furthermore, women have completed higher educational levels than men and stood out academically. They published books, articles, and magazines on various topics of their specialties. In the business world, women also took the lead. Several females have come up with brilliant business ideas and founded successful organizations. These activities of women show that, in fact, women do enjoy the capabilities to become leaders. Their participation in the public sector successfully illustrated the advanced skills that women have. They are well educated and experienced, they are able to influence change, to run campaigns, to handle responsibility and to outshine high ranking positions. Moreover, they enjoy the necessary motivation and are willing to sacrifice their time and effort. Going back to the Lebanese parliamentary elections of 2018, a total number of one hundred thirteen women attempted to become candidate, eighty-six of them made it the list and only six were elected (UN Women, 2018). This means that women are trying to prove their potential and participate in the political system. The number of candidates registered shows the willingness of women to be represented and have a say in the decision-making process. Whereas the number of female candidates that actually won shows how sectarianism is obstructing the society to become liberal.

Therefore, as long as the government functions on sectarian lines, Lebanese citizens will remain attached to the religious communities that they belong to. In turn, these religious communities have hindered women's ability to be represented and enter the government. The society has been raised to rely on men to be the decision makers of the group, which is evident in the gender gap of the elections' results. As evident above, women have shown that their educational levels, coupled with their experience and skills allow them to reach high positions. As such, they were able to

succeed in different areas of society's institutions that do not follow sectarianism. However, the repercussions of sectarianism have been unavoidable when it comes to their ability to advance in politics. It has prevented them from being represented and kept them outside the realm of politics.

5. Conclusion

Women in Lebanon have had a difficult journey. Born in a patriarchal country, they have faced all sorts of discriminatory acts that have prevented them from discovering their full potentials. Moreover, religions have gained control over personal status laws. As a result, males have been made guardians over females, as if females were unable to handle themselves on their own. Their access to protection and equality remains largely limited. Step by step, women have been able to march their way into society. Despite the various forms of struggles that were pushed over their shoulders, they were able to prove themselves. They advanced in the business world, where they became managers, founders, and CEOs. Similarly, they participated in social uprisings, phenomenally in the latest October revolution where they showed excellent leadership skills. As well, they were able to take part in university elections where they ran campaigns and competed professionally. Lebanese women taught themselves their rights and uncovered their potentials. They then acted accordingly which is evident in the great accomplishments that women were able to achieve. Yet, women still suffer from underrepresentation in the political arena. Until today, they are still kept out of the decision-making process of the country. The number of women holding parliamentary and ministerial positions remain relatively low. Based on the variable that exists between the political sector and the public sector, it can be concluded that sectarianism plays a vital role. The structure of the political system has thus hindered women's representation. This power sharing formula has concentrated power in the hands of males and marginalized women.

Why Do Lebanese Women Remain Underrepresented in Politics?

Through the excessive analysis of women's activities outside of politics, it can be concluded that females are motivated enough. They are willing to sacrifice their time and effort to influence change in the society. As such, the issue is not in the ability of women to run for office. Therefore, in order to address the situation accurately, reform attempts should be made regarding the structure of the system.

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