The Gender Attitude of the Lebanese October Revolution: Women’s Representation and Civil Rights

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in International Affairs

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The Gender Attitude of the Lebanese October Revolution: Women’s Representation and Civil Rights

Ayah Al Alieh

ABSTRACT

The Lebanese political landscape has long been dominated by an underlying confessional balance of power. In 2019 and 2020, however, the October 17 Revolution emerged to challenge the status quo, exerting pressure on the Lebanese government to push for systemic reform, thereby bringing a decade-long political structure to the verge of collapse. Among the structural challenges brought against the confessional regime are women taking the lead in the reform and revolutionary movement. A role that exposed confessionals not only as a communitarian share of power, but also as a male order regime. More importantly, however, the protest has set in motion an irreversible momentum that shaped a new public attitude toward politics and society in rejection of women subjugation. This thesis explores the fundamentals of Lebanese gender perspective that is being reshaped by the public protest movement. It surveys diverse online and phone samples of respondents to highlight common gender-based themes and emerging perceptions as they relate to women and political representation. The findings demonstrate that a convergence is developing across political divide in support of gender quotas as well as in reforming civil status laws. The findings are indicative of an overwhelming bottom-up, cross confessional, and politically diverse drive,
undermining patriarchal elites’ reluctance to women’s civil and political equality. They also stipulate that 2022 elections’ support will be highly formulated by candidates’ adoption to women political and civil rights.

Keywords: Lebanon, Women, Revolution, Political Representation, Citizenship Law
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Chapter One

Gender, Political Representation and Civil Status

Laws

1.1. Women’s Political Representation in the Arab World: Slow Progress

The ramifications of gender inequality extend toward all aspects of women’s lives, including social, economic and political spheres. While women in most countries around the world are still pushing for equal rights under the law, in some regions such as the Arab world, they are at a higher disadvantage than in first-world countries. For various reasons, perhaps dominated by cultural factors, Arab women must contend with a greater number of obstacles in their quest for comprehensive gender equality. For one, Arab women’s political representation has traditionally been very low compared to men. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), by the end of 2010, merely 19.2% of world parliamentarians were women, with the Arab region ranking the lowest at 12.4% (Al Maaitah & Al Maaitah, 2011).

Naturally, every country in the Arab world is unique in so far as its political structure and overall social values. Lebanon, in particular, is fairly complex in that regard. While hailed as being one of the most – if not the most
– progressive of Arab countries whereby women face little restrictions at the socio-economic level, few female politicians have been able to penetrate the political arena. In 2009, only four Lebanese women were elected to parliament, or just 3 percent, a substantial drop from 6 women in 2005. It would surprise many to know that, compared to most other Arab countries, Lebanon scores very poorly in this regard: “Compared with other countries in the region, Lebanon ranks as one of the lowest in terms of female representation in parliament, with only Oman, Kuwait and Yemen having fewer” (“Why Do Few Lebanese Women,” 2018, para. 5).

Even at the executive level in Lebanon, recent cabinets have featured relatively few women. Before the revolution brought down Hariri’s cabinet, the ex-Prime Minister had appointed four women as part of the thirty-seat executive government, which set a precedent: women represented more than 10% of this government with Raya al-Hassan, Violette Safadi, May Chidiac and Nada Boustani making the cut (El-Hage, 2019). After the cabinet resigned due to popular demand in the streets, yet another precedent was set when Hassan Diab appointed 6 women as part of his cabinet: Lamia Yammine, Minister of Labour, Marie-Claude Najem, Minister of Justice, Zeina Akar, Minister of Defense, Fartina Ohanian, Minister of Youth and Sports, Manal Abdul-Samad, Minister of Information and Ghada Shreim, Minister for the Displaced (McLoughlin, 2020).

Yet, according to some women activists like Iqbal Doughan, Former head of the Lebanese Council of Women, these appointments, while a step in the right direction, may not have come as part of a whole-hearted intention to offer women more opportunities in the political realm. She states that international agreements have helped enhance the status of Lebanese women, and that politicians in
Lebanon may have been more motivated by their attempts to appease the international community, and thus may have opted to appoint more women under international pressure (Houssari, 2020).

Overall, progress is being made at the level of women’s political participation, but consensus among researchers is that this progress is slow. In the past few decades, many Arab countries have indeed endeavoured to help women play a more prominent role in politics. As early as the 1970s, the League of Arab States adopted the Arab Strategy for the Advancement of Women, which set the stage for the advancement of women on three levels: Economic, political and social. Subsequently, various Arab countries began to implement programs aimed at encouraging women’s participation in public life, such as through revamped labour laws, particularly involving benefits related to maternity and leave and childcare. Others introduced women’s suffrage for the first time, and established various committees, national institutions and ministries dedicated to help women achieve gender equality.

The international community, predominantly in the form of UN oversight, was one of the key influential players in such initiatives:

“The formulated councils or ministries have the responsibilities of planning, recommending policies and legislations, monitoring and coordinating activities for the various women’s issues as well as preparing the national reports to the UN. In some cases these organizations are chaired by the first lady, as in Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon and Bahrain to directly influence decision-making. Therefore, many organizations have succeeded initiating modifications in some laws… and in introducing general strategies/plans for a gender component in national plans” (Al Maaitah & Al Maaitah, 2011, p. 10).
Despite many other positive developments at the level of women’s empowerment, women’s political participation in the Arab world is still low, as core, systemic obstacles subsist.
1.2. Factors Inhibiting Women’s Political Participation

1.2.1 Structural, Institutional and Ideological Obstacles

Common justifications of women’s relatively low rate of participation in politics include structural and political explanations. For instance, many researchers have found a positive correlation between women’s educational attainment and their likelihood of being political representatives (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Moore & Shackman, 1996). However, there is no evidence to suggest that men in the Middle East – and particularly in Lebanon – are more privileged in terms of educational attainment than their female counterparts. In fact, the opposite appears to be true. According to a United Nations study on gender disparity in the Middle East, in approximately two thirds of countries in the region women’s university enrolment is higher than that of men. Yet, at the same time, this does not translate into higher levels of gender equality in other fields, including the labour market and politics (“Mideast Women Beat Men,” 2012). Other researchers highlight the negative effect of institutional discrimination on women’s political participation, whereby some electoral systems and political parties have a dampening impact on the “demand” side of women in politics, for the main reason that they are traditionally associated with men who are reluctant to cede some of their power to women (Caul, 1999). Moreover, ideological beliefs may also be associated with low female representation in politics: “Ideas about women’s role and position in society can enhance or constrain women’s ability to seek political power. Public opinions has been shown to matter for a variety of political outcomes. Thus, despite the presence of favourable political systems or an adequate supply of qualified female candidates, cultural norms can limit women’s opportunities to
participate in politics” (Paxton & Kunovich, 2003, p. 91). In particular, certain expectations of women are pervasive in Arabic societies. For one, they traditionally attribute less value to women’s contributions to public life than those of men. In other words, whereas men are generally perceived to be breadwinners and capable of judgement without being drawn into an overblown emotional state, women’s value is attached to their childrearing and household management abilities. Consequently, women are less likely to keep themselves informed about political affairs, or to be active in political parties and events, like elections. Not to mention that they are perceived to have less credibility than their male counterparts in this domain, mostly because they are unable to engage in the mobilization of male-dominated networks to offer clientelistic services to constituents: “On an individual level, such gendered expectations placed on women result in many of them experiencing ‘time poverty’, which makes their political participation more difficult. The great majority of women in the region must perform a triple role, spreading themselves thin between paid employment, taking care of their household and raising their children” (“Women’s Political Representation”, 2017, p. 20).

While the institutional and ideological inhibitors to women’s political participation are by no means specific to the Arab world or Lebanon, they are nevertheless more pronounced in this region. In Lebanon, as far as political parties are concerned, past research has shown that those leaning toward the left and center of the ideological spectrum are likelier to support enhanced female participation in government (Tremblay, 2007). However, thus far there seems to be general consensus among Lebanese political parties to limit women’s political participation to certain functions, beyond which they are
discouraged from venturing: “… women do play prominent decision-making roles in some of the establishment political parties. For instance, seven women are employed in the politburo of Future Movement, while the Secretaries General of both the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces are women. However, political parties seem uninterested in nominating women to Parliament in particular” (Batruni & Hallinan, 2018, p. 4). This sentiment has clearly spilled over to political parties’ opinions regarding gender quotas in politics. For some traditional parties, the notion is completely out of the question. Despite being a senior member of Hezbollah’s political bureau, Rima Fakhry asserts that her party is against gender quotas in parliamentary elections, for two reasons. First, she argues that artificial conditions should not be imposed on otherwise democratic elections. Second, she expresses her party’s belief – which she shares – that women occupy different roles in society than those of men, such as taking care of their households and raising their families. As a result, they do not have sufficient time to handle legislative duties (El-Deeb, 2018). Other parties, when prompted about gender quotas, are less straight-forward: At the surface, it appears as though they advocate for such a scheme, but they stop short of aggressive lobbying and legislation. The Future movement, Amal movement, FPM, Lebanese Forces, and PSP all voiced their support in the past, and yet no gender quotas were included in the 2017 new electoral law (Osseiran, 2018).

1.2.2. Enduring Authoritarian and Patriarchal Values

One of the main obstacles to women’s political representation in the Arab world is its patriarchal nature with authoritarian undertones. Since most Arab societies are profoundly male-centric, in countries that suffer from
authoritarian regimes, including those that hide behind the false veil of a seemingly representative democracy, women find it difficult to acquire influential positions in a sphere dominated by men: “Female candidates do face numerous challenges to garner voter support and confidence, but the real issue lies at the top levels of power where electoral outcomes are manufactured, even manipulated by the ruling elites to ensure their survival while maintaining the façade of fair and free elections” (Shalaby, 2016, p. 46). It is important here to emphasize that the challenges to women’s entrance or expansion into the political realm are not specific to authoritarian regimes per se, like for instance Saudi Arabia, but rather authoritarian politics even in states that are otherwise considered democratic. In fact, countries like Morocco, Jordan and Egypt may indeed have some democratic freedoms; nevertheless, their political modus operandi may be considered as semi-authoritarian, whereby they place limitations on the recognition of personal and individual rights primarily through the potent male-dominated executive branch (Ottaway, 2004).

Moreover, while Lebanon is hailed by many as being one of the few democracies in the Middle East, some researchers suggest that the country shares many authoritarian, patriarchal traits with its fellow Arab nations. In fact, prior research on Lebanon’s post-colonial development highlighted the country had effectively proven itself to be a model for consociational democracy, maintaining an adequate balance of power among different sects within the context of a complex demographic composition (Assaf, 2004). For decades, Lebanon was thus perceived to be a successful example of democratic, peaceful cooperation and coexistence; until the 1970s, not only were there no unsurpassable problems at the level of sectarian power sharing,
but the country also witnessed substantial economic growth. Furthermore, Makdisi and Marktanner (2009) claim that one of the positive outcomes of Lebanon’s confessional power-sharing formula was that it empowered civil rights and enabled elevated levels of freedom compared to other Arab countries. However, the Taif agreement that was signed in 1989 following the country’s gruelling civil war showed the frailty of a system based on sectarian divisions. Calfat (2018) argues that, in retrospect, Lebanon’s continuous resilience pertaining to its own plurality across the decades did not reveal a great degree of success as far as democratic values are concerned. Rather, what the agreements and pacts of 1923, 1943 and 1989 did was transpose the traditional communitarian and patriarchal values into the state system of confessionalism, effectively turning Lebanon into a country where, in practice, sectarian polarization inhibits democratic values and the potential for growth on all levels, not just economic but also social and political. Hence, in many ways, the Lebanese political regime behaves in an authoritarian manner, whereby constituents of each sect are compelled to make concessions, including their acquiescence to a stagnant socio-economic order. In such a quagmire, women face additional challenges to their integration in the political sphere.
1.3. Lebanon’s Personal Status Laws

Unlike in other more religiously homogeneous countries, personal status laws in Lebanon constitute a complicated affair. As per Law 60 of 1936, the Lebanese state offers recognition to the country’s various sects by granting them the right of self-regulation, on the condition that state authorities are endowed with oversight duties. Nevertheless, in practice, the state has done little to oversee the activities of the different sects. On the contrary, it has strengthened the sectarian system by adopting a strategy of non-interference, thereby awarding sects a great degree of independence and autonomy (Karame, 2018).

1.3.1. Discrimination against Women across Confessions

There exist 15 sect-based personal status laws in Lebanon, all of which have been found to discriminate against women. In a report entitled “Unequal and Unprotected” and published in 2015, Human Rights Watch (HRW) elucidated the different forms of such discrimination.

1.3.1.1. Civil Marriage

Thus far, Lebanon the only civil marriages that the Lebanese state recognizes are those which have been registered outside the country. While debates revolving around this subject resurface every now and then, laws pertaining to the legalization of civil marriage have been consistently shelved. Technically, the 1936 degree that governs the basic personal status order in Lebanon recognizes individuals’ freedom of belief and grants them the right to
opt out of their religions’ personal status laws (HRW, 2015). More specifically, under Decree 60LR and as part of the freedom of faith which the constitution guarantees, individuals could choose to reject any religious affiliation, and would consequently be subject to a civil code which pertains to personal status matters. However, although many campaigns have been launched in that regard, Lebanese law still has not adopted a civil code: “Until recently, this has meant in practice that those who wish to marry under a civil code, either because they do not want to subject to the laws of their religion or because they are from different religious backgrounds, have had to travel abroad to get married and have their foreign marriage recognized in Lebanon” (HRW, 2015, “Foreign Civil Marriages”, para. 4). Moreover, the latest attempt by Minister Rayya El-Hassam of former Prime Minister Hariri’s cabinet to re-introduce the civil marriage debate failed, for seemingly religious reasons: Repeatedly, Lebanon’s authorities of 15 different religions and 18 sects have denounced such proposals. For instance, Dar Al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority in Lebanon, usually rebukes civil marriage proposals under the guise that this kind of marriage inherently contradicts the provisions of Islamic law (Hamadi & Farhat, 2019).

1.3.1.2. Divorce

In divorce, Muslim personal status laws (both Shia and Sunni) award men the absolute right of divorcing their spouses, whereas a similar decision by women comes with conditions. For Sunnis, women are allowed to file for divorce through severance, in order words they could ask to dissolve the marriage by resorting to a judicial order. However, the sectarian court would
then have to evaluate the causes of the allegedly failed marriage to determine who the blame falls on. HRW revealed that a review of dozens of relevant court cases indicated that Sunni courts regularly found women at least partially guilty of the marriage’s failure, including in cases where their husbands beat them. Consequently, many Sunni women resort to relinquishing their pecuniary rights to *mahr* (the amount of the money that the husbands pays upon marriage termination) as well as maintenance, such that they persuade their husbands to divorce them. As for Shia women, in the case where their marriage contract does not include a clause pertaining to the power of divorce, they often find themselves powerless, having to seek relief from a Ja’fari religious authority; the associated process could take years. Moreover, Christian personal status laws make it difficult for both men and women to obtain a divorce, but they differ from those of Muslims in some key areas such as the ability to promptly end a marriage in the case of spousal violence (HRW, 2015).

1.3.1.3. Child Custody

Divorce-related discrimination of women in Lebanese Personal Status laws also extends to child custody, as they are often compelled to make undesirable sacrifices: “… when it comes to finances, there is no such thing as ‘marital property.’ If a house is in a husband’s name – which is typical – it belongs to the man, even if a woman contributes financially or supports her husband at home and raises their kids while he works. These laws often force women into unfair compromises. Women often have to give up custody of their children and any financial rights to obtain a divorce” (Fakih &
Braunschweiger, 2015, para. 3). Moreover, even if women were to successfully obtain a divorce without particular issues, they would still face child custody challenges. The problem is pervasive across all sects; while the law does give custody preference to mothers when their children are very young, it nevertheless reverts it to fathers once these children reach a certain age. In the case of Shiites, the father can reclaim his children at the age of 2 for boys, and 7 for girls. For Sunnis, a recent amendment to the law set the age for both genders to 12. As for Catholics and Orthodox Christians, the respective ages are 2, and 11 (boys) / 13 (girls). Furthermore, for Evangelicals, the age is set at 12 (Fakih & Braunschweigher, 2015). Not to mention that after custody reverts to fathers, mothers’ ability to see their children becomes limited and dependent on discretion of the religious courts or the parents themselves, with fathers’ decisions being the decisive ones (HRW, 2015).

1.3.1.4. Inheritance

Aside from rampant religious court discrimination in divorce and child custody affairs, women also suffer from obstacles when it comes to inheritance, which are most blatant in the case of interfaith marriages: “If a Muslim husband dies, his Christian wife cannot inherit from him, and if a Christian wife dies, neither her husband nor her children can inherit from her. Therefore, couples in mixed marriages must resort to other legal measures to ensure that members of their mixed family can inherit from them, often at risk of jeopardizing their own ownership while still alive” (Dabbous, 2017, pp. 11-12). The matter is further exacerbated by the reluctance of lawmakers in the country to introduce and support the option of civil marriage, which would
resolve inheritance issues by taking away religion-based restrictions, thereby liberating couples from the discriminatory power of religious courts. As early as 1998, President Elias Hrawi championed a relevant law, but he was faced with resilient opposition from both Christian and Muslims religious figures who succeeded in preventing the law from making it to parliament (Dabbous, 2017).

1.3.1.5. Citizenship

Aside from low political representation, Lebanese women also have legal troubles, the most controversial of which being the country’s citizenship law that bars them from passing on citizenship to their offspring in case they are married to foreigners. The law dates back to 1925, officially allowing the foreign spouses of Lebanese men to apply for and acquire citizenship after one year. It also endows children of Lebanese fathers with citizenship. Moreover, children of women whose husbands’ identity is not certain legally have better claims to acquiring citizenship than those whose fathers are known to be foreigners (“Lebanon: Discriminatory Nationality”, 2018). Notably, even in the original 1925 law, prior to any amendments, technically women’s ability to pass on citizenship was possible, but it would have to occur after their foreign husbands themselves acquire the nationality through naturalization. In fact, Article 3 of this law stipulates that naturalization may be applied to by “a foreigner who marries a Lebanese women and has been living in the Lebanese territories for one consecutive year as of the date of this marriage” (“Decree No15 on Lebanese Nationality”, 1925). Thus, mothers could theoretically wait for their husbands to acquire the Lebanese nationality and pass it on to their offspring. However, this would have to be by virtue of an order issued by the
Head of the State, a historical rarity. In fact, in the past couple of decades, very few cases of naturalization by presidential decree have occurred, and those that did were mired in controversy. For instance, in 2018, a decree signed by President Michel Aoun to naturalize 375 foreigners sparked a nationwide outrage (Azar, 2018).

The repercussion of this law can be very severe for some women and their families, as for instance, their children cannot acquire a job in certain sectors or access public healthcare. In addition, they are required to apply for and renew a residence permit to be eligible to remain in the country (Le Borgne, 2019). Critics of this law label it as misogynistic, and while several political parties have claimed to be in favour of a legal amendment that would alleviate women’s woes, little action as thus far been taken. The main argument emanating from the ruling political class is that the topic is sensitive and must be discussed thoroughly, because any change could put the country’s demographic and sectarian balance at stake. However, the handling of this issue among different political parties reveals some noteworthy nuances. Shiite-majority parties such as Hezbollah and Amal Movement, as well as the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), have expressed some lenience but otherwise general animosity to the right of women to pass on the Lebanese citizenship to their children. For instance, FPM leader Gebran Bassil has consistently expressed fears that the naturalization of children born to Palestinian and Syrian men would lead to a scenario where demographic scales are tipped in favour of Sunnis (Sewell, 2019). As a result, in 2018, Bassil proposed an amendment to the 1925 nationality law that would allow women with foreign spouses to pass on the Lebanese nationality with the exclusion of husbands.
hailing from “neighbouring countries”. Such a proposition was nevertheless heavily opposed by the left-leaning Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), headed by Walid Joumblatt, arguing that the proposed amendment would perpetuate new forms of discrimination against Lebanese citizens. Furthermore, in the same year, the Sunni-majority Future Movement drafted initial legislation that would allow women to pass on citizenship to their children, but not to their husbands (Sewell, 2018).

1.3.1.6. Court Procedures

However, the laws themselves are not the only discriminatory element, but rather the judicial process as well. HRW claims that all of the women it interviewed mentioned suffering from procedural obstacles such as protracted lawsuits, elevated fees, as well as the dearth in legal aid in the form of available material during legal proceedings. As a result, they have little access to religious courts and a limited ability to enforce the laws that safeguard their rights (HRW, 2015).
1.4. Women’s Role in Social and Political Movements

1.4.1. The Arab Spring

The events that kicked off the prominent Arab Spring in 2011 were replete with political awareness, as well the participation of men and women of all ages in online and offline mobilization, geared at political reform. Women’s role, in particular, appeared to be of utmost importance to the effectiveness of protests in engaging the ruling state in reform efforts. Valentine Moghadam (2017) writes that across the Arab world, different countries saw different political outcomes after a series of both violent and non-violent demonstrations. Whereas countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen saw little progression in the way of democratization and modernization, others like Morocco and Tunisia made tremendous progress in that regard. Studying women’s pre-Arab spring status in these countries, Moghadam finds a correlation between women’s role and rights in the civil and political spheres on one hand, and their countries’ progress during the Arab Spring on the other. In Morocco and Tunisia, before the protests women had already made achievements at the level of gender equality and participation in the public sphere. Charrad and Zarrugh’s (2014) discussion of women in the new Tunisian Constitution after the Arab Spring indicates that they were able to make significant strikes legally, particularly when it comes to the Code of Personal Status. In contrast, in countries like Egypt and Libya women’s rights movements were weak, as the state’s patriarchal values sustained a great deal of influence over political affairs. The researcher concludes that women’s mobilization efforts, their legal status and gender relations contributed to the shaping of the uprisings during the Arab Spring, whereby the most positive
outcomes were connected to favourable conditions for women at the level of civil rights and legal status (Moghadam, 2017). However, even in those countries that saw some negative repercussions after the events of the Arab Spring like Egypt, women did also play a tremendous role in the fight against oppression and injustice. Participating in masses in the protests, they managed to break the glass ceiling of intimidation and fear, expressing themselves proudly and loudly in civil resistance movements to demand dignity, freedom and social justice; they also showed that they were not just mothers and household managers, but also breadwinners (Ahmad Ali & Macharia, 2013).

1.4.2. Lebanon’s October 17 Revolution

While women during the Arab Spring played a key role in the events that unfolded at that time, more recently women in Lebanon have taken the streets by storm in an ongoing “revolution” against the country’s corrupt ruling class. On the very first day, one woman quickly turned into a revolutionary icon when she proceeded to side-kick one of the Education Minister’s bodyguards as he attempted to open fire on protesters in the streets. (Kassir, 2019). Since that incident, women have assumed a prominent role on the front lines of the revolution: “Women have been key mobilizers in this uprising, leading marches, organizing sit-ins, chanting, discussing politics, and setting up tents, among other functions. On more than one occasion, women formed a human shield to protect protesters from riot police” (Duque, 2019, para. 4). Moreover, it is important to note Lebanese women’s multidimensional and diverse roles and responsibilities during the protests. Not only have they often served as physical buffers between security forces and demonstrators, but they have also
worked to dampen the violent side of the protests, as well as mobilized the Lebanese diaspora. Also pertinent is that they crossed sectarian lines, coming together from various religious backgrounds as well as different ages, sexual orientations, professions, socio-economic backgrounds, etc. In essence, they transcended society’s homogenization of women as one group, displaying a multitude of identities and interests (“Understanding the Role of Women”, 2019). Still, as the revolution unfolds, it is unclear whether such impressive mobilization and bravery in the face of an oppressive, patriarchal regime will result in tangible social and political change.
1.5. Research Questions

As Lebanon rapidly approaches electoral milestones, whether these may be through early parliamentary elections or those scheduled in 2022, new research initiatives based on current socio-political developments must fill in the gap pertaining to women’s underrepresentation in the political sphere. Is women’s political empowerment through the establishment of quotas correlated with fears pertaining to sectarian and demographic changes? With women leading the way on the ground in the ongoing “revolution,” will their loud voices be transposed onto the parliamentary scene? If the challenges pertaining to the rigidity of the male-dominated political establishment prove difficult to overcome, can women’s liberation be attained only through street and mass protests?
1.6. Plan

The second chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to a review of relevant literature, especially that which discusses politics in the Middle East in the context of patriarchal societies with traditional and religious undertones. Lebanon’s history of sectarian politics, in particular, helps shed light on the obstacles that stand in the way of political reform. Moreover, a survey of literature on women’s political representation in the Arab world and Lebanon, as well as the conundrum of citizenship laws in the country, establishes a firm ground on which to base the primary research method and nuanced objectives. Thus, the second chapter subsequently leads to the descriptive yet analytical methodology section that delineates the motivation for choosing a mixed-method approach to harness data that is used to answer the research questions. As for the fourth chapter, it analyses the collected data in light of the findings from the literature, culminating in the fifth chapter’s concluding remarks and recommendations suggested for future research.
2.1 Religion and Politics in the Middle East

2.1.1. Religiosity

In the Western world, social and political modernization movements over the past few centuries have gradually led to widespread secularization, to such an extent that traditional, religious and patriarchal values have declined. In particular, while many still identify as Christian in Western Europe, findings from a PEW Research study conducted in 2018 indicate that a rising number of adults who consider themselves religiously unaffiliated; in some countries, more than half of respondents claimed that they were neither spiritual nor religious (Sahgal, 2018). In contrast, the history of the Middle East denotes a region that has held on to religious values and affiliations with more resilience. Aside from religiosity figures being higher than the West, religion in the Middle East and Arab world is often intertwined with politics. In fact, one need only examine the ramifications of the conflict and wars that have ravaged the region for decades to understand the relationship between religiosity and political developments. For one, the geopolitical rivalry and Iran, particularly following Iran’s Islamic revolution in 1979 which overthrew the controversial Western-backed Shah, sheds light on the sectarian rift in the Middle East, which has had devastating consequences for many countries: “Making religion a tool in pursuit of political struggle and geopolitical competition has led to the
spread of all kinds of extremist, to the further polarization of local conflicts in Syria, in Iraq and in Yemen, and ultimately has put in jeopardy the very existence and future or religious minorities” (Meddeb et al., 2017, p. 4).

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the Middle East is unique in the world in so far as its religious affiliations constituting the main identity market which determines membership to a group. More so, Middle Eastern individuals have been found to be two times likelier than their counterparts from other regions to belong to identity groups that are excluded from being politically represented in a legitimate matter (Rorbaek, 2019).

Sectarianism, in particular, has been on the rise in the Middle East in recent decades, with some explanations to this phenomenon provided by Abdo (2017) and Al-Sumait et al. (2015): For one, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 reshuffled the sectarian power struggle cards not just in the Iraqi nation but also all around it. In fact, the invasion effectively replaced Sunni Saddam Hussein’s rule with a Shia-dominated alternative. Consequently, Saudi Arabia was provoked, leading to a rise in Sunni-Shia polarization. Moreover, such polarization was fuelled by other international interventions in the region’s armed conflicts, including not just in Iraq, but also in Syria and Yemen. However, Wehrey (2014) stipulates that there were also domestic antecedents of sectarian identity conflict, primarily rooted in an imbalance of political power within nations fragmented by religion or sect, whereby such imbalance would in some cases lead to the emergence of illegitimate domestic institutions including non-state actors with external affiliations.

However, despite ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including proxy wars that are fuelled by sectarian groups, some research has noted a recent
secularist trend with nonreligious undertones, focusing on the Arab world. One study conducted by the BBC and Arab Barometer Research Network reveals that since 2013, the percentage of respondents in Arab countries who claimed not to be religious has gone up significantly. For instance, while only 14% of Tunisians identified as nonreligious that year, by 2019 that figure had risen to 25%. In the more traditional Morocco where merely 4% claimed not to be religious in 2013, 13% said the same in 2019 (“The Arab World in Seven Charts,” 2019). Phil Zuckerman (2019) asserts that the importance of this trend lies not just in the rapid pace at which many individuals in the Arab world have turned their backs on religion, but rather in the clash between religious tendencies and the legal status quo: In most Arab countries, the historically pervasive anti-secular and anti-atheist culture made it such that legislation was enacted to punish any anti-religious behaviour or even sentiment. In Egypt, for instance, speaking ill of religion is illegal, and engaging in this “crime” may lead the perpetrator to be jailed for up to 5 years; more so, some politicians have pushed to ban atheist altogether, attempting to qualify it as a criminal offence. In Palestine, those who identify as secularists could face not just jail time but also torture. Yet, despite these risks, it appears that many Arab individuals are rebelling against earlier norms.

2.1.2. Effect of Religiosity on Political Behaviour

Literature on religious attitudes and what effect they have on individuals’ political behaviour is mixed. Some scholars suggest that religiosity has a dampening effect on democratic values and attitudes. Tezcur et al. (2012) studied the influence of religiosity in the Iranian context, arguing that religious
attitudes served to inhibit the arrival to power of figures outside the scope of Islamic affiliation. Geddes and Zaller’s (1989) findings in the case of Brazil hint at a distinctive influence on voter attitudes toward official representatives compared to Iran, but also described ideational mechanisms, including religious and theological attitudinal components, which were not compatible with democratic processes. However, scholars like Djupe and Calfano (2012) challenge these claims, arguing that religion’s role may be positive with regard to democratic norms. Gu and Bomhoff (2012) also found that religiosity was positively correlated with support for democracy in both Muslim and Christian countries, faiths that have otherwise been accused of being anti-democratic. In the Lebanese context, Hoffman (2019) tested the theory of religion, group interest, and democracy which is centered on communal religion’s impact on regime preferences. He found that in its various forms, including religious service attendance, communal prayer, and experimental primes, communal religion increases the salience of sectarian identity and compels individuals to mold their political preferences in relation to their sectarian beliefs and depending on their respective interests. For instance, communal religion has for long had an anti-democratic influence on Sunnis, whereas for Shiites Hoffman noted the opposite. The scholar inferred that the most reasonable explanation for such divergence has to do with group interests. In fact, economic redistribution and electoral reform would be in favour of Shiites at the expense of Sunnis, whereas it would not affect Christians as clearly.

In Lebanon, the existence of various religions and sects, as well as the country’s history of sectarian strife, has made the hyper politicization of religion a salient reality. Cammett (2019) argues that when individuals or
groups are targeted based on identity, religious or otherwise, the political dimension of this identity is enhanced. Thus, since sects in Lebanon have historically been at odds with each other, individuals with sectarian affiliations have flocked to politicians who used the underlying tensions as a means to gain political stature. Consequently, this led to the consolidation of political sectarianism in Lebanon. Cammett adds that this system was further empowered by the intertwinement between politics and social welfare:

“Through the direct provision of social services or through indirect brokerage of access to benefits provided by other public and nonstate organizations, sectarian actors effectively consolidate their control over territory and people, and present themselves as protectors and guarantors of well-being. Social welfare involves an obvious material exchange, in which the beneficiary receives assistance to meet his or her family’s basic needs. The immaterial dimensions of the relationship are less obvious, but equally, if not more, important. Providing services and meeting basic needs are acts of community-building because they signal who is a member of a protected group. Social welfare provision also brings a sense of security and psychological comfort that is especially valuable to low-income beneficiaries who, by definition, lead more precarious lives” (“Cammett, 2019, “Boundary Policing”, para. 2).
2.2. Lebanon’s Sectarian Politics

Given the effect of religiosity on political attitudes and outcomes, literature on sectarian and secular attitudes in Lebanon is pertinent to the discussion of women’s political representation and how it could play a role in the disruption of the patriarchal, sectarian regime. One of the most noteworthy results of the Arab Barometer survey is the finding that in Lebanon, less than 25% identify as being religious. However, upon examining the country’s rich history of sectarian conflict, one could not be faulted for being cautious about such a finding.

2.2.1. Historical Sectarian Divide

Sectarian politics in Lebanon date back as far as colonial politics during the country’s French Mandate. Weiss (2010) stipulates that the institutionalization of sectarianism did not occur organically but rather was fuelled by French divide-and-rule tactics that engendered a cultural politics of difference: “Paradoxically, differences – religious, cultural or sectarian – that were supposed to be undermined by Lebanese nationalism were modified into durable national institutions, inextricably bound up with the uneven process of Lebanese state formation” (p. 709). Ofeish (1999) asserts that even prior to the French Mandate, the very idea of “Greater Lebanon” was controversial among different sects. While Christians – especially Maronite – were predominantly supportive of the new state, advocating for its creation, Muslims were not so enthusiastic, rather tending toward a reunion with an Arab/Syrian nation: “The
different concentrations of sectarian communities in the center versus the peripheries also meant that Christians, predominantly of the center, had better access to resources while Muslims, predominantly of the peripheries, had less. This access also varied with class differences, with the upper classes of various religious affiliations in both regions having much better access to resources” (p. 102). However, Ofeish’s work mirrors Weiss’ claim that the French were partially responsible for the institutionalization of sectarianism. In fact, he relates how the consistent rejection of the French Mandate and its local allies in the 1920s and 1930s had led to the establishment of secular political groups who sought to represent the popular classes. Consequently, it prompted the ruling elite to support sectarian representation in government as a pushback attempt. Thus, in the first parliament of 1926, seats were allocated based on a sectarian system. By Lebanon’s official independence data in 1943, this system had reached maturity, whereby the National Pact was signed, de facto partitioning the country by sect under the guise of ensuring a sectarian balance that reflected the Lebanese demographic: The Maronite elite were awarded the presidency, the Sunni elite the premiership, and the parliament speakership went to the Shiites. Over the course of its First and Second Republic, Lebanon was ravaged by an unprecedented level of corruption, especially following the end of the country’s gruesome civil war. “Economically, the post-war state continues to face some of the same major problems that plagued Lebanon before 1990. Pre-war patrons often came from the landed class and had provided the connections to facilitate services for their clients. Now the war lords-turned-business owners, along with the new capitalists, are providing both jobs and connections to their clients. This situation has made the
clientelist system more socioeconomically entrenched and effective, facilitated by tight labour market conditions, which has tied the clients more tightly in their livelihood to the destiny and whims of their patrons” (Ofeish, 1999, p. 112). Associate professor of political science at the Lebanese American University Bassel Salloukh (2019) corroborates this account, asserting that while the Taif Agreement that was signed in 1989 was meant to engender significant political reforms, in reality it led to post-war paradox: A rebalanced confessional power-sharing system resulted in a less autonomous public sector, higher corruption, and more expansive clientelism. The more enduring this kind of system is made out to be, the less the Lebanese state is capable of bureaucratic autonomy, extractive capabilities, and a national agenda.

2.2.2. Religious Authority

Since the clientlistic political system that was emerged more powerful from the Lebanese civil war has proven to be resilient, and part of the reason why pertains to the fact that this system is fuelled by sectarian division. At the surface, the Lebanese republic appears to be governed, as the vast majority of other countries, by typical political bodies including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the state. However, religious authority adds a rare layer of complexity. Religious leadership in Lebanon is inherently abstruse, whereby it combines two functions: The role of spiritual authority on affairs of religious behaviour and doctrine, and the role of public spokesmen for broader sectarian communities (Henley, 2016). Moreover, the Lebanese political system has traditionally institutionalized the representations of various sects, granting religious leaders’ power over sectarian matters, including places of worship, personal-status courts, and the centralized employment of clerics,
education and wealthy endowments. Yet, these leaders do not thrive on separation of politics. Rather, they arrive to power through selection by elite institutions, as opposed to a popular vote (Makdissi, 1996). Paradoxically, religious leaders in Lebanon have often served as tools not to incite sectarian hatred, but rather to defuse any such tensions when they occur in this context. At the same time, they are part of a system of distinct confessional regimes that deal with matters such as education and family law that are rigidly defined. In addition, the very legitimacy of their representation appears to be doubtful. Aside from their mandates being contingent on decisions made by the ruling class and their affiliated religious bodies (in practice, an exclusive group of elite men), as community heads, religious leaders have historically rarely been renowned for their brilliance in theological learning, purity of faith, or spiritual wisdom. One notable exception is late Shia cleric Musa Al-Sadr, a popular religious leader who used his popularity as leverage to establish the Higher Islamic Shiite Council, an institution of religious leadership for Lebanon’s Shia (Henley, 2016).

Essentially, religious and political authority are intertwined and reinforce each other. In that regard, a typical scenario that usually unfolds is described by Henley:

“Where a particular political faction has had sufficient weight in parliament, they have sometimes been able to amend electoral laws to engineer overwhelmingly unanimous electoral outcomes in favour of particular religious leaders. The election of the grand mufti in 1996 is a case in point, with an amendment passed by parliament on the very
morning that Qabbani was anointed. That amendment reduced the number of electors from over one thousand to ninety-six” (p. 36).

Historical evidence indicatives that this type of *quid pro quo* is not specific to a certain political party and adjoining sectarian leader. Rather, it is pervasive across all sects in Lebanon. Another similar event occurred in 2006, after the landslide victory of Walid Joumblatt’s political block in the parliamentary elections one year prior. As Syrian influence diminished in the country following the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanese territory, so too did their ambition to counterweight the predominance of Joumblatt via the ambitious Druze religious figure, sheikh al-aql. As a result, the political leader managed to win all the Druze seats in parliament and brought to office a more compliant religious leader and confessional council (Hazran (2015).
2.3. Secularism and Political Reform

Secularist reform movements in the Arab world date back many centuries. Salem (1996) relates how secular elements in Arab culture appeared as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, whereby the *mutazalite* philosophers had developed secularist and rationalist perspectives on the basis of Hellenic sources. At that time, one of the primary channels through which Arabs could express was classical poetry, which helped sustain even nonreligious views that predated Islam throughout the Islamic period. However, it was not until the late 18th century that secular movements made a qualitative and distinctive shift.

For instance, Napoleon’s intrusion into Egypt in 1798, combined with the fact that local elites were exposed to Western culture and science, led to a sort of shock in so far as intellectual movements and policymaking are concerned. Thus, historically, Egypt became one of the first bastions of secular thought; significant segments of society began to identify themselves by state and national allegiances instead of religious affiliation. Decades later, the Ottoman Empire would also experience similar trends toward secular modernization, particularly during the period of the Tanzimat reforms, resulting in encroachments into law, education and popular consciousness. Among the most notable secular movements emerged in Lebanon, where the first proposal of state and religion separation was made by a Lebanese Maronite Catholic, Faris Al-Shidyaq, in the 1850s. However, at that time the Ottoman authorities repressed freedoms of speech and expression not just in Lebanon, but
throughout the Empire, including neighbouring Syria (Wu, 2007). Even after the disintegration of Ottoman rule and the establishment of the Lebanese Republic, issues of collective identity and cohesiveness persisted, particularly as the multi-confessional power sharing system that was set up led to sectarian movements that would go on to define the country’s socio-political scene. Within this system, anti-sectarian talk has always had its place, albeit confined in a relatively small environment that comprises non-governmental organizations, as well as educated youth or middle-aged individuals who have decided to rebel against the status quo. To many of those, secularism is not only indispensable to the creation of national unity, but also to the building of a just, free, democratic and peaceful state (Bahlawan, 2014). Furthermore, even after the civil war ended in 1990, the Taif Agreement’s recommendation to gradually phase out sectarianism did not materialize; instead, sectarian sensitivities remained high, fuelled by a political system where “patrons” relied on sectarian divisions to perpetuate a profitable oligarchy. Hence, secular movements thus remained moot. Recently, however, the popular revolution that was ignited on October 17, 2019 revealed a growing trend of secular thought in the Lebanese society, as hundreds of thousands of Lebanese individuals from all sectarian backgrounds united to denounce the corrupt sectarian political regime: “What has emerged since the protests began is a revolt against the system and a complete collapse of trust in all institutions – state institutions, political parties, the banking sector, and professional associations. This revolt has been accompanied by an expanding sense of national solidarity and recognition that the ‘us versus them’ formulation is no
longer about sect, ethnicity, class or gender. It is about a corrupt political class versus the rest of the country” (Yahia, 2019, para. 5).

2.4. Challenges to Arab Women’s Political Participation

There is consensus among many scholars that women’s low participation in politics is not particularly due to systemic discrimination enshrined in the legalities of electoral systems per se, but rather to a variety of factors that are mainly rooted in cultural norms and preconceptions. Al Maaitah and Al Maaitah (2011) assert that many Arab parties are reluctant to include women in their electoral lists because they believe that they are not likely to win seats, as they are perceived to lack certain necessary skills like leadership. This, they argue, explains why many women who have actually acquired positions in public office have done so thanks to their connections with their respective political regimes, including kinship ties. In Lebanon, Henderson, Nelson and Chemali (2015) find that while Article 7 of the Lebanese Constitution offers the right to equality for all, including women, the legal system is not immune from discriminatory interpretations that (re)produce gender-based inequalities. Moreover, deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes have made it challenging for women to push forward their status in the public and private spheres: “Although Lebanese sectarianism perpetuates inequalities among women of different religions, patriarchy sustains gender disparities in myriad ways. From the time of birth, Lebanese women are identified by a family registration number through the male line” (p. 235). The
researchers argue that women are treated as *de facto* second-class citizens who are not as effective in politics as their male counterparts.

2.5. Gender Representation in Lebanese Politics

Despite being one of the first Arab countries to offer women suffrage rights in 1953, Lebanon suffers from very low female political representation, which has been attributed by scholars to a variety of reasons, with the lion’s share of analyses focused on the predominant patriarchal system that has governed Lebanon since the civil war, which was mainly fought by men who were subsequently involved in peace negotiations and post-war politics (Ekmekji, 2006). Nevertheless, the idea of a women’s quota, particularly in parliamentary elections, has been floated since 2006, when the National Commission for Electoral Law Reform (NCELR) submitted a relevant electoral law proposal that supported the inclusion of a minimum of 30% candidates on each list of candidates running in the larger electoral districts. Yet, this proposal was later rejected in the electoral law passed in 2008. Moreover, despite the fact that multiple other women’s quota proposals were made, none were actually passed; Hussein (2017) argues that this due to the paralysis of various branch judicial committees and legislative assemblies tasked with overseeing electoral reform. However, such paralysis may be due to a veiled reluctance of political parties to empower women at the legislative level. Some noteworthy comments include Lebanese Forces Secretary-General Chantal Sarkis who declared that the important goal is to win seats, and
therefore to select candidates who have the potential to do so: “We don’t want to add [women’s] names just to say we did. We don’t want decorative women” (Osseiran, 2018, p. 2). Others, such as Future Movement MP Ahmad Fatfat also provided shallow and inconsequential feedback: “A gender quota would help bring women in politics” (Osseiran, 2018, p. 3). Moreover, some comments made by Amal Movement lawmaker Inaya Ezzeddine contradict the supposedly positive views of other political party representatives. Referring to the 15% quota that Amal leader Nabih Berri suggested, she described it as “very minimal, but we are discussing if we can increase it. Speaker Berri said he proposed [20 seats] because… a lot of parties are against it, so he made it the minimum” (Alsharif, 2019, para. 5).
2.6. Women’s Rights Movement

Despite the significant obstacles to gender equality that they continue to face today, women’s rights groups have impressively achieved far more than their counterparts in other Arab nations. After forming the Lebanese Council of Women in 1950, the group was successful not just at lobbying for women’s voting rights three years later, but also abolishing a law that forced women to renounce their citizenship when they chose to marry foreign men. The Council also effectively pressured for an end to bureaucratic restrictions on women’s right to travel when they did not have the approval of male figures in their families, such as husbands or fathers (Stephan, 2012). One key distinction between the women’s movement and others – particularly those that operated within the charitable system – related to the discourse employed. Unlike other entities, women’s rights groups did not particularly mirror Lebanon’s confessional structure, and dealt with issues that were highly controversial by religious standards, such as domestic abuse. In the period spanning 1995-2005, multiple NGOs were established to work directly with the survivors of sexual and domestic violence, offering services such as counselling, shelters, legal assistance and even direct hotlines. However, many of these organizations hit roadblocks pertaining to the legal structure that they were operating in, which led to the focus shifting toward the amendment of laws that do not properly address women’s rights (Khattab, 2006). Furthermore, while there was clear resistance by heads of confessions to their efforts, especially with regard to
domestic violence matters, such pressure was mitigated by the influence of international aid agencies that actively contributed to related campaigns (Stephan, 2012).

Moreover, despite the positive effect that women’s rights groups in Lebanon have had on society and women’s prospects in it, they did ever nevertheless receive a fair share of criticism not just from political entities, but also by academics and civil society figures. The main target of this criticism was the alleged inability of women’s groups to organize and mobilize without at least partially yielding to class and factional interests: “women’s organizations in Lebanon are based on ‘patron-client models of organization, where the leader is at once the head of the organisation, benefactor, often sole or main decision-maker, and frequently the founder of the organisation, which limits the ownership of the cause by a broader constituency. In addition, critics contend that the women’s movement and their agenda are captives of international aid and foreign funding… this had led to an increasing rift between voluntary-based women’s movements and larger professional NGOs, a de-politicisation of gender-based agendas, and partly a lack of local recognition as well as problems of accountability” (Khattab, 2006, p. 10).
2.7. Personal Status Laws in Lebanon: Spotlight on Citizenship

Before delving into literature discussing the gender dynamics of personal status laws in Lebanon, it would first be pertinent to review scholarly work on the notion of citizenship in the context of Middle Eastern nations. A broad definition of citizenship is given Souad Joseph (2010) in her treatise of gender and citizenship in the Middle East: She writes that citizenship constitutes an array of political, economic, legal and cultural practices that produce social processes through which agents are construed and constructed. However, Lana Khattab (2016) argues that despite the fact that constitutions in Middle Eastern nations have been drafted in gender-neutral language, drawing a portrait of a universal citizen, nevertheless political manifestations generated primarily by state institutions have instead consolidated gender inequalities while endeavouring to hide or offer justification for these inequalities on the basis of family, history, culture and religion:

“Women’s centrality in reproducing ‘the nation’ as an imagined community and their symbolic significance as bearers of honour and tradition strongly frame the nature of their citizenship. This symbolic equating of ‘women’ with the ‘nation’ often leads to the practical subordination of women in reality through calls for the preservation of ‘traditional’ families, codes of ethics, values and conduct. Conversely, ideals of modernization tend to highlight women’s education and empowerment. Preserving and governing the nation, as well as the state, results in moves to control various aspects of women’s lives” (p. 5).
To understand the dynamics of gender and citizenship in Lebanon in particular would first entail an understanding of the disparity that exists between the meaning of citizenship in the West on one hand, and the Middle East on the other. In Western countries the liberal construct dominates, whereby society’s units are individualized citizens who bear rights and duties in relation to the state. As such, citizens are not assumed to harbour potent identities and loyalties vis-à-vis other collectivities. In contrast, in the Middle East, within constitutions that convey conceptions of the individualized citizen, additional social constructs of citizens as “members of subnational communities” are present. More specifically, citizens in this region are acknowledged formally as belonging to family units, ethnicities, tribes, religious sects or other subnational groups (Joseph, 2010). One particularly revealing analytical framework used to shed light on the state-citizen relationship in Lebanon is “political familism”, which involves complex political processes that incorporate a network of interlaced kinship, familial and patronage relations. In a two-way practice, citizens are dependent on their immediate and extended families to acquire privileges and resources from the state; in return, state actors utilize these linkages in the mobilization of their factions. In this manner, political blocs perpetuate their status in society by establishing and maintaining perennial gendered patronage networks and allegiances, thereby institutionalizing political familism. As a result, political positions and loyalties are conveniently passed on from one generation to the next (Joseph, 2011).

Indeed, an examination of Lebanese political culture reveals that the notion of citizenship is substantially different than in other national contexts.
However, Joseph’s account of “political familism” is not complete without the incorporation of a crucial element that acts as a glue: Religion/Sect. In fact, Lebanon’s history of entrenched sectarianism has rendered citizens as individuals belonging to disparate groups that harbour distinct allegiances to sectarian leaders. Jinan al-Habbal (2011) affirms that the clientelist system that has dominated throughout the decades has led to the weakening of the relationship between citizens and the Lebanese state, particularly in so far as identity, the rule of law, and justice are concerned: “… Lebanese people are loyal to their sectarian groups and leaders instead of their country and its institutions. There is no collective national Lebanese identity but rather there are eighteen sectarian identities where each one of them interprets Lebanon and its history differently. Moreover, Lebanon’s consociational democracy makes individuals prefer their group identity more than the national one” (pp. 32-33).

Thus, one cannot really speak of citizenship in the traditional sense when exploring citizenship laws in Lebanon. Rather, one must be wary of the ramifications of the consociational system that itself assumes a tremendously divided society across sectarian lines cannot be ruled as other homogenous societies. More so, in practice, while a substantial proportion of the Lebanese population may indeed have developed a political consciousness that transcends sectarian borders, it is nevertheless trapped in a system of dependence: Lebanese nationals’ very existence is contingent on their sectarian belonging, rendering their access to state resources and political representation at the whim of their sectarian leaders. Worse, the system is so resilient and self-reinforcing that it makes the pursuit of traditional citizenship very challenging, forcing individuals into a sort of free-for-all where they either
play by the sectarian rules of the game or face isolation and the loss of welfare: “It is through this system of positive and negative sanctioning that sectarianism has been able to reproduce itself and to co-opt most attempts to organize according to class interests from below. In other words, the current sectarian system acts as the guardian of the class interest of the elites and plays divide-and-rule politics whenever it feels that the status quo might be threatened or that people might be organizing based on class awareness” (Majed, 2017, p.7).

In line with this train of thought, Jaulin (2014) argues that Lebanon’s confessional democracy prevents any successful efforts made to revamp citizenship laws. In turn, the citizenship system itself contributes to reinforcing the political status quo. In that regard, one of Jaulin’s most pertinent premises is that the political order sustains itself primarily on demographics. As such, citizenship practices and norms constitute tools used by elite to play a game of numbers, vying for power through a demographic struggle. Hence, the legal conditions and administrative processes associated with Lebanese citizenship are dependent on the capacity of the regime to affect the demographic state of the country as a means to enhance the relative size of their sectarian group, thereby garnering a more substantial share of political power.

Lina Khatib (2008) explores the condition of women as political agents in Lebanon. Dividing policies pertaining to women in three categories, she argues that inequality is pervasive across all of them, including those particularly aimed at women, those with deal with relationships between women and men, and other “general” policies. The scholar makes the point that while the policies themselves are inherently discriminatory, the social frameworks within which they subsist make them de facto so. In particular, the Personal Status
Laws, concerned with the regulation of gender relationships, are in obvious contraction with basic legal principles of equality. The two primary areas that are affected are family status laws and citizenship. While the latter are infamous for barring women from passing on citizenship to her children if their husbands are not Lebanese, the former are governed by religious authorities: “Lebanon is constituted of 18 recognized sects divided among three religious groups: Muslim, Christian and Druze. Laws governing issues like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody are dependent on the rulings of the different sects within each religious group” (p. 439). Because of this arrangement, Rania Maktabi (2013) affirms that, compared to other Arab countries, Lebanon has in place dual courts that protect the judicial autonomy of clerics and empower them to push back on efforts to reform family law.

When it comes to the citizenship law, the main allegation set forth by authorities, which are also shared by a significant proportion of the Lebanese public, is that enabling women to pass on citizenship would lead to the naturalization of a substantial refugee population, with Palestinians coming to mind first (Mansour and Abou Aad, 2012). However, Sanna Karlsson (2009), discussing the subject through an intricate historical analysis, argues that the real reason resides in the deep-rooted Lebanese system of clientelism and kinship that permeate society and political organizations, following confessional lines: “Religious groups still enjoy a great political and social influence in Lebanon, and the personal status codes constitute an important part of this” (p. 23).
2.8. The “Demographic Threat” Argument

Any discussion about the viability of amending the citizenship law in Lebanon and the reluctance of the political class to do so must include the perennial argument pertaining to the “demographic threat”. For a very long time, various figures of authority across the political spectrum have attempted to persuade the public that by enabling women to marry Palestinians and Syrians who reside in Lebanon and pass on citizenship to their children, this would effectively cause a disruption in the Lebanese sectarian balance (“Lebanon: Discriminatory National Law”, 2018). To put things into perspective, Yasmin and Sukkar (2019) provide some historical context that expands on the general framework of Lebanon’s sectarian politics. Since the National Pact, an unwritten agreement in 1943 that allocated a ratio of 6:5 in parliament where Christians were assumed to be slightly more numerous than their Muslim counterparts, the sensitive topic of sectarian / demographic change/imbalance is still vivid both in political and social circles. Whereas the ratio set forth by the National Pact was based on a census conducted under French colonial rule, it was nevertheless controversial, as some argued that it exaggerated the proportional size of Christians through the exclusion of Muslim immigrants, mainly Kurds from Turkey. Regardless, with time the proportion of Christians to Muslims has significantly declined due to elevated levels of emigration and relatively low Christian birth rates. Consequently, this has driven some Christian leaders in the not-too-distant past to lobby for a change to the citizenship law which is conditioned on a distinction between male spouses in “neighbouring” countries on one hand, and foreign counterparts from different countries on the other. In particular, Free Patriotic
Movement (FPM) leader Gebran Bassil suggested a law that would *de facto* rule out women’s ability to pass on citizenship to their children if they were married to Palestinians or Syrians (Yasmin and Sukkar, 2019). The scholars’ interpretation of this push to isolate and discriminate against women married to predominantly Sunni immigrants goes beyond sectarian motives, tying back to Khattab’s gendered state-citizen analytical framework: “This amendment describes the paternalistic state-gaze of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ Lebanese women. By selecting the ‘right’ foreign spouse, ‘good’ Lebanese women will be spared the humiliating and distress of lengthy bureaucratic residency applications and fees. More importantly, in performing their (wifely) duties to the state they are at last seen as fully legitimate citizens” (Yasmin & Sukkar, 2019, p. 29). While Bassil and other figures in the political arena continue to vie for discriminatory amendments to the citizenship law, the reality of their motivations may lie elsewhere, more specifically in the perpetuation of a patriarchal system where men have the upper hand, and where women continually suffer from systemic inequalities, including a gendered division of labour and the infamous glass ceiling.

Indeed, research pertaining to Lebanese women’s marriages to non-Lebanese male spouses on the demographic balance reveals that the “demographic threat” argument is blown out of proportion. In fact, a field analytical study conducted by Fahmia Charafeddine (2010) reveals data that pours cold water on allegations of impending demographic imbalance. For instance, in the 14-year period spanning 1995-2008, out of 191,483 marriages that Muslims Lebanese women engaged in, only 15,635 (8.2%) were with non-Lebanese men. In the case of Christian women the percentage was even lower.
at 2% or 2,225 marriages out of 108,932. In addition, among the marriages that involved non-Lebanese men, more than half (51.5%) was with Lebanese Sunni women. This weakens the “demographic threat” even further, seeing as the assumption may be made that most Sunni immigrants marry Sunni Lebanese women, with Christians virtually unaffected in that regard: “While the percentage of Muslim women married to men of other Arab nationalities is 78.1, the percentage of Christian women married to men of other Arab nationalities is almost 50.3. These contrasting percentages are balanced out by the marriages of Christian women to European men whose percentage is 25.7 while that of Muslim women married to European men stands at 9.3. The same goes for marrying American men with a percentage of 16.2 percent for Christian women and only 6.3 for Muslim women (p. 25).
2.9. Consequences of Absent Legal Protections

As personal status laws in Lebanon are riddled with gender discrimination, there is consensus in the surveyed literature that such discrimination is significantly associated with a lack of legal protections for women, even outside the scope of their family-centric rights such as in marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody. In fact, inadequate personal status laws at the level of gender equality in the country seemingly go hand-in-hand with little to no legal resources for those women who are subjected to injustices at the hands of men. One such form of injustice typically stands out: Violence, mostly in the context of domestic abuse. Nassar (2019) relates the story of one Lebanese woman who claimed her divorce, child support and alimony grievances were consistently dismissed by the religious courts, to such an extent that it (ironically) compelled her father-in-law to hit her in reaction to her efforts. When she made this allegation in court, the judge dismissed it and advised her to go settle the matter on her own with the pretext that it is a family issue that could be solved in private. The following is an excerpt from her testimony:

“After I struggled I struggled with domestic violence and a very long divorce process in the religious court, every time I tried to collect my kids’ alimony from my non-compliant ex-partner, I had to get a prison verdict from the civil court and transfer it to a police station and wait for them to try to capture him and make him pay. When I go down to the station to check if there’s any news, every time I am faced by sentences like ‘give up already,’ ‘go find yourself a nice guy and get married, you are still young and beautiful,’ or ‘you know miss we’ve got more important issues, you have to wait.’” (Nassar, 2019, p. 7).
Extensive research indicates that the (anonymous) woman’s experience is not an isolated case; rather, domestic abuse in Lebanon is prevalent, albeit underrated issue. Annahar journalist Nada Richa (2018) argues that the law passed in 2014 that aims to endow women with more protections in cases of domestic abuse was a step in the right direction, but also insufficient. Having been ratified under the pressure of efforts by various Lebanese women’s organizations, it nevertheless left many loopholes and gaps intact, particularly concerning marital rape. Richa discusses the law in relation to the generally discriminatory personal status laws, suggesting that both play a part in sustaining obstacles to women attaining their full rights in the Lebanese judicial system.

One factor that has exacerbated the situation also relates to the predominantly patriarchal nature of the Lebanese society. Much like Richa (2018), Moussawi and Yassin (2017) argue that while Law 293 (which was enacted in 2014) is a clear amelioration of its predecessor in so far as outlining more protections for women against domestic abuse, there are economic obstacles that prevent women from taking advantage of it: In most cases, filing a case against a violent/abusive spouse would necessitate economic empowerment on women’s part that they lack. With no alternative financial resources other than their husbands, these women often end up reverting on their decision to seek legal recourse. Moreover, while the law does technically apply to all women who are located in Lebanese territory, many who belong to some minorities like refugees are incapable of resorting to the Internal Security Forces (ISF), particularly when their status is that of illegal residents or if they reside in camps. At the same time, this subset of women has proven to be
exceedingly vulnerable to domestic and sexual abuse (Moussawi & Yassin, 2017).
2.10. Women in Revolution: October 17 and Beyond

The October 17 revolution has provided women with the opportunity to take a firm stand in favour of their rights, particularly in so far as the demand to institutionalize gender equality and inclusive citizenship. Abu Habib (2020) suggests that this implies the implementation of a “full and inter-related package including equality in the right to confer nationality, egalitarian civil family laws, curbing control of religious institutions over the lives of women, criminalizing all forms of violence, oppression and discrimination against women and people of all sexual orientations and gender identities” (para. 12). Abu Habib also argues that the October 17 revolution provided a platform for young feminists to engage in the shaping of women’s demands for reform, marking a notable break from previous mass protests and demonstrations where those most vocal and dominant were men. In that regard, the writer compares women’s prominence in the October 2019 revolution with the garbage-focused movement of 2015, which she asserts failed to account for the pervasive diversity of the Lebanese society, citing some incidents such as the vicious assaults against trans-women has being a blatant sign of misogyny. Generally, Abu Habib (2020) contextualizes women’s involvement in the ongoing Lebanese revolution within what she refers to as an overarching “fourth wave of feminism”: “critically, the movement is not limited to or bound by geographic or thematic confines, but rather moves away from defining gender as a binary, and employs an all-inclusive and an uncompromising approach to its understanding of human rights. Of equal importance is the growing cross borders connections among young feminists in
the MENA region using different networks and platforms, Indeed, this is a new generation of feminist sisterhood and solidarity in the making” (para. 5). Moreover, Sarah Khalil’s (2019) perspective mirrors that of Abu Habib, arguing that women’s participation in the revolution was not only characterized by high visibility and a tremendous degree of efforts put to organize and execute campaigns throughout the country, but also by boldness: Often, they would risk their own lives to protect other protesters, mostly men; in fact, one of the most striking symbols of the revolution early on became a Lebanese women who karate-kicked an armed man in the groin as he attempted to brandish his firearm amid a throng of protesters in the streets.
2.11. Research Gap

While the review of literature does indeed shed light on the plight of women in Lebanon when it comes to political obstacles in the face of their representation, the link between women’s higher political participation and Lebanon’s personal status laws is still somewhat ambiguous. The rationale provided by political leaders concerning the risk of demographic change is valid but argumentatively weak; yet, it is not clear whether such rationale resonates with Lebanese constituencies. If the political class’ reluctance to pursue gender quotas in parliamentary elections is, in part, motivated by popular attitudes that see this kind of representation as a threat in so far as the potential citizenship law reforms, then it could be argued that political leaders are merely unwilling to anger their constituents for electoral reasons. However, if popular opinion regarding women’s citizenship rights is in favour of reform, then the weight would shift toward the political class’ unyielding desire to stifle women’s ascent to meaningful political positions for the sake of conserving the status quo. It would thus be pertinent to survey popular opinions on this matter, not just on women’s political participation and citizenship rights, but also on participants’ religious and demographic perspectives, such that a line may be drawn across social, political and religious dots. The next chapter elaborates on the dissertation’s chosen methodology to obtain the relevant data required for the ensuing discussion.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

3.1.1. Philosophy

Before an all-encompassing primary research strategy may be outlined, the first step is to reflect on the underlying philosophy that is most apt at tackling the research question at hand. In fact, the beliefs and values that are associated with this philosophy would then guide the design, collection and data analysis stages (Gemma, 2018).

Given the exploratory nature of this dissertation’s study, inductive reasoning appears most suited. In fact, unlike deductive reasoning which begins with a theory, makes predictions based on that theory, and subsequently tests it by experimenting or observing certain phenomena, inductive reasoning begins with measurement and experimentation, then seeks to find patterns in the collected data in such a way to possibly infer theoretical outcomes (Bryman, 2008). The purpose of the research is to determine whether there is a link between the underrepresentation of Lebanese women in politics and the reluctance to reform discriminatory citizenship laws, and so by surveying the attitudes of various constituencies about the topic. Thus, inferences can only be made after the data is in hand, using an inductive approach.

Moreover, because the study deals with socio-political attitudes, the most adequate philosophy to guide the research is that of interpretivism. In
fact, the interpretivist paradigm is rooted in the notion that knowledge and trust are subjective, more specifically influenced by cultural and historical contexts. In that regard, individuals’ behavior is molded by their own meanings which are typically generated from social interactions. As such, individuals may assimilate meaning on the basis of their own experiences and circumstantial perceptions (Flick, 2014). In that way, individuals’ attitudes toward gender equality in politics and what it entails are shaped by their own experiences and understanding of them.

3.1.2. Strategy

Considering the interpretivist philosophy that guides the research, the most suitable research strategy relies on a mixed methods approach, involving both quantitative and qualitative research. Typically, quantitative research is associated with a positivist philosophy, which is centered on the notions of empiricism and objectivity. However, many sociologists have argued that often quantitative studies prove a valuable tool to social research without necessarily being inherently objective. Rather, even “hard” quantitative methods cannot be considered to be purely objective. In fact, humans are flawed, subjective beings who are incapable of processing information without some level of subjective interpretation (Westmarland, 2001). Thus, survey responses regarding political or social attitudes are not only based on subjective interpretations but should also be analyzed by the researcher as such. However, an exclusively quantitative research design cannot effectively survey the attitudes of Lebanese constituencies, as it is too rigid and impersonal; thus, it would engender a level
of ambiguity that could derail the discussion or at least make its conclusions less accurate, with fewer nuanced analytical routes possible.

Moreover, recently the merits of the mixed research strategy have become more apparent in the field of gender politics, prompting a higher level of sophistication than its individual quantitative and qualitative counterparts on their own. The main reason is that quantitative and qualitative sections of a study typically inform and dialogue with one another (Tripp & Hughes, 2018). Most notably, the qualitative section may help to further elucidate quantitative research results, thereby providing more insight on the matter at hand. When it comes to socio-political attitudes toward women’s representation in politics and their civic rights, administering quantitative surveys may generate some valuable comparative insight, particularly insofar as the differences among constituencies in distinct political and religious spheres of influence. However, these results would not offer an in-depth account of the reasons behind these attitudes, which is essential to the discussion. Not to mention that the mixed-methods strategy also serves the purpose of increasing the study’s degree of validation, seeing as it aims to triangulate the collected data in such a way that each method will compensate for the weaknesses of the other (Lin & Loftis, 2010).
3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Quantitative Survey

While the quantitative part of this study is not necessarily meant to serve a deductive purpose, it is nevertheless useful in collecting a considerable amount of data from participants for the purpose of detecting patterns and making generalizations (Harwell, 2011). Surveying various areas with unique socio-demographic characteristics is essential because it allows for a better, sufficiently objective way of determining the overarching trend in socio-political attitudes specific to these areas. A concise, clearly worded survey administered to an adequately large sample would accomplish this objective. However, quantitative surveys do suffer from some limitations or weaknesses, such as reliability issues pertaining to respondent data accuracy (Queiros, Faria & Almeida, 2017). The final version of the survey used for data collection is available in Appendix A.

3.2.2. Semi-structured Interview

The topics of Lebanese women’s representation in the political realm and citizenship law reform are highly sensitive to a predominantly patriarchal society. Thus, it is not nearly enough to survey the opinions of participants by using quantitative measures; rather, their nuanced insight is important to unravelling their opinions in such a way to better guide the discussion. For instance, if the survey results reveal that a majority of the subpopulation located in a specific quarter of Beirut are in favor of awarding women the right to pass on their citizenship, but are generally opposed to gender quotas, a semi-
structured interview with some of these participants would help further elucidate if and how they believe citizenship law reform could take place in the absence of women’s political agency or at least lobbying influence.

Understandably, interviews – especially those conducted on-site – are labor-intensive and time-consuming. However, their main strength is that they offer in-depth insight into the reasoning of participants that would help further key parts of the discussion such as how likely citizenship reform would occur in the foreseeable future, or what the extent of women’s influence through mass protests is. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews, in particular, are flexible, such that the interviewer may guide the interview in certain directions when there is a need to deviate a bit from the main ideas or go even deeper into some of them (Adams, 2015). The interview questions used for this thesis’ study are available in Appendix B.
3.3. Research Sample

Given the importance of obtaining representative data from a diversified sample, some probability-based population sampling strategies are more suited than others in the case of this study. In particular, it would be pertinent to explore how different constituencies perceive and react to gender issues in politics, particularly with regard to increasing women’s representation in the Lebanese parliament. Thus, cluster sampling was employed to split the target population into different groups of participants based on their area of residence, which in Lebanon is significantly (albeit not completely) also associated with sectarian and political affiliation. The benefits of cluster sampling are numerous, including its capacity to organize and concentrate data collection in such a way to use as few resources as possible. In addition, it helps increase the feasibility of the research by segmenting the whole population into homogenous groups (Bornstein, Jager & Putnick, 2015). Five data collection points were selected in Beirut: Hamra, Mar Elias, Cola, Tarik el Jdide and Ashrafieh. While Hamra and Mar Elias may be considered to be “mixed” areas, in the sense that they are not very homogenous when it comes to political and sectarian affiliation, Cola is populated by a largely Shiite demographic while Tarik el Jdide is predominantly Sunni and Ashrafieh Christian. Finally, only individuals over the age of 18 will be surveyed, to ensure an acceptable degree of political and social maturity.
3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Preferably, data collection will take place on-site at each of the different aforementioned areas. However, due to the ongoing, critical Coronavirus situation, it may be more prudent to conduct the research online. This would entail a small variation in the sampling process, whereby respondents would be prompted and encouraged to truthfully indicate their area of residence before taking the survey / interview.

As for data analysis, the results of the quantitative survey were organized into statistically meaningful data from which the attitudes from each cluster of participants were inferred. Subsequently, the interpretation of interview results was conducted according to a thematic analytical process, spanning categories such as religiosity, political affiliation, women’s rights, and civic reform. These results were used as a qualitative means of further elucidating the quantitative findings.
3.5. Ethical Considerations

Given that the themes discussed in this dissertation are sensitive in nature, including personal sectarian beliefs, political affiliation and overall opinions on matters that are highly controversial, the researcher assured participants that their data will be completely anonymized. Participants were not asked to provide their full names and other personal information. In particular, this step is in compliance with proper research etiquette, whereby respondents’ dignity, privacy and well-being must be protected (Mosley, 2013).
3.6. Limitations

Given the temporal restrictions that this thesis needs to abide by, one of the limitations of the study is that the number of participants may not be significant enough to provide for ample representative value. Moreover, the scope of the research was limited to Beirut, excluding suburban areas and other regions. It was acknowledged that this may increase the probability of bias, seeing as other areas may have their own distinctive outlooks on the matter of gender representation in Lebanon. It could also put too much weight on more urbanized areas where residents tend to have higher educational attainment.
Chapter Four

Discussion

4.1. Survey Findings

4.1.1. Demographics

To ensure an equitable distribution of results among all areas studied, the first 20 surveys filled for each of these areas were considered, amounting to a hundred surveys in total. The vast majority of participants were in age range between 18 and 50, accounting for 92% of the total sample, split between 43 men and 57 women, with a noteworthy 52% claiming to be between 18 and 24 years of age. Moreover, 82% of the sample claimed having at least completed an undergraduate degree, with 22% stating that they have also completed higher studies. The highest average educational level was in Hamra and Ashrafieh. This could be explained by a few factors. For one, these areas have a more thriving middle class than other, “poorer” areas such as Cola and Tarik el Jdideh. Moreover, the cost of living in these areas is higher than in their counterparts, which may indicate that residents have higher salaries, and thus are likelier to have the educational requirements that justify such salaries, in addition to the capabilities of renting or buying spaces to live there.

Furthermore, the sectarian affiliation of participants indicates that the traditional associations between certain sects on one hand, and geographic locations on the other, still stand. In fact, 16 out of 20 participants residing in
Cola identified as Shiites, with 2 Druze and 2 Sunnis. In addition, 19 out of 20 participants in Tarik el Jdideh identified as Sunni with only one outlier (a Shiite). All other areas under examination were more heterogeneous, including Ashrafieh. In fact, for a predominantly Christian area, only 13 out of 20 participants who claimed they lived in it identified as Christian, with 4 Shiites, 2 Sunnis, and 1 Druze. This result in particular could be due to factors that do not necessarily apply to other areas, such as the fact that Ashrafieh hosts multiple good universities such as USJ, for instance, that attracts students from a wide range of different demographic backgrounds. Indeed, most participants from that area (65%) claimed they were between 18 and 24 years of age. Moreover, Mar Elias and Hamra were clearly mixed at the sectarian level, although the balance was evidently tipped in favor of the Muslim faith. In Mar Elias, 12 participants identified as Shiite, 5 as Sunni, 2 as Druze and only one Christian. In Hamra, the majority identified as Sunni (9), with 5 Shiites, 4 Christians and 1 Druze.

4.1.2. Political Involvement and Religiosity

Among the most noteworthy findings regarding political involvement was that 58% of participant indicated not supporting any political party. In the absence of any private information collected such as name, email address, physical address, this result is all the more important because it means that this self-reported lack of political affiliation is not the product of social pressure, shyness, fear of retribution etc. like, for instance, in the case of the “silent majority” of Trump supporters in the U.S., many of whom would not declare their support in public. Evidently, a few factors may have contributed to this high rate of political neutrality (in so far as support for traditional political
parties). First, as already mentioned, the majority of participants are young (between 18 and 24), meaning that they are less susceptible to being influenced by the rhetoric of “civil war” parties such as the Amal movement, Lebanese Forces, Progressive Socialist Party, etc. Moreover, as expected the areas typically associated with specific sectarian affiliations had the highest rate of political support. In Cola, 12 out of 20 participants indicated claimed that they supported either Amal or Hezbollah, whereas in Tarik el Jdideh, 9 asserted their support for the Future Movement. In Ashrafieh, 3 participants indicated that they support the Lebanese Forces, whereas another 4 claimed that they support the Free Patriotic Movement. In Mar Elias, the results were rather mixed: 3 respondents identified as supporters of the Future Movement, 5 as either Hezbollah (3) or Amal (2), and 1 said he supported the Progressive Socialist Party. Finally, participants from Hamra were the least likely to claim support for traditional Lebanese political parties, with only 5 saying so (1 Hezbollah, 2 Future Movement, 1 Progressive Socialist Party and one Free Patriotic Movement). This could be explained by the fact that Hamra is not only the most heterogeneous area among all 5, and thus the most “neutral” at the sectarian level, but also because, as already mentioned, participants there are likely to be more educated than their counterparts from other areas and thereby more politically skeptical, given the dire socio-economic situation in the country. The low rates of support for the Christian parties including the LF and FPM (8%) as well as the Druze PSP (2%) may be explained by the fact that there is a larger concentration of Sunnis and Shiites in administrative Beirut. Whereas it is true that one area (Ashrafieh) has a large concentration of Christians, a greater preponderance lies in more Northern regions such as
Mount Lebanon, Kaslik, Jounieh, Jbeil (Byblos), etc. As for Druze population, aside from being less numerous than its Muslim and Christian counterparts, it is also mostly concentrated in areas such as Aley and its surroundings.

As for the rate of participation in the last parliamentary elections in 2018, the results were in line with the low level of political support for traditional parties, whereby only 26% indicated that they voted. While there may seem to be a gap between the two figures, much of it may be explained by the age of participants: Since the elections occurred almost 2 years prior to this study, any respondent who claimed to be 22-23 or younger would not have been able to vote back then. Overall, however, the findings show that even though a proportion of the Lebanese population still sustains some kind of support for traditional parties, some individuals are still reluctant to participate in elections. There are multiple factors that could explain this. First, some participants may not be familiar with the voting process, due to lack of education on the matter. Others may have opted out of voting because of logistical issues (for those who are required to vote in areas that are far from where they actually live, based on where they are originally from officially). Otherwise, some psychological factors may also be at play, such as learned helplessness, the belief that “nothing will change anyway, so why bother?”

Finally, on the question of religiosity, participants were asked to rate how religious they perceived themselves to be. The results here were mixed. Among party supporters, the majority of participants rated themselves at least a “5” on the scale, with the highest rates of religiosity (rated 8 or more) appearing in Hezbollah and Amal supporters (14 out of 18), followed by the Future Movement (8 out of 14), FPM and LF supporters (4 out of 8). In contrast, both
PSP supporters rated themselves lower than 5 on the religiosity scale. For non-supporters, the rate of religiosity was substantially lower, with only 12 out of 58 respondents identifying as “5” or higher on the suggested scale.

4.2. Women’s Political Participation

The bulk of this study focuses on the correlation between the degree of women’s participation in politics on one hand, and the effect that it may have on civil status laws (focus on citizenship law) as well as any connected ramifications on the other. Thus, an understanding of perspectives on women’s political participation in Lebanon precedes any such discussion.

A substantial 73% of participants noted their belief that Lebanese women faced difficulties when it came to gender discrimination, such as at the political and professional levels. Among those who did not believe so, 14 participants were with Hezbollah or Amal, 1 with PSP, 9 with Future Movement, and 3 with FPM. Quite notably, all participants who did not express political support for any party held this belief, in addition to those who claimed to support the LF. The results were similar for the next couple of inquiries, but with varying nuances in so far as the nature of the participants in favor and against. In fact, an even more overwhelming 77% of participants stated that they were in favor of gender quotas, indicating a higher rate of agreement among party supporters than in the question about gender inequality. This finding appeared all the more intriguing after dissecting it by stratifying the participants who were in favor. Among party supporters, the Christian parties led the way, with 7 out of 8 FPM and LF supporters favoring such quotas, followed by the Future Movement with 9 out of 14 supporters,
PSP (1 out of 2), and the Hezbollah/Amal duo (7 out of 18). Thus, approximately 57% of political party supporters asserted their belief that there ought to be gender quotas put in place, despite only 36% of them acknowledging challenges relating to gender inequality. No strong connection can be made between these results and previous positions taken by political parties with regard to gender quotas, except that a majority of Hezbollah/Amal supporters seem to agree with their representative in parliament that such quotas are futile. Nevertheless, almost 39% of these supporters claimed to support gender quotas, which is statistically significant, especially when contrasted with statements made by some Hezbollah figures, including women like Rima Fakhry. In fact, Fakhry had expressed an unequivocal objection to gender quotas, arguing that they not only infringe on the democratic process, but also on the inherent gender differences between men and women which render the latter better suited at legislation than the former. At the same time, while the Future Movement, for example, has expressed support for gender quotas, still approximately 36% of their supporters (as per the survey) were not inclined to support the idea.

However, the main takeaway remains that more than three-quarters of participants expressed their belief that there should be gender quotas put in place, with only 5 participants representing almost 9% of those who did not voice any support for political parties claiming not to be in favor of gender quotas. These findings were consolidated by those of the interviews, with some nuanced answers pointing to the complexity of this suggested solution, even if the idea itself sounds convincing. In fact, 8 out of 10 participants expressed enthusiasm for the application of gender quotas. Only two participants from
Cola and Tarik el Jdide were against, mostly because they believed politics to be a man’s domain. Thus, it was evident that their answers were driven by preconceptions inspired by patriarchal values. Of those who argued in favor of gender quotas, one participant from Hamra expressed her belief that in a country like Lebanon where patriarchal values are salient, having such quotas can play a positive role by forcing both men and women to think differently and conducting more due diligence on female candidates. Another participant from Mar Elias was especially vocal about gender quotas’ positive effect on law making: “Listen, let’s assume the worst-case scenario. I’m willing to assume that with gender quotas, many women who are politically mediocre will get elected at the expense of men who may be more suitable. Notice, I’m not saying these will happen; surely, it won’t. But let’s say it happens. Still, you would at least have representatives in parliament who think differently, who have different ideas on who to solve problems, and most importantly, who are hyper vigilant about women’s needs and sufferings in a male-dominated society were honor crimes are still a thing”.

Moreover, the favorable reaction to gender quotas was positively correlated with perceptions relating to women’s current representation in parliament, whereby 79% at least agreed that women were underrepresented, and 73% at least agreed that a higher representation of women in politics would benefit the Lebanese society. However, when prompted to compare between men and women’s abilities in politics, the results were starkly different. Among party supporters, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that men are naturally better-suited to handle political tasks than their female counterparts. Among non-supporters, approximately 14% believed the same. Nevertheless,
there was overwhelming consensus on the statement that higher female representation in parliament would lead to progress affecting laws that protect women in society, including in the workplace, with 88% of the sample acquiescing, split almost evenly between party supporters and non-supporters. This finding was backed up by the vast majority of interview results, with a striking 9 out of 10 interviewees giving positive feedback in that respect. Even one fairly conservative participant from Tarik el Jdideh asserted that because women make up half of society, their presence in parliament would be important to make progress in certain laws because they can bring into government their nurturing powers, thereby affecting positive change in welfare in particular, like enacting more protections for vulnerable categories, including orphans, the elderly, etc.

By contextualizing these results within the findings of the secondary research, one explanation to the dichotomy between perceptions of women’s political abilities and their potential effect on more favorable protective laws lies in the country’s enduring patriarchal culture. Henderson, Nelson and Chemali’s (2015) work, in particular, may shed light on this phenomenon. The scholars found that despite technically being considered as equals to men, women in Lebanon are still considered to subordinates to their male counterparts not just because cultural and religious tradition has reinforced stereotypical gender roles in society, but also because the legal system has contributed to the consolidation of these stereotypes. In essence, while the sectarian political modus operandi is already inherently discriminatory when it comes to women’s status, it is the institutionalization of gender inequality that has compelled women to be seen as lesser than men in certain areas that are
typically associated with “male” ability, including politics. After all, since birth, women are identified by a family registration number that is based on the male line. As for the consensus on the notion that a higher representation of women in parliament would likely lead to legal progress, it may reveal a connection with the nascent trend of secularization in the Middle East in general, and Lebanon in particular. Once confined to a small environment of well-educated activists and non-governmental organizations (Bahlawan, 2014), secularism and anti-sectarian discourse have noticeably increased over the years, most recently visible in the October 17 revolution’s pervasive rhetoric about unity based on non-sectarian fraternity. In fact, for the first time in Lebanon’s modern history, a revolt erupted based on a growing sense of national solidarity that transcends sectarian lines, binding Lebanese individuals from various religious backgrounds together in a struggle against a corrupt political class (Yahia, 2019). Considering the reformative undertones of secularist movements, it makes sense to find that most participants perceived a higher representative of women in power to be positively correlated with reform, particularly when one reiterates the generally youthful sample. This would explain why despite the propensity of the Lebanese to favor a higher proportion of women in parliament, some stubborn cultural stereotypes persist, such as that men are better equipped at politics generally. This enduring cultural bias becomes all the more evident when one examines the findings of the study conducted by the BBC and Arab Barometer, which revealed that while a majority of Lebanese respondents (circa 65%) agreed that a woman president or prime minister “is acceptable”, more than 50% also believed that “husbands should have the final say in all family decisions” (“The Arab World
in Seven Charts”, 2019). Furthermore, perhaps there are also some psychological factors at play when it comes to the positive perceptions of more women acquiring a political presence overall. Familiarity, for one, may breed a sort of “acceptance”, whereby Lebanese individuals are already used to seeing female figures that belong to political parties making statements or participating in internal decision-making. In fact, not only are there many women playing prominent political roles within self-proclaimed “moderate” parties such as the Future Movement, LF and PMF, but also in highly conservative parties such as Hezbollah. Thus, this familiar image may reinforce the positive perception of women in political life. Arguably, however, some may not explicitly be able to tell the difference between positions such as, for example, Secretary General of a political party on one hand, and Member of Parliament (MP) on the other. Hence, there may have already been a sense of satisfaction among many Lebanese when it comes to the number of women in politics, neglecting that the more influential positions are in the legislature which is embodied by the parliament.
4.3. Women in Politics and Citizenship Law Reform

On the question of whether the current citizenship is unfair, 74% of non-supporters either agreed (24) or strongly agreed (19). The unexpected result, however, was that the majority of party supporters also at least agreed, in total a remarkable 67%. Those who did not agree, however, were mostly supporters of Hezbollah and Amal (9), but also FPM (3) and Future Movement (2). Moreover, on the question of whether allowing women to pass on citizenship to their children even if their spouses were not Lebanese would lead to a demographic imbalance, the majority of non-supporters strongly disagreed (48%) or disagreed (31%), whereas 50% of supporters at least disagreed, 19% were neutral, and only 13 participants agreed or strongly agreed. Interestingly, all FPM supporters at least agreed, whereas only 1 LF supporter out of 3 strongly agreed, the rest were either neutral or disagreed. 7 Hezbollah or Amal supporters also at least disagreed. Of all the survey findings, this result in particular was particularly illuminating. In fact, one of the primary concerns of this study was the determination of whether the political decision to stall citizenship law reform was based on popular sentiment regarding the possible destabilizing demographic shift that may ensue. The answer to that question, as suggested by respondents’ feedback, is a resounding “no”. Even among party supporters, a mere 27% saw in citizenship law reform a demographic threat, whereas the percentage among non-supporters was far lower. Thus, not only did most respondents agree that the law was unfair to women, but they also
implicitly indicated that they would not be opposed to its reform. One participant from Tarik el Jdide ridiculed the fact that women were stripped of their right to pass on citizenship in certain cases: “My aunt, a lawyer, is married to a Palestinian. An amazing, hard-working man. They have three children, and yet they cannot manage to find work simply because they are Palestinian. Where’s the justice in that? Are some people afraid of Sunnis? I don’t get it. They are already Sunnis, so what’s the point of depriving them of their most basic right?” Remarkably, even participants from Ashrafieh and Cola had a similar thought pattern. The latter claimed that it was futile to try and control women like that, to tell them they ought to be careful in choosing their spouses because they might risk subjecting their own children to injustices. The former was equally repulsed: “I am Shiite, but who am I to judge if a Shiite marries a Sunni? We are all brothers and sisters in this country; sectarianism is a disease, and one of the way to annihilate it is to let people marry who they want to marry, not remain enclosed in a bubble like we see today everywhere, even among Christians”. Such views stand in sharp contrast to the reluctance of political parties to enact an amendment to the law that would effectively alleviate Lebanese women’s woes. In fact, while some suggestions have been made to reform the law, proposed amendments have been either discriminatory (such as Gebran Bassil’s amendment that excludes Palestinians and Syrians) or was not lobbied for seriously such as in the case of the Future Movement’s amendment (Sewell, 2018). Nevertheless, there were some seemingly expected results such as that the fact that a good proportion (39%) of Hezbollah and Amal supporters (all Shiites) and 75% of Christian-party supporters were persuaded that an amendment to the law would entail a
demographic imbalance. This response was expected because of the general understanding that amending the law allow women married to Palestinians and Syrians (majority Sunni) to pass on their citizenship and by extension their sectarian affiliation, which consequently threatens to increase the number of Sunnis in the country compared to Christians, Shiites, Druze and all other sets. However, this “moderate” fear, even among sects that are in the direct line of fire, so to speak, may be explained by the low impact of intersect marriages in the countries, particularly in terms of their proportion in relation to more homogeneous same-sect marriages. In fact, Charafeddine’s (2010) work clearly suggests that the percentage of marriages of Lebanese Shiite and Christian women to non-Lebanese men is negligible, in the single digits. Hence, perhaps participants’ seemingly shy responses are nothing more than a reflection of the reality that they are living in. Ironically, this would imply that because the Lebanese society continues to be segmented into homogenous sectarian categories that individuals do not worry about the repercussions of any law because they are persuaded that no law may disrupt the status quo. However, while this conjecture may be valid at the surface, it is nevertheless somewhat naïve considering the hypervigilance that the Lebanese have developed with regard to their sectarian identities across the decades, especially after the country’s 15-year long bloody civil war. It could also be the case that the Lebanese are generally unaware of what kind of effect the law amendment would have, particularly because the country has yet to conduct a census after the last one that was undertaken in 1932, a controversial reluctance: “The multi-confessional system by which the country still operates – which defines not just parliamentary seats but also cabinet positions and employment
throughout the public sector – is built atop murky population counts. Real, hard demographic data could disrupt the whole thing. There is a compelling bizarre argument to be had. Do you accept the lie, and relative stability, of an entrenched status quo? Or do you push toward truth, no matter the consequences?” (Barshad, 2019, para. 4).

In conjunction with the noteworthy indifference of the Lebanese regarding the effect of citizenship law reform on demographic balance, there was an overwhelming consensus on the idea that a higher representation of women in Lebanon would likely lead to amendments to the citizenship law, with 92% of the sample either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This finding was expected for two main reasons. First, historically, women in Lebanon have not shied away from any fight that championed gender equality. In that regard, the tremendous confidence among participants that the citizenship would likely be amended under the influence of more female legislators may be based on the awareness, relating both to the past and present, that women in Lebanon are willing to go the extra mile to lobby against injustice. In fact, they have succeeded in the past in enforcing legal changes including not just basics relating to voting rights, but also citizenship-related injustices including the removal of a law that forced them to renounce their citizenship if they married any foreign man (Stephan, 2012). Moreover, the sheer number of Lebanese women that have taken to the streets during the October 17 revolution has registered with the majority of Lebanese participants in the revolution and even onlookers. In what could be described as remarkable tour de force, in many protests women often led the way, using their bodies as human shields to protect other demonstrators from riot police. They were also on the frontlines of the revolution in so far as
mobilization and organization efforts (Duque, 2019). Thus, the survey participants’ responses only serve to reinforce the already strong conjecture that the ascension of women to legislative power would substantially increase the chances of citizenship law reform.
4.4. Women’s Political Protests in Times of Revolution

On the statement concerning the effect of social movements on the likelihood of higher female representation in Lebanese politics, there was a clear schism between supporters and non-supporters. For one, party supporters tended to disagree, with 18 out of 42 participants strongly disagreeing and 9 others disagreeing. As for non-supporters, they seemed more optimistic, with overall 82% of them agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, the nuanced answers obtained through the conducted interviews expressed a substantial degree of caution. One of the Ashrafieh participants argued that while the protests were a positive sign of things to come, they were nevertheless not yet mature enough to incorporate women’s rights to their overarching agenda, even if “rebellious” groups (“majmou3at el thouwar”) were to agree on common principles and plans of reform. When asked to elaborate more on why she believes this is the case, she recounted details of her own experience while protesting with a group of like-minded feminists and LGBT rights activist:

“There we were, chanting in favor of equal rights for all genders and individuals of all sexual orientations, when another group passed us by and launched sexist and homophobic slurs at us. Granted, it was an isolated incident, of course. We were not subjected to many other similar incidents, but it’s just so telling! Many people are rebelling because they are hungry and demand answers, economic plans; they want to know if they will be able to put food on the table. I think it’s easy to get lost in our small bubble and forget that
for the vast majority of protesters, it’s literally a matter of life or death. They
don’t care if more women rise to power, as long as they experience some
improvement in their livelihoods”. A more optimistic outlook was expressed
by one of the participants from Hamra, who claimed that the protests were
replete with young, ambitious women, and that at times these women
outnumbered men. Asked why she thought that was significant in a country
that is famous for its high women-to-men ratio, she responded: “It’s not just
about how many women there are. Actually, that’s very important, come to
think of it, because numbers do matters when it comes to voting. But what I
meant was that women are packing the streets despite there being a cultural
taboo that women who leave the house to participate in riots or just simple
demonstrations are acting against their “nature”; trust me, I’ve heard this so
many times, even from some of my family members. It’s not that they think
women should stay in the kitchen or anything –although some do – but overall
they expect women to be “softer” (“Aljens al-Latif”) so more inclined to let
men go out and fight the fight. You know?” In sharp contrast with these views,
participants from Tarik el Jdide and Cola were much less confident not about
potentially positive prospects for women in Lebanese politics, but rather the
approach that they were using. This was one of the more interesting results of
the research. One Tarik el Jdide participant argued that women’s presence in
the protests is positive overall, but that they should be less “manly”
(“mestarjlin”) because otherwise they risk alienating not just men but also
other women who are at home watching them on TV. Asked about what
constitutes “manly” behavior, the participant replied: “Like they should not
yell all the time, or aggravate the police, or dress like men… some of them
really dress like men and cut their hair short. I don’t have anything against that, everyone is free, but that hurts their image. We live in Lebanon, not Europe. If women want to be taken seriously, they should act the part at least.” Moreover, one Cola participant fervently disagreed that the revolution would have any positive effect on women’s political prospects. An unapologetic Hezbollah supporter who made sure to affirm his support for the party multiple times throughout the interview, he held negative beliefs pertaining to the “revolution,” attributing it to conniving efforts by some parties to ride an otherwise just movement: “We were the first to join the protests. Me, my friends, even ‘devout’ women in my family. Everyone was participating. But then it became clear that some parties were interfering. And anyway, we felt it in the behavior of some protesters, especially women. I heard one girl shout that she would rather risk having ISIS in Lebanon if it meant removing the ‘resistance’ weapons. And after that, I saw videos of women almost naked participating in the protests. I knew then it was all over; if these are the women who want to arrive to power, then to hell with them! I will never accept. And my party will never accept”. Not surprisingly, this viewpoint aligns directly with that of Hezbollah political representatives. Nevertheless, the most interesting insight from the interview was unequivocally that of the 30-year-old Mar Elias participant in her thirties. She remarked that while she firmly believed in the positive effect that women’s protests may have on their likelihood to gain ground at the level of political representation, she was nevertheless pessimistic because of one main factor: The fact that many of these women are inspired by influential figures who work for organizations that receive funding from abroad, including Europe and the US. When
prompted to elaborate further, she said: “Surely, external funding does not automatically mean illicit influence or like an international conspiracy to use women as a tool or anything. I’m not really suggesting that, per se. But for instance, personalities like Dima Moukalled, who runs Daraj (a self-proclaimed, independent platform)... she is very active as a pro-revolution activist. I did a fair bit of fact-checking about who is funding her and her colleagues and found out that all organizations were international. Against, not saying that it’s bad. But when you think of how this would affect women’s chances of assuming more political positions, you have to consider who will vote for them. And people who would consider voting for women in Lebanon are usually either very skeptical or are looking for an excuse to relay their vote to men instead. What better excuse than ‘Oh, wait. These women are led by figures who might be agents to foreign powers!’ This viewpoint merits special consideration, especially in the context of previous work like Khattab (2006) which emphasized the double-edged sword the de-politicization of gender-based agendas. On one hand, it allowed women some room to maneuver away from the rigid politico-sectarian framework according to which political institutions functioned. However, due to this kind of de-politicization, women’s movements also ended up losing steam on the political front because of diminishing local recognition. Thus, assertive conclusions about how women’s chances are affected by their participation in social movements like the October 17 revolution cannot be made. Perhaps the most accurate sentiment about such prospects remains along the lines of cautious optimism.
4.5. Women’s Liberation through Street and Mass Protests

In response to the statement that even if women do not succeed in acquiring more political seats in parliament, that through mass protests and activism they can attain better rights, the majority of survey participants were pessimistic. 74% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, with marginally more party supporters disagreeing than their non-supporter counterparts. This shared sense of pessimism was confirmed in the findings of the interviews, which also pointed to a bleak outlook. In fact, even participants who claimed to extremely pro-revolution such as those from Hamra and Ashrafieh did not express much hope for liberation through mere street and mass protests. One Hamra participant stated: “What have protests ever accomplished for women on their own? How many laws have been enacted or amended thanks to women marches or activism? As far as I know, none! At least not in my lifetime. The only way to change these laws is to be present, as strong, independent women, in parliament. Otherwise the sexist, misogynistic men in power are not going to move a finger”. Another participant from Ashrafieh echoed these thoughts, suggesting that women’s liberation can only be attained through their participation in the legislative branch, because that is the only way that they can secure support for legal reform.

It could be argued that the young age of most participants, including interviewees, may have played a role in their pessimistic tendencies regarding the effect of civic activism and social movements, as most were not familiar
with the history of women’s social movements in Lebanon and their accomplishments, as some of the secondary research findings point to. For instance, women’s movements in Lebanon were capable of some feats in the 1950s such as abolishing a law that forced them to renounce their citizenship when they chose to marry foreign men, and ending bureaucratic restrictions on their right to travel (Stephan, 2012). However, respondents’ negative perceptions also cannot be faulted, as very little has been done in the way of gender equality in the past couple of decades by a legislative branch dominated by men in a country that still harbors potent patriarchal values. Hence, in a sense their reactions consolidate some of the findings of the reviewed literature, in particular Charrad and Zarrugh’s (2014) discussion of the Arab Spring protests: The countries that benefited most from these protests at the level of gender equality and female political participation were those in which women had already experienced substantial progress beforehand in so far as a modern, fair personal status code and legal protections for women in cases of discrimination or abuse. In fact, the outcomes of protests in the Arab Spring were more flavorful for some countries like Tunisia than others like Egypt, which the scholars attribute to Tunisia’s comparatively more progress civil laws. In fact, the history of the country since its proclamation of independence in 1956 is unique relative to its Arab counterparts. A few months after Tunisia had attained independence, its new government enacted a new personal status code, which constituted an array of laws that sought to regulate affairs such as marriage, divorce, inherence, custody, etc. Most notably these laws were pioneering, in that they diminished the weight of gender inequality by endowing women with protections that were otherwise rare for an Islamic
country. Intriguingly, however, the Tunisian Code of Personal Status (CPS) was not enacted as a result of any pressure by women’s movements, but rather with the rationale from the ruling elite that it would constitute an instrument of positive change, transforming family life and kinship patterns, which was perceived to be an essential condition for the burgeoning of political, social and economic reform (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). In contrast, women in Lebanon do not share similar privileges, which arguably makes it less likely that they would attain liberation via mass protests or social movements alone.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Findings

The findings of these thesis shed light on the current political sentiment in Lebanon spanning various areas of Beirut and religious backgrounds, particularly with regard to the worthiness of amending the decades-old citizenship law which deprives women of the right to pass on their citizenship to their children. The largely youthful sample was compelled not just to affirm the issue of gender inequality when it comes to women’s lacking political representation, but also the notion that the citizenship law is unfair and must be amended. In particular, there was strong consensus among participants from all areas and religious backgrounds that a higher representation of women in parliament would be beneficial to society and would likely lead to the amendment of the citizenship law. There was also consensus, albeit a lesser one, about the idea that gender quotas could serve as a tool to empower women politically. Furthermore, respondents’ religious affiliation did not seem to significantly affect their perception about amending the aforementioned law. Notably, Shiite participants were not substantially inclined to believe that endowing women with the right to pass on their citizenship to their children –
even if they are married to foreigners including predominantly Sunni Palestinians and Syrians – would tip the sectarian balance. Furthermore, despite the fact that statistically 75% of Christian party supporters claimed that a demographic shift would occur, the fact that the vast majority were of a particular political affiliation (FPM), indicating that it could be a primarily political issue as opposed to a sectarian one, considering that the FPM is famous for championing anti-immigrant rhetoric. Moreover, there was cautious optimism about the effect of social movements such as the October 17 revolution on women’s prospects of political inclusion, and a largely pessimistic outlook on these movements’ propensity to provide women with their much-desired liberation without increasing their political participation.
5.2. Concluding Remarks

5.2.1. Enduring Political Resistance to Women’s Political Representation

There is little doubt that the results obtained from this thesis’ study point to a dichotomy between street / constituent sentiment on one hand, and political will on the other regarding the issue of citizenship law amendment. Despite multiple parties already making suggestions on how to move forward, so far no action has been taken, thereby betraying an implicit consensus among these parties that the matter should be left alone. Yet, simultaneously there does not seem to be any sort of popular veto on a comprehensive amendment that allows women to pass on citizenship no matter who their spouses are, except from FPM supporters. However, it would be naïve to expect that the FPM was alone in its adverse position. Both the findings of the literature and the primary research showcase that the “demographic threat” argument is weak, rendering it no more than an excuse. Furthermore, whereas gender quotas are received positively by Lebanese from various areas and religious backgrounds, they too face stubborn resistance from the ruling elite. Hence, the reason for the reluctance to reform the citizenship law and endow women with a greater likelihood of being represented in parliament lies elsewhere. Political
parties are not responding to the aspirations of their constituents, and Joseph’s
treatise of the dynamics of gender and citizenship may offer the best
explanation. In particular, the scholar’s notion of “political familism” is
revealing in this context, whereby it justifies the relative stability over the years
of political party support despite the gap between constituents’ aspirations and
political decision-making and legislative achievements. In fact, historically,
Lebanese citizens have been highly dependent on a network of intertwined
kinship, familial and patronage relationships. Largely patriarchal by nature,
these networks are under the direct influence of political patrons, through
which men in particular may acquire certain privileges and resources from the
state for themselves and their families. Moreover, when needed, political
patrons use this same network to mobilize their factions, whether it be in the
face of political rivals, during elections, etc. Thus, it makes sense for the
political class not to push for a higher representation of women in parliament,
as they are conscious that this could entail a challenge to the long-standing
“political familism” system.

Moreover, when it comes to the citizenship law, political appear to be in
double-trouble. In fact, not only would a higher representation of women in
politics almost surely lead to reforming this law, thereby empowering women
further to break away from the patriarchal clientelistic system, but it would also
entail a challenge to the consociational pillars of a political structure that is
highly sectarian by nature. The work Jaulin (2014) here is particularly relevant.
The dynamics of Lebanese citizenship are and always have been heavily
affected by the ruling political class, whereby in conjunction with religion-
centric personal status laws, the current citizenship law contributes to
reinforcing the capacity of the regime to affect the demographic state of the country by discouraging interfaith marriages and women’s marriage to foreigners, thereby allowing each political faction to retain control over its sectarian group of followers.

5.2.2. On Religiosity and the Frailty of the Sectarian Political System

One particularly surprising – albeit reasonable – finding in the research is that a substantial proportion of the youthful indicated a relatively low level of religiosity, in a country that would otherwise be considered traditional and conservative. Nevertheless, this would seem to go hand-in-hand with other findings in the secondary research regarding the increase in secularism throughout the entire region, not just Lebanon. Another pertinent sign of such shifting religious attitudes is the way that the October 17 revolution unfolded. Many Lebanese individuals left their religious affiliations at home and were calling for the separation of state and religious institutions, a telling indication that the usually tightknit relationship between religiosity and political attitudes is weakening. This puts into question the ability of the sectarian political system to endure much longer. While the death of sectarianism altogether still seems a long way off, the foundations of the clientelist system which is heavily controlled by religious groups (karlsson, 2009) seem to be cracking under the pressure.
5.3. Limitations

While this study did manage to solicit a diverse sample from which to obtain insightful data, it did nevertheless face multiple challenges that impeded potentially better results. For one, the social distancing guidelines imposed in Lebanon (and everywhere around the world) restricted the data collection to online surveys and interviews by phone. This was problematic on three accounts. First, online participants naturally tend to be on the youthful side, seeing as Millennials and subsequent generations are more tech-savvy and likely to access and use social media frequently. As such, the data’s representative value may have suffered, inducing biases due to the lack of input from older age categories and groups that may not necessarily be comfortable with the English language. Second, semi-structured interviews are known to solicit far better data in person because participants’ nonverbal cues may be observed and incorporated into the subjective interpretation of their responses. Third, time constraints inhibited the researcher’s ability to collect more representative data by sampling individuals from across the country, including other cities, villages, etc. This added another layer of bias.
5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research would do well to expand on this thesis’ findings by soliciting information about constituents’ political intentions moving forward, particularly the parliamentary elections set to take place in 2022. In light of the deleterious consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic, which came at a time when the Lebanese economy was already crumbling, it would be pertinent to survey how political supporters in particular would behave from this point onward. Such research would thus shed light on possible political developments in the future, including the chances of enhanced female political representation after women’s loud voices in street protests.
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Appendix A: Quantitative Survey

Thank you for choosing to participate in this survey. Please ensure that your responses accurately reflect your perceptions; your effort is highly appreciated.

Age
A. 18-24  B. 25-34  C. 35-50  D. 51-64  E. 66+

Gender
A. Male  B. Female  C. Other

Level of Education
A. High School  B. Undergraduate  C. Graduate  D. Postgraduate

Sect
A. Sunni  B. Shia  C. Christian (Maronite Catholic)
D. Christian (Orthodox)  E. Druze  F. Other: _____
1. Which political party do you support?

A. Future Movement  B. Amal Movement  C. Hezbollah  D. Free Patriotic Movement  
E. Lebanese Forces  D. Progressive Socialist Party  F. Other: ___  G: None

2. Did you participate in the last parliamentary elections (2018)

A. Yes  B. No

3. Do you believe women in Lebanon face difficulties when it comes to gender discrimination?

A. Yes  B. No

4. Are you in favor of enacting gender quotas in parliamentary elections

(Securing a certain percentage of seats that only women can fill, for example: 30%)?

A. Yes  B. No
5. How religious would you say you were, on a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the least religious and 10 the most)?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please rate the following statements:

6. Women are currently underrepresented in the Lebanese parliament.

A. Strongly Disagree    B. Disagree    C. Neutral    D. Agree    E. Strongly Agree

7. A higher representation of women in politics would positively affect the Lebanese society.

A. Strongly Disagree    B. Disagree    C. Neutral    D. Agree    E. Strongly Agree

8. Men are naturally better-suited than women in politics (more capable of handling political tasks)
9. A higher representation of women in Lebanon politics would likely lead to more progress at the level of gender equality (Example: Better laws that protect women in society, in the workplace, etc.).

A. Strongly Disagree  B. Disagree  C. Neutral  D. Agree  E. Strongly Agree

In Lebanon, the current citizenship law does not allow women to pass on the Lebanese citizenship to their children if they are married to foreign men (such as Syrians or Palestinians).

10. Do you believe the current citizenship law is fair to women?

A. Strongly Disagree  B. Disagree  C. Neutral  D. Agree  E. Strongly Agree

11. A higher representation of women in Lebanon would likely lead to amendments to the citizenship law that allows women to pass on citizenship to their children even if their spouses are non-Lebanese.
B. Allowing women to pass on citizenship to their children when even if their spouses are non-Lebanese would lead to a big shift in demographics (For example, a sectarian imbalance).

C. Big social movements such as the October 17 revolution will likely lead to a higher political representation of women in the next parliamentary elections.

D. Even if women do not succeed in acquiring more political seats in parliament, through mass protests and activism, they can attain better rights.
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

1. Do you believe women deserve to have a higher level of representation in politics? What kind of contributions do you think they can make to society if they reached official positions, particularly in the legislative branch?

2. Do you believe that gender quotas are fair? Are they an effective policy to bring more women into politics? Or is there a better strategy? Please elaborate.

3. The current citizenship law specifies that Lebanese women cannot pass on citizenship to their children if they are married to a non-Lebanese. Do you think this is a good law, or is it unfair? Please elaborate.

4. The main argument advanced by politicians against allowing the wives of non-Lebanese individuals to pass on citizenship to their children is that doing so would cause a demographic shift, particularly in favour of the Sunni sect (seeing as Palestinians and Syrians are mostly Sunni). Does that argument convince you? Why or why not?

5. Do you believe that women’s higher participation in the parliament would lead to a fairer citizenship law?
6. How do you see big social movements such as the October 17 revolution affecting women’s prospects in politics? Will they likely gain a higher share of political representation? If not, can women’s liberation be attained only through street and mass protests? Why or why not?