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Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiya in Post-War Lebanon: Political
Appeal and Performance

By

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DEDICATION

To all diligent researchers who relentlessly explore the genuine factors behind every outcome, refusing to settle for mere appearances or superficial analysis, and rejecting simplistic or essentialist interpretations.

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Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya in Post-War Lebanon: Appeal and Electoral Performance

Mohamad Fawaz

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood branch, and its political and electoral experience in Lebanon especially in the post-Civil War period. While extensive research has been conducted on the Muslim Brotherhood globally, the Lebanese experience has received limited attention. This study aims to fill this gap by examining *Al-Jama'a's* electoral performance, achievements, and limited success in garnering popular support and playing a significant political role in the country. The research primarily focuses on *Al-Jama'a's* parliamentary experience following the Taif Agreement as an indicator of popularity, accompanied by a historical and ideological background to provide a comprehensive understanding. Interviews with current and former officials and specialized analysts supplement the limited available information. The research also highlights the political, popular, and electoral challenges faced by *Al-Jama'a* and analyzes internal and external obstacles that have hindered its progress. These include issues related to the organizational structure, missed opportunities, and external influences such as political clientelism and regional dynamics. The study emphasizes the need for organizational reforms and highlights the significance of context-specific analyses of the Muslim Brotherhood's experiences. By shedding light on the Lebanese case, this research contributes to a broader understanding of the political dynamics of Islamic movements in the Middle East especially within a multi-sectarian system.

Keywords: *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, Muslim Brotherhood, Lebanon, Islamic Movements, Middle East, Lebanese Politics, Power-Sharing system.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRB.....	Institutional Review Board
ISIS.....	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MB.....	Muslim Brotherhood
MP.....	Member of Parliament
PM.....	Prime Minister

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon, which started out as the Lebanese branch of the global Muslim Brotherhood movement (MB). The research primarily examines *Al-Jama'a's* parliamentary experience following the Taif Agreement as an indicator of appeal, accompanied by a historical and ideological background and evolution to provide a comprehensive understanding. The research highlights the political, popular, and electoral challenges faced by *Al-Jama'a* and analyzes different obstacles that have hindered its progress. Its primary objective is to examine the influence of the political and socioeconomic environment, as well as the internal dynamics of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, on the movement's ideology, organizational structure, and overall appeal to the Lebanese population, with a special focus on its electoral performance. This study is based in part on in-depth interviews with leading members of *Al-Jama'a* and with local specialists on the group. It thus provides a perspective on *Al-Jama'a* that is partly informed by how it views itself, its role in Lebanese politics, its relation to other groups and its vision for the future of Lebanon. Through open-ended questions, it provides *Al-Jama'a* members with the opportunity to provide their own perspectives on the reasons behind the limited political appeal of *Al-Jama'a* which was reflected in the post-war period by the small number of seats won by *Al-Jama'a* in successive parliamentary elections.

Following the formal dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924, numerous groups emerged with the aim of Islamic revival. Among these, the MB movement spearheaded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928 stood out as the most prominent. Al-Banna's vision encompassed the revival of Islam in the face of a growing trend toward secularism among the rulers and populations of newly formed Islamic nations. Education and preaching were identified by Al-Banna as crucial avenues for achieving this Islamic revival. Consequently, the movement he founded spread across numerous Islamic countries, including Lebanon, which forms an integral part of the Islamic world, at least according to Islamist movements (Wickham, 2013). As

a result, the influence of the Brotherhood extended from Syria to Lebanon, following its progression through Syria.

By delving into the historical development of the MB and its expansion and action in Lebanon, this study aims to shed light on how the movement's ideology, organization, and appeal were shaped by the prevailing political and socioeconomic circumstances. Additionally, it seeks to uncover the internal dynamics within *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* that influenced the trajectory of the movement in Lebanon, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of its role and significance within the broader Lebanese and Islamic landscape.

Although *Al-Jama'a* was affiliated with the broader MB movement and influenced by its general trajectory, it is important to recognize that each country has its own distinct characteristics that shape the organization's experience. For instance, in Jordan, the Brotherhood operated within a monarchy, which differed from the context in Lebanon. Unlike Egypt, the Jordanian regime did not adopt a harsh approach towards the Brotherhood, instead opting for containment and political engagement. Similarly, unlike in Syria, the Brotherhood in Lebanon and Jordan engaged in political activities within the permissible boundaries defined by the state. Consequently, the Brotherhood's activities in each country were influenced by a combination of broader Islamist dynamics, the specific circumstances of the Brotherhood itself, and the unique context of the country in which it operated (Obeid, 2017).

In 1952, Dr. Mustafa al-Sibai, the founder of the MB in Syria and the General Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood at the time, sought refuge in Lebanon. His presence in Lebanon played a significant role in spreading political Islamic ideologies within the country, which had already been introduced through the writings of figures like Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb (Al-Jama'a, 2016; Yousaf, 2010; Abdul Ghani, 2006). This influx of Islamic thought into Lebanon coincided with successive visits by leaders of the MB, organized in coordination with the *Ibad Al-Rahman* group (Al-Jama'a, 2016; Yousaf, 2010).

The organization known as *Ibad Al-Rahman* was established by Mohamad Omar Daouk¹ in 1949, with the idealistic aim of nurturing future generations imbued with the ethical teachings of the Prophet Mohamad (peace be upon him) (Ibad, 2022). While the central leadership of *Ibad Al-Rahman* resided in Beirut, there existed a noticeable divergence in the orientations of its secondary branch in Tripoli. Daouk, along with the Beirut branch of *Ibad Al-Rahman*, favored a non-political approach, prioritizing religious and humanitarian endeavors (Yousaf, 2010; Al-Jama'a, 2016; Abdul Ghani, 2006).

Conversely, the Tripoli branch, under the youthful leadership of Sheikh Fathi Yakan², wholeheartedly embraced political engagement, particularly following the 1958 Lebanese crisis. It was during this period that Yakan and his comrades in Tripoli began issuing statements pertaining to the state of affairs in Lebanon and the broader Islamic world, leading to a fracture between the northern faction of *Ibad Al-Rahman* and Beirut. Consequently, the establishment of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* was announced, originating from the northern regions of Lebanon (Yousaf, 2010; Al-Jama'a, 2016; Abdul Ghani, 2006).

Henceforth, even prior to the formal establishment of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon in 1963, Yakan and his comrades were actively engaged within the Lebanese landscape. *Al-Jama'a* initially capitalized on the prevailing Islamic Awakening that reverberated across the entire Muslim world. However, both the regional and domestic circumstances presented formidable challenges to the Islamic revival in Lebanon. In the midst of the Nasserist wave sweeping the Arab world and the persecution endured by the MB, particularly in Egypt, during the mid-20th century, Yakan and his compatriots in Lebanon made a conscious decision to adopt

¹ Mohamad Omar Daouk (1910 - 2006 AD), is a Lebanese Muslim preacher who founded *Ibad Al-Rahman* group in Lebanon in 1949 after Muslims defeat against Israel in the Nakba War. Daouk focuses on raising a Lebanese generation responsible for its religion and nation as a basis for the Islamic revival.

² Sheikh Fathi Yakan (1933- 2009 AD) was among the pioneers of the Islamic movement around the world since 1950s. He is the founder of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* and its leading ideologue and an MP from 1992 to 1996. He left *Al-Jama'a* and found *The Islamic Action Front*, in 2006 during the July war between Lebanon and Israel to confront sectarian strife after his political view differed from *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* view.

an alternative name—eschewing the moniker of the MB—and opting instead for "*Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*" or "The Islamic Group" (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009).

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya did not publish extensive treatises to disseminate its ideological tenets to the public. Rather, it disseminated concise pamphlets that reflected the principles espoused by the MB. The organization maintained a close affiliation with the MB, both in terms of its organizational structure and the teachings it imparted, which included studying their literature, attending their gatherings, and even organizing events such as the Executive Office Leaders meeting of the MB held in Lebanon in 1953 (Al-Jama'a, 2016).

Over time, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* underwent a process of gradual refinement in its ideology, which can be characterized as a "Lebanonizing" endeavor. While the initial pamphlets released by *Al-Jama'a* did not explicitly mention Lebanon, a significant shift in ideology occurred during the 1972 election when the movement extended its support to one of its leaders, the lawyer Mohamad Ali al-Danawi, who campaigned on the platform of advocating for equal rights between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon and vehemently opposing sectarianism (Al-Danawi, 1973). This marked a notable transformation in *Al-Jama'a's* ideological stance at that time.

The process of "Lebanonizing" further culminated in 2017, when *Al-Jama'a* organized a landmark conference under the banner of a "homeland vision," the first of its kind. Approximately 1,000 *Al-Jama'a* members participated in this conference, aimed at revitalizing the movement's vision and affirming its enduring principles. Notably, what set this conference apart was its public nature and official invitations extended to representatives across all levels of official and unofficial political leadership in Lebanon. This gesture emphasized a spirit of openness towards all Lebanese political parties, harmonious coexistence with state institutions, and the proclamation of a distinctly Lebanese-oriented program (Maarouf, 2017).

Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* garnered significant support during the Lebanese Civil War and preceding years, which enabled the movement to secure three parliamentary seats in the initial post-war election (two in the North of Lebanon and one in Beirut). However, subsequent to that election, *Al-Jama'a* encountered a multitude of challenges that impeded its progress (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). As a

consequence, *Al-Jama'a's* ability to secure more than one parliamentary seat has been elusive over the past three decades. In 1996, *Al-Jama'a* won a solitary parliamentary seat in 'Akkar (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017), followed by victories in 2009 (Itani, 2009b) and 2022 in Beirut (Fakhereddine, 2022). Conversely, the movement failed to attain any seats in 2000 (Kassir, 2005), 2005 (Yakan, 2009) and the 2018 parliamentary elections (Fadel, 2018).

The divergent outcome in Lebanon, compared to the MB's widespread popularity in other Arab countries during this period, is perplexing. Nonetheless, few studies have delved into examining the underlying causes. Consequently, this research endeavor aims to bridge this gap by investigating the factors contributing to *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's* inability to sustain and enhance its appeal within Lebanon. The analysis will primarily focus on *Al-Jama'a's* electoral performance (mainly parliamentary, alongside available data from municipal elections) Post-Lebanese Civil War, as the most viable means to gauge the movement's popular reception in Lebanon.

1.1 Literature Review

A dearth of scholarly literature exists regarding *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon, particularly when compared to other countries, notably Egypt. Written works pertaining to *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon have primarily focused on specific events or offered fragmented chapters and excerpts discussing Islamists in general, with only a handful of books concentrating on the pre-2000 period. Consequently, discussions revolving around Lebanon and Islamists tend to center on *Hezbollah*, as it stands as the most prominent Islamist actor within Lebanon. Furthermore, publications addressing *Al-Jama'a's* political performance and popularity have become increasingly scarce, with the majority of available literature predominantly delving into ideology and historical aspects.

Among the few notable English-language publications dedicated to *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* is Yousaf's master's thesis, which meticulously examines the history of *Al-Jama'a* up until 2000. Yousaf's research suggests that *Al-Jama'a* succumbed to the influence of Hariri, who was supported by Saudi Arabia, leading *Al-Jama'a* to become an "Islamist accessory" to Hariri's political agenda. Yousaf

argues that *Al-Jama'a* yielded to Syrian pressure during the war and failed to seek alternative external support, relegating the party to a secondary role within Lebanese politics. Nonetheless, *Al-Jama'a's* resilience amid such challenging circumstances and its ability to maintain its audience are noteworthy achievements in their own right (Yousaf, 2010).

Additionally, the two books published by Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations stand as crucial Arabic-language works on the history of *Al-Jama'a*, covering the period from its inception until 2000. The first book addresses the establishment of *Al-Jama'a* and its history until 1975, while the second book delves into the war period and the subsequent era until 2000, with a specific focus on the party's political endeavors. Itani et al., while acknowledging *Al-Jama'a's* affiliation with the MB, also highlight variations in its popularity across different districts, influenced by specific circumstances such as Syrian control over the Bekaa region, the Syrian invasion of the north, and the Israeli occupation of the south (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). Regarding the impact of the Civil War, Itani et al. contend that while *Al-Jama'a* benefited from the Islamic momentum generated by the Iranian revolution in 1979, the party was hindered in making substantial progress due to the war and the presence of *Hezbollah* (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

Towards the termination of the war, *Al-Jama'a* found itself lacking the leverage to secure a seat at the negotiation table. Nevertheless, it greeted the agreement that would bring an end to the conflict, thereby initiating a new chapter of engagement with Lebanese factions (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

Regarding electoral matters, Itani et al. underscore the success of *Al-Jama'a* in the 1992 elections, which can be attributed to several favorable circumstances. However, *Al-Jama'a's* leadership identified organizational challenges, Syrian dominance, electoral betrayals from alliances, and a concerted war waged against Islamists by those apprehensive of losing their positions of leadership or benefits within the sectarian Lebanese system as the primary causes of their subsequent failures. Nevertheless, *Al-Jama'a's* leaders maintained that the election results did not accurately reflect the appeal and support enjoyed by the movement, as demonstrated by their resounding victory in the 1998 municipal elections across numerous regions (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

Hamzeh, in his analysis, asserts that the Arab crises that gave rise to Islamic movements worldwide were compounded in Lebanon by the crisis of the Lebanese regime and the socio-political imbalance between Muslims and Christians. However, certain significant factors contributed to tempering the revolutionary fervor of *Al-Jama'a* within Lebanon, leading to their increased engagement in political activities. These factors encompassed the Taif Agreement, Syrian influence, and the moderation of the extremist wing in Iran during the same period (Hamzeh, 1997). Moreover, *Al-Jama'a's* pursuit of providing social services as a means to broaden its appeal signaled a growing pragmatism within its ranks, exemplified through various programs, projects, and alliances forged during the 1998 municipal elections, which emphasized economic reforms in Lebanon. Moussalli corroborates this perspective, emphasizing that *Al-Jama'a's* political participation following the Taif Agreement serves as a clear indication of their acceptance of the Lebanese republic and its legal framework (Moussalli, 1999). The outcome of the municipal elections validated the popularity of the Islamists and *Al-Jama'a*, in contrast to their previous performance in parliamentary elections (Hamzeh, 2000).

Furthermore, Al-Sayyed posits that the "Islamic boom" that emerged after the Nasserist era, which the MB capitalized on in various Arab countries, was overtaken in Lebanon by the Palestinian resistance and the Fatah movement, leaving *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in the shadows. Moreover, following the conclusion of the war, *Al-Jama'a* struggled to compete with Hariri within Sunni circles. After Hariri's assassination, the Future Movement assumed leadership of the remaining Sunni support base. *Al-Jama'a*, along with other Islamic factions, lacked an alternative vision or a charismatic figure capable of mobilizing the masses, and they also lacked an external patronage (Al-Sayyed, et al., 2011).

Abdul Ghani further contends that the Lebanese sectarian system, along with the adaptability of traditional leaders and authorities under different slogans, created obstacles and delayed the emergence of religious parties. According to Abdul Ghani and Al-Sayyed, the wave of Palestinian activism during the global Islamic awakening diverted the momentum away from the Islamists. However, the Islamic revolution in Iran, coupled with the Palestinian exodus from Lebanon, revitalized the Islamic movements in the country, particularly among the Shiite factions. Furthermore, Abdul Ghani emphasizes that *Al-Jama'a's* indecisiveness between "demarcation," as

espoused by Qutb, and "communication," as advocated by Mohamad Abdo, delayed its integration into society (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

Previous writings predominantly focused on the period preceding the assassination of Prime Minister (PM) Hariri, with only a few addressing the subsequent phase.

Regarding the decline of the Arab Spring and the mounting pressures on the MB, Iskandarani asserts that it will drive *Al-Jama'a* towards a more patriotic discourse, at the expense of a discourse directed towards the broader Ummah. The Arab Spring also prompted an internal reassessment and leadership renewal within *Al-Jama'a*. Iskandarani further contends that the movement's interaction and electoral success hinge on its actions, services, and programs (Iskandarani, 2018).

This evolving regional landscape propelled *Al-Jama'a* towards a period of rejuvenation by electing a young Secretary-General, as highlighted by Lefèvre, with the hope that he would steer *Al-Jama'a* towards growth and garner popular support without engaging in sectarian conflicts with *Hezbollah* (Lefèvre, 2016). Choukair also underscores the influence of the regional context on *Al-Jama'a*, its political interactions, and even its identity. In light of these circumstances, *Al-Jama'a* is now striving to safeguard its interests, much like Islamic minority groups, and function as a sectarian party that protects its constituents due to concerns over Iranian expansion. This stands in contrast to its earlier aspirations of spearheading a cross-sectarian reform movement (Choukair, 2015).

Furthermore, amid the tumultuous regional conditions following the decline of the Arab Spring, *Al-Jama'a* suffered defeat in the 2018 elections. Gade affirms that multiple factors contributed to this setback, including the dissolution of the alliance with the Future Movement led by Saad Hariri, son of the late PM Rafik Hariri, the electoral law, foreign interference in the electoral process, and the increasing influence of *Hezbollah*-affiliated parliamentarians. Internal challenges, such as internal and external positioning dilemmas, organizational issues, and the difficulty of persuading supporters to embrace new alliances such as the Free Patriotic Movement, also played a role according to Gade (2019). Regarding *Al-Jama'a's* engagement with the popular uprisings that unfolded in 2019, Choukair

asserts that *Al-Jama'a* perceived it as a beacon of hope for a new, non-sectarian Lebanon. Despite not explicitly participating in the protests due to the nature of the demonstrations and the memories of the Arab Spring in the collective consciousness of Islamists, *Al-Jama'a* earnestly supported the movement (Choukair, 2020).

The protests provided a shield for *Al-Jama'a* to navigate away from the pressures imposed by the Future Movement, while also granting its youth an opportunity to operate beyond the confines of organizational structures. However, *Al-Jama'a* failed to seize the moment to critically evaluate its organizational framework or expand its political sphere, which still remains comparatively limited in comparison to its social and civic endeavors (Choukair, 2020).

Furthermore, the protests exacerbated the strain in the relationship between *Al-Jama'a* and *Hezbollah*. With the decline of *Hezbollah*'s regional influence and in light of *Al-Jama'a*'s support for the Arab revolutions, the latter's rapport with *Hezbollah* has become increasingly inconsequential to the latter (Choukair, 2020).

1.2 Research Question

While numerous studies have focused on the MB and the broader phenomenon of political Islam, there remains a noticeable dearth of research investigating the specific experience of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the subject in greater depth. Rather than offering a generalized discussion of the party, the research will delve into the intricacies and complexities of the Lebanese context, addressing the following overlapping key questions.

How did the political and socioeconomic environment in Lebanon influence the electoral performance and appeal of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya after the Lebanese Civil War (1992-2022)?

How did organizational issues and political strategies adopted by Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya impact its performance and appeal in the post-Civil War period (1992-2022)?

What were the unique obstacles and challenges that Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya faced in Lebanon, distinguishing them from those encountered by sister organizations?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's* experience, shedding light on the multifaceted factors that have shaped its trajectory in the aftermath of the Civil War. Stated more precisely, the answers to the above questions will provide us with a gateway to understand the political appeal of *Al-Jama'a* and its electoral fortunes in the post-Civil War Lebanon.

1.3 Research Significance

It is crucial to recognize that the limited amount of research dedicated to this subject does not diminish its importance. Instead, this scarcity can be attributed to the tendency of scholars to focus on more prominent and widely acknowledged topics. In the context of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon, it has not gained the same level of recognition as other political parties in Lebanon or the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) parties worldwide. However, the unique circumstances surrounding *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon make it a distinct case that deserves thorough investigation precisely because of the Lebanese sectarian and fragmented political landscape of which it operates. Instead of reiterating research on the factors that contribute to the Brotherhood's popularity in other countries where it has emerged, it is crucial to delve into the reasons behind *Al-Jama'a's* lack of prominence. By examining its limited success, a more nuanced understanding for MB and Islamic movements can be achieved especially their performance and activism within a multi-sectarian system.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Research Strategy

To address the research gap and accomplish the research objective, a qualitative approach will be employed, for several compelling reasons:

1. The nature of the topic: Given the scarcity of literature on the subject, it is essential to conduct multiple interviews to gather comprehensive responses to the research questions. Open-ended questions will facilitate the exploration of new perspectives and insights. Hence, qualitative research is indispensable in this context, as opposed to quantitative methods.
2. Subjectivity and societal complexity: The research topic inherently involves human interactions and complex dynamics within Lebanese society. Consequently, qualitative research will enrich the study by capturing diverse perspectives and nuances that may not be captured by purely objective measures.
3. Exploring multiple causes and analyses: The aim of the research is to delve into the varied factors contributing to *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*'s political and electoral performance in Lebanon. Rather than seeking a singular, definitive cause through quantitative means, qualitative research allows for a more nuanced exploration of the subject matter.
4. Non-generalizability and non-comparability: The research undertaken does not aspire to generalize findings or make direct comparisons, as the context of Lebanon and *Al-Jama'a's* experience within it are unique. The focus is on studying the specific case, understanding and explaining it, and extracting insights and lessons, without seeking broad generalizations or direct comparisons.
5. Subjectivity and researcher perspective: Recognizing the inherent subjectivity of human nature and acknowledging that different interviewers may perceive the problem from distinct angles, the research adopts an ontological stance of constructionism and an epistemological stance of interpretivism. These perspectives respect the inherent subjectivity of human responses, acknowledging that complete objectivity may not be attainable.
6. Inductive approach: The research will employ an inductive approach, allowing for the discovery of insights and patterns through an iterative process of data collection and analysis.

By adopting a qualitative methodology, the research endeavors to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter at hand, accounting

for the unique complexities of the context and the diverse perspectives of the individuals involved.

1.4.2 Design Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, aiming to investigate a singular case within the constraints of limited time and resources. As a result, comparative, experimental, or cross-sectional designs, which demand greater effort and time and are commonly employed in quantitative research, are not suitable for this research endeavor. Consequently, the most appropriate design method for this qualitative single case study is the case study design, which is specifically tailored to comprehensively comprehend and elucidate a unique case. The design entails generating a multifaceted and profound understanding of a complex case within its authentic real-life context, primarily through the utilization of interviews and discussions. Nevertheless, to deepen the understanding of the perspectives of the selected group of interviewees and to clarify their responses to the preceding research questions we added a single closed question. It is worth noting that this questionnaire is not intended for generalization, given that the sample was selected by name from current or former leaders of *Al-Jama'a* and has a limited number of samples.

1.4.3 Method and Tool

- **Extrapolating from the existing data**

Prior to commencing the interview process, it is imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the intricate Lebanese system. A solid grasp of Lebanese history and the significant events that unfolded within the span of those decades is equally vital. Given Lebanon's entwinement within the realm of regional politics, it becomes indispensable to comprehend the contextual dynamics prevalent in the region during the specified period. Furthermore, a profound knowledge of political Islam and its intricate circumstances and impact on *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* is indispensable for this research endeavor.

This approach not only equips the researcher with the necessary insights to conduct robust and fruitful interviews but also enables the identification of the most appropriate interviewees.

It is important to note that this section deviates from a mere literature review, as its purpose is not limited to presenting a comprehensive analysis of *Al-Jama'a's* current status. The researcher will also draw from their previous knowledge regarding *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, encompassing past discussions with its members and leaders, as well as any articles previously authored concerning this movement.

As a result, the study will seamlessly advance, delving into a comprehensive understanding of *Al-Jama'a* encompassing its intellectual foundations, ideological tenets, and historical evolution, alongside its initial foray into the political landscape. This initial exploration will serve as a platform for further investigation into its electoral and political accomplishments in the post-war period. Subsequently, the research will meticulously probe the underlying backgrounds and causes that shaped the aforementioned performance across various stages after the war and more broadly. In this endeavor, the study will address diverse categories of factors, encompassing both internal dynamics and external influences.

- **Interviews**

Utilizing a qualitative approach, this research endeavor will employ a series of interviews. To commence, the researcher will meticulously examine and scrutinize pertinent literature and scholarly sources pertaining to the subject matter, thereby enabling the identification of optimal questions and interviewees conducive to addressing the research inquiries.

The interviewees encompass current and past leaders of *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon, esteemed researchers, and knowledgeable writers who have previously delved into the subject matter. Furthermore, the perspectives of *Al-Jama'a's* female members regarding the party's standing will be duly taken into account. (Details of the interviewees can be found in Appendix 2)

By adopting this methodology, a diverse array of responses will be elicited, thereby allowing the researcher to construct persuasive arguments and reinforce them with insights from experts and varying viewpoints within the organization. It is worth noting that a combination of open-ended questions and a closed-ended question will be employed to recapitulate the interviews and fortify the obtained answers. (Interviews questions can be found in Appendix 1)

1.5 Thesis Outline

- Chapter 1: Introduction
 - In the inaugural chapter, we delve into the main ideas of this study, accompanied by an examination of the preeminent scholarly works concerning the topic. Moreover, we expound upon the significance and methodology of our research endeavor, with a particular emphasis placed on upholding the principles of research ethics.
- Chapter 2: *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, History and Ideology
 - This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the inception and ideological evolution of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, tracing its historical journey from its inception to the present day. Furthermore, it examines the party's stance on significant Lebanese events that transpired prior to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War.
- Chapter 3: The Electoral Performance of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Post-Civil War.
 - The aim of the chapter is to examine the electoral performance, specifically the parliamentary elections, of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon to determine the reasons for its limited political role and presence, and to explore its popularity.
- Chapter 4: Behind *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* Electoral and Political Performance.
 - Largely based on interviews, this chapter analyzes of the factors that have influenced *Al-Jama'a's* electoral results, positioning, and political performance at significant events following the Taif Agreement.
- Chapter 5: Key Impediments Encountered by *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Its Political and Electoral Trajectory in Post-War Lebanon
 - In this chapter, we delve beyond the realm of specific events, particularly those of electoral nature, and embark on an exploration of the overarching external and internal obstacles

encountered by *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* subsequent to the Lebanese Civil War.

- Chapter 6: Conclusion
 - The concluding chapter incapsulates the study's main findings.

1.6 Ethical Issues

In this research involving human subjects, ethical considerations are of utmost importance. Adherence to ethical practices and standards is paramount throughout the study. The well-being and comfort of the interviewees are a top priority, ensuring they are not obligated to respond and are given ample time to answer. Questions will be asked politely, with careful selection, avoiding any undue pressure to influence responses. The interviewees will be fully informed about the researcher and the research nature, with the researcher available to address any inquiries.

Since it involved interviews, the approval of the university and Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been obtained before commencing the interviews. It is worth noting that ethical restrictions are not burdensome in this research as there is no funding with specific agendas. Disclosing comprehensive details of the research to the interviewees is unlikely to impede the study. The research is conducted under the auspices of a reputable university, aiming to provide space for interviewees to express their viewpoints and defend their arguments. As such, the interviewees are expected to readily and confidently engage in the process when the researcher clarifies the research particulars. Ethical restrictions do not pose substantial impediments.

CHAPTER TWO

AL-JAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA, HISTORY AND IDEOLOGY

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the emergence and ideological evolution of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, tracing its historical journey from its inception to the present day. Furthermore, it examines *Al-Jama'a's* stance on significant Lebanese events that transpired prior to the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War.

2.1 The Muslim Brotherhood, From Egypt to Syria

In 1928, Hassan al-Banna, an Egyptian educator born in 1906, founded the MB in Ismailiyah, near the Suez Canal, as a reaction to the disintegration of the Arab and Islamic world into multiple nation-states after the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate (Pirmoradian, Montazerolghaem, & Abdipour, 2019).

The MB aimed to resist westernization, propagate Islamic teachings, and apply Islam to all aspects of life, including the governing system, international relations, judiciary, economy, defense, education, and individuals' relations, with the ultimate goal of re-establishing Islamic dominance over people's lives (Tadros, 2012; Mellor, 2017). Al-Banna's ideas quickly gained traction and spread at a remarkable rate throughout Egypt and the Islamic world, with the MB establishing two thousand branches in Egypt alone, comprising more than 300 thousand members (Obeid, 2017). This widespread popularity extended beyond Egypt, with MB branches or movements with similar ideas emerging in various countries (Wickham, 2013; Nafi, 2017).

During this period, Sheikh Mustafa al-Sibai, a member of a renowned religious scholarly family from the city of Homs in Syria, was studying in Cairo, where he became familiar with the MB and Hassan al-Banna, leading to a friendship between them (Lund, 2013). Al-Sibai participated in many significant events with the MB while living in Cairo, including demonstrating against the British occupation and

supporting Rashid al-Gaylani revolution in Iraq, resulting in his arrest in 1941. After three months of imprisonment, he returned from Egypt to Syria (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

At the same time, several Islamic-oriented groups were active in Syria, campaigning against the French mandate. After Al-Sibai's return to Syria from Egypt, he met with a group of scholars who shared his Islamic views. They regarded Al-Banna and the MB as an inspirational movement, so they held several conferences to unify their efforts, resulting in the establishment of the MB in Syria as a separate organization, modelled after the Egyptian MB (Obeid, 2017; Teitelbaum, 2011). Mustafa al-Sibai was elected as the Secretary-General of the MB in Syria in a meeting attended by Saeed Ramadan from the MB in Egypt in 1942 (Al-Jazeera, 2014).

2.2 The Islamic Scene in Lebanon Before *Al-Jama'a* Establishment

In the early 19th century, while Islamic associations and Sufi groups were present in Lebanon, they were primarily focused on traditional religious practices and charitable activities, such as Al-Makassed, the Sunni main NGO (Deeb, 2020). Al-Najada Party played a significant role in Lebanon's independence in 1943, but later adopted a Nasserist orientation in the 1950s (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). Unlike in other parts of the Islamic world, there was no Lebanese organization calling for the dominance of Islam in all aspects of life, such as the MB, until the 1950s. This can be attributed to the fact that while the emergence of Islamic movements in the 1920s was a response to the abolition of the Islamic caliphate, the Lebanese were still debating the establishment of "Greater Lebanon" between Islamic rejection and Christian encouragement (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

2.3 *Ibad Al-Rahman*

The declaration of Israel on Palestinian territory in 1948, commonly known as *Al-Nakba*, was a catalyst for engineer and preacher Mohamad Omar Daouk to establish *Ibad Al-Rahman* organization (The Servants of the Merciful). Daouk posited that adherence to Islamic principles was an obligatory path to victory (Rabil, 2011). His presence in Jaffa during *Al-Nakba* energized him to return to Lebanon and

initiate an Islamic renaissance aimed at restoring Palestine. Through his persuasive rhetoric, Daouk attracted a substantial audience of notables in Beirut, leading to the recruitment of roughly 10,000 youths in the first year of *Ibad Al-Rahman's* establishment, an impressive feat in record time (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009).

In the 1950s, the influence of the MB had penetrated into Lebanon via a variety of channels, including the magazines "*Al-Da'wa*" and "*Al-Muslimoun*" from Egypt, "*Al-Shihab*" from Syria, and "*Al-Kifah al-Islami*" from Jordan, as well as visits to Lebanon by MB leaders (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). During that period, there was no clear differentiation between *Ibad Al-Rahman* and the MB (Al-Masri, 2022). As a result, a general conference of the MB was held in Bhamdoun-Lebanon, attended by the Brotherhood's general guide, Hassan al-Hudaybi, several Brotherhood leaders, and Mohamad Daouk (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). Mustafa al-Sibai, who represented the Brotherhood in Syria and Lebanon, also attended and spoke at the conference (Al-Masri, 2022). Al-Sibai had settled in Lebanon after being exiled from Syria by Colonel Adeeb al-Shishakli in 1952 (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). Al-Sibai's relationship with Mohamad Daouk was so close that he authored the *Ibad Al-Rahman* curriculum (Al-Masri, 2022).

2.4 *Ibad Al-Rahman* in Tripoli

During the early 1950s, a group of individuals, including Fathi Yakan, Abdel-Rahman al-Qassab, Mostafa Moussa, Medhat Balhous, Madih al-Shami, Hisham Qattan, and Saeed Shaaban, who would later become prominent members of the first generation of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, would meet at the *Makarem al-Akhlaq* organization in Tripoli to study the MB's publications (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). Meanwhile, Al-Sibai was frequently delivering public lectures in Tripoli, which had a profound impact on the youth at *Makarem al-Akhlaq*, and their relationship with Al-Sibai was quickly established (Al-Masri, 2022).

In addition, Al-Sibai introduced Yakan and his group to *Ibad Al-Rahman* and Daouk, resulting in Daouk visiting Tripoli multiple times to give lectures and meet with the group. Consequently, *Ibad Al-Rahman* established a branch and center in Tripoli in 1956 (Al-Masri, 2022). However, *Ibad Al-Rahman* group in the north of Lebanon differed from their counterparts in Beirut, as they focused on a wider

interpretation of Islam, engaging in political and military activism as part of their understanding of Islam. This stands in contrast to the *Ibad Al-Rahman* group in Beirut, who focused on teaching Islamic ethics and engaging in social welfare activities (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009; Rabil, 2011; Yousaf, 2010).

2.5 1958 Crisis and *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* Establishment

The schism between *Ibad Al-Rahman* in the north and Beirut deepened over time, culminating in a full separation during the 1958 crisis.

In 1958, Lebanese nationalists and Islamists found common ground in their opposition to President Camille Chamoun's attempt to involve Lebanon in the Baghdad Pact, which was viewed as a Western-inspired alliance that ran contrary to the Arab and Muslim orientations of the vast majority of the people of the region (Little, 1996). This conflict amongst the Lebanese population over the Baghdad pact constituted a principal cause of the "mini-Civil" War in which the country was roughly divided between Muslims and Christians. The northern branch of *Ibad* responded by establishing the "*Sawt Lubnan al-Hor*" (Voice of Free Lebanon) radio station, which became the voice of the Muslim faction in the conflict, and by training youth in Tripoli for military purposes (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009).

The northern *Ibad* group became deeply involved in the political and military conflict to the extent of manufacturing weapons. Consequently, Daouk terminated *Ibad Al-Rahman's* activism in the north and entirely separated the branch, as he opposed political and military engagement, favoring the dissemination of Islamic teachings among the youth instead (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009; Yousaf, 2010). Yakan outlined the indirect causes of the separation, stating that Nasser's popularity and his clash with the MB negatively impacted Islamists in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut, where Nasser had significant support. Daouk felt the need to match Nasser's stance, whereas the northern *Ibad* branch openly supported the MB. Furthermore, *Ibad Al-Rahman* in Beirut was highly influenced by Daouk's apolitical approach, whereas the northern *Ibad* branch was swayed by frequent visits from MB leaders to Tripoli (Lagha, 2012).

The northern group continued to engage in unofficial activism under different names due to financial difficulties after the separation and established an independent administrative office in Tripoli. They later chose to call themselves "*Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*" instead of the MB due to Nasserist pressure, as Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi³ argued. However, the group failed to obtain an official license until Kamal Jumblatt became the Minister of Interior and accepted their license request in 1964. *Al-Jama'a* then spread from Tripoli to all Lebanese Muslim districts and Palestinian camps in the 1960s and 1970s, before Hamas's emergence (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009; Yousaf, 2010).

2.6 The Ideology of Establishment

One of the most widely debated topics concerning *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, particularly in the context of Islamic movements in general, is their ideology. To trace *Al-Jama'a's* ideology, one can examine its publications, conference papers, the writings of its founder Fathi Yakan, and its actions, which constitute the most significant test and reflection of its beliefs.

In the initial stages of its formation, *Al-Jama'a's* ideology mirrored that of the MB and its leaders worldwide. *Al-Jama'a's* curriculum was, in fact, the MB and MB leaders' publication (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). *Al-Jama'a* disseminated its ideology through numerous publications, including "*Al-Fajr*" (The Dawn) magazine in 1957, "*Al-Tha'ir*" (The Revolutionary) in 1958, the pioneering "*Sawt Lubnan al-Hor*" (Voice of Free Lebanon) radio station in the north in 1958, and "*Al-Mujtama'*" (The Community) magazine in 1959. Officially established in 1966, "*Al-Shihab*" (The Shooting Star) magazine became the flagship publication of *Al-Jama'a*. During the Lebanese Civil War, *Al-Jama'a* launched "*Sawt al-Mujahidoun*" (Voice of the Warriors) radio station and "*Al-Jihad*" publications (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009).

Following the Lebanese Civil War, *Al-Jama'a* members established "*Al-Israa'*" radio station (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). However, "*Sawt Lubnan al-Hor*"

³ Faisal Mawlawi (1941 - 2011 AD), is a Lebanese Muslim preacher born in Tripoli. He held a number of judicial positions in Lebanon, He was *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's* Secretary General, succeeding Dr. Fathi Yakan from 1992 until 2009. He also spent years in Europe, established and managed a number of leading Islamic organizations. Mawlawi authored many letters, fatwas, and many educational and jurisprudential books, and won several Islamic awards.

radio station, which had already been operating in the north, was officially transformed into “*Al-Fajr*” in 2007 (after years of disputes over its licensing). “*Al-Aman*” (The Security) newspaper, which still operates today, switched to an electronic format recently (Al-Masri, 2022). Nevertheless, despite its extensive media presence, *Al-Jama'a* was unable to establish its own television station.

In its early days, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* expressed its ideology through a well-known pamphlet entitled “*Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya...Principles and Objectives*” (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). At that time, *Al-Jama'a's* message carried the MB's full ideology without even giving it a Lebanese character.

In this pamphlet, *Al-Jama'a* articulates its goals, which comprise delivering the call of Islam to people in a pure and contemporary context, organizing and educating those who respond to the call to Islam, confronting the challenge posed by Western civilization, building a new society wherein Islam is the equilibrium of individuals' actions, and uniting Islamic sects through the prism of Islamic principles (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016). *Al-Jama'a* expands on these objectives in other pamphlets, including “From the principles and objectives of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*” (*Al-Jama'a*, 2016) and “*Da'watouna*” (*Al-Jama'a*, n.d.). These publications reiterate the previous goals while also presenting additional key ideas. For instance, they promote Islam as a civilized message to the world, warn against sectarianism as a colonial weapon, reject state recognition of atheism, accept the recognition and coexistence of other religions. They also recognize the legitimacy of private wealth and protect the public one, fight corruption and corruptors, ensure the right people are in the right positions, safeguard workers' rights to adequate compensation and treatment, mandate military service for young people, and emphasize the role of women in society's renaissance.

Nonetheless, *Al-Jama'a's* primary focus remains on the global Islamic paradigm of combatting materialism, communism, capitalism, and occupiers, disseminating Islam worldwide, advocating for Islamic governance in all areas of countries' laws and people's lives, and promoting Islamic unity (Islamic Umma) (Abdul Ghani, 2006). In the 1950s and 1960s, *Al-Jama'a* centered on the Islamic intellectual debates against secularism, materialism, and communism. They focused on resisting Nasserist and communist thought, as well as nationalism. They were concerned on the plight of Muslims worldwide, including the Algerian revolution,

unity between Egypt and Syria, the Muslim revolution in Eritrea, the Suez War, and particularly supporting the Palestinian cause, which it considered pivotal. *Al-Jama'a's* proposals, like other active movements during that period, called for the universality of the message, disregarding national borders, and advocated applying Islam in each country as a precursor to Islamic Umma unity (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009).

2.7 The Sayyid Qutb Era

Yakan's writings in the 1960s and 1970s were heavily influenced by Sayyid Qutb, the prominent radical Egyptian Islamist thinker and activist. In a work titled "Hazha Houwa al-Tariq" (This is the path) (*Al-Jama'a*, 1965), Yakan drew inspiration from the renowned book by Qutb, "Ma'alim fi al-Tariq," both in terms of its title and its substantive content. This was considered by Abdul Ghani as "a coup against the foundational ideas" that advocated for accepting and respecting other ideologies (Abdul Ghani, 2006). Qutb believed that the Muslim community was in a state of Jahiliya (the period before Islam, also means ignorance of Islam), which was interpreted by many as "Takfir al-Mujatama" (Shepard, 2003). Despite this criticism, Mawlawi and *Al-Jama'a* insisted that *Al-Jama'a* rejects Takfir and focuses on "Calling to God", refusing to judge people. *Al-Jama'a* believes in social change starting from bottom to top. Furthermore, they refuted isolationism and stressed the importance of social integration (Iskandarani, 2018; Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009; Mawlawi, 1966; Mawlawi, 1973; Rabil, 2011).

2.8 The Lebanese Civil War Explosion: The Increase Lebanonization and Political Involvement

Starting in the 1970s, *Al-Jama'a* began to shift its focus towards Lebanese issues, driven by a desire to participate in parliamentary elections. Their parliamentary experience began in Tripoli in 1972, when they supported one of their leaders, the lawyer Mohamad Ali al-Danawi, as an independent candidate. Al-Danawi's campaign marked a change in *Al-Jama'a's* interests, as he emphasized the importance of achieving equality between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. He argued that the unequal distribution of rights and opportunities between the two groups is a fundamental issue that could lead to conflict. His speeches, titled

"Muslims in Lebanon are citizens, not subjects" (Al-Danawi, 1973), had a significant impact on Tripoli residents and were later compiled into a book of the same name (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Al-Jama'a, 2016; Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). As a result, Mohamad al-Danawi, won 4,192 votes - a significant achievement considering that a victory required approximately 8,000 votes (Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009; Yousaf, 2010). Also, Yakan's writings changed towards more realistic and humanitarian publications. Yakan's works after the 1970s emphasized the importance of being realistic, practical, and popular (Yakan, 1985; Yakan, 1998).

In 1975, the Lebanese Civil War exploded. Yakan and *Al-Jama'a* attributed the conflict to deep political and ideological causes. According to Yakan (1979) and *Al-Jama'a* Secretariat (n.d.), the root cause of the war was an ideological and moral crisis, which was further aggravated by materialistic and positivist systems that failed to address Lebanese issues and promote justice.

Moreover, *Al-Jama'a* highlighted the constitutional sectarian imbalance in Lebanon as the main political cause of the conflict. In its 1972 electoral campaign, *Al-Jama'a* stated that non-Maronites felt like second-class citizens in Lebanon. Constitutional powers were concentrated in Maronite positions, creating a social environment that promoted discrimination and sectarian tension. *Al-Jama'a* also emphasized that the Western attempts to end the Palestinian cause by striking the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon contributed to the outbreak of war (Secretariat, n.d.; Yakan, 1979).

Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's military training was significantly developed to the point where it was organizing weekly trainings for all members at fixed locations, which were led by officers with military experience. Additionally, all members of *Al-Jama'a* possessed a personal rifle (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). Despite this significant military training, *Al-Jama'a* did not play a prominent role during the Lebanese Civil War. While it founded "*Al-Mujahidoun*" organization, published the "*Al-Mujahid*" magazine, and participated in the Dinniyeh-Zgharta Military clashes to defend the north (Dinniyeh) against the "isolationists," as it described them (Secretariat, n.d.), the organization was dissolved with the Syrian forces taking control of most of the Lebanese territory at the end of the two-years war (1975-

1976). *Al-Jama'a* was generally satisfied with its defensive mission, without aiming for external support or financing (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

In 1976, the Syrian forces entered Lebanon after a request was submitted by the Lebanese president, Suleiman Frangieh (Lawson, 1984; Traboulsi, 2007). *Al-Jama'a* leaders were not significantly harmed during the two-year war, except for some detentions and kidnappings, which Yakan experienced twice. After his first kidnapping, Yakan was replaced by Faisal Mawlawi in leading the organization before Yakan was re-elected to the leadership in 1980 (Yousaf, 2010). Following the Hama crisis of 1982, Yakan was arrested and met with the Syrian President, Hafez al-Assad, during detention. Yakan succeeded in protecting *Al-Jama'a* from a clash with the Syrian regime (Lagha, 2012).

In the late 1970s, in conjunction with the broader Islamic revival, Islamist movements emerged in Lebanese Muslim neighborhoods. In 1982, Sheikh Saeed Shaaban, a prominent *Al-Jama'a* leader in the north, was deeply influenced by his visit to Iran and the ascendance of Islamic scholars following the 1979 revolution. Upon returning to Lebanon, he attempted to replicate this model, independent of *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Masri, 2022). Consequently, Shaaban united a number of small military factions in the north under his leadership in 1982, forming a new organization known as "*Al-Tawheed*" (The Unification) (Abbas, 2018).

That same year, Israel invaded Lebanon, causing Yasser Arafat and the PLO to withdraw from Lebanon. Moreover, Arafat tried to return to the Lebanese scene from its north, which exacerbating internal factional struggles among the Palestinians. This was particularly true in light of the escalating tension between Arafat and Al-Assad. Palestinian leaders and groups were divided between Arafat and Al-Assad supporters, with efforts to court Lebanese groups' support (Sahliyah, 1986).

At that time, Arafat searched for a Lebanese backing especially in the north. Yakan stated that Yasser Arafat had offered him a collaboration in exchange for the necessary logistics, financial support, and military assistance. However, both Yakan and *Al-Jama'a* declined the offer, refusing to become embroiled in the Arafat-Al-Assad conflict (Yakan, 1986). Arafat found what he was seeking in Shaaban, and

they collaborated closely, with Shaaban receiving significant support from Arafat. As a result, the *Al-Tawheed* Movement expanded and seized control of Tripoli.

However, as soon as *Al-Tawheed* gained control of Tripoli and declared it the "Islamic Emirate," disputes within the organization intensified, and Tripoli became a target of hostility for Al-Assad and his allies (Yousaf, 2010).

Between 1982 and 1985, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* endeavored to cooperate with *Al-Tawheed* movement, seeking to protect Tripoli from any conflict with the Al-Assad regime while maintaining its independence and abstaining from endorsing the actions of *Al-Tawheed*. Negotiations with *Al-Tawheed* took place repeatedly, though the ultimate outcome was not favorable to *Al-Jama'a*, as Tripoli eventually fell to the Syrian forces in September 1985 (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

On the other hand, during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, *Al-Jama'a's* youth organized secretly under the name "*Al-Fajr* Forces" and fought Israeli forces and their collaborators in Saida, culminating in the latter's eventual withdrawal from the city. *Al-Jama'a's* popularity surged in Saida as a result, and they continued to defend the city from the "Lahd Forces" in the east until the conclusion of the Taif Agreement, at which point *Al-Fajr* surrendered its positions and weaponry (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, however, was not a significant political entity in Lebanon after the war's end and did not play a role in the Taif Agreement, despite its support for the accord as a means of ending the conflict in the country. Throughout the war, *Al-Jama'a* presented several proposals for constitutional and social reform. Yakan similarly addressed Lebanon's social, economic, and political challenges and offered solutions that echoed those of *Al-Jama'a*, yet he concluded his book with a radical proposal for Lebanon's merger with a larger entity, such as the Levant, despite acknowledging the difficulty of such a move (Yakan, 1979).

Even within the War time, the process of Lebanonization did not stop. It was manifested in the formation of its Political Bureau in 1982, led by Ibrahim al-Masri (Iskandarani, 2018; Itani, Ali, & Manna, 2009). While *Al-Jama'a* had initially underscored the significance of political participation as a crucial part of its Islamic outlook, the formation of the Political Bureau signaled *Al-Jama'a's* heightened political interest and engagement.

2.9 The “Politicization” and “Lebanonization” Progress After the Civil War

Following the Civil War, *Al-Jama'a* participated in most of the election stations, and Yakan wrote three books defending the concept and practice of political participation (Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996). Yakan discussed *Al-Jama'a's* experience in parliament and how it interacted with other leaders, parties, and media, underscoring the rotation of *Al-Jama'a's* focus from excessive concern with Islamist general ideas and *Da'wa* to internal Lebanese political interaction.

Nonetheless, *Al-Jama'a* issued three main documents, in 2003 ("The Islamic Charter in Lebanon") (*Al-Jama'a*, 2003), 2007 ("The Islamic Document on Violence and Extremism, Nahr al-Bared Crisis") (*Al-Jama'a*, 2007), and 2010 ("The Political Vision of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon") (*Al-Jama'a*, 2010). In these documents, *Al-Jama'a* reiterated its values: refusing violence, calling for peace, emphasizing Islam as a comprehensive religion, and presenting *Jihad* in its broad sense, including "*Jihad* against the soul" and "*Jihad* against the Zionist enemy" simultaneously.

However, the third document was focused in its discussions of *Jihad*, "prohibition of evil," and terrorism, which were all left unmentioned in the previous documents. The concept of resistance also evolved from the first document, which focused on resistance outside the borders, to the Lebanese resistance in the second, and was more detailed in the third. The third document supported the idea of the "Army, People, and Resistance," while opposing the use of weapons inside Lebanon (Iskandarani, 2018).

Furthermore, during its general conference in 1998, *Al-Jama'a* proposed the establishment of a specialized political party, which was licensed under the name "*Al-Islah*" (Reform) Party. Although *Al-Jama'a* had yet to activate the party, the fact that it had obtained a political party license was viewed as a step forward in the direction of general politicization and “Lebanonization,” by adapting to the Lebanese environment and giving priority to issues and concerns of the Lebanese population especially the Sunni community in Lebanon (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

2.10 The Electoral Programs

In the post-war era, *Al-Jama'a's* electoral platforms were characterized by their generality and practicality, offering multiple pledges without adequate consideration of their feasibility. Furthermore, their electoral programs were often anchored in a religious perspective, which served as a significant catalyst for action and reform in the successive electoral programs. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that these programs have exhibited a gradual shift in tone, with an increasing emphasis on Lebanese issues at the expense of religious discourse (*Al-Jama'a*, 1992; *Al-Jama'a*, 1996; *Al-Jama'a*, 2000; *Al-Jama'a*, 2009).

2.11 “A Vision for A Country”

On May 14, 2017, *Al-Jama'a* held a major conference and introduced a new vision called "A Vision for a Country." This conference was unprecedented for *Al-Jama'a*, with roughly 1,000 members participating to revitalize the vision and reaffirm its constants. For the first time, many Lebanese political leaders, officials, and media, including the three presidents, former presidents, ministers, deputies, heads of parties, and representatives of countries and embassies, were invited to confirm openness and harmony with state institutions (Maarouf, 2017). During this conference, *Al-Jama'a* opted not to use its original logo, instead presenting a new one that did not contain the Quran and the sword (*Al-Jama'a*, 2017). In various interviews, *Al-Jama'a's* leaders did not conceal their desire to alter the logo. Given the inclusion of dual swords in the current logo, *Al-Jama'a* harbors concerns that it may inadvertently be interpreted as endorsing or embracing a violent approach (Iskandarani, 2018). The impact of the success of counter-revolutions in the Arab world, the decline of the MB, and the emergence of ISIS was evident in the new vision. *Al-Jama'a* attempted to focus more on Lebanese internal politics and distance itself from the MB. Thus, it established "A Vision for a Country" that reflects this view.

In terms of content, "A Vision for a Country" continued in the same vein as prior documents, emphasizing the basics. However, the terminology changed considerably in the new document to the point of not utilizing any Quranic verse or prophetic hadith for the first time. *Al-Jama'a* changed its definition from "An Islamic

ideological reform movement" to simply a "reform movement." It also did not mention any religious terminology, such as "forbidding evil," "*Sharia law*," or "*Jihad*." Additionally, in complete recognition of the Lebanese state, *Al-Jama'a* singled out an entire chapter for "the state," calling for a "constitutional, civil, and modern state" (*Al-Jama'a*, 2017; Iskandarani, 2018). In summary, this conference and the new vision were viewed as the pinnacle of *Al-Jama'a's* openness and Lebanonization.

In brief, *Al-Jama'a* has gradually transformed from a movement with complete Islamic, worldwide, and *Da'wa* interests to a Lebanonized political movement with considerably less interest in worldwide Islamic issues and *Da'wa*, at least in its publications.

2.12 Conclusion

From its inception, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* functioned as a branch of the MB. However, the organization underwent a significant transformation over the years, driven by various challenges and the pursuit of new interests. Gradually, *Al-Jama'a* shifted its focus from a single-minded emphasis on Islamic preaching, advocacy, and general Islamic issues to a more profound involvement in Lebanese politics, ultimately embracing complete "Lebanonization" as articulated in its most recent document, "Vision of a Nation". It is important to note that *Al-Jama'a's* youth were politically active even before the organization's formation, and this was a key factor in their decision to separate from *Ibad Al-Rahman*. However, their involvement in the 1958 actions arose from a general Islamic perspective, motivated by a desire to support the Arab-Muslim axis against the Western axis. An analysis of the organization's electoral programs and political activities reveals a declining interest in external and general Islamic affairs, accompanied by an increasing focus on internal Lebanese issues and a corresponding shift in discourse away from religious themes.

During the Lebanese Civil War, *Al-Jama'a* was involved in the conflict through two different organizations: "*Al-Mujahidoun*" in the early stages of the war, and later through "*Al-Fajr Forces*" in the 1980s. However, the organization's role in the war was limited, and its efforts were mainly focused on defensive missions.

Notably, *Al-Jama'a* contributed to the resistance against the Israeli invasion in 1982, but it did not play a significant role in the conflict as a whole. *Al-Jama'a* supported the Taif Accord as it brought an end to the war, but it was not an active participant in its formulation due to its relatively minor role in the War.

After the Lebanese Civil War, the political activism of *Al-Jama'a* increased. It actively participated in the first election following the Taif Accord. However, despite this initial involvement, *Al-Jama'a* faced consecutive electoral setbacks. In the following chapters, we will delve deeper into *Al-Jama'a's* electoral experiences, offering an analysis of its performance.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE OF *AL-JAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA* IN POST-CIVIL WAR

The objective of this chapter is to comprehensively investigate the electoral dynamics of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon. The main emphasis will be on examining its alliances, positioning, and outcomes in the elections that followed the Lebanese Civil War. Thus, a solid foundation can be established for analyzing the dynamics discussed in subsequent chapters, which are aimed at attaining a deeper understanding of the factors that have constrained the political influence, appeal, and presence of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*.

Unlike most of the Arab countries, which are organized as monarchies or dictatorships, the Lebanese political system provides for the transfer power through elections, neither by inheritance nor by coups. However, the Lebanese system is beset by various flaws that hinder the political choices of its citizens, including the sectarian political structure, corruption, and political clientelism (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015). This complex state of affairs confounds researchers in determining whether Lebanon can be classified as a democratic or non-democratic state (Guru, Krishna Puthiran, & Manikandan, 2017). Nevertheless, Consociationalism, as demonstrated by the Lebanese system, is considered a form of democratic Power-Sharing by definition (O'Leary, 2005; Baroudi & Salamey, 2011). Furthermore, the outcome of elections plays a significant role in shaping the country's political leadership and authority, and the Lebanese system provides the freedom of movement for parties and the press to operate (Parliament, 1926).

The political performance of Lebanese parties is a crucial factor in determining their popularity, as evidenced by the parliamentary elections. For instance, the Free Patriotic Movement is experiencing a decline in popularity, whereas its rival, the Lebanese Forces, is on the rise (Geukjian, 2016). Additionally, the electoral performance of the Lebanese Forces and the Shiite duo is increasing their role in the political arena. This clearly indicates that popularity in Lebanon can

be assessed through elections, and it is a malleable metric that is influenced by the political performance of the party. Also, the electoral popularity of a party, in conjunction with other factors, determines its role in local politics.

3.1 The Electoral Participation of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* After the Civil War (1990-2005)

After the Lebanese Civil War, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* decided to participate in parliamentary elections, which was met with some controversy among Islamist groups (Abbas, 2018). This controversy can be seen through the allocation of a significant portion of Yakan's election series books to justify the legitimacy and importance of electoral participation (Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996). In 1992, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* released a document titled "The Legal Justifications for Running the Electoral Battle" to further support their position (Yakan, 1996, p. 179).

Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi also responded to Lebanese sheikhs who opposed democratic participation and elections, such as Sheikh Hassan Qaterji and Subhi al-Tufayli (Yakan, 1996, pp. 157-165). *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* and Mawlawi provided several religious justifications for electoral participation, including opinions from past and present religious scholars. They considered it a crucial tool for *Jalb al-Masaleh Wa Dare' al-Mafased* (promoting interests and preventing corruption), calling people to Islam, and "*Al-Amr bl-Ma'rouf Wa al-Nahy 'an al-Monkar*" enjoining good and forbidding evil (Yakan, 1996, pp. 157-165).

However, the process of participating in elections within *Al-Jama'a* is a complicated procedure. Prior to running, approval must be obtained from the Shura Council. Subsequently, a referendum is held among the "Working Brothers," a distinguished rank within *Al-Jama'a*, to select a candidate for their district. The administrative office of the region then endorses the nomination and forwards it to the political office for confirmation. Finally, the endorsement is granted by the general office, which is the governing body of *Al-Jama'a* and is headed by the Secretary-General (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

3.1.1 The 1992 Parliamentary Election

The Parliamentary Election of 1992 was the first such election to take place in Lebanon since 1972. According to the Taif agreement, the number of parliamentary seats was increased from 108 to 128, divided equally between Muslim and Christian constituents (Khazen, 1994; Nohlen, Grotz, & Hartmann, 2001). However, due to the Syrian control over Lebanon after the Civil War, the absence of General Aoun, Amin Gemayel, and the incarceration of Samir Geagea, and the boycott by prominent Christian forces (Khazen, 1994), the voter turnout was recorded to be only 30.3% of the registered citizens (Khazen, 1994; Nohlen, Grotz, & Hartmann, 2001).

The electoral law in 1992 did not follow the principle of proportionality and registered lists were not adopted (Khazen, 1994; Nohlen, Grotz, & Hartmann, 2001). However, political parties resorted to forming alliances and exchanging votes as a means of securing victory in the elections. That year, the Syrian forces had a more relaxed grip, with the exception of Bekaa, which provided *Al-Jama'a* with an opportunity to participate (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). In Beirut, *Al-Jama'a* nominated Dr. Zouheir al-Obeidi, in Tripoli, Dr. Fathi Yakan, Asaad Harmoush in Dinniyeh, Engineer Anwar al-Khatib in Chouf, Sheikh Mohamad Saeed Saleh in West Bekaa, Mr. Mohamad Mashhour al-Soloh in Baalbek, Sheikh Abd al-Hakim Atwi in Rashaya, and Dr. Ali Ammar in the South (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Yakan, 1996).

The party did not form alliances with any other political parties except for some independents, and still managed to secure outstanding results (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017; Yousaf, 2010). In the North, Yakan won with 46,231 votes in Tripoli and Harmoush won with 38,208 votes in Dinniyeh. Al-Obeidi won in Beirut with 12,570 votes, surpassing PM Rashid al-Soloh, who secured 11,730 votes, where the impact of the Christian boycott was most significant (Yousaf, 2010).

Despite its lack of success in winning elections in certain regions such as Chouf, Bekaa, Rashaya, and the South, *Al-Jama'a* still managed to secure a substantial number of votes, totaling 44,977 for Ali Ammar, 4,881 for Mohamad Saeed Saleh, 3,937 for Anwar al-Khatib, 9,262 for Abd al-Hakim Atwi, and 1,819 for Mohamad Mashhour al-Soloh (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Yakan, 1996). In Bekaa, the

Syrian grip was strong, and the influence of families and clans, who had a history of providing services, was significant. Besides, in Chouf, the sectarianly mixed area with a significant Christian and Druze population, *Al-Jama'a* had yet to establish itself, and the nomination was under the name of "The Faithful Masses" (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

Al-Jama'a often took the position of opposition in parliament, consistently voting against Hariri government (1992-1998) due to corruption, clientelism, the unclear official stance regarding the war against Israel, and their reliance on foreign loans, which *Al-Jama'a* believed would be disastrous for Lebanon (Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996; Yakan, 1996; Yousaf, 2010).

3.1.2 The 1996 Parliamentary Election

On June 25, 1996, the Council of Ministers, under Syrian supervision, approved a draft election law that designated the four governorates of the north, Beirut, the south, and the Bekaa, as well as the six districts in Mount Lebanon, as electoral districts with the purpose of restrict opposition (Yousaf, 2010). Prior to the 1996 elections, the Syrian leadership held significant control over Lebanese political life and Damascus served as the central point of reference for competing lists. *Al-Jama'a*, however, faced challenges due to media campaigns that distorted its image, its inability to provide services comparable to PM Rafik Hariri, and its lack of effectiveness during its parliamentary experience. Furthermore, differences between *Al-Jama'a* leaders grew, as Hariri boycotted Yakan due to his controversial speeches and refusal to give confidence to Hariri's governments (Yakan, 2009), while Harmoush's relationship with Hariri flourished and he gave confidence to his first government. These differing perspectives towards Hariri were reflected in *Al-Jama'a's* alliances during the 1996 elections (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Yakan, 2009).

Prior to the election in the North, Yakan attempted to form a strong list of northern leaders, selecting individuals with standing and traveling to Damascus to meet with the Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam and General Hikmat al-Shihabi, the Syrian chief of staff, who was very close to Khaddam. Despite his efforts, Yakan did not receive approval from either of them. In the meantime, Hariri reached out to Yakan after a long hiatus and proposed an alliance with *Al-Jama'a* in the North, but Yakan insisted on aligning in all districts to benefit from Hariri

popularity in other districts especially Beirut. Under these circumstances, Yakan preferred not to run and did not submit his electoral papers (Yakan, 2009). As a result, two major lists were established in the North, the first being headed by PM Omar Karami, Suleiman Frangieh, and Issam Fares, while the second list was led by Ahmad Karami - the director of Tripoli Port (1973-1991), head of the National Youth Party and cousin of the current deputy Faisal Karami- and with Hariri's support. Yakan declined to ally with Hariri, yet Harmoush formed a partnership with Ahmad Karami securing three seats on the list for *Al-Jama'a*, in coordination with the Syrian regime (Abdul Ghani, 2006). In his final publication, Yakan referred to the alliance meeting between Harmoush, Mawlawi, and Hariri as "the catastrophic meeting," blaming it for their defeat (Yakan, 2009). Also, a few days before the deadline for candidacy, Mona Haddad, Yakan's wife, announced her own candidacy without consulting Yakan, leading him to decline running (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

In the wake of Yakan's departure, *Al-Jama'a*, which had relied heavily on Yakan's popularity, hastily replaced him with Mawlawi (Abdul Ghani, 2006). Mawlawi, who had been residing in Beirut for a prolonged period, was late to launch his electoral campaign (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). Moreover, unlike the previous election, there were numerous Islamist candidates in the district, including Mona Haddad, Yakan's wife, Mohamad Shandab, a member of *Al-Jama'a*, Da'i al-Islam al-Shahhal, a Salafist leader and head of the Guidance and Charity Association, Hassan al-Shahhal, a distinguished Salafi leader, and Ibrahim al-Saleh (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

In Beirut and Bekaa, *Al-Jama'a* once again nominated Dr. Zouheir al-Obeidi and Sheikh Mohamad Saleh respectively, however, they were unable to secure a coalition partners. In the south, *Al-Jama'a* re-nominated Dr. Ali Ammar and formed an alliance with *Hezbollah*. Meanwhile, in the northern Bekaa, Chouf and Arkoub, *Al-Jama'a* chose not to participate in the election (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

The election results were unfavorable for *Al-Jama'a*. Mawlawi received 54,610 votes, which was not enough to win as, approximately, 64,000 votes were required. The same applied to Harmoush, who obtained 54,140 votes. The only

candidate from *Al-Jama'a* who won was Khaled al-Daher in Akkar, with 52,364 votes (Abdul Ghani, 2006), and from a second round (Al-Hout, 2023).

In the other districts (Beirut, Saida, Bekaa), Al-Obeidi, Ammar, and Saleh received 19,102, 95,182, and 9,324 votes respectively, falling short of the required 48,000, 128,000, and 51,000 votes respectively, as *Al-Jama'a* was impacted by a higher voter turnout compared to the 1992 election.

3.1.3 The 1998 Municipal Election

In 1998, municipal elections were held the first time in 35 years, which made their value significant. *Al-Jama'a*, after having suffered a loss in the parliamentary elections that took place two years prior, considered the municipal elections as an opportunity to re-establish its popular presence (Hamzeh, 2000).

The political bureau of *Al-Jama'a* made a resolution to participate in the elections across the entirety of Lebanon. However, the nomination and alliance decisions were left to the regional offices and later to be approved by the political bureau. This decision was characterized by a considerable degree of freedom in alliances and a high degree of pragmatism, since *Al-Jama'a* allied with parties in some regions, while competing with the same parties in other regions, as a result of the decision-making being delegated to the regions (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

Al-Jama'a ran in the elections either alone or with close associates in Tripoli, Al-Qalamoun, Miniyeh, Dinniyeh, and parts of the Iklim al-Kharroub region. However, traditional forces such as Karami in the north, Hariri in various districts, and the Progressive Socialist party and family leaders in Iklim al-Kharroub sought to marginalize *Al-Jama'a* and exclude it from coalition alliances, or offered it small shares that it did not accept (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017; Yousaf, 2010).

In the regions of Bekaa and Akkar, where families play a Major role in determining candidacy and forming alliances, *Al-Jama'a* entered into family alliances as individuals rather than as party members. This was with the exception of Fnaideq and Benin, where *Al-Jama'a* formed its own party list, unlike in Baalbek, where it proved difficult for *Al-Jama'a* to participate in the elections. In Beirut and Saida, *Al-*

Jama'a joined coalition lists alongside Hariri and other parties. In these cities, *Al-Jama'a* felt that it had secured a proportionate share based on its size (Hamzeh, 2000). Contrary to the widespread belief that Islamist forces had weakened at the time, *Al-Jama'a* achieved noteworthy results in the elections. The party's five candidates were successful in Saida and one candidate in Beirut (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017; Yousaf, 2010).

In Tripoli, the independent list of *Al-Jama'a* and its Islamist allies managed to win a third of the municipality, outperforming Hariri's list, which won only five seats. *Al-Jama'a's* lists won in Qalamoun, the villages of Dinniyeh, Akkar, and Miniyeh, securing 231 seats and control of 17 municipalities in the north, compared to the competitors' 12 municipalities and 164 seats (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Hamzeh, 2000).

For the first time in Chouf, *Al-Jama'a* was able to defeat the Progressive Socialist Party in the largest municipalities of Iklim al-Kharroub (Chehim, Barja, and Ketermaya), as well as in other Predominantly Sunni villages in Iklim al-Kharroub. In Bekaa, *Al-Jama'a* was not as successful as in other regions, winning only five out of the 15 municipalities. Overall, *Al-Jama'a* achieved a major victory in the municipal elections in Sunni districts (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017; Yousaf, 2010).

3.1.4 The 2000 Parliamentary Election

The Often dubbed “Ghazi Kanan” electoral law was instituted prior to the 2000 parliamentary elections and it impacted the division of the North and merging districts. The North district was divided into two electoral circles: Akkar, Dinniyeh, Bsharri and Tripoli, Zgharta, Koura, Batroun. *Al-Jama'a* was among the parties significantly affected by the law. In accordance with the Syrian Regime’s wishes, *Al-Jama'a* joined the lists of the Baath Party, the Nationalist Party, and Issam Fares, with Asaad Harmoush as its candidate for the Dinniyeh district. However, Khaled al-Daher refused to withdraw from Akkar, leading to his dismissal from *Al-Jama'a*. In the elections, Ahmad Fatfat, Hariri's candidate outside the main list, emerged victorious with 56.6% of the vote, whereas Khaled al-Daher received 30.3% and Harmoush only 22.6% (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

In the second North electoral circle, *Al-Jama'a* joined the strongest list, which included prominent figures such as: Suleiman Frangieh, Najib Mikati, Mohamad al-Safadi, Saleh al-Khair, Ahmad Karami, and the representative of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, with Abdullah Babati representing *Al-Jama'a*. Although the list received support from Hariri, it lacked the backing of Islamic organizations. The main list faced opposition from Karami's list and his allies, along with a third weak list (Abdul Ghani, 2006). 13 candidates from the main list won with only 3 losses, including Babati. Harmoush believed that there was an unwritten agreement to support certain candidates instead of *Al-Jama'a's* candidate (Abdul Ghani, 2006; Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

The election law divided Beirut into three electoral districts. Rafik Hariri personally ran in the first district, while Tammam Salam ran in the second district in alliance with *Hezbollah*, facing Hariri's list. Salim al-Hoss, the PM, ran in the third district. *Al-Jama'a* nominated Al-Obeidi to run in the second constituency, but he could not join a strong list and instead formed an incomplete list with independent candidates. Al-Obeidi received only 1,807 votes, or 4.8% of the Sunni votes and 4% of the votes in the constituency. In contrast, Bassem Yamout and Walid Eido, who were Hariri's candidates, received more than 50% of the total votes and approximately 70% of the Sunni votes in the constituency (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

In the South, the election law merged the South and Nabatiyeh into one constituency, where the major parties agreed on a unified list, making the possibility of competition impossible. *Al-Jama'a* found itself outside these alliances and nominated Sheikh Ammar without any allies. As a result, Ammar received only 16,800 votes, including 5,886 from Saida, compared to the 182,193 votes received by Bahia Hariri, including 15,472 from Saida. In comparison to 1996, *Al-Jama'a* maintained its voter bloc in Saida, but lost its alliances. As for the Bekaa and Chouf, *Al-Jama'a* chose not to run due to the perceived impossibility of winning (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

In conclusion, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* ended the election without any parliamentary members.

3.1.5 The 2004 Municipal Election

The 2004 Municipal Elections did not differ significantly in terms of electoral strategy from prior elections. *Al-Jama'a* allowed the various districts to select their own alliances, which led to an inconsistent approach. Despite this, these elections saw a decline for *Al-Jama'a* compared to previous years, as it suffered significant losses in cities such as Tripoli, Saida, and several key villages in the north to the growing influence of Hariri (Abdul Ghani, 2006).

3.2 Prelude to the 2005 Parliamentary Elections: The Impact of the Assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri

The assassination of PM Rafik Hariri in 2005 and the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon were the result of a chain of political changes in the middle east and Lebanon (Blanford, 2006). The death of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in 2000 (MacFarquhar, 2000), the liberation of Lebanon from Israel in 2000 (Goldenberg, 2000), the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks (Jackson, 2021), and the President Emile Lahoud, Syrian regime ally, control of Hariri government pushing him to resign at 2004, created a highly tensioned environment in Lebanese political sphere. Furthermore, the escalation of the Christian opposition movement, as evidenced by the formation of the "Qurnet Shahwan Meeting," added to the political tension (Mirror, n.d.).

The conflict reached its zenith when Syria Orchestrated the extension of Lahoud's presidential term. In response, Hariri resigned from the government and the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1559 in September 2004, calling for free and fair elections without outside interference, the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon, the disbanding of all militias, and government control over all Lebanese territory (Gardner, 2009). This decision was interpreted as a demand for a full Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, which was supported by the Lebanese opposition. As a result, a series of meetings were held at the Bristol Hotel, attended by representatives of the Qurnet Shahwan Meeting, the Progressive Socialist Party led by Member of Parliament (MP) Walid Jumblatt and the Democratic Assembly, the Democratic Left Movement, Hariri's movement, and former army commander General Micheal Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement. The attendees demanded a fair

electoral law and an honest government to oversee the parliamentary elections in May 2005 (EU, 2005; Haddad, 2005).

As a result of the intensification of opposition from the largest Christian-Sunni-Druze movements and the threat posed by international decisions, a new political status was established in Lebanon in 2005. This change in the political landscape led to increasing tensions, culminating in the assassination of PM Hariri (Blanford, 2006).

Blame for Hariri's assassination was directed towards Syria, but its allies in Lebanon gathered in a massive demonstration to show their support and gratitude for Syria's efforts in Lebanon. This demonstration, which took place on March 8th, was attended by the political movements and leaders known as the March 8th political alliance. (Ali, 2019).

In response, those opposing Syrian control over Lebanon held an even larger demonstration on March 14th, calling for the departure of the Syrian troops and the truth behind Hariri's assassination to be revealed. These forces were known as the March 14th political alliance. As a result of these events, the Syrian military presence in Lebanon ended on April 26th, and Christian leaders and forces returned to the political arena following their absence since the Taif Agreement. General Aoun returned to Lebanon, Samir Geagea was released from prison, and there was increased sympathy from the Sunni public towards the Hariri family. The one-party policy represented by the Syrian regime was abolished, leading to ongoing political competition in Lebanon with heightened sectarian and political tensions, as well as a series of assassinations (Geukjian, 2014).

3.3 The 2005 Parliamentary Election

The elections were conducted in four stages and, despite the substantial dispute over the election law, the law remained unchanged due to the limited time available and the international community's insistence on holding the elections as scheduled. (Kireev, 2005).

During the election period, several prominent journalists associated with the March 14 alliance were assassinated, including the renowned journalist Samir Kassir

on June 2nd and the former Secretary-General of the Lebanese Communist Party, George Hawi, which escalated political and sectarian tensions (Kireev, 2005).

The election outcomes reflected the sectarian political landscape. Saad Rafik Hariri, who was seen as the political successor of PM Hariri, and his Future Movement, emerged victorious in the Sunni districts. Jumblatt won in his respective district, while the Christian March 14 alliance triumphed in the Christian districts, where the presence of Aoun was significant. Meanwhile, the Shiite regions were dominated by the Shiite duo. Despite this, the March 14 alliance emerged as the overall winner, and Saad Rafik Hariri was proclaimed as the new Sunni leader (Haddad, 2005).

Al-Jama'a, at a critical juncture, adopted a nuanced stance by refusing to implicate Syria in the assassinations, but calling for the resignation of the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud. Nevertheless, the motivation behind the staunch Sunni opposition to Syria was widely attributed to Hariri's assassination (Yakan, 2009). Following its participation in the pro-Syrian supporting "Ain al-Tineh" meeting, *Al-Jama'a* withdrew from the coalition and promptly demanded President Lahoud's resignation after the parliamentary elections (Al-Jazeera, 2005). Despite facing harsh criticism, *Al-Jama'a* abstained from aligning itself with or against *Hezbollah* (Abdel-Latif, 2008).

Citing the electoral law as the reason, *Al-Jama'a* chose not to participate in the elections, as it had failed to secure representation in the 2000 elections under the same law (Kassir, 2005). *Al-Jama'a's* unwillingness to run could be to the sharp polarization that characterized Lebanese politics, which it chose to remain detached from and adopt a stance that was seen by some as indecisive, and failed to garner widespread public support (Kassir, 2005).

Al-Jama'a opted to forgo participation in the elections and instead held a large gathering to celebrate the affiliation of 300 young men with their organization. This event served as a demonstration of *Al-Jama'a's* presence and strength, despite their absence from parliament since 2000 (Kassir, 2005).

Despite *Al-Jama'a's* stance against *Hezbollah*, they publicly affirmed their participation in the 2006 war (Abdel-Latif, 2008). After the July war, the Shiite duo

demanded additional government seats, which was rejected by PM Fouad Siniora. The duo's deputies resigned from the government, but *Al-Jama'a* refused to undermine Siniora and the government under the pressure of demonstrations. Their position in this context was clear: to not target and betray Siniora, and to avoid the resignation of the government (Al-Doubaysi, 2006).

In response to the resignation of the Shiite ministers from Fouad Siniora government, the government implemented two measures with the intent of undermining *Hezbollah's* control over Beirut airport. These measures entailed the dismantling of *Hezbollah's* communication network and the dismissal of an airport security official affiliated with the Amal movement. *Hezbollah* regarded these decisions as an affront to their resistance and in response, the organization's leader, Nasrallah, declared that they would use their weapons to defend themselves. This led to the deployment of *Hezbollah* militants and their allies to Beirut on May 7, 2008. Within a matter of days, the militants had gained control of Sunni West Beirut, causing the clashes to escalate and reach Mount Lebanon, a stronghold of the Druze community. Conflicts between pro and *anti-Hezbollah* forces also spread to Tripoli. This conflict resulted in over 80 deaths and the displacement of numerous residents from various regions (IGMEB, 2008).

The situation rapidly brought forth the specter of Civil War, especially as the confrontations had taken on a sectarian character, with tensions rising between Sunni and Shia, Druze and Shia, and Christians who were fearful of the situation. The conflict only came to an end on May 21, when the Lebanese parties reached a solution through Arab mediation in Doha, Qatar (MEJ, 2008; Nafea, 2008; Züfle, 2009). The agreement reached was a reflection of the balance of power on the ground, with *Hezbollah* obtaining what it wanted. The discussion of *Hezbollah's* weapons was postponed indefinitely, and they received the government representation they desired, granting them and the March 8 front the power to veto any government decision. Additionally, it was agreed to adopt a new electoral law, which divided Beirut into three constituencies and ended the presidential vacuum by electing General Michel Suleiman as the new president, effectively bringing the armed conflict to a close (NDI, 2009).

However, *Al-Jama'a* repudiated the actions of *Hezbollah* and its alliances on May 7, perceiving it as a “deviation from the resistance” in order to serve internal political objectives, which is prejudicial to the very essence of the resistance (Al-Jama'a, 2008). Additionally, during May 7 clashes, *Al-Jama'a* assumed the defense of the Aisha Bakar area in Beirut, where the *Al-Jama'a* and Dar al-Fatwa centers are located. *Al-Jama'a* deployed its presence in this area, surrounded it with its flags, and prepared to defend it. Nevertheless, an agreement was reached between *Al-Jama'a* and *Hezbollah* to abstain from attacking the aforementioned area to avoid any conflicts (Al-Hout, 2023). Moreover, *Al-Jama'a* took a defensive military stance in other regions such as Saida and Iklim al-Kharroub (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

3.4 The 2009 Parliamentary Elections

The Doha Accord put an end to May 7, 2008 confrontations, but it left a deep imprint on the hearts of the Lebanese people, particularly the Sunnis, which motivated them to rally around Hariri and March 14 on a sectarian basis, much like what happened after the assassination of Hariri's father (Nafea, 2008).

In 2009, *Al-Jama'a* aimed to nominate six members for different districts: Dr. Imad al-Hout in Beirut, Ali Ammar in Saida, former deputy Asaad Harmoush in Miniyeh-Dinniyeh district, head of the Islamic Medical Association Rami Dergham in the Tripoli district, Mr. Mohamad Hoshier in the Akkar district, and Sheikh Sami al-Khatib in Western Bekaa. *Al-Jama'a* was dealt a blow in 2009 with the sudden death of its founder, Fathi Yakan, and the illness of its Secretary-General, Faisal Mawlawi, which were consecutive setbacks for *Al-Jama'a* before the parliamentary elections (Al-Akhbar, 2009).

The aspirations of *Al-Jama'a* to nominate six candidates for the 2009 parliamentary elections were thwarted by the electoral law and prevailing tensions. The organization declined to oppose the Sunni majority and declined to align with the March 8 forces. The Future Movement proposed a compromise in which *Al-Jama'a* would receive a single seat in exchange for withdrawing all its candidates from the election. *Al-Jama'a* reluctantly accepted the offer with the refuse to withdraw from the north; thus, they continued running in the north solely (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023). As a result of this agreement, Imad al-Hout was the

sole representative of *Al-Jama'a* in the parliament, having been elected on Saad Hariri's list in Beirut (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017).

The results of the 2009 Beirut third district elections revealed that Saad Hariri received 78,382 votes, while Imad al-Hout received 75,954 votes, both on the same electoral list. Meanwhile, the first runners-up received 21,703 votes (LF, 2009). The outcome mirrored that of the 2005 elections, with the March 14 coalition securing victory, the Shiite duo and Jumblatt consolidating their control over their respective regions, and Aoun exhibiting formidable results (Haddad, 2010).

3.5 The Arab Spring

Al-Jama'a wholeheartedly supported the Arab Spring of 2011, which saw popular uprisings across the Arab world. The organization was optimistic about the potential for improved circumstances in Lebanon, especially after the MB's electoral victory in Egypt. Despite its enthusiastic support for the Arab revolutions, *Al-Jama'a* demonstrated wisdom and caution in its actions, declining to participate in the Syrian war or encourage military conflict in Lebanon. This stance led to criticism from Islamist groups, who accused *Al-Jama'a* of neglecting its duty to “support truth” in both Syria and Lebanon (Al-Arabiya, 2012).

The relationship between *Al-Jama'a* and *Hezbollah* experienced a decline following the assassination of Rafik Hariri, however it continued within certain parameters. This relationship faced a significant blow in May 7 and received its greatest challenge due to the vastly divergent positions towards the Syrian revolution.

However, *Al-Jama'a's* optimism was short-lived as the overthrow of President Mohamad Morsi in Egypt and the shift of the Syrian situation in favor of the regime led to the Arab regimes turning against the revolutionaries and labeling the MB as a terrorist movement. This had a detrimental impact on Saudi Arabia's relationship with *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon, particularly after King Salman's ascent to power in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Choukair, 2019).

Additionally, Islamists were subjected to multiple setbacks. *Al-Jama'a* was previously impacted by security and military incidents involving the Lebanese army and Islamic groups, such as the actions in Dinniyeh in 2000, the battle of Nahr al-

Bared with Fatah al-Islam in 2009 (Hassan & Hanafi, 2010). Ahmad al-Assir actions in 2012-2013 (Agency, 2017) the battles of Jabal Mohsen and Al-Tabbaneh (ARIJ, 2013), and the battles of the Lebanese army in Aarsal (Agency, 2017) These events damaged *Al-Jama'a's* image as an Islamist group.

On the other hand, since the Doha agreement, *Hezbollah* has dominated governments through a crippling third. Jumblatt recognized the changes and moved away from the March 14 camp (Salem, 2009), while Hariri left Lebanon for three years (2011-2014) announcing a new era for *Hezbollah* (Perry & Holmes, 2014).

In 2016, *Al-Jama'a* elected Azzam al-Ayoubi, for the first time in its history, as Secretary-General from outside the founding trio. In 2017, Al-Ayoubi presented the "Vision of a Nation" document in a massive conference, showcasing *Al-Jama'a's* significant openness and complete Lebanonization of the movement (Maarouf, 2017). Despite these efforts, *Al-Jama'a's* political status and role did not improve, but rather declined.

3.6 The 2018 Parliamentary Election

After a prolonged period of a vacant presidency, PM Hariri lent his support to Suleiman Frangieh of the 8 March camp while Samir Geagea backed Michel Aoun, the candidate of *Hezbollah* (Dagher, 2016). Consequently, Hariri negotiated an agreement with Aoun, which led to Aoun's appointment as President on October 31, 2016 (Abou Rahal, 2016). The arrival of General Aoun to the presidency, in conjunction with the success of Bashar al-Assad and *Hezbollah* in Syria, resulted in the agreement on a new electoral law that reflected the shifting balance of power both regionally and locally (Ali, 2018).

A significant milestone was achieved with the approval of a proportional election law for the first time in the country's history, replacing the previous nine majoritarian laws and better reflecting the representation of political forces in Lebanon. Nevertheless, the Lebanese parties limited this proportionality by increasing the number of districts to suit their interests (Elghossain, 2017). The law was approved in June 2017 and divided Little Lebanon into 15 districts, each with a sectarian hue, on the basis of hybrid proportionality and an additional preferential vote within a smaller district. Proportionality was further restricted by the electoral

quotient and preferential vote, which varied from one district to another, and was subject to a mathematical equation (Elghossain, 2017).

Before participating in the elections, *Al-Jama'a* had desired to form an alliance with the Future Movement, but it sought to secure three seats, which led to its widening of alliances after encountering difficulties in aligning with the components of March 8 as a result of sectarian tensions (Rizk, 2017). *Al-Jama'a* selected its candidates from various districts, including Imad al-Hout in Beirut, Bassam Hammoud in Saida, Sami al-Khatib in the Bekaa, Dr. Wasim Alwan in Tripoli, Asaad Harmoush in Dinniyeh, Mohamad Shadid in Akkar, and Youssef Jajieh in Miniye (Al-Samad, 2017).

Al-Jama'a delayed forming its alliances, and the Future Movement declined to offer more than one seat, which *Al-Jama'a* refused. Despite the prolonged negotiation, *Al-Jama'a* remained resolute in contesting multiple constituencies. It declined to ally with the Shiite duo (*Amal* and *Hezbollah*) but left the possibility open for an alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement (Khalil, 2018).

In the second North (Tripoli, Miniye-Dinniyeh), *Al-Jama'a* was late in weaving alliances, and find itself outside the strong lists (Khalil, 2018). Thus, *Al-Jama'a* formed a list with independents, which was rejected by Harmoush, who submitted his resignation as head of the political bureau and refused to run. In addition, Harmoush welcomed Saad Hariri and conducted a joint interview with him a few days before the elections, which was considered joining Hariri's electoral campaign against *Al-Jama'a* (Khalil, 2018).

In regards to the North (Akkar) and Saida-Jezzine, *Al-Jama'a* formed an alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement for the first time in opposition to the Future Lists. Meanwhile, in Beirut, a coalition was established with individuals closely associated with the Future Movement, and *Al-Jama'a* felt (after the election) that it had been betrayed. In the Bekaa and the Chouf, *Al-Jama'a* reached an agreement with the Progressive Socialist Party to support Socialist's party's candidates (Khalil, 2018).

However, *Al-Jama'a* faced a substantial setback in the elections. The electoral law with its preferential vote mandate required voters to select a single candidate,

thereby revealing the size of political parties and forcing them to rely solely on their own strength. In Beirut, Al-Hout was unable to secure more than 3938 votes, while the coalition as a whole only received 7475 votes. Similarly, in the North, *Al-Jama'a* in Tripoli obtained 2000 votes and the coalition achieved 4184 votes. In Saida, Hammoud got 3204 votes, whereas the independent candidate Abdul Rahman Bizri on the same coalition received 3509 votes. The Free Patriotic Movement leveraged these votes to increase the coalition's score. This pattern was repeated in Akkar, where *Al-Jama'a's* candidate obtained 5277 votes, and the Free Patriotic Movement benefited from these votes to elevate the coalition's score (Anon., 2018).

Despite this significant failure, *Al-Jama'a* did not experience a major change in its leadership and re-elected Azzam al-Ayoubi as Secretary-General and Imad al-Hout as head of the Political Bureau. However, Al-Ayoubi won by only one vote, which reveals the extent of the competition within *Al-Jama'a* (Choukair, 2020).

3.7 The 2019 Lebanese Protests

2019 marked a particularly trying period for *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, which had lost its parliamentary representation, was grappling with a lack of direction in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, was facing internal organizational issues, and was subjected to external political and financial blockade.

At that time, the October 17 uprising broke out. *Al-Jama'a* perceived this movement as a beacon of hope for a new, non-sectarian Lebanon and a chance to free the country from the grip of the March 8 forces. Despite the fact that *Al-Jama'a* did not explicitly participate in the movement owing to the sensitive nature of the protests and the legacy of the Arab Spring in the collective consciousness of Islamists, the organization hastened to lend its support (Choukair, 2020).

Al-Jama'a was present in Beirut and Tripoli, through the "Youth for Beirut" and "Youth for Tripoli" groups, which were particularly active in the early days of the revolution. The organization also had a noticeable presence in the revolutionary movements in Saida and in the protests in peripheral areas such as Arkoub and Bekaa. The movement provided *Al-Jama'a* with a degree of respite from the harassment by the Future Movement and opened up opportunities for its youth to work outside organizational frameworks. However, *Al-Jama'a* failed to seize the

moment to review its organizational structures or expand its area of political action, which remained limited compared to its social and political endeavors. Moreover, *Al-Jama'a* and the Islamists in general failed to leave a lasting impact on the revolutionary movement, unlike the Lebanese left organizations (Choukair, 2020).

It is noteworthy that the supporters of *Al-Jama'a* eagerly participated in the revolutionary movements without any preconditions, which underscores the patriotic inclination of the members of *Al-Jama'a*. This imposes additional pressure on the organization to reassess its plans to keep up with its members and supporters (Choukair, 2020).

3.8 The 2022 Parliamentary Elections

In 2018, the political and economic situation in Lebanon rapidly deteriorated as a result of the prolonged political turmoil in the country. The explosion at the port and the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic further exacerbated the economic and living crisis in the country, in the absence of a responsible political leadership and the resignation of the government.

During that time, attention was focused on the parliamentary elections as they were seen as a potential means to change the political and economic situation in the country. Meanwhile, *Al-Jama'a* was preparing for the elections with the hope of re-entering the political arena through the Parliament.

At 2022 elections, the electoral role did not change. However, suddenly Hariri announced its suspension of political action and call for electoral boycott.

On the other hand, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* announced firstly nine candidates for different regions, including Yahya al-Braidi in the northern Bekaa, Walid al-Louis in the Middle Bekaa, Ali Abou Yassin in Zahle-Western Bekaa, Bassam Hammoud in Saida, Mohamad Ammar al-Chamaa in Chouf, Imad al-Hout in the second Beirut, Mahmoud al-Sayyed Dinniyeh, Mohamad Hoshier in Akkar, and Azzam al-Ayoubi in Tripoli (Al-Ayoubi, 2022).

In Beirut, *Al-Jama'a* engaged in negotiations with PM Siniora, however, no agreement was reached. In the north, the organization formed a coalition with

businessman Ihab Matar and others (Al-Ayoubi, 2022). In Chouf-Aley, after failing to reach an accord with various political parties, *Al-Jama'a* established its own list (Lebanon24, 2022). In the Bekaa region, *Al-Jama'a* entered into an alliance with the Progressive Socialist Party (Fawaz, 2022). In Saida, *Al-Jama'a* withdrew its support and at the last-minute endorsed candidate Youssef al-Naqib (Al-Mayadeen, 2022). The organization also withdrew its candidates in Akkar, West Bekaa, and North Bekaa.

Al-Jama'a encountered difficulties in forming alliances, as it was forced to navigate between revolutionary groups that rejected it and political parties that it rejected in turn. As a result, *Al-Jama'a* chose to only ally with the Progressive Socialist Party in the Bekaa, while declining to ally with the March 8 forces. The unexpected movements of PM Hariri further hindered the process of forming alliances, which caused *Al-Jama'a* to be ill-prepared for the elections (Fawaz, 2022).

Compared to the 2018 election, *Al-Jama'a* experienced significant improvement in their results. In Beirut, the organization emerged victorious, securing 7,362 votes for Al-Hout, However, Al-Chamaa received 5119, Al-Ayoubi received 4569, Al-Sayyed received 2271, and Abou Yassin received 2928 votes, respectively without being able to win (Fawaz, 2022). Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* has embarked on a new chapter, as they have already begun preparations for the internal elections scheduled to take place in the latter half of the current year (Fakhereddine, 2022).

Table 1- Number of Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya won seats and their location in every parliamentary election after Taif agreement.

Parliamentary Election	Number of Seats Won	Districts of Winning Candidates
1992	3	1 Seat (each from Beirut, Tripoli, and Dinniyeh)
1996	1	Akkar
2000	0	-
2005	0	-
2009	1	Beirut
2018	0	-
2022	1	Beirut

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*'s electoral performance in the post-war era. Although in the 1992 elections, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* successfully won three seats in parliament, it was unable to replicate this success in subsequent elections. While *Al-Jama'a* managed to secure a parliamentary seat in three different instances, it failed to do so in two other sessions. Additionally, there was one election where *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* decided to boycott the electoral process. Moreover, these varied outcomes will be further examined and analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

Explaining The Electoral and Political Performance of *Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiya* in Post-Civil War Lebanon

This chapter aim to explore the reasons behind *Al-Jama'a's al-Islamiya* electoral and political performance and positioning after the Lebanese Civil War from an insider view. It will delve into *Al-Jama'a's* performance within the context of the main Lebanese political event during the post-Civil War period, while examining the underlying reasons for variations in its electoral performance across different Lebanese parliamentary elections and districts. Additionally, this chapter will shed light on *Al-Jama'a's* relationships with significant political actors during various periods spanning from 1992 to 2022.

As mentioned earlier in the preceding chapters, there exists a scarcity of information regarding *Al-Jama'a's* performance during this particular period, with a notable dearth in comprehensive analyses. Consequently, this chapter, along with the subsequent one, rely on interviews conducted with *Al-Jama'a's* leaders and experts on the subject, aiming to bridge this significant gap in knowledge. Accordingly, the analysis presented herein will be an amalgamation of the perspectives and insights of both *Al-Jama'a* leaders and recognized experts in the field.

To reiterate, based largely on interviews, this chapter analyzes of the factors that have influenced *Al-Jama'a's* electoral results, positioning, and political performance at significant events following the Taif Agreement.

4.1 The Factors Influencing *Al-Jama'a's* Electoral Performance After the Taif Agreement

All of the interviewees concurred that *Al-Jama'a* achieved a remarkable outcome in the 1992 elections, albeit noting that this was not its inaugural foray into parliamentary elections. This favorable outcome resulted from a variety of factors, including the integrity of the elections and their independence from the Syrian regime's directives, except in specific regions (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-

Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Moreover, the internal cohesion of *Al-Jama'a*, the transparency of its Islamic message (Al-Khatib, 2023; Othman, 2023), the solidarity of the Islamic factions with *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023), the Christian boycott, especially in Beirut (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023), and the advancement of the Islamic movement since 1972 when it enjoyed a favorable electoral experience (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023), all contributed to the success of the movement. The Islamic Awakening of the seventies and eighties, which manifested itself in the 1992 elections, also played a significant role in this regard (Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023).

It is worth noting that the 1992 elections witnessed the emergence of a new generation of voters who had not experienced the Lebanese political divisions prior to the Civil War and who sought out well-organized and anti-corruption movements. Consequently, the Islamic movements were an attractive option for a important segment of first-time Sunni voters (Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Furthermore, at the end of the Civil War, there was no Sunni reference point with an unchallenged presence at the national level (Othman, 2023).

In parallel, *Al-Jama'a's* institutions in various regions were continually evolving and integrating with the community (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023). Additionally, *Al-Jama'a* benefited from the expanded constituencies in the North, low voter turnout even among Muslims, and its resistance to Israel in the south, which constituted a crucial attraction factor for Islamic factions (Dandashli, 2023; Kassir, 2023). Kassir also highlighted the caliber of *Al-Jama'a's* representatives at the time, who were influential and renowned figures in their regions, such as Sheikh Fathi Yakan in the north (Kassir, 2023).

Al-Jama'a's 1992 legislative election experience marked its first entry into parliament, characterized by a tension between the idealism embodied by Yakan and the pragmatism represented by Harmoush (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Dandashli, 2023;

Othman, 2023). *Al-Jama'a* proved effective in parliament in terms of introducing laws, monitoring proposed legislation, and holding the government accountable, with Dr. Al-Obeidi, for instance, being particularly noteworthy (Al-Khatib, 2023; Najem, 2023). However, this was insufficient for *Al-Jama'a's* supporters. *Al-Jama'a* struggled with the entrenched political system post-Civil War, which was based on quotas, political funding, and regional backing (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). MPs' primary responsibility shifted from the legislative domain to the provision of services (Al-Khatib, 2023; Najem, 2023), which *Al-Jama'a* was unable to provide (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023).

Moreover, one of *Al-Jama'a's* challenges was the emergence of PM Rafik Hariri, one of the cornerstones of the new regime, with substantial regional and international ties, considerable financial resources, and sharing the same Sunni sect, and hence the same primary target audience as *Al-Jama'a* (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Hariri was able to amass great popularity, particularly in the Sunni regions. While all political factions were striving to appeal to the public by providing services and public employment, *Al-Jama'a* failed to do so (Al-Khatib, 2023). Dandashli, on the other hand, emphasized that *Al-Jama'a* faced a range of security challenges that affected it during that period (Dandashli, 2023). Furthermore, Najem argued that democratic change necessitates a parliamentary majority, and even blocs with ten or fifteen deputies face considerable difficulties in effecting change. Therefore, it is hard to imagine the situation for three deputies outside (Najem, 2023).

Al-Jama'a's decline, primarily in terms of elections, can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including its failure to secure more than one representative in the parliamentary sessions of 1996 and 2000, as well as in a second round (Al-Hout, 2023). The party's inability to deliver on its grand electoral promises (Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023), as well as its increased scrutiny from the ruling powers and Syrian leadership, ultimately limited its presence in the Lebanese political sphere after 1992 (Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). The decline of *Al-Jama'a* occurred simultaneously with the emergence of the

post-sectarian system and the Syrian regime's supremacy, which regulated the electoral legislation, affiliations, and distribution of parliamentary seats (Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). This political landscape led to a considerable political and electoral hindrance against *Al-Jama'a* throughout the years, as Al-Khatib points out. Consequently, *Al-Jama'a* was subjected to severe constraints. *Al-Jama'a* was prohibited from providing services, obtaining administrative positions, participating in power, building robust alliances, and launching successful electoral campaigns. Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* was subjected to campaigns of Islamophobia and vilification, which targeted Islamic movements (Al-Khatib, 2023). This however was not unique to Lebanon, other branches of the MB in Arab countries such as Egypt and Syria were subjected to even stronger repressive measures.

Al-Ayoubi also notes that *Al-Jama'a's* insistence on being present in the Lebanese parliament led it to form “crude and unappealing alliances, which were not accepted by its audience”. The party's audience held it to a higher standard of religious purity, making it difficult to evaluate it like other parties. This resulted in a rift between *Al-Jama'a* and its base (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Moreover, differences in opinions within *Al-Jama'a's* leadership, ranging from excessive realism to excessive idealism, greatly affected the party's alliances (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Othman, 2023). Additionally, the Islamic community experienced a significant number of splits, leading to the dispersion of the Islamic voice, as some Islamic associations, who had previously considered elections *Haram*, began nominating candidates (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Othman, 2023). Even within families, splits occurred, with disagreements arising between Yakan and his wife, which had repercussions on both the party and the Sunni Islamic community (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Othman, 2023).

Kassir also notes that the increase in polling rates after 1992 led to Christians returning to vote, further complicating *Al-Jama'a's* position. Ultimately, the confusion and disarray experienced by the party led other parties to abandon it in 2000 and distance themselves from allying with it (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Nevertheless, MP Khaled al-Daher argued that the problem lay within *Al-Jama'a*, blaming the formed alliances and *Al-Jama'a's* willingness to be a follower, which caused it to lose support. Al-Daher accused *Al-Jama'a's* leadership of harboring excessive eagerness to secure parliamentary representation, even at the expense of sacrificing "*Al-Jama'a's* dignity." He steadfastly contended that in the year 2000, *Al-Jama'a* had initially consented to join Karama's electoral list but subsequently reneged on the agreement and opted for a single seat from another list, selecting Harmoush over him—an action that ran counter to the established decision-making process within the organization.

Ammar and Mawlawi, on the other hand, assigned responsibility for the electoral losses during this period to a combination of factors. They identified the election law, *Al-Jama'a* and the Islamic forces, and the lack of respect from other parties towards their alliance with *Al-Jama'a* as contributing factors. They also acknowledged the existence of a conspiracy against *Al-Jama'a* orchestrated by the security services. However, they did recognize *Al-Jama'a's* internal responsibility, which Yakan emphasized as the primary cause of *Al-Jama'a's* electoral failures (Yakan, 2009).

Additionally, Al-Obeidi attributes *Al-Jama'a's* loss of seats after 1992 parliamentary election to three factors: internal financial conditions, alliances that failed to uphold their commitments to *Al-Jama'a*, and the contentious "war" waged against the Islamist parties (Itani, Itani, & Sa'adah, 2017). Hammoud, Najem, Al-Khatib and Othman also contend that *Al-Jama'a* did not decline in popularity but rather electorally, as evidenced by its significant municipal results in 1998 and the expansion of its institutions in the 1990s (Al-Khatib, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023).

4.1.1 *Al-Jama'a* Relationship with Main Powers

During this period, *Al-Jama'a* had a strained relationship with Dar al-Fatwa. Lebanese Mufti Mohamad Qabbani sought to distance *Al-Jama'a* members from Dar al-Fatwa institutions, but *Al-Jama'a* always aimed to foster a positive relationship With Dar al-Fatwa (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). In terms of *Al-Jama'a's* relationship with PM Hariri, our interviews yielded mixed views. While some considered him influential,

Choukair and Al-Hout believed that Hariri did not directly impact *Al-Jama'a*, but rather the so-called post-Taif regime, including regional sponsors and local players such as Rafik Hariri, had a more significant impact on *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Hout, 2023; Choukair, 2023). This regime transformed *Al-Jama'a* into a more localized entity, which had a profound effect (Choukair, 2023).

In contrast, *Al-Jama'a* had a normal and even good relationship with *Hezbollah*, especially concerning coordination on the resistance front, but this relationship was eventually strained due to *Hezbollah's* support for the Syrian regime during the latter's withdrawal from Lebanon (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). While *Hezbollah* was able to continue playing the resistance card, *Al-Jama'a* failed to capitalize on this strategy after 1992 (Dandashli, 2023; Kassir, 2023). Nonetheless, Najem argues that *Al-Jama'a's* resistance was still present, but resistance was monopolized after Taif (Najem, 2023).

4.2 Electoral Performance in the Post-Rafik Hariri Era

The assassination of PM Rafik Hariri in 2005 marked a pivotal moment in Lebanese politics since the Taif agreement, which relied on Syria's international mandate to sponsor Lebanon. The Lebanese parliamentary elections took place only three months after the assassination, which *Al-Jama'a* decided to boycott. According to our interviewees, two main reasons influenced *Al-Jama'a's* decision: sectarian tension and polarization following the assassination, which implicated Syria, and the fact that the elections used the same law as the previous one, in which *Al-Jama'a* had failed to win any seats. Moreover, the most prominent political forces at that time held “the quadripartite agreement”, which predetermined the competition in several circles, particularly those with an Islamic majority, making it challenging for *Al-Jama'a* to form beneficial alliances (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Kassir added that the return of the Christian forces at that moment further complicated the situation (Kassir, 2023).

However, Al-Hout, Dandashli, and Al-Khatib believed that this decision was a mistake because political candidacy aims not only to win seats but also to increase political presence and engage with people. Thus, *Al-Jama'a* could have presented a

different project during the elections, redirecting people's compass in a rational way and using its campaign to promote this project, creating an interactive relationship with the public (Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023). Also, Hammoud believes that the decision had no internal consequences for *Al-Jama'a* because it was made within *Al-Jama'a*'s Shura institutions (Hammoud, 2023).

4.2.1 The 2009 Parliamentary Elections

The political climate in Lebanon during the period between 2005 and 2009 was characterized by a series of intense political events, during which *Al-Jama'a* was absent from parliament since 2000, which relegated it to the periphery of the political scene (Dandashli, 2023).

In the aftermath of the sectarian clashes in May 7, 2008, sectarian tensions reached a boiling point, leading to a highly charged political environment during the 2009 elections. *Al-Jama'a* was able to secure a seat in parliament through Imad Al-Hout, but this achievement was deemed insufficient by its supporters (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). According to Kassir, *Al-Jama'a* aligned itself with the March 14 alliance, a decision that he considered a mistake and contrary to Yakan's vision. Kassir argued that *Al-Jama'a* could have directed the street towards a non-sectarian direction, but instead, it sided with the "March 14 American Project" (Kassir, 2023). However, the other interviewees rejected Kassir's assertion as unrealistic, given the political climate at the time. Their view was that *Al-Jama'a*'s primary concern was to preserve the balance of the country and the unity of its environment (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Najem, 2023). The actions of the March 8 alliance were highly provocative to the environment of *Al-Jama'a*, with many pointing fingers at Syria for the series of assassinations that occurred at that time, especially the assassination of PM Rafik Hariri, which had a significant impact on the Sunni community. The May 7 actions further exacerbated the sectarian conflict, with "the March 8 alliance invading the neighborhoods of Beirut" (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Al-Ayoubi, who served as the president of the Political Bureau, stated that he searched for any decision by *Al-Jama'a* to join March 14 but did not find any. He believed that the rapprochement with March 14 was only the result of the

impressions and stances of a few *Al-Jama'a* leaders and a general popular atmosphere (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). Given the tense atmosphere, *Al-Jama'a* found it difficult to form an alliance with the March 8 alliance (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023), which would have been viewed as a "popular betrayal" and could have had a detrimental effect on *Al-Jama'a's* presence in its nurturing environment (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Regarding allegations that *Al-Jama'a* complied entirely with Saad Hariri's wishes and only accepted one seat, Al-Ayoubi, Al-Hout, and Najem argue that this is not the case. They maintain that *Al-Jama'a* engaged in negotiations with Hariri and secured additional candidates, including Harmoush and Dergham as independents, in Saida and Beirut (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Najem, 2023). However, Hariri declined to ally with *Al-Jama'a* outside Beirut (Al-Ayoubi, 2023), and *Al-Jama'a* sought to distance itself from Hariri by continuing its candidacy in the north independently (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023). Despite this, Dandashli claims that *Al-Jama'a* withdrew its candidates in Saida, Iklim al-Kharroub, and Bekaa to support Hariri's candidates and that Hariri evaluated *Al-Jama'a's* candidates in various regions, even before reaching an agreement on the Beirut deputy seat. Dandashli further contends that *Al-Jama'a* failed to maneuver effectively, as it committed all its resources to a single direction from the outset (Dandashli, 2023).

According to Hajj Chehadeh, *Al-Jama'a's* mistake was in limiting its political involvement to parliamentary work. This resulted in an internal evaluation of *Al-Jama'a's* success based solely on the number of parliamentary seats it acquired, which generated a sense of frustration (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

4.2.2 2009-2018

According to Al-Hout, being a part of Parliament is crucial for any political party as it grants them access to the political arena. He cites his own role in the 2011 crisis and the appointment of PM Tammam Salam as evidence of the importance of parliamentary involvement. Al-Hout believes that parliamentary representation also provides political parties with institutional legitimacy and immunity in the Lebanese political system (Al-Hout, 2023).

According to Dandashli, distinguished parliamentary experience characterizes Imad al-Hout's time in parliament. Al-Hout worked diligently in committees and questioned the government on numerous occasions (Dandashli, 2023). However, Hajj Chehadeh, Dandashli, and Najem argue that *Al-Jama'a's* representative's focus was solely on parliamentary work, neglecting popular work that could have contributed more to the party's success (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Najem, 2023). Hajj Chehadeh and Najem contend that people viewed the representative as a "transaction auditor" (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Najem, 2023). Additionally, Al-Hout acknowledges that his huge effort was not enough. Nevertheless, his position as the sole *Al-Jama'a* representative in parliament created obstacles that made it difficult to achieve the party's expectations (Al-Hout, 2023). Kassir and Dandashli suggest that *Al-Hout* was acting as a member of the Future Bloc, a surprising claim to Al-Hout (Dandashli, 2023; Kassir, 2023), who refused to give confidence to any government, including Hariri's, and opposed their decisions most of the time (Al-Hout, 2023).

Furthermore, between 2009 and 2018, Lebanon underwent numerous political transformations, such as the fragmentation of March 14, the Saudi-Syrian agreement, Hariri's visit to Syria, Hariri's three-year departure from Lebanon, and the rise of "Sunni frustration" with the Arab revolutions' retreated after initial success, and the election of Aoun as president. Despite these transformations, the size of *Al-Jama'a's* political role remained constant, according to Dandashli (Dandashli, 2023).

During this period, the Future Movement witnessed a decline following Hariri's departure from Lebanon, and *Al-Jama'a* failed to step up and fill the resulting vacuum in the Sunni arena. According to Al-Ayoubi and Hammoud, this was not the primary aim of *Al-Jama'a* as it recognized that Hariri's role was too significant for it to assume without having regional backing (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hammoud, 2023). Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* and other political Islam movements suffered in the aftermath of the decline of the Arab revolutions (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023).

Both Al-Hout and Othman emphasized that *Al-Jama'a's* financial constraints and the dominance of capital owners and political powers in the media prevented it from effectively marketing its project to the people. Kassir, Hajj Chehadeh, and Al-

Hout added that filling the Hariri vacuum required mass action mechanisms that were different from the elite organizational mechanism employed by *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023). According to Al-Khatib, there are two additional reasons. The first reason, which he considers to be the least important, is the internal factors within *Al-Jama'a*. This particular period was especially noteworthy due to the transition that occurred between the founding generation, and the new generation that took on the mantle of leadership. The second reason is the dispersion of Sunnis after Hariri's departure and the entrenchment of various Sunni factions, which are unwilling to allow any party to take the leadership of Sunnis after Hariri (Al-Khatib, 2023).

4.2.3 2018 Elections

In 2018, a new electoral law was implemented for the parliamentary elections, adopting a proportional law with small constituencies and one preferential vote. The law negatively impacted *Al-Jama'a*, which experienced it for the first time, and was designed to be highly restrictive for the nonruling political parties. Also, *Al-Jama'a* faced external pressures (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Furthermore, unlike *Al-Jama'a's* decision, Harmoush refused to run for the elections and welcomed PM Saad Hariri prior to the elections in his home, which appeared as support in the face of *Al-Jama'a* at a time when the party was nominating a new candidate in Tripoli (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). *Al-Jama'a* believed that Harmoush would be their lever popularly and politically due to his long experience and political presence in the north (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Al-Hout adds that one of the main reasons for the loss in 2018 was *Al-Jama'a's* "semi-traditional electoral campaign" as if the law didn't change, except in Beirut, where victory was close (Al-Hout, 2023). Othman and Kassir emphasize additional issues such as the inability to present mass and popular figures that constitute an electoral lever for the party with the preferential vote law (Kassir, 2023; Othman, 2023).

However, Hajj Chehadeh, Kassir, and Dandashli all argue that *Al-Jama'a* committed an error in relying on an alliance with Hariri until the last minute, which caused a significant delay in preparations for the elections. It is worth noting that *Al-Jama'a* required time to train its members in the new electoral law (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023).

On the other hand, according to Hammoud, the alliance between *Al-Jama'a* and the Free Patriotic Movement was intended to break the political blockade that *Al-Jama'a* faced. The goal was successfully achieved, as Hammoud reports (Hammoud, 2023). Al-Hout also confirms that the 2018 parliamentary elections were the first instance of *Al-Jama'a* running independently without the support of its traditional allies, who typically bear the high costs of running campaigns (Al-Hout, 2023).

Hajj Chehadeh considered the loss of the 2018 elections as a major blow that was unexpected for *Al-Jama'a*. However, Kassir, Hammoud, and Al-Hout considered it a positive development towards expanding the party's margin of independence and its ability to control its decisions away from alignments and external pressures and besieging (Al-Hout, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023).

4.2.4 The October 17 Protest Movement

The October 17 movements provided an opportunity for *Al-Jama'a* to regain public attention and relevance after its absence from parliament. Al-Ayoubi, Al-Hout, Al-Khatib, and Hammoud noted that on the first night of the movement, the political bureau of *Al-Jama'a* met and made the decision to participate without using its name. Despite *Al-Jama'a's* strong presence in all regions by an organizational decision, the movements' interest was to refrain from announcing its participation to “prevent politicization and maintain its purity” (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Hammoud, 2023).

In several regions, such as Akkar, Tripoli, Barja, and Saida, Hajj Chehadeh confirmed that *Al-Jama'a's* youth were the main drivers of the movement (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). However, *Al-Jama'a* largely failed to capitalize on the movement due to various reasons, despite Kassir's emphasis on its importance as a step towards Lebanonization and focus on local issues (Kassir, 2023).

Hajj Chehadeh considered that *Al-Jama'a* did not believe in itself that it could play a major role at this stage and considered itself part of the ruling parties (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). As for Hajj Chehadeh and Dandashli, *Al-Jama'a* did not know exactly what it wanted and how to market it (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). Hajj Chehadeh gives an example of a single meeting that was not repeated to discuss how to benefit from the popular movement and says that *Al-Jama'a* could have strengthened the role of its youth who are active in the revolution, but it did not (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Dandashli asserts that *Al-Jama'a* failed to respond to the revolution by promoting new leaders and giving more prominence to its youth. This lack of responsiveness prevented the organization from renewing itself at a time when the public was seeking change (Dandashli, 2023). Despite this, *Al-Jama'a* was hesitant to fully engage with the movement, fearing that it would be exploited and politicized by various factions (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Moreover, the prominence of certain individuals and groups in the revolution and its aftermath was not a result of spontaneity, but rather, it was part of a calculated plan that relied on external funding and support (Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Othman, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023).

Kassir highlights the notable weakness of *Al-Jama'a's* public and media tools, which hindered the organization's growth at all stages (Kassir, 2023). Meanwhile, Al-Ayoubi concludes that the nature of certain movements, such as leftist parties, is more suited to the revolutionary atmosphere compared to *Al-Jama'a's* reformist approach, which is more active in stable environments. Additionally, it was difficult to convince a significant portion of *Al-Jama'a* to participate in the revolution alongside individuals who did not share *Al-Jama'a's* exact ideals (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

4.2.5 The 2022 Parliamentary Elections

In the 2018 elections, *Al-Jama'a* withdrew or was expelled from its alliance with the ruling political forces, a matter that was further emphasized in the 2022 parliamentary elections. While the movement provided additional momentum for *Al-Jama'a* to distance itself from the ruling parties, Al-Hout contends that *Al-Jama'a*

sought to form alliances with “like-minded independents when possible”, taking into account electoral considerations, though this was deemed impractical and unattainable (Al-Hout, 2023).

According to Al-Ayoubi, the Lebanese state of change faltered and regressed, failing to bring about significant change in the country, thereby forcing *Al-Jama'a* to strike a balance between its electoral interests and the direction of change (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). This is particularly difficult given that many of those who “showed” hope for revolution and change do not share *Al-Jama'a's* values or political affiliations due to their external connections and moral decay (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023).

In the 2022 elections, *Al-Jama'a* attempted to broaden its circle of candidates to include various Islamic forces under the banner of “The Reform candidates”. However, this effort was unsuccessful, according to Hajj Chehadeh, due to the failure of Islamic associations to play a role, whether by presenting significant political figures for candidacy or in electoral campaigns, leaving the responsibility solely on *Al-Jama'a* in all regions (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Once again, as is customary in every election cycle, *Al-Jama'a* has encountered various challenges. The first of which is the division of electoral law constituencies, which ultimately divided its votes. Additionally, the movement suffered from financial (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Othman, 2023) and external constraints (Al-Khatib, 2023), which made it difficult to launch an effective electoral campaign. Also, *Al-Jama'a* prioritizes ethical principles in its alliances, leading it to forsake certain electorally beneficial alliances that do not align with its moral values (Al-Khatib, 2023).

Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* experienced a delay in establishing its electoral machine, settling on nominations and alliances, and had a limited understanding of the law in some districts, which made it difficult to choose the preferred allies and attract votes (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023).

Aside from the aforementioned obstacles, Hajj Chehadeh points out that *Al-Jama'a* has yet to emerge from the effects of the coronavirus, the 2018 elections, and general Sunni frustration. As a result, it was difficult for *Al-Jama'a* to establish a

robust electoral campaign (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023), particularly given that *Al-Jama'a* does not have a vast private political audience. It has acceptance from a broad audience, but it requires more interaction with the public long before the elections to secure their vote (Othman, 2023).

Overall, Al-Hout and Al-Khatib regards the outcome in Lebanon as “good”, with *Al-Jama'a* obtaining 25,000 preferential votes "without any other parties' favor ". Nonetheless, *Al-Jama'a* could have had more than one representative (Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023).

Al-Hout attributes his victory in Beirut to an unconventional electoral campaign, intensifying mini-discourse with the public, adopting it as a method of communication, the public's familiarity with *Al-Jama'a* as an independent political player in Beirut, given that this is the second time *Al-Jama'a* has run with independents, *Al-Jama'a's* good reputation among Lebanese seeking a representative who is not part of the ruling class, the absence of PM Hariri, and the people's need for an institutional and impartial alternative (Al-Hout, 2023).

Concerning the North, Al-Ayoubi acknowledged that *Al-Jama'a* did not succeed, but it achieved a better result than expected. Analysts predicted that it would receive a maximum of 3,000 votes in the district. However, *Al-Jama'a* won 8,000 preferential votes for its candidates in a district filled with Sunni leaders where other lists spent millions without winning any seats (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

In regards to Iklm al-Kharroub, the election results were considered favorable and the number of votes was deemed satisfactory. This could be attributed to various factors such as *Al-Jama'a's* historical presence in the region, which had not been expressed since the 1992 elections, its alliance with independent candidates, effective individual promotion due to existing social cohesion, and its strong service and institutional presence in the various villages of the area (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Othman, 2023).

However, *Al-Jama'a* faced difficulties in finding a strong alliance in Iklm al-Kharroub region and did not have enough time to promote its young candidate, who had no prior political experience (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

In the Bekaa region, Al-Khatib considered the results to be positive after an absence of over 20 years from candidacy. Deviating from political participation could result in a loss of popular support and limit the number of votes from those affiliated with *Al-Jama'a*. Additionally, the nature of the law and district divisions compelled *Al-Jama'a* to participate in alliances that were not favored by its supporters in the Bekaa (Al-Khatib, 2023).

Concerning Saida, the alliances that provided *Al-Jama'a* opportunities to win were not satisfying to its audience in the region, leading to the organization's decision to withdraw. However, Hammoud believed that this decision was not the best course of action (Hammoud, 2023). In other regions, the law mandated that *Al-Jama'a* not run due to the absence of the possibility of winning (Najem, 2023).

On the other hand, Dandashli asserted that *Al-Jama'a* inadequately handled the management of the electoral process, resulting in evident flaws. These shortcomings ranged from the selection of candidates to the management of alliances and commitments to multiple lists simultaneously, practices that *Al-Jama'a* was unaccustomed to. Furthermore, the candidates themselves were responsible for overseeing the electoral dossier. It is worth noting that a considerable number of *Al-Jama'a's* candidates in Lebanon, such as those in Saida, Akkar, the northern and southern Beqaa, withdrew from the elections in favor of the leadership of the electoral file. *Al-Jama'a* also continued to participate in Iklim al-Kharroub with a hesitant approach, neglecting serious efforts to secure a robust ally. Dandashli added that *Al-Jama'a* success in Beirut and Tripoli was facilitated by the absence of PM Hariri (Dandashli, 2023).

Dandashli contended that if *Al-Jama'a* desires to assume a prominent role in the Sunni arena, it must not acquiesce to being a mere appendage of a single candidate's list, who practically assumes leadership of the list. He questioned the wisdom of an age-old political party being a candidate on a list of a political newcomer in Lebanon. He further postulated that with the recent internal elections and proposals of each of the two leaderships, it is uncertain which direction the voter ultimately supported (Dandashli, 2023).

On the other hand, Al-Ayoubi remarked that those conversant with *Al-Jama'a* recognize that the party is governed by institutions rather than individuals, and cannot be swayed from its fundamental tenets (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). Echoing the same sentiment, Al-Hout reinforced the importance of *Al-Jama'a's* institutions (Al-Hout, 2023). Conversely, Kassir underscored that *Al-Jama'a's* new leadership presents an opportunity for the party to augment its ties with the resistance axis, which could prove to be pivotal for its future achievements (Kassir, 2023).

4.2.6 *Al-Jama'a* Relationship with Main Powers

Regarding *Al-Jama'a's* relationship with the resistance axis, Al-Ayoubi notes that it is not a recent development, but rather it began when he assumed the position of General Secretary. At that time, it was decided that continuing the boycott of *Hezbollah* would only exacerbate sectarian tensions in Lebanon and potentially lead to conflict, particularly with the changes in Syria and increasing regional conflicts. This led to the opening of communication channels between *Al-Jama'a* and *Hezbollah* to prevent sectarian strife, even if no agreement was reached (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Hajj Chehadeh and Al-Hout caution that the relationship with *Hezbollah* is subject to political calculations and should be handled rationally (Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). Al-Hout clarifies that while there are points of agreement, there are also points of disagreement with *Hezbollah* (Al-Hout, 2023). Furthermore, Al-Ayoubi acknowledges that some agreements in the region necessitate engagement with *Hezbollah* in certain areas (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

As for *Al-Jama'a's* relationship with Islamic forces, Kassir notes that *Al-Jama'a* has recently shown interest in rekindling its electoral relationship with these forces after years of neglect (Kassir, 2023). Al-Ayoubi emphasizes that *Al-Jama'a* maintains an excellent relationship with Dar al-Fatwa and has always sought to foster this relationship. However, the new Mufti, Sheikh Abdul Latif Darian, has been particularly keen on strengthening this relationship (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

4.2.7 *Al-Jama'a* in the Peripheral Districts

Throughout this period, it is notable that *Al-Jama'a*'s electoral attention was primarily focused on Beirut and the north. The majority of the individuals whom we interviewed agreed that the electoral law was a central issue for *Al-Jama'a*, as evidenced by its choice of candidates and alliances in these regions (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Choukair, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). Dandashli emphasizes that due to the majoritarian laws, which prohibit the selection of only one or two seats, *Al-Jama'a* preferred to contest seats in the capital, or the north where its founders are based (Dandashli, 2023).

Najem emphasized that *Al-Jama'a* was active in the villages of Al-Arkoub, despite being prohibited from having a parliamentary presence by the law. Even during the boycott in 2005, *Al-Jama'a* was highly visible and directed people in the region towards "the development vote". *Al-Jama'a* refused to succumb to the impossibility of winning under the existing law and instead worked effectively to benefit the region (Najem, 2023).

In the region of Iklim al-Kharroub, apart from the electoral law and the ensuing discussions, Othman cites various reasons for *Al-Jama'a*'s reluctance to participate in elections from 1992 to 2022. These include apprehensions about inevitable defeat, a desire to obtain political gains from the elections, or at the very least, minimize damages in the region such as supporting the Socialist Party for fear of the March 8 alliance in 2018. Othman further argues that peripheral regions like Iklim al-Kharroub and Bekaa have suffered from marginalization and were therefore used as bargaining chips. Internal disputes have also affected *Al-Jama'a* in the region, and it did not have mass leaders prepared for confrontation in a region controlled by long-established parties (Othman, 2023).

Regarding Saida, Hammoud explains that *Al-Jama'a* faced challenges with the electoral laws and forming alliances, in addition to its belief that serving the community was a religious and moral obligation that it did not need to politicize. The general Islamic atmosphere in Saida faces political interests and pressures and also

grapples with certain Islamic ideas that continue to debate the prohibition of participating in elections (Hammoud, 2023).

4.3 Conclusion

It is evident that the electoral and political performance of *Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiya* is subject to the influence of local and international factors. Moreover, *Al-Jama'a's* own performance and the specific intricacies of each event play a significant role, with discernible variations observed across different regions.

Having examined *Al-Jama'a's* performance and its contextual background in each event during the post-Civil War period, the subsequent chapter aims to draw comprehensive conclusions regarding *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's* experience and the impediments that hindered its ability to assume an elevated political and electoral role. These conclusions will be informed by the insights gleaned from this chapter and *Al-Jama'a's* engagement in each event.

CHAPTER FIVE

KEY IMPEDIMENTS ENCOUNTERED BY *AL-JAMA'A AL-ISLAMIYA* IN ITS POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL TRAJECTORY IN POST-WAR LEBANON

This chapter aims to present the principal hurdles that impeded *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* ability to secure a more substantial number of parliamentary seats and assume a more influential political role within the Lebanese arena. This chapter thus delves beyond the realm of specific events, particularly those of electoral nature, and embark on an exploration of the overarching external and internal obstacles encountered by *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* subsequent to the Lebanese Civil War. The obstacles discussed here are based by and large on the interviews with *Al-Jama'a* leaders, while also encompassing the insights of a selected group of analysts who have observed *Al-Jama'a* up and close. However, this chapter offers the interviewees vision to overcome these obstacles.

The obstacles can be classified into two distinct categories: firstly, the external challenges that *Al-Jama'a* faces, which are beyond its capacity to alter, such as the intricate Lebanese and International systems; and secondly, the internal obstacles that pertain to *Al-Jama'a* itself, such as its organizational structure.

5.1 External Obstacles

Since its inception, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* has encountered various challenges. The country's hybrid sectarian and factional composition, marked by internal interests and external dominant parties, has been a significant barrier to *Al-Jama'a's* success (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Othman, 2023). This nature has also led to the domination of sectarian instincts over people's political choices, limiting *Al-Jama'a's* reach (Al-Hout, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Othman, 2023). Sectarian laws, which distribute political and electoral positions based on sects, have also hindered *Al-*

Jama'a's ability to represent more than one-third of the population (The Sunnis) (Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). Moreover, a portion of the Sunni sect population is hostile towards the Islamic discourse, making it even more difficult for *Al-Jama'a* to gain momentum (Al-Hout, 2023).

Lebanon's political freedom is also questionable. Although Lebanon is free from the dictatorship of an individual, it is plagued by the dictatorship of the ruling parties (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Khatib, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). Furthermore, as pointed out by Choukair, politics in Lebanon lacks organization and rules, adding to the complexity of the political landscape. The absence of a clear political field and the chaotic environment in Lebanon give regional powers the most influence (Choukair, 2023).

Moreover, *Al-Jama'a's* lack of depth and support from neighboring countries poses a significant challenge. Unlike the Future Movement, *Al-Jama'a* lacks Saudi support, and unlike *Hezbollah*, it does not receive Iranian support. Additionally, it does not receive support from Syria, as was the case with the Amal Movement (Choukair, 2023). Al-Khatib affirms that *Al-Jama'a* not only failed to garner external support, but was also subjected to a protracted siege that persisted throughout its journey. *Al-Jama'a* was precluded from establishing a foothold in state administrations, which other political factions heavily relied upon to acquire political prominence (Al-Khatib, 2023).

In addition, the Lebanese political parties have heavily relied on external funding and financial support to secure political loyalty, perpetuating nepotism and political clientelism. This practice has opened the door for political parties to gain power through regional support, a share in the state, and abundant resources. Consequently, people have been affected by these waves of corruption and have succumbed under clientelist pressure, seeking government services and job opportunities in companies controlled by major political parties or influenced by politically-funded media (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023). In contrast, *Al-Jama'a* has consistently refused external support to preserve the independence of its decision-making (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023).

On the other hand, regional politics have played a detrimental role in *Al-Jama'a's* interests. *Al-Jama'a* has suffered from the negative impact of the Syrian presence in Lebanon prior to 2005, the declining political influence of Sunnis in the region, and the war against Sunni Islamists, particularly following the setbacks of the Arab Spring revolutions (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Hammoud, 2023; Othman, 2023).

5.2 Internal Obstacles

One of the foremost leaders to address the overall defect within *Al-Jama'a* was Sheikh Fathi Yakan prior to his death in 2009, who unequivocally asserted that the organization experienced a regression with the ascendancy of political preoccupation over educational and *Da'wa* endeavors. The crisis gripping *Al-Jama'a* was fundamentally rooted in a crisis of values, characterized by spiritual deviation and the prevailing dominance of the political vision over the realm of *Da'wa*. Leadership positions had become occupied by individuals based on proximity to higher leaders rather than merit, fostering a climate of skepticism towards dissenting opinions. Consequently, weaker members faced retribution while those close to the leadership were bestowed preferential treatment (Yakan, 2009).

Moreover, political work was transformed from a means to advance a cause to a goal in itself. This shift led to the abandonment of priorities, the withering of educational nurturing environments, and some members began prioritizing political positions while others succumbed to despair and retreat. These internal dynamics significantly impacted the trajectory of *Al-Jama'a*, hampering its *Da'wa* efforts and overall political presence (Yakan, 2009).

According to Yakan, the situation within *Al-Jama'a* had reached a critical juncture, wherein the organization found itself internally fragmented in each battle, exhibiting weakened faith, plagued by ailments, and plagued by religious and behavioral deviations. Given these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that *Al-Jama'a* experienced a decline. Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a's* failure to foster organizational development and its overreliance on doctrinal education and fraternal ties proved inadequate. Instead, each individual within the organization ought to possess a comprehensive understanding of their abilities, obligations, and the

boundaries encompassing all aspects—an essential element that had been lacking (Yakan, 2009).

In contradistinction to Yakan, whose analysis of *Al-Jama'a's* retreat emanated from a holistic religious framework, the majority of interviewees adopted political and organizational perspectives. This profound shift in the orientation of *Al-Jama'a's* leaders and their mode of discerning affairs underscores the primacy of political considerations over religious considerations.

Al-Ayoubi recognizes the fact that *Al-Jama'a* was enclosed in a shell, and since his assumption of the General Secretariat, he has endeavored to introduce a new vision that could liberate *Al-Jama'a* from this state of confinement and present it in a more accessible manner, detached from the conventional ideological or Sunni rhetoric (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Despite some progress made by *Al-Jama'a* in this regard, as demonstrated by the 2022 elections, it was unable to establish institutional autonomy for political actions within the framework of an all-inclusive political party (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). Hajj Chehadeh corroborates this argument on the inadequacy of openness and ascribes it to the dearth of space given to women's political activities in *Al-Jama'a*. Women's advancement within *Al-Jama'a's* political ranks, according to Hajj Chehadeh, has been tardy and confronted with numerous internal obstacles (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). Al-Hout bolsters this view and asserts that *Al-Jama'a* must employ open public mechanisms rather than exclusive *Da'wa* organizational tools to target a broader audience (Al-Hout, 2023).

Choukair pointed out that even after *Al-Jama'a* moved past its religious identity, its organizational structure remained the same. (Choukair, 2023). Kassir shares a similar perspective, highlighting that *Al-Jama'a's* large organizational size and slow political progress during a crucial time for Lebanese politics exemplified its weakened media presence (Kassir, 2023).

Nonetheless, Al-Ayoubi maintains that *Al-Jama'a* was in a challenging position. Amidst a political landscape dominated by parties accentuating their sectarianism, extremism, and isolation, *Al-Jama'a* distinguished itself by pursuing an opposing course of action. Nevertheless, Al-Ayoubi maintains that *Al-Jama'a* cannot

achieve political success unless it adheres to this all-inclusive national path (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Choukair contends that *Al-Jama'a* is characterized by a regional focus, prioritizing the Palestinian and Syrian issues over local ones. Despite issuing documents indicating a move towards "Lebanonization," this approach has remained limited to parliamentary work and has not extended to a wider audience. This closed organizational structure has hindered *Al-Jama'a*'s ability to progress within the Lebanese sectarian political and electoral sphere (Choukair, 2023).

Al-Ayoubi observes that *Al-Jama'a* has encountered a challenge between its idealistic aspirations and pragmatic political considerations, where some of its officials have made remarks indicating *Al-Jama'a*'s alignment with March 14, thereby casting doubt on *Al-Jama'a*'s neutrality and impartiality in the political arena (Al-Ayoubi, 2023). Othman adds that *Al-Jama'a*'s excessive focus on preserving Islamic privacy and demanding complete independence has led to its isolation from the public (Othman, 2023). Consequently, both Al-Khatib and Othman underscored the paramount significance of intensifying efforts to effectively promote *Al-Jama'a*'s spirit of inclusivity and actively engage with individuals, groups and parties from diverse sectarian backgrounds within Lebanon. This strategic approach aims to elucidate and reinforce other's acceptance, understanding, and support of *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Khatib, 2023; Othman, 2023). In essence, *Al-Jama'a* possesses a distinct vision; however, it has encountered challenges in effectively marketing and disseminating its message to the wider public. This deficiency in marketing efforts has resulted in a need for enhanced strategies and approaches to effectively communicate *Al-Jama'a*'s vision and ideals on front of islamophobia and counter political Islam campaigns (Al-Khatib, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Othman, 2023).

Similarly, Al-Hout believed that *Al-Jama'a*'s excessive utopianism has been a major hindrance to its progress. Despite having a broad audience that values its ideals and institutions, they tend to defer political decisions to other politicians. Consequently, *Al-Jama'a*'s services are taken for granted, and individuals seek additional benefits from other parties that are solely interested in gaining an electoral vote and political loyalty. This has resulted in *Al-Jama'a* suffering publicly, as it has

failed to cultivate its own audience despite having a broad base of support (Al-Hout, 2023).

Al-Jama'a's faces challenges in reconciling its inclusive preaching discourse with a competitive political discourse, according to Al-Hout, which hinders its ability to develop a clear political awareness and engage with the public. Al-Ayoubi notes that the decision to launch a mass political party is hindered by concerns within *Al-Jama'a* about potential negative impacts (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Furthermore, most interviewees confirm that *Al-Jama'a* is struggling with hesitation (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Othman, 2023), unable to adopt the robust political mentality. Instead, it is burdened by a narrow outlook that confines it (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

For example, Najem asserts that *Al-Jama'a* failed to position itself as a viable alternative during the 2022 Sunni leadership vacuum. Despite previous struggles with the Future Movement's dominance, *Al-Jama'a* failed to capitalize on the opportunity presented by the Future Movement's absence, perhaps due to a lack of external support and depth. Najem contends that this was a mistake and that *Al-Jama'a* should have boldly presented an integrated project to the people, but it did not do so. Additionally, Najem laments that *Al-Jama'a* did not effectively leverage its alliances, citing the 2018 elections and its partnership with the President's party, which was the largest beneficiary. According to Najem, *Al-Jama'a's* lack of a clear vision for the alliance hindered their ability to benefit from it (Najem, 2023).

Despite agreeing with many of the previous points, Dandashli asserts that *Al-Jama'a* struggles in managing the political file. Politics, by nature, thrives on contradictions and taking advantage of opportunities. While *Al-Jama'a* should be commended for not becoming a tool for external powers, it should not completely refuse to benefit from foreign countries contradictions, nor should it be inactive on this front (Dandashli, 2023).

In fact, *Al-Jama'a's* political management, both locally and internationally, has remained stagnant for years (Dandashli, 2023) and it failed to improve over the years. Dandashli reinforces his opinion by asking how many members of *Al-Jama'a* work on relationships with foreign political players? Dandashli and all interviewees

believes that being influential in the Lebanese politics needs backing from regional power. However, *Al-Jama'a* was not interested in building relations with regional states.

Lebanon has witnessed numerous political changes over the years, including the Syrian forces' departure, regime changes in Turkey and Palestine, the disintegration of the March 14 alliance, Saad Hariri's extended absence, and the MB's rise to the presidency in Egypt. Despite all these developments, *Al-Jama'a* failed to seize any opportunity to improve its situation (Dandashli, 2023). Clearly, this issue is either due to a lack of vision, laziness, or poor management of the political file, rather than blame being placed on external factors (Dandashli, 2023).

In his capacity as a member of *Al-Jama'a's* central political bureau for years, Dandashli notes that the bureau failed to address significant domestic issues such as economic, social, and political concerns, as well as evaluating alliances and relationships with various forces. Instead, he characterizes the bureau's sessions as "fraternal sessions" that primarily focused on the conditions of Muslims globally and produced limited "pre-packaged decisions". Moreover, the political bureau lacked sources of information and did not hold decision-making power within *Al-Jama'a*. Rather, there were various points of influence that pulled decisions in different directions. Also, Dandashli emphasizes that he and other rising youth members left *Al-Jama'a* due to some *Al-Jama'a* branches fears on their influence from the significant rise of youth (Dandashli, 2023). However, Al-Khatib staunchly asserts the substantial role that youth play within *Al-Jama'a*, commencing with the General Secretary, who, despite being in his fourth decade, is regarded as a youthful presence. This commitment to youth extends throughout all levels of *Al-Jama'a's* leadership boards, where the consistent representation of young individuals is maintained (Al-Khatib, 2023).

Additionally, Kassir enumerates various internal obstacles that have impeded the progress of *Al-Jama'a*, including the inadequate internal structure that lacks dynamism, rendering it challenging to keep pace with the rapidly changing Lebanese political landscape, as evidenced by the underdeveloped and slow media apparatus of *Al-Jama'a*, which continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a's* dearth of popular representatives that can serve as local advocates and draw support for *Al-*

Jama'a, coupled with its weaknesses in providing services, in a country where political parties are seen as the gateway to such services, exacerbate its problems. *Al-Jama'a* also suffers from poor comprehension of the regional and local political scenes, contributing to its inadequacy in forming alliances. *Al-Jama'a's* inability to liquidate its assets and constant indecisiveness in selecting a course of action further hamper its progress. Additionally, *Al-Jama'a's* internal disputes, mismanagement, or inability to resolve them, and the weakening relationship with other Islamic forces compared to its position in 1992 present an additional hindrance to *Al-Jama'a's* growth (Kassir, 2023).

Al-Khatib highlights the formidable challenge of replacing the historical leadership within any political party. The transition from a patriarchal mode of operation and problem solving to more structured systems and regulations introduces complexities that naturally impact *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Khatib, 2023). Besides, Al-Ayoubi asserts that his leadership in steering *Al-Jama'a* towards institutionalization, while adeptly avoiding fragmentation and fostering unity, has been a triumphant endeavor. This accomplishment becomes even more noteworthy considering the prevalent disunity among Lebanese political factions, particularly during the critical transition from the party's founders to the subsequent generation. Through his strategic stewardship, Al-Ayoubi effectively safeguarded the overall coherence of *Al-Jama'a* (Al-Ayoubi, 2023).

Despite the scarcity of financial resources available to *Al-Jama'a*, Dandashli and Hajj Chehadeh concur that *Al-Jama'a's* suboptimal utilization of its existing finances is a significant issue. While *Al-Jama'a* does not possess the same financial clout as other political forces, its present financial resources are not being invested judiciously. *Al-Jama'a* struggles with prioritizing its expenditures, and while media presence is achievable today, it is not a priority for *Al-Jama'a* to allocate funds towards. Furthermore, *Al-Jama'a* must appreciate that politics is not confined to electoral contests alone, and it is crucial to maintain a daily presence among the public through continuous media coverage, an aspect that *Al-Jama'a* has failed to realize. As Hajj Chehadeh and Dandashli note, *Al-Jama'a* has entered into numerous agreements with the Future and the Progressive Socialist parties, among others, without fully leveraging them to its advantage. For example, *Al-Jama'a* did not demand media coverage in exchange for these political agreements, indicating that

media coverage was not a priority for *Al-Jama'a* (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Moreover, Hajj Chehadeh and Dandashli assert that *Al-Jama'a* encounters various obstacles due to its flawed process of selecting officials. Officials are not chosen on the basis of political merit, but rather through a routine process devoid of strategic thinking or genuine political evaluation. The congregation's voter base is mainly religious, not political, resulting in the selection of representatives of a similar character, rather than those most suited to political positions, following careful evaluation and setting of standards (Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

Dandashli further reveals that *Al-Jama'a's* internal elections have recently been plagued by two significant issues. Firstly, the electoral process of *Al-Jama'a* has been undermined by corruption, as a handful of individuals-controlled *Al-Jama'a* financial power and its institutions. Thus, they manipulate the internal electoral decision of their employees that are *Al-Jama'a's* members. This enables them to exert a disproportionate influence over the electoral outcomes of *Al-Jama'a* due to their financial leverage over certain members. Secondly, *Al-Jama'a* has lost its primary source of strength: the preachers and sheikhs who have shifted their focus to social and political work instead of educational and *Da'wa* work, which had formed the bedrock of *Al-Jama'a* (Dandashli, 2023).

Dandashli added that *Al-Jama'a's* extensive work, from social and service to political and resistance, lacks comprehensive leadership capable of harnessing these capabilities (Dandashli, 2023). However, Al-Hout contends that *Al-Jama'a's* belief in change has taken root (Al-Hout, 2023). Also, Al-Ayoubi concurs that *Al-Jama'a* has embarked on a path of rejuvenation through internal renewal, starting with "the Vision of a Homeland." He insists that it continues to expand until achieving the cumulative awareness necessary for launching the aforementioned party (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023).

According to Hajj Chehadeh, the internal challenges faced by *Al-Jama'a* stem primarily from a lack of self-confidence and a belief in the organization's capacity for change. This has resulted in a tendency towards complacency and the transformation of work within *Al-Jama'a* into routine tasks for some, and personal gains for others.

Moreover, the leadership of *Al-Jama'a* does not receive remuneration for their organizational responsibilities. As a result, each member of the leadership engages in individual employment or occupation, thereby lacking full commitment to organizational work (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

These two factors contribute to the devaluation and routinization of work within *Al-Jama'a*, eroding its ability to present innovative practical visions that address its actual problems and take calculated risks. As a result, *Al-Jama'a* experiences a decline in its capacity and attractiveness to attract prominent and transformative groups in society. Additionally, this state of laxity establishes a hindrance that inhibits competent members within the organization from assuming leadership roles. Consequently, *Al-Jama'a* becomes entrenched in a cycle of stagnation, lacking the presence of officials capable of effecting change (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

In essence, the recurrent problems discussed by various analysts and *Al-Jama'a* leaders, such as hesitation, media relations, political alliances, vision formulation, internal and external relationships, and others, all trace back to the fundamental imbalance described earlier. Resolving this imbalance necessitates a revolutionary commitment to believe in the potential for change and requires a dedicated allocation of resources and efforts or the enlistment of capable individuals who can undertake such transformative tasks without hesitation (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023).

5.3 Overcoming Obstacles

In conclusion, to overcome these obstacles, *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* must cultivate a belief in its capacity for transformation and entrust the responsibility to individuals who possess both unwavering conviction and the competence to change (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023). It must also, establish an independent political party- instead of having politics as a branch in a huge *Da'wa* movement as it is now-(Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Najem, 2023; Othman, 2023), develop a precise vision that addresses the populace's interests (Dandashli, 2023; Najem, 2023), employ a comprehensive political mindset (Al-Ayoubi, 2023), adopt the appropriate tools and methods to attract audiences (Al-Hout, 2023),

articulate a comprehensive national agenda (Othman, 2023), and rebrand with fresh leadership, monikers, and slogans (Dandashli, 2023). Furthermore, it must rehabilitate its internal structure to absorb the Lebanese political milieu and accept plurality (Othman, 2023), analyze the current situation scientifically and objectively with specialized full-time analytical political institutions (Hajj Chehadeh, 2023), prioritize the deployment of its highly skilled personnel to state administrations (Al-Khatib, 2023), and foster closer ties with the public (Dandashli, 2023; Kassir, 2023).

5.4 The Questionnaire

Our interviews culminated with a questionnaire consisting of 23 themes, which aimed to assess their adverse effect on the electoral and political performance of *Al-Jama'a*. We asked them to rate the extent of negative impact (on a scale of one to five) of each on *Al-Jama'a's* electoral and political standing between 1992 and 2022. We also requested the interviewees to choose up to five of them that had the most detrimental influence on *Al-Jama'a* or add any theme that they deemed more impactful. Notably, none of the participants added a theme outside the list, signifying the list's accuracy and the importance of its contents for *Al-Jama'a's* political operations.

Eight interviewees, who are either current or former members of *Al-Jama'a*, namely Azzam al-Ayoubi, Imad al-Hout, Ahmad Othman, Wael Najem, Sami al-Khatib, Bassam Hammoud, Khitam Hajj Chehadeh, and Rabih Dandashli, responded to the questionnaire.

The table presented below illustrates the responses of the eight interviewees, designated with random names from A to H, along with their corresponding scores assigned to each theme. These scores are based on their individual perceptions of the impact on *Al-Jama'a's* performance. It is noteworthy that each interviewee, aside from assigning numerical values to each theme, has selected a maximum of five themes deemed most influential on *Al-Jama'a's* performance, highlighted in Yellow. Other colors have been employed to facilitate numerical tracking: Dark Green for number 5, Green for number 4, no color for number 3, Red for number 2, and Dark Red for number one.

The last two columns in the table represent the totals. The final column indicates the total number of times each theme was chosen as most influential on *Al-Jama'a* performance, while the preceding column denotes the cumulative score assigned to each theme (from total of 40).

Table 2- The influence of 23 selected themes on the performance of *Al-Jama'a*, *al-Islamiya* as perceived by eight distinct interviewees.

	How do you evaluate these titles and their negative impact on the performance of <i>Al-Jama'a</i> from 1 (they had no significant negative impact) to 5 (their negative impact was very significant)								Total	Times chosen as favorite	
	Titles	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 5			40
1	Clientelism	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	38	6
2	Financing difficulties	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	3	35	5
3	The hegemony of the Syrian regime before 2005	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	3	34	3
4	The decline of the Sunni Sect role in Lebanon and the region	5	4	4	4	4	3	5	5	34	2
5	Alliance Forging deficiencies	4	5	3	4	3	5	5	5	34	1
6	<i>Al Jama'a</i> weakness in marketing its vision	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	33	2
7	Lack of full-time employability and inefficient use of <i>Al-</i>	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	1	33	2
8	Lack of internal accountability	4	5	3	3	4	4	5	5	33	1
9	Absence of external support	5	5	3	1	4	4	5	5	32	4
10	Inefficient use of <i>Al-Jama'a</i> capabilities and services	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	2	32	4
11	Influence of Hariri family	4	5	3	3	4	3	5	5	32	1
12	Sectarianism	5	3	4	5	3	4	3	1	28	2
13	The presence of personal interests within <i>Al-Jama'a</i>	3	5	2	3	3	2	4	5	27	0
14	Poor assessment and evaluation process	3	3	3	1	3	3	4	5	25	0
15	Lack of action programs	2	3	4	1	4	1	5	4	24	2
16	Internal disagreements	4	3	1	2	1	3	5	5	24	0
17	Weakness in <i>Al-Jama'a</i> vision	2	1	3	1	4	2	5	5	23	2
18	Weak capabilities of <i>Al-jama'a</i> members	3	1	4	3	3	2	3	3	22	1
19	Unprioritizing political action in <i>Al-Jama'a</i>	3	3	3	2	2	1	4	3	21	0
20	Lack of Institutionalism	3	2	2	1	2	2	5	3	20	1
21	Hezbollah's power after 2005	2	3	2	3	2	3	4	1	20	0
22	Comprehensiveness	2	3	3	1	3	2	3	1	18	0
23	Freedom	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	11	0
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H		

Four themes received a minimum of four selections as the most influential on *Al-Jama'a*. These themes are:

1. Clientelism (38/40)
2. Financing difficulties (35/40)
3. Absence of external support (32/40)
4. Inefficient use of *Al-Jama'a* capabilities and services (32/40)

Eleven themes were found to have a significant impact on *Al-Jama'a* according to the survey results, with over 32 out of 40 respondents (or an average of 4 out of 5) identifying them as such. These are in addition to the previously mentioned four themes:

1. The hegemony of the Syrian regime before 2005 (34/40)
2. The decline of the Sunni Sect role in Lebanon and the region (34/40)
3. Alliance Forging deficiencies (34/40)
4. *Al-Jama'a* weakness in marketing its vision (33/40)
5. Lack of full-time employability and inefficient use of *Al-Jama'a* human (33/40)
6. Lack of internal accountability (34/40)
7. Influence of Hariri family (32/40)

There were also five themes identified as having a medium influence, falling within the range of 24 to 32, or an average between 3 and 4 out of 5.

1. Sectarianism (28/40)
2. Lack of action programs (24/40)
3. The presence of personal interests within *Al-Jama'a* (27/40)
4. Poor assessment and evaluation process (24/40)
5. Internal disagreements (24/40)

Finally, seven themes were considered to have a below-average or negligible impact on *Al-Jama'a*.

1. Weakness in *Al-Jama'a* vision (23/40)
2. Weak capabilities of *Al-Jama'a* members (22/40)
3. Giving secondary attention to political action by *Al-Jama'a* (21/40)
4. Lack of Institutionalism (20/40)

5. *Hezbollah's power after 2005* (20/40)
6. Comprehensiveness (18/40)
7. Freedom (11/40)

Regarding the “Lack of action programs” and “Weakness in *Al-Jama'a* vision”, the interviewees' responses displayed remarkable variation. While two interviewees considered them to be highly influential, at least one additional respondent considered them to have a significant impact, even though they were rated as having only limited or medium impact.

5.5 Conclusion: Summarizing the Responses to Questionnaire

This questionnaire is not intended for generalization due to its limited sample size, consisting of current or former leaders of *Al-Jama'a*. Instead, its purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of this selected group's perspectives and responses to the research questions.

The outcomes of the questionnaire align with previous inquiries, identifying various issues affecting *Al-Jama'a's* problems. These include the clientelistic nature of Lebanon, external support, funds received by ruling parties, and the broader political situation in Lebanon and the region. Internal factors related to *Al-Jama'a's* management, such as insufficient utilization of capabilities, alliance formation, vision marketing, and accountability, are also key contributing factors.

Some interviewees highlight a deficiency in *Al-Jama'a's* management, leading to challenges in effecting swift change within its structure. While some leaders assert that change has begun and is gradually impacting its individual bases, others express skepticism and perceive the organization to be on a negative trajectory. This pessimistic view is attributed to perceived setbacks and a lack of confidence in transformative change within the organization and the country.

In summary, the reasons cited in this section offer a comprehensive assessment of the backdrop to *Al-Jama'a's* political and electoral performance over the past three decades. These reasons highlight a combination of external factors beyond the organization's control and unresolved internal issues contributing to the encountered problems.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In the past century, the Islamist movements, notably the MB, have emerged as highly influential political actors in the Middle East and globally. Extensive research has been conducted on the Brotherhood movement at various levels; however, there have been noticeable gaps in the literature. Upon reviewing the existing body of work on the Brotherhood, it becomes evident that the Lebanese experience has received limited attention from researchers. This can be attributed to several factors, primarily the relatively minor role played by *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, the Lebanese MB movement, compared to other countries. Nevertheless, studying experiments that have not achieved complete success can be as significant as studying successful experiences, as it enables us to identify shortcomings and discern differences among various cases.

Thus, the objective of this study was to examine *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya's* experience and their interaction with Lebanon's multi-sectarian system, with a specific focus on assessing their electoral performance, exploring the reasons behind their achievements or failures in garnering popular support, and playing a significant political role within the country.

It is noteworthy that *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, akin to several other branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, has assimilated into the local system and undergone a process of Lebanonization. During this transformation, they have maintained their belief in the significance of gradual and peaceful change within the existing system, a perspective commonly embraced by various Muslim Brotherhood entities.

To accomplish this, the research primarily concentrated on their parliamentary experience following the Taif Agreement as an indicator of popularity, while also providing a historical and ideological background of *Al-Jama'a* to ensure a comprehensive and lucid understanding of the experience.

In order to supplement the limited availability of information and writings, the research conducted interviews with current and former officials of *Al-Jama'a*, as well as specialized analysts, to address the research inquiries.

The first chapter of this study reviewed the existing literature on *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya*, identified the research gap, outlined our research questions, and underscored the significance of the approach. Additionally, the research methods employed a combination of analyzing previous literature and conducting several interviews, emphasizing adherence to ethical research standards.

To comprehensively address these research questions, the second chapter sought to establish a comprehensive foundation for understanding the experience of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon. This chapter examined *Al-Jama'a's* history since its inception, explored its involvement in various political events, and traced its ideological development over time. Notably, it underwent substantial ideological shifts, transitioning from its initial adoption of MB ideology and focus on broader Islamic affairs to a more recent emphasis on Lebanonization, resulting from internal dynamics within *Al-Jama'a* and its interactions with the surrounding environment.

Regarding *Al-Jama'a's* political history, a review of its experience confirmed its presence within the political landscape at various stages since its establishment. However, the review also revealed that *Al-Jama'a* primarily held a secondary political role rather than being a primary actor of influence.

The third chapter focused on the post-Taif period, which was the central timeframe of our research. Specifically, it examined *Al-Jama'a's* electoral experience, particularly within parliamentary elections from 1992 to 2022. Our analysis extended beyond election results, delving into *Al-Jama'a's* stance on prominent political events surrounding these elections. Despite its continuous presence in Lebanese political life over the 30-year period and across six parliamentary sessions, it only secured six seats, reflecting limited influence for the most part.

While the third chapter focused on presenting results without extensive analysis, the fourth chapter addressed this gap. Drawing on insights from *Al-Jama'a's* leaders and specialized analysts, the chapter identified the factors

contributing to *Al-Jama'a's* election outcomes and its position during significant political events within the same period. Additionally, it explored *Al-Jama'a's* relationships with major political forces and internal divisions.

Furthermore, chapter five offered a comprehensive overview of *Al-Jama'a's* overall experience and examined the key obstacles that hindered it from achieving significant electoral success and assuming a prominent political role. These conclusions were based on the perspectives of *Al-Jama'a's* officials and analysts.

Consensus was evident that both internal and external obstacles had contributed to *Al-Jama'a's* limitations. In terms of external obstacles, interviewees emphasized political clientelism in Lebanon, the reliance of Lebanese parties on foreign support and financing, and the subsequent necessity of foreign endorsements for political efficacy in Lebanon, which *Al-Jama'a* lacked. Lebanon had become entangled in external dealings, rendering *Al-Jama'a* unable to exert substantial influence. Moreover, the decline of political Sunnism and political Islam in the region, along with setbacks faced by the Arab Spring, had naturally impacted *Al-Jama'a's* standing in Lebanon.

In terms of internal challenges, *Al-Jama'a* encountered difficulties stemming from its non-political organizational structure and adherence to traditional non-partisan methodologies. These factors led to an underutilization of *Al-Jama'a's* human and material resources, a weakened capacity to effectively promote its vision, establish alliances, and enforce accountability measures. These internal constraints, combined with missed opportunities within the Lebanese political landscape, revealed a deficiency in *Al-Jama'a's* political management. Consequently, *Al-Jama'a* encountered challenges in: huge hesitation, effectively engaging with the general public and with the influential powers within Lebanon, inefficient use of *Al-Jama'a* capabilities and services, weakness in marketing its vision, the persisting confusion in forming alliances and positioning, and utilizing international contradictions to further its interests. Those obstacles and others highlighted the leadership's shortcomings.

Despite the shift towards Lebanonization within *Al-Jama'a's* ideology, its leadership struggled to translate this transformation into its core foundations. The

development remained elitist within *Al-Jama'a*, prompting leaders to emphasize the importance of a more inclusive and politically-oriented composition. However, these ideas were yet to be effectively implemented. This was underscored by the emphasis placed by interviewed *Al-Jama'a* leaders on the need for organizational reforms, which also indicated weaknesses in *Al-Jama'a's* leadership, as it failed to implement the necessary adjustments within *Al-Jama'a*.

When comparing *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon with counterparts in other countries, the interviewees unanimously agreed that most countries in the Islamic world had a Sunni-dominated demographic composition. This enabled the Brotherhood to engage with a broader segment of the population and implement development programs more effectively. In contrast, Lebanon lacked such a demographic makeup, and sectarian discourse held greater appeal than programmatic discourse, which did not align with *Al-Jama'a's* reformist approach, as emphasized by the interviewees (Al-Ayoubi, 2023; Al-Hout, 2023; Dandashli, 2023; Hajj Chehadeh, 2023; Kassir, 2023; Najem, 2023). Kassir supported these reasons and further noted the disparity in material capabilities between *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon and the majority of other countries (Kassir, 2023).

Finally, this study, in alignment with previous researches, underscored the formation of the MB based on the unique context and circumstances of each country. It was not feasible to categorize all MB movements under a single framework or conduct a comprehensive analysis. Instead, multiple influential factors shaped the outcomes of *Al-Jama'a* in Lebanon, differentiating its experience from that of other countries. *Al-Jama'a's* trajectory was influenced by the interactions within Lebanon, internal dynamics within it, as well as regional and international factors pertaining to the broader Sunni and Brotherhood context.

While this study did not offer a definitive judgment on the experience of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* in Lebanon, it stood as one of the few comprehensive studies that examined various facets of *Al-Jama'a* from both internal and external perspectives, offering an inside view to overcome those obstacles.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS

- Open questions:

Al-Jama'a attained notable success in 1992 parliamentary elections; however, it subsequently experienced a decline, particularly in its electoral performance, as evidenced by the elections of 1996 and 2000. What, in your informed perspective, do you attribute to this decline?

Following the unfortunate demise of Rafik Hariri, coupled with Saad Hariri's prolonged absence from Lebanon and the onset of the Arab revolutions, why do you believe *Al-Jama'a* failed to reinvigorate itself and secure a more prominent position on the Lebanese political landscape?

How would you assess *Al-Jama'a's* electoral performance in the multitude of electoral events that occurred in the years subsequent to the Civil War?

How would you appraise *Al-Jama'a's* performance during the Lebanese October movements and its interactions with the other components of the Lebanese society?

What are the specific factors within your district that have influenced *Al-Jama'a's* electoral results and popularity, differentiating it from other regions?

In a broader context, what challenges hinder *Al-Jama'a* from assuming a more substantial political role? These challenges can be categorized into internal factors specific to *Al-Jama'a* and external factors associated with Lebanon's sociopolitical dynamics and other influential entities both domestically and internationally.

Lastly, how do you envision *Al-Jama'a's* ascendance and its ability to play a more prominent political role in Lebanon in the foreseeable future?

- Translated Questions:

• حققت الجماعة نجاحا لافتا عام 1992 ولكنها ما لبثت أن تراجعت أقلها انتخابيا وهو ما ظهر في انتخابات عامي 1996 و2000. لماذا برأيك؟

- بعد وفاة رفيق الحريري وغياب سعد الحريري عن لبنان لعدة سنوات واندلاع الثورات العربية، لماذا لم تستطع الجماعة استنهاض نفسها واحتلال مكانة أكبر على الساحة السياسية اللبنانية؟
- كيف تقييم أداء الجماعة الانتخابي في الاستحقاقات الانتخابية المختلفة للأعوام التي تلت الحرب الأهلية؟
- كيف تقييم أداء الجماعة في الحراك اللبناني وعلاقتها بباقي المكونات؟
- ما العوامل الخاصة التي أثرت على الجماعة في منطقتكم وجعلت نتائجها الانتخابية وشعبيتها تختلف عن باقي المناطق؟
- بشكل عام ما هي المشاكل التي تعاني منها الجماعة وجعلتها غير قادرة على لعب دور سياسي أكبر؟ الأسباب الداخلية في الجماعة الأسباب الخارجية المرتبطة بطبيعة لبنان والقوى الأخرى داخل لبنان وخارجه
- ما الفرق بين الجماعة الإسلامية في لبنان وجماعات الاخوان المسلمين في الدول الإسلامية؟ يمكن تصنيف هذه التحديات إلى عوامل داخلية خاصة بالجماعة وعوامل خارجية مرتبطة بالديناميكيات الاجتماعية والسياسية في لبنان والكيانات الأخرى المؤثرة على الصعيدين المحلي والدولي.
- كيف يمكن للجماعة أن تنهض وتلعب دور سياسيا أكبر في لبنان في الفترة القادمة؟

Finally, we provided the interviewees with 23 themes in this question and asked them to rate the extent of negative impact (on a scale of one to five) of each on *Al-Jama'a's* electoral and political standing between 1992 and 2022. Furthermore, we requested that those we interviewed select a maximum of five themes from the 23, which they believe to have the most negative effect, or add themes that they believe to be more impactful.

The chosen themes are:

1. Clientelism
2. Sectarianism
3. Freedom
4. The hegemony of the Syrian regime before 2005
5. Influence of Hariri family
6. *Hezbollah's* power after 2005
7. The decline of the Sunni Sect role in Lebanon and the region
8. Absence of external support
9. Financing difficulties

10. Unprioritizing political action in *Al-Jama'a*
11. Lack of Institutionalism
12. Comprehensiveness
13. Alliance Forging deficiencies
14. Weakness in *Al-Jama'a* vision
15. *Al-Jama'a* weakness in marketing its vision
16. Lack of action programs
17. Weak capabilities of *Al-Jama'a* members
18. Lack of full-time employability and inefficient use of *Al-Jama'a* human
19. Inefficient use of *Al-Jama'a* capabilities and services
20. Lack of internal accountability
21. Poor assessment and evaluation process
22. The presence of personal interests within *Al-Jama'a*
23. Internal disagreements

However, themes were used in Arabic while interviewing. The Arabic translations is:

1. الزبائنية السياسية
2. الطائفية في لبنان
3. الحرية في لبنان
4. سطوة النظام السوري قبل العام 2005
5. تأثير عائلة الحريري
6. قوة حزب الله بعد العام 2005
7. تراجع الدور السنوي العام في لبنان والاقليم
8. غياب الدعم الخارجي
9. صعوبة الواقع المالي
10. عدم إيلاء الجماعة أولوية للعمل السياسي
11. ضعف المؤسسية
12. شمولية العمل في الجماعة
13. صياغة التحالفات
14. ضعف في رؤية الجماعة
15. ضعف في تسويق الجماعة لرؤيتها
16. ضعف في اعداد البرامج
17. ضعف قدرات أفراد الجماعة

18. ضعف استغلال الجماعة لمقدراتها وخدماتها
19. غياب التفرغ واستغلال لقدرات أفراد الجماعة
20. ضعف المسألة الداخلية
21. ضعف عملية التقييم والتقويم
22. تواجد المصالح الشخصية
23. الخلافات الداخلية

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEES DETAILS

Table 3- Interviewees details

Name	Status	Region
Sheikh Azzam al-Ayoubi	Served as Secretary General of <i>Al-Jama'a</i> from 2015 to 2022 and previously as the Head of <i>Al-Jama'a's</i> Political Bureau.	Tripoli
Dr. Bassam Hammoud	Former political officer of <i>Al-Jama'a</i> in the South from 2015 to 2022 and a candidate for the 2018 parliamentary elections.	Saida
Mr. Chafic Choukair	Researcher at Al-Jazeera Center for Studies, specializing in Islamic movements and having authored several papers on <i>Al-Jama'a</i> .	Al-Orkub
Dr. Imad al-Hout	<i>Al-Jama'a</i> Member of Parliament for two sessions in 2009 and 2022, and previously held the position of Head of <i>Al-Jama'a's</i> Political Bureau.	Beirut
Mr. Kassem Kassir	Political writer with expertise in Islamic movements and a collection of articles focused on <i>Al-Jama'a</i> .	-
Dr. Khitam Hajj Chehadeh	President of the "Al-Najat" social association -the Women's Sector of <i>Al-Jama'a</i> - from 2015 to 2022.	Iklīm al-Kharroub
Mr. Rabih Dandashli	Director of the Recode Research Center and formerly served as <i>Al-Jama'a's</i> Political Officer in Beirut.	Beirut
Sheikh Sami al-Khatib	Current and past member of <i>Al-Jama'a's</i> General Office in various sessions.	Bekaa
Sheikh Ahmad Othman	Former Governor of Mount Lebanon within <i>Al-Jama'a</i> .	Iklīm al-Kharroub
Dr. Wael Najem	A current member of <i>Al-Jama'a's</i> Political Bureau, possessing extensive expertise in Islamic movements and having written a master's thesis on <i>Al-Jama'a</i> .	Al-Orkub