Institute for
Global Prosperity

The 2022 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections: Between Traditional and Alternative Politics

Working Paper

Rahaf Zaher

June 2023

PROCOL
المختبر التشاركي للإزدهار
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About PROCOL

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1. INTRODUCTION

The latest round of parliamentary elections in Lebanon took place on the 6th and 8th of May for voters abroad and on the 15th of May 2022 in Lebanon. The elections were highly anticipated, following four years of continuous turmoil. The degradation of the Lebanese Lira started in August 2019 and was shortly followed by the October 17 revolution (The Policy Initiative, n.d).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the failure of the healthcare system as medicine became inaccessible, healthcare became expensive, and social insurance was not able to cover expenses. Inflation continued to fluctuate, reaching around 160% in October of 2022 (Trading Economics, n.d), where the dollar reached around 40,000 in the parallel market in comparison to its official rate at 1,507.

As a result, hospitalisation, education, electricity, food, and more became 'dollarised' – available only in exchange for 'fresh' dollars or at the black-market dollar rate – while most people were still getting paid in Lebanese Lira. Simultaneously, people's savings were stuck in a collapsing banking sector that was struggling with fluidity and wanted to prevent the loss of capital amid the financial crisis. Last but not least, more than two years after the Beirut Port explosion, no one was held accountable for devastating the city and its inhabitants. Amidst all of this, cabinets resigned and new ones were formed, statements were given by major actors in the country, and some recovery plans were proposed. Despite some small feats, none of these were translated into practical actions that successfully alleviated people's burdens. That is, lack of faith in state-led recovery dominated, and still dominates, people's assessment of government due to their perception of widespread state inaction (see Maktabi et al., 2022, OHCHR, 2021, Fawaz &

Harb, 2022, and Maktabi et al., 2022).

The inability of the government to halt the Lira's depreciation, implement a sufficient recovery plan, and increase accessibility and affordability of basic services had a substantial impact on the public's mood, especially in the aftermath of the 2019 revolution. This was translated in the Gallup Global Emotions Report (2021-2022) which crowned Lebanon as the World's angriest country – with 49% of people reporting an experience of anger the day prior to the survey – and among the top five countries experiencing stress and sadness (2022). In the context of poor governance, widespread anger and disillusionment, as well as high suspicion of those in power, speculations that the ruling elite will find a way to postpone the elections in order to preserve their power were commonly made in the run up to the scheduled election dates. These speculations were exacerbated by the precedents of election postponement, systematically employed by the political establishment. Three rounds of elections were adjourned between 2009 and 2018, whereby politicians illegally extended their parliamentary duties, citing as justification a range of factors such as security issues, regional disputes and discord over the electoral law. Further tension arose all over the country's TV stations and social media platforms, as rivalling parties voiced their 'campaigns' and citizens argued in favour or against different parties' discourses. Many newfound parties were already active in the political arena, presenting themselves as alternatives to traditional parties, but they gained additional visibility due to the inadequate government responses in times of turmoil.

2. DOING POLITICS: FROM PHYSICAL TO VIRTUAL SPACES

Figures 1 and 2: Shots of electoral campaigns of rivalling political parties on the streets of Lebanon (credit: Rahaf Zaher)

During the electoral campaigns, the country turned into a mosaic of colours as every political party covered the streets with its flags, slogans, and candidates' faces. Although the paraphernalia was concentrated in areas typically considered 'theirs', political parties tried to expand their reach by mounting posters and billboards in other areas as well. While some citizens were indifferent or accepted the campaigns, others refused the presence of rivalling political party posters and billboards in their areas. The latter either plainly expressed their disdain or took matters into their own hands: ripping and vandalising oppositional posters or contacting their municipalities to remove them. I witnessed some of the

vandalism myself, but also encountered these incidents through my observation of social media platforms (especially Twitter and Facebook which are highly popular in Lebanon). What follows are examples of the reactions that could be observed across the various platforms.

هذا الإعلان من طريق دير الزهراني-حبوش في الجنوب، بكل وقاحة و وضوح، القوات اللبنانية تسوق لحملتها الانتخابية في مناطقنا، لماذا؟ هل لها مرشحون في هذه المناطق؟ هل لها بيئة حاضنة؟ او ان بعض المرشحين على لوائح ما يسمى الثورة و القوات اللبنانية مشغلهم واحد و مشروعهم واحد و اهدافهم واحدة؟ المهم، الإعلان وضعه تمام و على ما يرام و هذا لا يسبب الفتنة و لا الاستفزاز، بس في سؤال بسيط، لو حزب ا. لله حط اعلان انتخابي بالاشرفية؟ جونية؟ بشري؟ شو كان بصير؟ طبعا لكم ان تتخيلوا

و ملاحظة كمان : من غبائهم نستفيد و نزداد اصرار و صوابية في الخيار

Figure 3: A Facebook post shared on 07/04/2022 criticising the presence of a Lebanese Forces poster in an area in the South of Lebanon.
Translation: This ad is on the road of Deir Al-Zahrane-Habboush in the South. Rudely and clearly, the Lebanese Forces are marketing their electoral campaign in our areas, why? Do they have candidates in these areas? Do they have a fostering environment? Or do some candidates on the lists of what is called the revolution and the Lebanese Forces have one concern, one campaign, and one goal? Anyway, the ad is in good shape and this does not lead to sedition or provocation, but one simple question, if Hezbollah put their ad in Ashrafieh, Jounieh, or Bcharre, what would have happened? I leave this to your imagination. An additional note: We benefit from your stupidity and become more insistent and precise in our choices.

Figure 4: A still image from a viral video of a person vandalising a Lebanese Forces billboard by writing "There's a Habib to every traitor." This phrase is referring to the assassination of Bachir Gemayel, founder of the Lebanese Forces and a president-elect, by a Syrian Social Nationalist Party member, Habib Al-Shartouni, in 1982. Gemayel was a controversial character as he allied with Israel against the Palestinian and Syrian presence in Lebanon.

من بعد اقدام ح ز ب الله على زرع اعلامه على اعمدة البلدية
اقدمت منسقية زحلة في القوات اللبنانية بتوجيه كتاب اعتراض بهذا الخصوص للبلدية المعنية
واليوم استجابت بلدية زحلة وباشرت بنزع الاعلام
شكرا"
#القوات_هي_الضمانة

Translate Tweet

Figure 5: A tweet dated 12/04/2022 thanking the municipality of Zahle for removing Hezbollah's flags from the area.
Translation: After Hezbollah put its flags on the municipality columns, the Lebanese Forces coordination group in Zahle submitted a petition of objection to the municipality. Today, the municipality responded and removed the flags. Thank you. #LebaneseForces_Are_ The_Guarantee

Figure 6: A tweet shared on 7/5/2022 showing torn posters of the Free Patriotic Movement campaign.

Social media presence and expression extended far beyond the display of political posters and the contestation and vandalism that they were subjected to. In fact, the majority of social media content was about the promotion and critique of political parties and ideas: politicians were tweeting their takes on different issues as well as key messages from their speeches and meetings; some social media users were using their platforms to advocate for political actors and support their campaigns; some users focused on criticising oppositional parties; and others critiqued the system as a whole.

إنت ورايح تنتخب ضد حركة أمل ..تذكر أنو المدرسة لي بدك تنتخب فيها عمّرها نبيه بري

#بالوحدة_أمل
#معك_للموت

Figure 7: A tweet shared on 8/5/2022 showing support for the Amal movement.
Translation: When you go to vote against the Amal movement, remember that the school you will vote from was built by Nabih Berri.

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لكل واحد كان تيار و هلق حردان او بارم بوزو و ما بدو يصوت، اذا ما صوتت للتيار يعني انت عم تصوت للخصم، ايا صوت منخسروا تلقائيا" هو صوت للقوات و الكتائب. هلق مش وقت الحرد، هلق وقت نربح انتخابات كرمال #ميشال_عون و بعدين لكل حادث حديث

#صوتي_تيار_وطني_حر

#صوت_تيار_صوت_لبنان

Translate Tweet

Figure 8: A tweet shared on 5/5/2022 urging people to vote for the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM).
Translation: For every person who was with FPM and is now angry or sullen and does not want to vote, if you do not vote, then you're voting for the opponent. Any vote we lose is automatically a vote for Lebanese Forces or Kataeb. Now is not the time for sullenness, now is the time to win the elections for Michel Aoun and we will cross other bridges when we come to them.

On Twitter, people were more comfortable expressing opinions, thoughts, and experiences they usually refrain from sharing in other settings. Thus, social media allowed for easier transfer of ideas and experiences, access to similar and opposing political networks, and circulation of disputes and transgressions occuring at the time of the elections. Many voters took to Twitter to share their pre-election experiences. Users were aware of the increase in service provision by political parties before the election and posted about alleged instances of monetary or in-kind bribes and threats. These tweets exemplify some of these alleged incidents.

Tell me it's nearly time for #Elections in #Lebanon 🇱🇧 without telling me it's nearly time for elections in Lebanon.

Figure 9: A tweet shared on 8/3/2022 showing street pavement activities two months before election date.

حركة أمل عرضوا على خيّ ينتخبهم مقابل انهم يطلعولوا باسبور 🤣🤣

Figure 10: A tweet posted on 19/3/2022 alleging an in-kind bribe.
Translation: Amal Movement offered my brother a passport renewal if he votes for them.

#فؤاد_مخزومي يشتري ذمم الناخبين:كنت قبل قليل في احدى تعاونيات بيروت وبالصدفة استرقت النظر الى بطاقة من مؤسسة مخزومي رصيدها ٧٥٠ الف ليرة لشراء حاجيات..بئس هذا الزمن ومن اوصلنا الى العوز وشراء الذمم!

Figure 11: A tweet posted on 19/4/2022 alleging a monetary bribe.
Translation: Fuad Makhzoumi is buying people's conscience: I was at a supermarket in Beirut and accidentally saw a ration card from Makhzoumi Foundation for 750,000 LBP. What shameful times we are in and shame on those who lead us to conscience-buying and being in need.

قليل اللي عم يحكوا بس الضغط اللي عم يتمارس عالناس بأشغالهن ومن عيلهن ومحيطهن واللي عم يوصل لتهديد أحيانا بس لأن ما رح يصوتوا للحزب الأقوى بمنطقتهن كبير كتير، تحية لكل حدا عم يتحمل وما عم يغيّر موقفه

Figure 12: A tweet shared on 10/5/2022 related to threats received by citizens.
Translation: Only few people are talking about this, but the pressure exerted on people at their jobs and through their families and societies, reaching up to threats, just because they are not going to vote for the dominant party in their areas is huge. Salutation to every person enduring this and not changing their stance.

Social media had a huge role during the electoral campaigns, but the most important tool for visibility in Lebanon remains traditional media. TV stations in Lebanon are either politically affiliated or heavily opinionated. As analysis from the Media Landscape initiative shows that only Télé-Liban is unaffiliated while the rest are divided between pro-Iran stations like Nabih Berri's NBN, Hezbollah's Al-Manar, and Michel Aoun's OTV or Pro-Western stations such as Al-Murr's MTV, Pierre Daher's LBC, and Tahsin Khayat's Al-Jadid (Trombetta et al., n.d). Thus, it comes as no surprise that traditional parties received the largest on-screen time between February and election day, amounting to 95% of broadcasting and 63% of talk show appearances (Maharat Foundation, 2022). Media outlets differed in their coverage of the elections: parties appeared excessively on their 'own' TV Channels, specific parties received negative-tone broadcasting on opposing channels, and emerging candidates were completely absent on some screens (ibid). Yet, this does not come for free. TV stations were reported to charge between 20,000$ and 125,000$ for appearances, with some spots saved for alternative candidates (El Jammal, 2022). This clearly gives more access to traditional parties and creates competition between emerging parties due to limited opportunities in case of insufficient funding. Although some stations gave greater exposure to emerging parties than others, traditional media seemed to disproportionately benefit the political establishment.

3. SECTARIAN NERVE-PULLING: THE DISCOURSE OF THE POLITICAL ELITE

As the day of the election came closer and the likelihood of further delays began to decrease, activists and other civil society actors became progressively more relieved that the election would take place as planned. Yet, unease was also apparent among those disillusioned with the political establishment, and especially the youth. They had fears that the absence of delays meant that the ruling elites had guaranteed their wins already and were just eager to renew their authority and consolidate their power. This apparent disdain towards the return of political elites to power led me to have a look at their political discourses: what was it that politicians were saying in their speeches, and why did it resonate or fail to resonate with different groups of voters? While doing my research, I listened to the electoral speeches of major political parties. What I noticed was that none of them included ownership of responsibility for the country's failures in governance, an indication towards reforming their ways, or a presentation of feasible action plans to alleviate the troubled livelihoods of people in Lebanon. Rather, the speeches were laden with snide remarks, talks about removing or keeping Hezbollah's arms, and preserving the identity of 'Lebanon' as it specifically fits a particular party's vision, rather than a country of multiple and diverse identities. That is, narratives about identity and culture took precedence over addressing corruption, lack of decent jobs, mass emigration, declining quality of life and the collapse of the state.

Most of the senior politicians who gave such speeches were present at the Taif agreement in 1989, and by 2022 were unable to implement most of its tenets. The latter most notably include amendments such as abolishing political sectarianism, implementing administrative decentralisation, and installing a chamber of deputies (Taif Agreement, 1989). The consociational system in which every sect is represented proportionally in government bodies was still maintained, and various key members of the political elite, their party members, or party-affiliated personnel were continuously chosen or re-elected as parliamentarians, ministers, and judges. Occupying the aforementioned primary decision-making positions, traditional parties were in a position to legislate and implement. Some parties took hold of certain ministries over consecutive governments. For instance, the Ministry of Energy and Water has been held by consecutive ministers affiliated with the Free Patriotic Movement, and the Ministry of Finance has been held by ones affiliated with the Amal Movement for years. Yet, in their pre-elections speeches, these politicians criticised the failing system that they had a major role in building. They followed the criticism by the rhetoric that they 'tried but couldn't' implement reforms because opposing parties hindered their efforts – a rhetorical gesture that saves face and concurrently sustains divisions and animosity between different parties and sects. Consequently, in their speeches, political leaders apologised for not being up to the expectations of their followers and pledged to work harder. What was missing, however, was an indication of how they planned to alter their approach concretely, particularly as they frequently presented themselves as passive spectators instead of active actors with respect to the system.

Instead of putting forth ways of improving livelihood strategies and public services, political discourse often seemed to deliberately entice people's emotionality. This is particularly achieved through partisan and divisive references to past war and conflict, specifically the 1975 civil war in which several parties participated and the Israeli

wars. Examples of the use of this strategy were abundant in the discourse that political leaders used to address their supporters: "Just like you won in the militaristic war, now you should win the political war since we perform political resistance to preserve militaristic resistance"; "In this election, we can't bargain… simply because anywhere we go we see our martyr's brother, our martyr's mother, our martyr's father"; "Lebanon cannot endure a civil war even for the sake of changing and repairing the current political system or imposing new political equations".

References to past conflict were part of a bigger discursive context in which the aim of political speech was to create mistrust, fear and anxiety about political opponents and the possibility of losing out to them: "Rockets and guns are their weapons, our voice is ours"; "Every person who decides not to vote or to vote with an empty ballot is giving them their vote without knowing"; "You tried them and look where they got you, you tried to go to the streets and nothing changed because they control everything". As one campaigner for a traditional party explained "Those affiliated with political parties have undergone what is known as 'political nerve pulling'" (Abed et al., 2022). In this way, the survival of the sect, and by extension the identity of people who were members of the sect and affiliated to it, became the main topic of discussion of the election. This came at the expense of common issues and solution strategies that would unify people rather than divide them. As I had conversations with family and friends, I noticed that many people were convinced by the politicians' approach and – at least from my perspective – were considering disregarding their daily struggles for the sake of preserving their sectarian representation in the face of traditional and alternative rivals. In a sense, it appeared that the concept of elections in Lebanon had been transformed into a display of party popularity and dominance instead of a democratic step towards deliberation about which party offers the best policy for redressing the crisis and supporting people's livelihoods.

4. THE ALTERNATIVE SCENE: DISCOURSES AND CHALLENGES

Alternatively, more than a dozen emerging parties presented 212[1] candidates all over Lebanon (Sawti Impact Lebanon, 2022) and contributed considerably to the increase in the number of electoral lists from 77 in 2018 to 103 in 2022 (Jouhari, 2022). Ultimately aiming towards political change, these parties differed in their approaches (The Policy Initiative, n.d). Some parties, such as Citizens of a State, the National Bloc, and Madinati, believed in the primary need for top-down change through independent governments; others relied on bottom-up strategies: elections (Taqaddom and Khat Ahmar), grassroot development (Mada and LiHaqqi), or collective action (Tayyar al-mujtama al-madani).

The process of analysing new-found party campaigns was more complicated. Contrary to the relatively well-consolidated structures of hierarchy and lines of political discourse that one could observe among the established parties, the new alternative parties appeared more decentred and horizontally structured. They often lacked an established leader, or za'im, who would present political positions and relied more on meetings, canvassing, and panel discussions rather than televised speeches. New-found parties focused on livelihoods and infrastructure relatively more than traditional parties. This became particularly apparent in the articles, posts, and videos they shared, which included titles such as "The housing crisis in Lebanon and its implications" (National Bloc, 2021), "Subsidy removal: sacrificing society for preserving the government" (Mmfidawla, 2021), and "Health: from a commodity

to enrich clientelism to a basic need for life" (Mmfidawla, 2022). Many parties had extensive visions[2] or major goals[3] for reform in the economic, health, infrastructure, and educational system and were clear in their positions regarding recovery of the banking sector and protection of depositors.

Most importantly, addressing traditional parties' primary concern, Hezbollah's arms, only 4 out of 15 alternative parties found the issue a short-term priority (The Policy Initiative, n.d). The discourse of alternative parties, thus, revolved around clearly positioning themselves as antagonists with respect to the self-serving establishment, which they criticised for operating in a clientelistic power-preserving manner for decades. And, at the same time, they presented more livelihood-centred approaches compared to their traditional opponents, and focused concretely on pressing challenges of infrastructure and services such as housing and health.

However, the political arena was difficult to penetrate for many of the emerging parties. During the elections, this was reflected by the frequent use of the term 'infiltration', instead of, for example, 'win', whenever an alternative list secured a seat. Compared to traditional parties who have been in government for the past 60 or so years, alternative parties were still new within the system and consequently faced major obstacles. First and foremost, traditional parties existed in every village and were members of municipalities which facilitated their exposure and eased their political activity, putting emerging parties at a disadvantage in terms of visibility and access in many areas. Restricted access was evident in South II and Beirut I districts where emerging party campaign meetings

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1   It is worth mentioning that 18 out of the 212 candidates were endorsed or allied with Kataeb and other traditional parties.
2   See Taqaddom: https://rb.gy/lipokn ; Citizens of a State: https://mmfidawla.com/en/political-vision/ ; LiHaqqi: http://lihaqqi.org/vision22/
3   See Madinati: https://beirutmadinati.com/elections.aspx ; National Bloc: https://en.nationalbloc.org/home_point_boxes ; Tahalof Watani: https://tahalofwatani.org/

were cancelled after a physical altercation with non-supporters in the area (Chehayeb, 2022). When meetings were feasible, they consisted of smaller-scale gatherings, as opposed to the huge festivals and dinners hosted by traditional parties. The obstacles that emerging parties faced while popularising their campaigns and increasing their visibility was not restricted to physical space. Since Lebanese TV stations are also politically affiliated, alternative parties were disadvantaged. As these stations also required high expenses for TV appearances, parties and independent candidates with low funding were not as visible as traditional parties (Abed et al., 2022) and resorted heavily to social media presence.

A major obstacle faced in the alternative party arena was the parties' inability to form alliances in most neighbourhoods due to differences in ideologies and approaches regarding various issues. These included major differences on issues such as Hezbollah's arms, endorsements by traditional political parties like Kataeb, and disagreements on the number of candidates to be included in lists. This produced three or more lists in 14 out of the 15 electoral districts (Jouhari, 2022), contributing to the dilution of votes between multiple lists at the cost of a more unified approach in which an aggregated list would consolidate support for independents and secure more seats in parliament.

5. EXPATRIATE VOTING: DOES CHANGE START OVERSEAS?

The 2022 Lebanese elections witnessed a substantial mobilisation of expats who voted for alternative parties, showing that the government-led institutionalisation of emigration had actually backfired for the established political parties. The government and its traditional constituents supported the emigration of educated Lebanese – effectively a brain-drain – for generations in order to increase foreign currency revenues through remittances and expatriate expenditure during visits to the country (Ghobril, 2004). Between 2018 and 2022, as the economic and political situation in Lebanon worsened and was accompanied by the shock of the port blast, a wave of mass migration was reported. According to Information International (2021), 195,433 Lebanese emigrated in the previous four years, 40% of whom left in 2021 alone. Accordingly, expats were seen as integral agents of change, as the drastic conditions generated by traditional parties

'forced' them to leave the country and motivated them to vote for alternative parties whose campaigns criticised the status-quo. As expected, votes cast abroad increased considerably: in the 2022 election, there were 95,242 more overseas votes than in 2018, with the largest increase in turnout documented in countries that welcomed a large number of expats after 2019 (Jouhari, 2022). As data from the Data Liberation Project shows, around 35% of expatriate votes were geared towards alternative and emerging parties (Independents, The 13, MMFD, and Jad Ghosn in Figure 13) and therefore had a huge impact on guaranteeing the threshold needed for the lists to win a seat in various districts (ibid). An analysis of the percentages of votes received by each traditional party compared to emerging parties, shown in the chart below, reveals that the emigration 'institution' has started to turn against its engineers.

Yet, traditional parties also accumulated a substantial number of votes from expatriates. Their campaigns and committees were
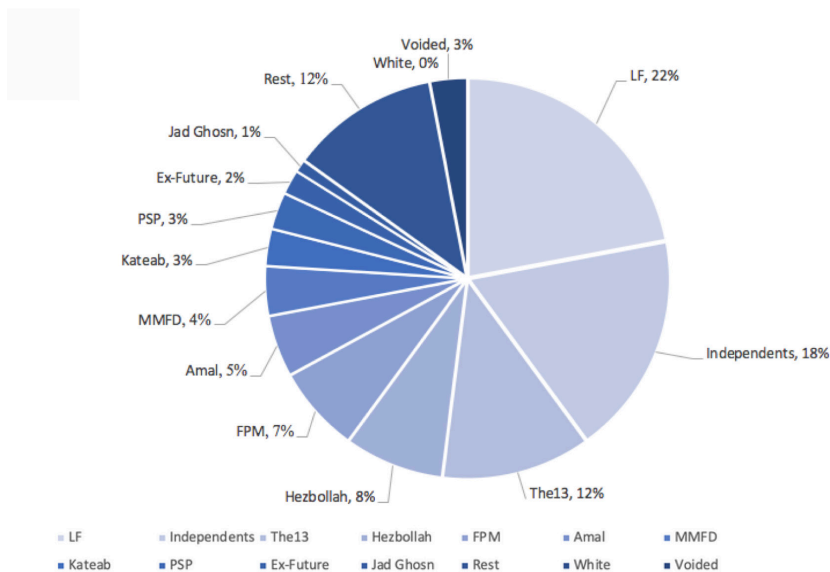

Expats votes per Political Affiliation

Voided, 3% | White, 0% | LF, 22% | Rest, 12% | Jad Ghosn, 1% | Ex-Future, 2% | PSP, 3% | Kateab, 3% | MMFD, 4% | Amal, 5% | FPM, 7% | Hezbollah, 8% | The13, 12% | Independents, 18%

Legend: LF · Independents · The13 · Hezbollah · FPM · Amal · MMFD · Kateab · PSP · Ex-Future · Jad Ghosn · Rest · White · Voided

Figure 13: Expats vote per political affiliation from Expatriate's Voting Analysis Report.
The data was extracted by the Data Liberation Project and analysed by the Electoral Lab.

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visible in various countries and active on social media. Traditional media coverage of the expat elections also documented the presence of a large base of supporters for traditional parties abroad. Additionally, during the 2009 elections, it was estimated that traditional political parties covered the expenses of around 120,000 expatriates to travel to Lebanon and vote locally (Salloukh et al., 2022). It is plausible that this happened in the 2022 elections also, which would mean that the expat voting percentages might be even higher than reported.

6. ELECTION DAY: SCENES ON THE GROUND

Early in the morning of election day, I was on the ground in front of the voting station, the public school of the village where I am registered to vote. I was aware that as a voter for change I am a minority in this village. Witnessing the endless flags of traditional parties engulfing the village, their speaker-laden trucks touring the streets with their anthems, and the uneven number of representatives compared to alternative parties, I was discouraged. What added to this sense of discouragement was a conversation I had with a traditional-party-affiliated friend who confidently told me: "We are not scared at all, there's no hope that [the opposition list] will win any seat". Such statements are indicative of the consequences that sectarian politics has on both the individual level – how people relate to each other – and the larger structural level. At the structural level, they are an expression of the power and control that traditional parties believe they have over their communities. At the level of individual interactions and encounters, they demonstrate how people treat one another as political subjects. Rather than considering one another as fellow citizens with a common cause but different political views and governance visions, the current political system positions people as adversaries, reducing their constructive interaction as political subjects.

Unsurprisingly, corruption was also at play that day, as I witnessed party representatives cut the line for their constituents while we, all the others in the queue, were waiting for more than an hour for our turn. What was most interesting to observe, however, was what happened after the polling stations closed and the vote counting started. A minority of people who were campaigners, representatives and supporters of alternative parties were holding Lebanese flags and singing for Lebanon, while a majority of people – their neighbours on a regular day – carried party flags and taunted them with loud chants amplified by speakers. This incident really crystallised the issue for me: sectarian and political identities had become so inflated that people were not ashamed of placing themselves in opposition to the national flag. The flag itself seemed to have transformed into a proxy of a political ideology that was threatening to them. For supporters of the sectarian establishment, the flag seemed to have become a symbol of the revolution, and the waiving of the flag a gesture of political contestation. That is, it was not only the national flag anymore, but a provocative symbol that reminded them of the uprising that challenged the very system which their parties controlled. A portion of what they considered 'their' communities still believed in the revolution three years later and transformed it into political mobilisation; this warranted the flag-laden confrontations. This became more apparent in light of the vandalism that occurred as the results were announced. Symbols and spaces of the now three-year-old revolution were vandalised and torched by political party supporters across the country as an assertion of their dominance and victory (Keuchkerian, 2022; RT, 2022).

Later on, when alternative party candidates breached traditional party lists, activists and seekers of change replied to the vandalism with the commonly iterated proclamation that "the revolution has now entered the parliament." As 'infiltrations' were achieved in the constituency I voted in, I remembered the friend and many others who told me they would not lose any seat and I realised that this is a new era of politics in Lebanon. Despite this, traditional parties still presented themselves as absolute winners, as no losing candidate from the list was from their sect. They changed their definition of

absolute success to fit the new era and, to me, that was a good enough admission of defeat.

I am certain that these experiences could be heard from the tongues of many citizens like me all over the country. Although the results were not groundbreaking, it was documented that the second largest block of votes was accumulated by alternative parties and individuals. Thus maybe, just maybe, this could be the start of a new political culture that prioritises livelihood discourses and people-oriented politics over sectarian party-preserving ones.

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