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Instability and Upheavals in Post-2011 Lebanon: A Regional Security Perspective

Master's thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 06.2023   Joy El Hajaly

Length of the thesis: 90,274

Abstract

This thesis delves into the significant role played by civil society organizations and social movements in post-2011 Lebanon, focusing on their impact on the country's security dynamics, societal changes, and the contestation of sectarianism through the lens of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). The research explores how these movements have been instrumental in driving political reforms and conflict resolution by pressuring the government, advocating for policy changes, and garnering public support, leading to the adoption of new laws addressing societal grievances. The emergence of social movements in response to regional uprisings and the Syrian displacement has presented Lebanon with both challenges and opportunities. While existing power structures and resistance to change pose obstacles, the interconnectedness of these movements through digital technologies and shared goals has amplified their ability to mobilize and shape political discourse, thereby holding the potential for transformative change and creating opportunities for a more inclusive and democratic society.

Empowering and supporting these actors will be crucial in fostering a more democratic and equitable nation. As Lebanon moves forward, the transformative power of civil society stands as a beacon of hope. The people's mobilization on October 20th of 2019 exemplified a population united in dreams and aspirations for a contemporary homeland, free from corruption and divisions, and showcases a step forward for a promising future. The journey towards a better Lebanon has just begun, and this research offers valuable insights to guide that path.

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá významnou rolí organizací občanské společnosti a sociálních hnutí v Libanonu po roce 2011 a zaměřuje se na jejich vliv na bezpečnostní dynamiku země, společenské změny a zpochybňování sektářství optikou teorie regionálního bezpečnostního komplexu (RSCT). Výzkum zkoumá, jak tato hnutí přispěla k politickým reformám a řešení konfliktů tím, že vyvíjela tlak na vládu, prosazovala politické změny a získávala podporu veřejnosti, což vedlo k přijetí nových zákonů řešících společenské stížnosti. Vznik sociálních hnutí v reakci na regionální povstání a vysídlení Sýrie postavil Libanon před výzvy i příležitosti. Zatímco stávající mocenské struktury a odpor vůči změnám představují překážky, propojení těchto hnutí prostřednictvím digitálních technologií a společných cílů posílilo jejich schopnost mobilizovat a utvářet politický diskurz, čímž v sobě skrývá potenciál pro transformační změny a vytváří příležitosti pro inkluzivnější a demokratičtější společnost.

Posílení postavení a podpora těchto aktérů bude mít zásadní význam pro podporu demokratičtějšího a spravedlivějšího národa. Jak Libanon postupuje vpřed, transformační síla občanské společnosti je majákem naděje. Mobilizace lidu 20. října 2019 byla příkladem obyvatelstva sjednoceného ve snech a touhách po současné vlasti, zbavené korupce a rozdělení, a ukazuje krok vpřed pro slibnou budoucnost. Cesta k lepšímu Libanonu právě začala a tento výzkum nabízí cenné poznatky, které tuto cestu nasměrují.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

In recent years, the Middle East has witnessed a significant wave of social movements and political upheavals that have brought about great changes in the region's socio-political scene. One country that has experienced the impact of these transformative forces is Lebanon. Since 2011, Lebanon has witnessed a rise of social movements and civil societies that have challenged existing power structures, sought political reforms, and contested the deeply entrenched sectarian model that has shaped the country's political dynamics for decades. Thus, understanding the implications of these movements and their relationship to and impact on Lebanon's security and social dynamics is of the utmost importance for exploring the many complexities within the country.

The primary focus of this dissertation is to analyze the rise of social movements and civil society organization's activities in post-2011 Lebanon, specifically in using the lens of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT henceforth). By employing the RSCT framework, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the country's security dynamics, the societal changes that have occurred, and more specifically; the contestation of sectarianism.

This thesis will primarily investigate the role played by social movements and civil society groups in shaping political reforms in the country and their impact on policy-making processes. By analyzing the actions and demands of multiple actors, their implications for conflict resolution will be assessed.

We will also examine the key challenges and opportunities presented by the rise of such movements in Lebanon. This analysis will take into account contextual factors including

regional political uprisings and the influx of Syrian refugees, exploring how social movements are interconnected and influenced by these events.

Furthermore, the application of the RSCT framework will enable us to understand the dynamics of social movements and their interactions with regional actors. We will explore whether certain movements and groups have transitioned into institutionalized political projects and if so; the circumstances under which this transformation has occurred.

Finally, this research aims to highlight the implications of these movements for Lebanese society and politics, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics within Lebanon and also the broader region.

1.2. Research question, hypotheses, and methodology

1.2.1. Research question and sub-questions

The main purpose of this thesis is to answer the following question:

Through the lens of Regional Security Complex theory, how does the active engagement of civil society organizations and social movements in post-2011 Lebanon contribute to the country's security dynamics, societal changes, and the contestation of sectarianism?

To support the main question, the following questions need to be answered:

1. How have civil society groups and social movements in post-2011 Lebanon influenced political reforms, shaped the policy-making process, and contributed to conflict resolution, and what are the implications of their actions and demands for the country's stability?

2. What are the key challenges and opportunities presented by the rise of social movements, particularly in response to regional political uprisings and the Syrian displacement, and to what extent are these movements interconnected and capable of driving change?

3. How does RSCT support the analysis of security dynamics, including the interactions between social movements and regional actors?

4. To what extent do social movements challenge and contest sectarianism, and have certain movements transformed into institutionalized political projects, potentially reshaping the sectarian landscape?

5. What are the broader implications of social movements for Lebanese society and politics, and how do they contribute to our understanding of societal changes and evolving security dynamics within the country and the wider region?

1.2.2. Hypotheses

The hypotheses suggest that the political landscape of Lebanon has been shaped by the active involvement of social movements and civil society groups, whose actions and demands have had significant implications for political reforms, conflict resolution, and the contestation of sectarianism. By examining the interconnectedness of these movements and employing the RSCT framework to guide this research, we can gain valuable insights into the complex interactions between social movements, policy-making processes, and the broader security environment in Lebanon.

Overall, this research aims to prove the following hypotheses:

1. Social movements and civil society groups in Lebanon have influenced political reforms by pressuring the government, advocating for policy changes, and mobilizing public support. Their activities led to the adoption of new laws and reforms that address societal grievances and promote inclusivity.

2. The rise of social movements in Lebanon, driven by the 2011 regional uprisings and the Syrian displacement, presents both challenges and opportunities. Yet, these movements provide a platform for collective action and have the potential to bring about transformative change. Their interconnectedness, facilitated by digital technologies and shared goals, strengthens their ability to mobilize and shape political discourse.

3. Applying the RSCT improves our understanding of security dynamics in Lebanon, particularly the interactions between social movements and regional actors. RSCT emphasizes the interplay between internal and external factors, the role of regional rivalries, and the influence of transnational networks on social movements and their impact on security dynamics.

4. Social movements in Lebanon challenge sectarianism by promoting inclusive narratives, advocating for non-sectarian political reforms, and questioning the dominance of sectarian-based politics. However, the transformation of some movements into institutionalized political projects may lead to the co-optation of their original objectives and perpetuate sectarian divisions. It can be argued that this highlights the complex relationship between social movements and sectarianism.

1.2.3. Methodology

This section presents the methodological choices made in this study to investigate the role of social movements and civil society groups in shaping political reforms, driving conflict resolution, and challenging sectarianism in Lebanon.

Adopting an interpretivist research philosophy, this study recognizes the subjective nature of social phenomena and acknowledges my role in observing and interpreting these phenomena. This aligns with the qualitative nature of the study and enables a deeper exploration of the experiences, motivations, and beliefs of the actors involved. the interpretivist approach acknowledges the influence of social contexts, power dynamics, and individual perspectives in shaping political processes and conflict dynamics.

The study follows an inductive approach, starting with specific observations and data to finally derive general conclusions and theories. This exploratory approach is well-suited for understanding the complex and multifaceted dynamics of social movements and civil society initiatives in Lebanon. Furthermore, it allows for the exploration of emerging themes, patterns, and relationships within the data used, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The chosen research strategy for this thesis is document analysis, focusing mainly on the systematic review and analysis of relevant documents such as reports, policy papers, official government statements, reliable media articles, and scholarly works. This strategy enables a comprehensive examination of the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of the actors studied. The use of document analysis aligns with the available resources and provides access to more information that sheds light on both the historical and contemporary patterns in Lebanon's security dynamics.

Moreover, the data in this study will be collected at a specific point in time, thus adopting a cross-sectional time horizon. This choice is influenced by practical considerations, notably the availability of documents and the timeframe of the research which is post-2011 Lebanon. While a longitudinal approach would probably offer more comprehensive insights into the evolving nature of social movements, the cross-sectional design allows for a focused analysis within our timeframe.

In this study, documents are selected based on the insights they provide concerning social movement actors and civil society groups in Lebanon; thus, the sampling strategy is purposive sampling. The study aims to capture a broad range of voices and perspectives, hence the importance of purposefully selecting documents from different sources and organizations.

As for the data collection method, this study focuses on the analysis of existing documents. Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and discourses within the selected documents. This approach allows for a systematic exploration of various ideas, narratives, and discourses; thus providing a deeper understanding of the role of different actors in shaping political reforms in Lebanon.

This analysis involves a qualitative approach, using thematic analysis to uncover and interpret the underlying meanings within the selected documents. The identified themes will be analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework of the RSCT.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. These include the potential for bias in document selection and through the reliance on secondary data. However, efforts will be made to mitigate these limitations through careful document selection and a critical assessment of the data.

In essence, the methodological choices made in this study, guided by the interpretivist research philosophy, and employing document analysis, aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social actors in shaping political reforms, driving conflict resolution, and challenging sectarianism in Lebanon. The adoption of the RSCT framework adds a theoretical lens to explore the complex interplay between these movements and regional actors. By using qualitative methods and analyzing relevant documents, this study contributes to the existing knowledge on social movements in Lebanon and their implications for the broader security landscape.

2. Theoretical conceptualization and literature review

This section plays an important role in the research process, offering a comprehensive analysis of existing knowledge relevant to the study's focal point. The literature review will provide a solid foundation for our research by evaluating prior scholarly work. By assessing academic sources, we can identify gaps in the existing knowledge, understand key themes and trends, and gain insights into the dynamics of social movements and civil society's influence on policy making and conflict resolution in the region.

The primary objective of this section is to examine the interactions between social movements, civil society groups, and political reforms in post-2011 Lebanon. We aim to explore how these actors have driven policy changes, influenced the resolution of conflicts, and contested sectarianism within the country. Thus, by delving into this rich body of research, we seek to enhance our understanding of the complexities of Lebanon's political landscape and its broader implications for regional security dynamics.

This literature review will only include studies published since the outbreak of the Arab spring to ensure relevance to the current status-quo in the country and region. It will

encompass key concepts such as social movements, civil society, political reforms, conflict resolution, and sectarianism, providing a comprehensive analysis of their interconnectedness and impact in the Lebanese context. Moreover, the review will adopt a geographical focus on Lebanon, investigating the unique challenges and opportunities faced by social movements in the aftermath of regional political uprisings and the Syrian displacement.

The theoretical framework that underpins this research is the Regional Security Complex Theory. The theory offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing security dynamics in regions by examining the interactions between states and non-state actors. It highlights the interplay of internal and external state and non-state forces, regional rivalries, and transnational networks that shape security perceptions and actions. In the context of this study, RSCT provides a valuable lens to understand how social movements and civil society actors re-awakened post-2011 and how they navigate their roles amid regional upheavals and security challenges.

The relevance of RSCT to this research lies in its ability to capture the intricate relationships between social movements and regional actors in Lebanon. As a country situated in a volatile region, Lebanon's security dynamics are deeply influenced by both internal and external forces. RSCT allows us to explore how these movements' demands for reforms and conflict resolution intersect with regional power struggles and dynamics, ultimately shaping the security landscape.

Central to RSCT are key concepts such as security complexes, which refer to a group of states and non-state actors whose security is intrinsically interconnected. In Lebanon, various movements, and groups form part of this complex, engaging with regional actors and influencing security perceptions and actions. By reviewing and defining these concepts, we can better understand the complexities at play and their implications for changes in Lebanon.

Also, RSCT provides a theoretical framework that aligns with the questions presented. It allows us to explore how social movements' actions impact policy-making processes, challenge sectarianism, and drive conflict resolution within Lebanon's unique security complex. By considering both domestic and regional dimensions, the theory helps us examine the interconnectedness of these movements, shedding light on their capacity to mobilize political discourse in the country.

2.1. Regional Security Complex Theory

This dissertation is grounded in the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) which offers a framework for understanding security dynamics on a regional level, rejecting a state-centric approach in favor of one which includes non-state actors. RSCT was firmly established by Buzan and Waever in their book *Regions and Powers : The Structure of International Security* (Buzan, Wæver 2003).

By challenging the traditional state-centric approach to security, this theory emphasizes the interdependence and interconnectedness of states within a given region. The main argument is that security dynamics and interactions between states are shaped by both external threats and internal dynamics, shared identities, and relationships within a complex. Thus, security issues and concerns cannot be analyzed in isolation, they should be considered as part of a broader regional complex. Security in this sense also encompasses political, economic, societal, and ideational dimensions (Buzan, Wæver 2003).

RSCT encompasses three variants: standard RSCT, collective security systems, and security communities. In the MENA region, the prevailing structure is normally a standard RSCT, characterized by an anarchic system of insecure states and regimes, primarily concerned with military security, and governed by a balance of power (Rahman 2010).

The focus of this research diverges from the traditional military security concerns commonly addressed in the MENA region. Instead, it considers a holistic framework focusing on non-traditional security concerns which arise from various actors, including states and non-state actors.

At the core of RSCT is the classification of states into global powers, great powers, regional powers, and other powers within the region, each with distinct roles and interactions. External powers, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia exert influence both directly and indirectly. Their involvement is contingent on their network relations and the alignment of their interests with internal actors (Hussain, Pakistan 2013).

The Middle East RSC is a well-consolidated and interconnected system with several competing regional powers. Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel hold dominant positions, while the US's retreat and Russia's intervention have further impacted the anarchic structure of the region (Hussain, Pakistan 2013). The Israeli-Arab conflict and the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran serve as the major structures of amity and enmity, influencing the dynamics of alliances and conflicts in the region (Rahman 2010).

The theory has not developed without critique, however, with several academics arguing that the theory needs to be adapted to fit different parts of the world. Buzan and Waever themselves acknowledge the limitations of RSCT while explaining the African context, citing the outsized role played by thousands of non-state actors across the continent in the absence of strong and functioning post-colonial states (Buzan, Wæver 2003). It is important to that the term non-state actors in this case can refer to any type of group which challenges the state or fills the vacuum left by weak state power, ranging from prominent families to multinational criminal networks. Walsh builds on this point, arguing that a "clear articulation of how African leaders assert influence within, and shape, regional security dynamics" could

improve RSCT's usefulness (Walsh 2020). This conclusion is drawn from a case study on Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, who Walsh calls a "master tactician" who's transactional politics allows him to reward and coerce domestic and regional actors to influence and shape domestic and regional security dynamics (ibid.). In parallel, when examining Lebanese leaders, a mixed picture emerges regarding their effectiveness in transactional politics. Some have shown proficiency in utilizing transactional tactics to maintain power and forge alliances. For example, Rafic Hariri built alliances with various political factions and foreign powers which allowed him to wield significant influence over Lebanon's political dynamic (Wagner, Anholt 2016). Walid Jumblatt, the leader of the Druze community, formed and dissolved alliances based on shifting political interests, showcasing his ability to negotiate and influence policy decisions (Tinas, TÜR. Özlem 2018) Others, however, have faced challenges and constraints that hinder their ability to effectively navigate and shape domestic and regional security dynamics. For instance, Michel Aoun, the former president of Lebanon, faced constraints in navigating transactional politics due to his alliance with the Hezbollah-led March 8 coalition. This affiliation limited his ability to form broader alliances and hindered his influence in shaping various aspects of domestic and regional security dynamics (Orion 2017). Another example is Saad Hariri whose multiple terms as Prime Minister have been characterized by political deadlock and struggles in forming cohesive alliances, leading to difficulties in exerting decisive influence over Lebanon's security landscape (Shavit, Guzansky 2017).

Esmaeili et al. suggest that an additional variable, "the problematic", should be included in RSCT to make it adaptable to any regional system as well as better explaining the security suite of the Middle East (Esmaeili, Salimi, Dehghani 2021: 136-137) They define "the problematic" as a problem "which involves most of the states" of a region in some way or

another (Esmaeili, Salimi, Dehghani 2021). In relation to the subject of this dissertation, security dynamics in Lebanon are heavily influenced by regional problems in Syria, Palestine, and Iran.

Throughout the analysis, the research will explore the interlinkages and fluid nature of alliances, which shift based on prominent security concerns at different times. The RSCT framework will enable us to dissect Lebanon's security dynamics and understand how external actors' actions influence Lebanon's security dynamics, the Syrian civil war, and its potential outcomes. By delving into these regional security complexities, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into Lebanon's political landscape and conflict resolution efforts, paving the way for future developments in the region.

2.2. Civil society as a driving force in bridging political divide in postwar countries.

This section of the literature review presents the scholarly discourse concerning the role of civil society in promoting reconciliation and bridging political divides in postwar countries such as Lebanon. Drawing from various academic works, this review explores the inhibiting factors faced by civil society in the MENA region, stemming from societal transformations triggered by conflict, structural injustices, and unresolved claims, as well as internal challenges specific to civil society itself. Scholars have shed light on the interplay of factors that hinder civil society from effectively fulfilling its expected role in facilitating reconciliation and fostering a cohesive post-conflict society. Throughout this review, we will delve into the diverse perspectives that shed light on the significance of civil society's mobilization as a driving force in navigating the complexities of postwar scenarios and charting a course towards sustainable peace and stability.

In their article, *"Civil Society in Lebanon: The Implementation Trap"*, Abi Yaghi et al., contend that the effectiveness of civil society in fostering positive contributions to national reconciliation processes and ameliorating political divisions in post-conflict societies is contingent upon key factors. First, the extent of space available for civil society's presence and organization. Second, the accumulation of experience and mobilization within civil society. Third, the level of influence wielded by former warlords and leaders from the wartime period. And, finally, the pivotal role of these warlords and leaders within political institutions (Abi Yaghi, Yammine, Jagarnathsingh 2019).

According to Marchettti and Tocci, the presence and impact of civil society across the MENA region exhibit substantial variations from one country to another. For example, civil society's independent existence was non-existent prior to the downfall of authoritarian regimes in countries like Libya, Iraq, and Syria (Marchetti, Tocci 2009). However, as argued by Hafidh and Fibiger, in semi-authoritarian systems, such as the cases of Bahrain and Yemen, civil society organizations managed to find space for growth. Of course, this growth was stunted by constant surveillance and scrutiny by ruling authorities (Hafidh, Fibiger 2019). Following periods of intense political violence or conflict in the MENA region, countries usually experience active involvement of civil society. These countries can be categorized into three distinct groups (Ouaiss 2020).

First, as argued by Wimmen, in certain countries, such as Bahrain, civil society organizations focus on advocating for the rights of the marginalized, even if it comes at the expense of civil peace and their ability to partake in the political reform process (Wimmen 2014).

Other countries, including Yemen and Iraq, civil society plays a more varied role. Some groups actively engage in political reform while others align themselves with one of the

conflicting parties, intensifying political tensions and hindering their ability to influence political reconciliation (Marchetti, Tocci 2009).

The last group, and the one that is the most interesting for this research, includes more open societies like Lebanon. In this group, civil society had a visible role across the years; from the civil war of 1975-1990, the Syrian and Israeli occupations in the 1990s and early 2000s, and during and after the 2011 uprisings (Karam 2018).

In countries where civil society peacefully influences political reforms, it can effectively contribute to mitigating conflicts in the post-conflict period. This ability is linked to accumulated experience, a high level of mobilization, and extensive local and international networking (Abi Yaghi, Yammine, Jagarnathsingh 2019).

The significant impact of civil society in Lebanon can be summarized in two main aspects according to Ouaiss: first, its role in paving the way for institutional reforms, and second, its efforts in healing the wounds of war and establishing the foundation for sustainable peace (Ouaiss 2020).

Some of the activities categorized as institutional reforms encompass election law reform, enacting legislation for woman's rights, promoting better governance and transparency, advocating for worker's rights, safeguarding human rights and worker's rights, facilitating dialogues between political leaders and refugees, and collaborating with international organizations to strengthen governance (Davis 2011).

As for peace building, civil society plays a crucial role in bridging the political and sectarian divide fostering bottom-up reconciliation among people as argued by Ouaiss (Ouaiss 2020). A noteworthy example includes initiatives in the Shouf region, where efforts have been made to foster understanding and cooperation between the Druze and Christian communities

(Karam 2018). In Tripoli, for instance, similar endeavors aim to promote harmony between Alawite and Sunni communities (Osman 2022). According to Ouaiss and Abi Yaghi et al., these efforts manifest through organizing camps and projects that bring together youth from diverse regions, allowing them to interact, empathize, and support one another, thereby contributing to the formation of an inclusive national identity (Ouaiss 2020; Abi Yaghi, Yammine, Jagarnathsingh 2019).

2.3.   Arab Spring in Lebanon

Lebanon is marked by its history of sectarian division and has grappled with the challenge of power-sharing arrangements to achieve democracy and stability for a long time. The Ta'if Accord of 1989 is a notable milestone in Lebanon's political trajectory which introduced a cooperative power-sharing arrangement that aimed to distribute political power among Lebanon's religious sects (Karam 2018).

Unfortunately, these power-sharing arrangements, which were negotiated and supervised by external powers have had unintended consequences for Lebanon's political landscape. This division has solidified sectarian identities rather than inclusivity. Thus, the political system was characterized by rigid sectarian boundaries, impeding the possibility of cross-sectarian political mobilization (Bahout 2016).

Breaking free from the hegemony of the sectarian system has become an arduous task for political groups seeking to establish a democratic society based on tenets of transparency and accountability. Post-war Lebanon continues to witness state-society relations that are defined by the active use of the state's coercive power by the political elite (Wimmen 2014). A power that is often used to infiltrate, intimidate, and repress opposition groups, hindering any attempt at significant reform. It is, however, within this context that cross-sectarian and

anti-sectarian modes of political mobilization have emerged, challenging the status quo, and advocating for alternative approaches to governance (Marchetti, Tocci 2009).

The anti-sectarian movement in Lebanon was a direct response to the popular 2011 uprisings. The slogan "Al-cha'eb yurid isqat al nizam" (The people want the fall of the regime) which first emerged during the Tunisian Revolution inspired movements in Lebanon to express a specific demand for the fall of the sectarian regime in Lebanon. These movements drew support and resources from a diverse network of actors, including militant groups, associations, and NGOs. The expertise and skills of these actors contributed to the significant organizational capacity of the movements (Meier 2015). On March 20, 2011, around 20,000 people took part in a march that spanned from East to West Beirut, symbolically crossing the former demarcation line of the civil war. The march, empowered by the regional context of the uprisings, aimed to advocate for a secular and democratic state, reflecting the aspirations of the anti-sectarian movement (Haidar et al. 2019).

3. Civil society and social movements

Lebanon's dynamic civil society organizations and social movements have emerged over time with the goal of addressing various socio-political issues and advocating for transformative change. In this section, we will explore the landscape of these organizations, focusing on their areas of expertise, the challenges they have confronted, and the outcomes they have achieved.

These groups operate within a wide range of sectors and fields, our focus will be on three areas: electoral participation and reform, Syrian refugee aid, and the environment. Each organization presented below will focus on specific issues and employs various strategies to

drive change. Moreover, we will notice that some organizations are interconnected, sharing similar goals, and cooperating with each other at times.

As previously mentioned, these organizations have encountered numerous challenges in their pursuit of socio-political reforms. The Lebanese security and political context, as explored above, presents multiple obstacles such as political polarization, resource limitations, legal constraints, and, most importantly, the dominance of traditional sectarian parties. These challenges undoubtedly impede the efficacy and influence of civil society and social movements.

Nevertheless, these organizations have achieved noteworthy outcomes. They have successfully raised awareness, mobilized citizens, and shaped public discourse on various critical issues. Their endeavors have compelled policymakers to address concerns, initiate certain reforms, and undertake measures to enhance governance. While the outcomes may vary across different movements, their collective contribution to Lebanon's overall security landscape remains significant.

The subsequent sections of this paper will conduct an in-depth analysis of the experiences and strategies employed by these movements. We will explore the institutional and societal barriers they face and consider potential avenues for greater effectiveness and impact. Through this analysis, the aim is to enhance comprehension of the intricate dynamics among civil society, political elites, and society in Lebanon. Ultimately, this will contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential for social and political change within the country.

3.1.   Electoral Reform and Political Engagement

In 2018, Lebanon witnessed a significant political event as parliamentary elections were held after a long gap of nearly nine years. Prior to that, the previous elections occurred in 2009, before the wave of uprisings. During the 2009 elections, Lebanon adhered to the electoral framework outlined in the 1960 Electoral law, which was founded on a majoritarian block vote system in multiple member constituencies (IFES Lebanon Briefing Paper 2009). In this system, each voter had the option to cast multiple votes equal to the number of representatives to be elected in their constituency, providing an opportunity to vote for candidates from different political groups. However, it also encouraged the formation of electoral alliances and blocks, with political parties aligning to maximize their chances of winning seats (Ekmekji 2012).

The 2018 parliamentary elections marked a significant departure from the traditional majoritarian system. This change aimed to enhance voter secrecy and expand the scope of voting rights to include Lebanese citizens residing abroad for example. The adoption of the proportional representation system was seen as a step towards promoting fair representation and encouraging broader political participation (Atallah, El-Helou 2019).

Under the proportional representation system, each political party or electoral list received a share of parliamentary seats proportionate to the percentage of votes they garnered in each electoral district. This alteration allowed for a more accurate reflection of the voters' preferences which would ideally lead to a more diverse representation of political views within the Lebanese parliament (Dagher 2022).

However, of course, the new system revealed several shortcomings such as unequal representation by district, high barrier to entry into Parliament, and lack of popular support for winning candidates.

1. Unequal representation by district: the redrawing of Lebanon's electoral map and the merging of districts into larger ones was not based on consistent criteria and followed confessional lines. Thus, some districts had more eligible voters per seat than others, leading to a mismatch between representation in parliament and support at the national level (Dagher 2022).

2. High barrier to entry: the system introduced high electoral thresholds, making it challenging for smaller parties to win seats. These thresholds thus encouraged parties to form alliances during elections, leading to discrepancies between a party's vote share and seat share. In addition, this led to "wasted votes" that were not translated into parliamentary seats (Atallah, El-Helou 2019).

3. Lack of popular support: preferential voting, introduced with the confessional allocation of seats, compelled candidates to compete as individuals for those seats, resembling a majoritarian race. This system thus prevented highly popular candidates from winning if they are not aligned with dominant confessional quotas (Dagher 2022; Atallah, El-Helou 2019).

3.1.1. Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE)

The "Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections" (LADE) was founded on the initiative of a group of activists in 1996. LADE received funding from various sources, including the European Union, embassies, foreign foundations, International Media Support (IMS), and many more. The main work of the association revolves around electoral reform in Lebanon, including voter education and public awareness. Moreover, it monitors all national and local

elections. The main objective of LADE is to improve the Lebanese electoral system, especially in compliance with the set international standards; reinforce fair and democratic practices in both municipal and parliamentary elections; increase awareness and make sure that voters are aware of their electoral rights and duties; and, finally, monitor elections across Lebanon to ensure their fair application based on regulations and laws (LADE website 2017).

3.1.2. Beirut Madinati

Beirut Madinati is a civil society organization, which translates to *Beirut is my city*. The organization focuses on contesting the ruling class in Beirut. The movement was formed shortly before the 2016 municipal elections, and as a direct response to the trash crisis of 2015. Its focus is on the inclusivity of all Beirut residents in the municipal program of the city. Since then, the group grew into a political party with an organizational structure that is deemed as "horizontal" (Haidar et al. 2019) in the sense that decision-making processes are decentralized and participatory, fostering inclusivity and collective ownership of the party's goals and initiatives (Grant 2002).

Even though Beirut Madinati represented the first instance in post-2011 and even post-war Lebanon where a civil society-led movement and initiative challenged the sectarian political elite through local elections, its founders had always been politically engaged and involved in various political campaigns and movements post-2011. The core group was characterized by activists from student movements against Syrian tutelage, advocates for civil rights, including civil marriage and equal citizenship rights for Lebanese women, and urban planners (Karam 2018).

In these ways, Beirut Madinati positioned itself as a credible agent of change, adopting a positive and proactive political discourse. Their discourse was focused on providing feasible and realistic alternatives outlined in their electoral program. Their campaign thus highlighted the group's competencies and leadership abilities. The fact that their communication strategy focused on redefining the political landscape, a landscape that is often associated with sectarianism and corruption set them apart from other political organizations (Abu-Rish 2016). Their reframing of political discourse thus highlighted the importance of public welfare, transparency, social justice, citizen empowerment, and accountability.

The group engaged with a diverse segment of the city's population and their campaign relied on both traditional and innovative methods of electoral politics, which in turn attracted volunteers through meetings, debates, fundraising events, and digital platforms.

Most notably, Beirut Madinati managed to unite activists from various civil society movements and campaigns. For example, members of the "You Stink" movement, "For the Republic", and "People Want" were all involved in Beirut Madinati's activities and campaign (Haidar et al. 2019).

However, the campaign faced certain limitations. Beirut Madinati navigated delicate political topics with caution, avoiding contentious issues such as the controversial Soldiere project. That project shaped the city's postwar reconstruction and continues to exert influenced over the center. Their campaign also lacked a clear strategy to address illegal violations by developers along Beirut's coastline and did not directly tackle the issue of urban safety concerning groups like Hezbollah (Karam 2018; Haidar et al. 2019). This pragmatic approach aimed to appeal to a broader spectrum of society and avoid alienating specific political or sectarian segments. However, it came at the expense of poltical and ideological clarity.

Popular critics argued that Beirut Madinati also overlooked important topics that are central to the economic and political foundations of Lebanon's postwar sectarian system. However, the campaign's focus on proposing practical solutions within the purview of the municipality resonated with a significant portion of the population. Thus, this approach successfully countered the prevalent disillusionment with politics and engaged individuals who had previously been politically disengaged (Tabbara 2022).

Moreover, Beirut Madinati mobilized its supporters and provided support to impactful groups such as Li Baladi. Li Baladi also formed an alliance called "Koulouna Watani", which translates to "we are all for my nation", with other volunteer-based campaigns and independent candidates to increase their effectiveness in the parliamentary elections. In certain cases, civil society organizations and independent candidates joined forces with already established political parties to facilitate their participation in the Lebanese government, hoping for reform (El Kak 2019).

3.1.3. Koullouna Watani

Koullouna Watani consisted of 66 candidates, of which 19 were women, all from independent and secular sectors of civil society as mentioned above. The aim of this coalition was to dominate traditional political parties, given the state's poor performance and lack of accountability. During the 2018 elections, however, most voters chose to re-elect the same sectarian parties and leaders. In this section, we will examine the reasons behind the failure of Koullouna Watani in directly challenging entrenched sectarian politics. This failure is partly due to the institutional and repressive mechanisms employed by political elites which influenced voting patterns and hindered the emergence of alternative forces (Tabbara 2022; El Kak 2019).

The new electoral law that was introduced in 2018 incorporated proportional representation; but instead of promoting new parties' participation, the law failed to address abusive behavior by traditional sectarian parties and lacked an independent electoral commission or adequate campaign spending limits (Haidar et al. 2019). Political elites used the new proportional representation law as a façade to consolidate their power. Most traditional parties employed "dirty campaigns" and utilized vote buying along with intimidation tactics. For example, parties had their members interact with voters on a personal level, reminding them of services received or distributing payments and services to win their votes. Moreover, by using narratives on sectarian identities and by exploiting vulnerabilities, these parties were able to instill fear in certain voter populations (Al Alameddine, Hijazi 2021).

It is also important to note some internal shortcoming when it comes to civil society groups such as Koullouna Watani acting as a political party. Some examples are disorganized structures, conflicts over alliances and list formation, and the absence of a clear identity and political vision (El Kak 2019). These factors also hindered their efforts, along with ineffective grassroots campaigning and a lack of presence on the ground. Moreover, overcoming limited resources and scaling up decentralized approaches rooted in the government remain key challenges for anti-sectarian movements in Lebanon (Dagher 2022; Al Alameddine, Hijazi 2021).

However, despite the disappointing election results, the experience of participating in elections has provided valuable lessons for anti-sectarian opposition groups. Activists acknowledge that change requires time and incremental progress, rejecting the notion of change solely from outside the system. They emphasize the importance of building trust, forging common interests, and countering sectarian narratives. Moreover, they recognize the need for sustained community engagement, even in the absence of funds and full-time

political involvement (Ouaiss 2020; Karam 2018). Thus, this experience was a setting stone for further exploration and experimentation with new strategies before the next election, offering hope for a more effective anti-sectarian movement in the country.

3.2. Syrian Refugees Aid

The Lebanese government faces limitations in resources and funding, hindering its ability to provide adequate assistance to incoming Syrian refugees. Furthermore, deliberate barriers have been imposed on refugee settlement. Notably, Lebanon did not ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, which adds to the challenges in addressing the crisis (Kheshen 2022). Consequently, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Lebanon took the lead in responding to the rapid flux of refugees and facilitated their integration in the country. Subsequently, local civil society organizations, with prior experience in welfare services, stepped in to offer support (Janmyr 2018).

According to the UNHCR, Lebanese NGOs have played a crucial role in assisting refugees across various sectors such as: basic needs, water, sanitation, hygiene, shelter, food security, education, and much more (Amin, Kabbara 2020). Their contributions have been instrumental in alleviating the plight of refugees in the country.

While the Lebanese government established a committee in 2012 to collaborate with local and international entities in aiding refugees, 2014 witnessed the introduction of new policies aimed at reducing the number of refugees (Kheshen 2022; Karam 2018). This has made it challenging for them to renew or obtain residence permits. Consequently, local organizations assumed primary responsibility for supporting refugees. LebRelief, for example, emerged after 2011 to provide aid for Lebanese civil society in assisting refugees remains essential

and relevant, especially considering the challenges posed by government policies (LebRelief 2020).

While the initial efforts by civil society organizations were focused on providing humanitarian aid, there has been a notable shift towards education and employment projects over the past few years. This shift is a response to the UN's priorities, urging the Lebanese government to allow Syrian refugees to acquire vocational skills and start businesses (Chmali 2020). Despite this, some politicians remain concerned that granting such opportunities to Syrians might lead to their permanent settlement, further straining the country's weak political and social system. Civil society organizations are thus designing projects that cater to both the Syrian refugee population and the vulnerable Lebanese population. Attempting to find a balance between supporting refugees and addressing domestic concerns thus remains an ongoing challenge.

3.2.1. Civil Society Organizations

Arc En Ciel Lebanon

Arc En Ciel (Rainbow) is a Lebanese non-profit organization operating in the Beqaa Governorate of Lebanon, which is home to over 300,000 registered Syrian refugees. The organization is actively engaged in addressing the refugee crisis by providing sustainable solutions and social services to integrate marginalized populations. Their primary focus is to improve the living condition of Syrian refugees and the Lebanese population, offering inclusive services ranging from medical and psychological checks to education, day care, and care for the disabled (United Nations Development Programme 2019).

A notable aspect of Arc En Ciel is their commitment to employing Syrian refugees as seasonal agricultural workers at the Taanayel center in Bekaa. Additionally, they provide

economic opportunities in sectors like ecotourism and waste management. Recently, they installed PV panels, expected to save the center around $10,000 USD annually in electricity costs, which will be reinvested into diverse activities for the benefit of the refugee community (ibid.)

The organization's major emphasis lies in agricultural activities, and more specifically water-related projects such as water preservation and the implementation of new irrigation systems. They also aim to strengthen a sustainable educational and social network for economically vulnerable groups. Such initiatives not only have a humanitarian impact but also promote sustainable livelihoods, thereby contributing to economic empowerment and lasting positive change in the lives of those they serve (Arc En Ciel Engage in Development 2022).

Association Justice and Mercy

The Association of Justice and Mercy collaborates with the European Regional Development and Protection Program (RDPP) and provides legal aid for Syrian refugees in detention.

Forced displacement constitutes one of the most distressing human experiences, leaving many refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon extremely vulnerable to severe human rights violations. They face various socio-economic stressors and may get involved in criminal activities, leading to conflicts with the law.

Many Syrians entered Lebanon illegally or with forged identities in search of safety and better living conditions. Fearful of seeking assistance to regularize their status, they often get arrested for their unlawful stay. The lack of legal status exposes them to protection risks, poverty, and involvement in illegal activities (Association Justice and Mercy 2018).

For these reasons, the association's project encompasses various activities designed specifically to improve the situation of the target groups. Their goal is to increase knowledge and awareness of Syrian refugees' rights and legal matters, while also providing them with legal services. They also focus on monitoring violations and malpractices, working towards reducing and preventing them while ensuring fair access to justice and fair trial (European Union External Action 2016).

Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association of Beirut

In the education sector, Makassed University offers a diverse range of knowledge in various disciplines and comprises of three faculties: Islamic Studies, Nursing, and Teachers Training. Makassed Schools operate across Lebanon and serve Syrian refugees, prioritizing education as their core mission and providing subsidized education in elementary schools. The Makassed Vocational and Technical Center also caters to Syrian refugees and offers programs to elevate technical education through practical and theoretical studies (Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association of Beirut 2020)

In the healthcare sector, Makassed General Hospital is renowned for its quality and affordability, Syrian refugees also receive high-quality subsidized medical services. The hospital's Infection Control Program ensures a safe environment for both refugees and medical staff. The Makassed HealthCare Bureau oversees primary health care centers and mobile medical units, ensuring access to healthcare services for both Syrian refugees and the Lebanese community alike. They were actively engaged in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and providing vaccinations to Syrian refugees (Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association of Beirut 2020).

3.2.2. Lebanese Universities

Some universities such as the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, and the University of Balamand, assist refugees in multiple ways. For example, members in the Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine at both the University of Balamand and the American University of Beirut support health initiatives to aid refugees across the country (Karam 2018).

The director of the Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution at the Lebanese American University, Imad Salameh, led many projects that aimed to raise awareness about vulnerable populations and proposed solutions to protect the forcibly displaced Syrian people (Kadi 2016).

The universities also produced evidence to counter misconceptions that were spreading about refugees in the country. For instance, the "Refugee Research and Policy in the Arab World" is a program run by scholars at the American University of Beirut with the aim to produce policy briefs and hold public policy discussions events (Yassin et al. 2015). Thus, they helped raise social awareness about refugees in the country and in the region. In fact, a professor in the Faculty of Health Sciences also launched a Twitter series as part of the popular and trending hashtag #AUB4refugees that is based on academic research. His series "Fact of the Day" was based on data aimed at dispelling misconceptions concerning the refugees in Lebanon and the region. He focused a lot on the positive contributions of Syrian refugees, particularly economic contributions (Bajec 2017; Karam 2018).

3.3. Environmental Initiatives

3.3.1. You Stink Movement

In 2015, "You Stink" emerged as a civic resistance movement in response to the dire garbage crisis gripping Lebanon. The streets of Beirut were inundated with mounting trash, exposing the government's inefficiency and negligence in waste management. What started as a localized protest soon transcended into a larger movement, drawing participation from a wide spectrum of Lebanese society, including civil society organizations, concerned citizens, and passionate student movements from various backgrounds. The movement's main impetus was to hold the sectarian political class accountable for their corruption and demand a more transparent and effective governance system (Ekdawi 2021).

However, despite its initial fervor and wide-ranging support, "You Stink" encountered significant challenges that hindered its long-term success. First, the movement set unachievable goals that overlooked the complexities of Lebanon's deeply entrenched sectarianism. Second, the groups displayed stubbornness in negotiations and refused to engage constructively with the government. Third, the movement lacked clear strategies to channel their momentum effectively. Fourth, they adopted an exclusive approach that primarily appealed to the well-educated urban elite, thus alienating other segments of society. Finally, they rejected multiple opportunities for forming strategic coalitions with like-minded groups (Cham 2018).

These internal weaknesses, combined with resistance from Lebanon's powerful sectarian political class, undermined the movement's aspirations and led to its relatively short-lived impact. The ruling elite sought to co-opt some of the organizers by adopting a reformist

rhetoric against corruption aiming to dilute the movement's demands and divert public attention from their own mismanagement (Kraidy 2016).

However, the legacy of "You Stink" extended beyond its immediate results. It had a revitalizing effect on civil society organizations in Lebanon, inspiring and empowering individuals to take a more active role in shaping their country's future. as the movement waned, it paved the way for the emergence of several new political groups and initiatives, each addressing specific issues with more targeted approaches.

In retrospect, a more effective path for "You Stink" might have involved focusing on specific and attainable issues, thereby uniting a broader cross-section of society. Forming inclusive coalitions could have strengthened their collective impact and made it more difficult for the political elite to influence individual members. Moreover, engaging in constructive negotiations with the government would have provided a stronger foundation for lasting change. Nevertheless, the experience of "You Stink" serves as a valuable lesson for future civic movements in Lebanon and the region, demonstrating the importance of strategic planning, inclusivity, and adaptability in effecting meaningful and lasting social change.

3.3.2. Al Shouf Cedar Society

The "Al Shouf Cedar Society" is an organization known for its dedication to the preservation and promotion of traditional and cultural practices, biodiversity, and ecological values. It is important to note that the society actively engages in multiple projects, in this section we will focus on two recent ones.

The first project aims to address the lack of clarity surrounding traditional land-use practices, their impact on biodiversity, and the drivers behind changes in these practices. Through this project, the organization seeks to establish a comprehensive database of biodiversity and

ecocultural indicators in the Shouf region. Moreover, they aim to document the positive response of wildfire and flora to improve the management of traditional natural habitats in the region. The project also involves the restoration of revenues for local communities living in the transition area of the Shouf Biosphere Reserve. (Al Shouf Cedar Society 2022).

Their second most recent project focuses on restoring landscape multi-functionality through participatory planning and implementation of restoration plans for mountain pastures and wildlife. This project emphasizes capacity development and promotes adaptive management of cultural practices. Moreover, the aim is to diversify the local economy through green growth opportunities, such as marketing agro-forestry products and eco-tourism. The goal is to improve socio-economic conditions for local community groups by sustainably harvesting wild plants and honey in natural habitats. This strategy also includes the creation of infrastructures to support conservation and the dissemination of knowledge on biodiversity and ecocultural practices (Al Shouf Cedar Society 2020).

To foster environmental awareness, the society implements formal and informal educational actions in the Shouf region, aiming to educate and engage a new generation of environmentally conscious citizens through youth clubs and educational programs. Al Shouf Cedar Society also plays a crucial role in international cooperation and knowledge sharing in the Mediterranean region by exchanging practices and experiences with other partners in the region such as Wadi Rum and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan (Al Shouf Cedar Society 2019).

4. Discussion: The multifaceted role of civil society and social movements in Lebanon's political system (contributions, compromises, and challenges).

This section highlights the multifaceted role of civil society and social movements in Lebanon's political system, introducing but also going beyond elite-based compromises to explore the contributions of Lebanese organizations. It examines how civil society groups involved in politics, environmental causes, and refugee assistance help the government and often serve as substitutes for it.

This section argues that civil society and social movements play a crucial role in three key areas, contributing to stability and reform amid regional and national upheavals. First, in the context of electoral reform, civil society pressure has led to significant changes, including the adoption of a new electoral law that incorporates proportional representation for example. While still serving elite interests, this reflects civil society's advocacy for a fairer electoral system in the country.

Second, civil society organizations, particularly environmental NGOs, are relied upon by the government for environmental planning and protection. They work alongside the government to safeguard natural sites and address crises like the garbage crisis of 2015. Their expertise and initiatives are instrumental in finding suitable and realistic solutions to environmental challenges.

Finally, civil society groups and social movements have aided and relief to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These organizations, alongside notable scholars in Lebanese universities, have coordinated efforts to meet the needs of the refugee community and counteract misconceptions by raising awareness. Through various services and support, civil society contributes to the stability and resilience of the political system.

It can be argued, however, that as united consequence of civil society substituting for the state is the perpetuation of a weak government. In other words, the success and expertise of civil society in various areas create little incentive for the government to build robust public institutions. Instead, the political elite can exploit civil society's commitment while maintain the elite-based compromises at the core of Lebanon's political system.

Nevertheless, civil society's engagement demonstrates a determination to challenge the status quo within the existing sectarian-based political framework. Their ability to pressure and assist the government underscores their contribution to the stability of the political syste m to a certain extent.

4.1. Elite-based compromises and stability

In 2017, Lebanon witnessed a political crisis when Prime Minister Saad Hariri unexpectedly resigned, citing Iran and Hezbollah as the reasons for his decision. This sparked tensions among Lebanon's political elite, with President Michel Aoun and others claiming that Hariri was being held hostage by Saudi Arabia. However, with the intervention of French President Emmanuel Macron, Hariri eventually returned to Lebanon and withdrew his resignation. This incident showcased the resilience of the 2016 Aoun-Hariri entente in maintaining the national unity government and navigating regional rivalries. While the Aoun-Hariri agreement partly contributed to the resilience and stability of Lebanon's political system, they are not the sole nor major factor. In fact, the public's response to the crisis, with Lebanese citizens from different political and sectarian backgrounds denouncing external interference and demanding the return of Hariri, exemplifies the role of non-elite social forces in upholding the political system's stability.

Elite-based compromises have thus facilitated various important agreements such as electoral reform, which was clearly reflected in the adoption of a proportional representation system. Even though thew new electoral law maintains sectarianism to this day, the engagement of civil society in lobbying for reform paves the way for potential and significant change.

4.1.1. Recommendations

In light of the challenges highlighted in Lebanon's electoral system, here are some recommendations to address these issues and foster a more inclusive and effective political landscape:

1. Ensure Equitable Representation:

To address the issue of unequal representation by district, it is crucial to redraw Lebanon's electoral map based on objective and consistent criteria, rather than confessional lines. A fair and transparent redistricting process should aim to balance the number of eligible voters per seat across all districts, ensuring that each citizen's vote holds equal weight in the parliamentary election.

1. Lower Electoral Thresholds:

To overcome the high barrier to entry into Parliament for smaller parties, electoral thresholds should be reconsidered and possibly lowered. This adjustment would allow for a more diverse representation of political views within the legislature. Reducing the electoral thresholds would also encourage individual parties to run independently, promoting healthy competition and providing voters with a wider range of choices. Moreover, it would

minimize the phenomenon of "wasted votes" and ensure that the preferences of the electorate are adequately reflected in the composition of the Parliament.

2. Engage Civil Society in the Reform Process:

To ensure a comprehensive and inclusive electoral reform, it is essential to engage civil society organizations, academics, and other stakeholders in the reform process. Seeking input and feedback from a diverse range of voices will help identify potential pitfalls and develop solutions that resonate with the aspirations of the Lebanese population.

By implementing these recommendations, Lebanon can move towards a more inclusive and responsive political system that truly reflects the will and aspirations of its people. In doing so, Lebanon can pave the way for a brighter and more stable future, driven by the potential for social and political change within the country.

4.2. Civil society's role in supporting and reforming the state.

Lebanon's civil society stands as a formidable pillar in upholding the stability and progress of the political system. In a country where political challenges have often tested the resilience of the nation, civil society has emerged as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change. Through the concerted efforts of numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and various civil society groups, a resolute commitment to supporting and challenging the government has taken root, particularly concerning governance and the formulation of new laws (Karam 2018). This active engagement reflects the collective determination of citizens to shape their nation's destiny and forge a brighter future.

One of the most remarkable achievements of civil society's relentless engagement has been its influential lobbying efforts, which have played a significant role in the adoption of the

proportional representation system within the framework of the existing sectarian structure. While this may not represent a complete overhaul, it marks a crucial step towards more inclusive and representative elections. By embracing this incremental change, civil society showcases its pragmatic approach to driving reform from within the political apparatus, pushing boundaries without compromising the stability of the nation.

Beyond legislative victories, civil society's impact is felt through its grassroots initiatives and community-driven campaigns. Understanding the power of education and awareness, these organizations tirelessly work to inform and mobilize citizens, empowering them to become active participants in shaping their nation's future (Karam 2019; Karam, Majed 2022). Town hall meetings, seminars, and awareness campaigns are organized to engage with citizens on vital issues, sparking debates and nurturing an environment where people's voices are heard and valued.

Moreover, civil society's role extends to monitoring and evaluating government actions, acting as a watchful guardian of public interests. Through independent audits and assessments, they ensure transparency, accountability, and responsible governance. When the government falls short of its responsibilities or deviates from the path of progress, civil society organizations are quick to raise their voices and demand corrective action (Ouaiss 2020). Their advocacy serves as a powerful reminder to those in power that the people's needs and aspirations cannot be ignored.

Despite facing challenges and encountering resistance from certain quarters, Lebanon's civil society remains undeterred in its pursuit of positive change. Their resilience in the face of adversity is a testament to their unwavering commitment to creating a more just and equitable society. The vitality of civil society lies in its ability to inspire and mobilize the Lebanese people, transcending sectarian divisions and fostering unity in pursuit of common

goals. As they continue to shine a light on societal issues and advocate for meaningful reforms, the transformative potential of civil society becomes increasingly evident, offering a glimmer of hope for a future characterized by unity, inclusivity, and progress. The unwavering spirit of Lebanon's civil society exemplifies the power of ordinary citizens coming together to shape their nation's destiny and create lasting change.

4.3.   Environmental NGOs

In the realm of environmental responsibilities, the Lebanese government has found valuable allies in numerous local environmental NGOs and civil society organizations. These movements have assumed a pivotal role in responding to environmental disasters and exerting pressure on the government to tackle pressing environmental issues. A notable testament to their effectiveness lies in the successful cleanup of the oil spill that marred Lebanon's coast. Civil society activists, with the government's approval and support, took the lead in addressing the ecological catastrophe, showcasing the collaborative power of public and governmental forces.

Likewise, during the infamous 2015 garbage crisis, when uncollected waste choked Lebanon's streets, it was the collective voice of civil society groups that rose to the occasion. Spearheaded by movements like "You Stink" and the Lebanon Eco Movement, protestors demanded a sustainable solution to the crisis. While the government initiated the opening of two landfills as a stopgap measure, civil society activists continued their scrutiny, holding the government accountable for its limited and insufficient response (Karam 2019; Ouaiss 2020). Their concerns extended beyond short-term measures, advocating for proper waste management, and highlighting the environmental implications of improper disposal. In an inspiring display of determination, they drafted proposals and lobbied government officials for a more sustainable waste management plan.

Through unwavering dedication, Lebanon's civil society has consistently compelled the government to seek practical solutions to environmental challenges. By acting as a vigilant check on the political elite, these activist groups have thwarted corrupt arrangements and pressed for the formulation of more effective environmental policies. As governmental responses fell short, NGOs stepped in to fill the void, responding to various environmental disasters with support from international bodies like the United Nations and other international organizations (Karam 2019). Their contributions have been invaluable in formulating proposals and identifying viable solutions to address pressing environmental crises.

The mobilization and advocacy efforts of environmental NGOs and civil society activists in Lebanon have proven to be instrumental in addressing environmental disasters and holding the government accountable for its actions. As the nation grapples with ongoing waste problems and other environmental challenges, the continued engagement of these dedicated groups will be pivotal in fostering sustainable solutions and preserving Lebanon's natural heritage for generations to come. Their unwavering commitment serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring positive change, and environmental stewardship throughout the country.

4.4. Assistance to Syrian Refugees

Since 2011, and particularly in the wake of the 2019 uprising, civil society in Lebanon mobilized to provide vital support to Syrian refugees who were facing numerous challenges due to the protracted conflict in their home country. One of the most significant actors in this endeavor has been local NGOs such as the Lebanese Red Cross, Caritas Lebanon, and the Amel Association (Ouaiss 2020; Karam 2019). These organizations have been at the forefront of humanitarian aid efforts, delivering essential services and assistance to the refugee population.

For instance, the Lebanese Red Cross has been actively involved in providing emergency medical services and humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees, especially in areas with limited access to healthcare facilities (Kadi 2016). They have set up mobile clinics, conducted medical check-ups, and provided essential medications to those in need. Additionally, Caritas Lebanon has been working tirelessly to offer food and non-food assistance, including shelter and hygiene kits, to vulnerable refugee families.

Various educational NGOs have played a crucial role in supporting refugee children's education and integration into the Lebanese education system. Organizations like Beyond Association and Basmeh & Zeitooneh have established learning centers and schools, providing access to education for thousands of Syrian refugee children who would otherwise be left without proper schooling opportunities (Karam 2019).

Beyond basic assistance and education, civil society movements have also focused on promoting social stability and peaceful coexistence between Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees. The Lebanese Union of Environmentalists, for instance, has been engaged in projects aimed at environmental protection and restoration (Chmali 2020; Karam 2019). These initiatives not only contribute to preserving Lebanon's natural resources but also create opportunities for social interaction and understanding between local and refugee communities, fostering a sense of shared responsibility towards their environment.

As previously mentioned, universities and research institutions have partnered with civil society organizations to conduct research and advocate for more inclusive policies towards Syrian refugees. They have organized conferences, seminars, and awareness campaigns to address misconceptions about the refugee crisis and highlight the contributions that refugees can make to Lebanese society (Karam 2019; Yassin et al., 2015). One such example is the collaboration between the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Development for

People and Nature Association (DPNA). Together, they conducted research on the impact of Syrian refugee camps on the surrounding environment and proposed sustainable solutions to reduce the ecological footprint while improving living conditions for refugees.

Civil society continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to assisting Syrian refugees and addressing their humanitarian needs. Through the collective efforts of NGOs, educational institutions, and advocacy groups, significant strides have been made towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for the refugee community. These initiatives not only provide essential services and support but also contribute to fostering understanding, empathy, and social cohesion between Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees during these challenging times.

5. The 2019 uprisings in Lebanon

On October 17, 2019, Lebanon witnessed a momentous event known as "the Thawra", or revolutionary uprising. The catalysts for this uprising were a week of wildfires devastating the countryside, the government's failure to respond adequately, and a deepening financial crisis. Adding to the frustration, the government announced new taxes, including one on the popular WhatsApp application, which triggered hundreds of protesters to take to the streets in Beirut and other cities. The movement quickly gained momentum, unprecedentedly spreading across the country. Throughout the evening, hundreds of thousands of people joined the demonstrations, leading to what they termed a Thawra (Karam, Majed 2022).

This uprising was unique in Lebanon's modern history, as it marked the first time that protests erupted simultaneously across the country in a decentralized manner, mobilizing large numbers of people. The protesters represented the working classes and demanded the downfall of the regime, echoing previous calls for change in 2011 and adopting slogans from

the 2015 You Stink movement. Notably, the uprising focused on class-based issues, targeting both sectarian leaders and the oligarchy. The early days of the movement also stood out for the use of strong language and curses directed at politicians and bankers, symbolizing a powerful and rebellious revolution (Abi Yaghi, Catusse, Younes 2017).

The protests quickly evolved into road blockades, effectively shutting down the country to declare a new phase and disrupt the status quo. Lebanon's Thawra cannot be understood in isolation; it should be viewed within the broader context of global uprisings and movements since the Arab uprisings of 2011. These historical events have had a significant impact on social and political activism worldwide, including Lebanon. The echoes of the Syrian revolution and counterrevolution further shaped the sociopolitical landscape of Lebanon during this time.

5.1. Regional and international factors: understanding "sectarian neoliberalism."

In 2019, both Iraq and Lebanon experienced revolutionary uprisings that drew millions of people to the streets, forming an unprecedented wave of protests in terms of scale, social diversity, and significance. These upheavals signaled the emergence of major historical events. From the beginning, the sheer scope and geographic spread of the mobilizations distinguished them as something different (but not disconnected) from previous waves of protests that had emerged in both countries since 2011 (Yahya 2017). Lebanon and Iraq have been governed by what can be referred to as "sectarian neoliberalism". This term was coined by Majed and explains a political and economic system plagued by chronic social and political crises that have often led to street protests and mass mobilizations. These events are related to uprisings in other regions, but what sets the Lebanese and Iraqi cases apart is the political system that the protesters are seeking to overthrow (Karam, Majed 2022).Lebanon

and Iraq experienced uprisings within a consociational democratic framework, a power sharing arrangement based on identity affiliations, rather than targeting a single leader. This system is coupled with a neoliberal economic structure (reliant on rent, financial capitalism, reregulated labor markets, sectarian clientelism, political patronage, foreign intervention, occupation, and a legacy of civil wars and violence). Despite the spontaneous nature of these protests and the absence of coordination between Iraq and Lebanon at the grassroots level, cycles of contention have frequently erupted in both countries since 2011 (Salloukh 2019). Waves of protests occurred simultaneously in 2011, 2012, and 2015, all shaping the political trajectories of these nations. In 2015, the protests not only focused on identity politics but also on socioeconomic and environmental demands, marking a significant turning point for both countries (Karam, Majed 2022). In fact, it is this pivotal moment that led to the formation of civil society campaigns that participated in municipal and parliamentary elections in both countries.

Protestors in Lebanon and Iraq often expressed solidarity with each other in banners and slogans, recognizing the similarities in their predicaments as nations entangled in sectarianized geopolitical dynamics between Iran on one side and the United States with its regional allies on the other. However, it was not until 2019 that both countries gained global attention as part of the second wave of uprisings that began in late 2018, following Sudan and Algeria (ibid.). The 2019 uprisings initially centered around socioeconomic and governance issues. Core demands in both countries encompassed unemployment, unfair taxation, widespread corruption, sectarian politics, and much more. What distinguished these protests from previous ones was their ability to mobilize large segments of society across both countries, presenting a clear class-based discourse of demanding a radical change of regime, rather than mere reforms (Turkmani, Alkinani 2019). These uprisings managed to

mobilize individuals who had never participated in protests before or who were previously aligned with sectarian ruling parties.

5.2. Reflection: environmental disasters in 2019

In October 2019, devastating forest fires erupted across Lebanon, tragically leading to the death of a volunteer firefighter who bravely assister under-equipped responded. This uprising thus marked a significant shift in environmentalism, as citizens took center stage in ecological struggles, challenging the old perception of environmental activism as limited to certain groups (Azhari 2019).

Reflecting on the roots of the 2019 uprising, we find echoes of past disasters. During the war, Lebanon faced an ecological catastrophe when tons of toxic waste were illegally brought into the country and irresponsibly dumped in various locations. A similar tragedy unfolded in 2020 with the Beirut explosion. These interconnected events laid bare the undeniable truth: ecological disasters are not isolated occurrences confined to localities; they are intertwined with global power dynamics, intricately shaped by contemporary neoliberal policies (Karam, Majed 2022: 66-67).

Against this backdrop of ecological challenges, civil society organizations in Lebanon found themselves at the forefront of a critical mission. The 2019 uprising compelled these grassroots movements to confront and challenge dominant narratives propagated by state-donors and organizations that upheld the status quo of neoliberal paradigms in the socioecological realm (Karam, Majed 2022: 68-72). Armed with conviction and resilience, civil society stood against the prevailing rhetoric that treated nature as a commodity to be exploited, and instead championed a vision where environmental sustainability and social justice went hand in hand.

As we reflect on the lessons of the 2019 environmental disasters, we are reminded of the transformative potential of collective action. The tragedy served as a stark awakening, mobilizing citizens to reevaluate their relationship with the environment and demanding an end to business-as-usual practices. Civil society organizations played a pivotal role in this awakening, spearheading initiatives that not only brought immediate relief and aid but also sought long-term solutions to prevent such catastrophes from recurring.

5.3.   Regional and international responses to the 2019 uprising

The regime's initial response to the uprising in 2019 involved crackdowns and promises of economic reforms, leading to the resignation of Saad Hariri's government under immense pressure from the streets. During this period, Iran the United States employed varying counterrevolutionary tactics that are worth considering. Iran viewed the protests as a Western-led conspiracy against the "Axis of Resistance", thus urging Hezbollah to suppress the uprising. The United States (U.S.) seemed torn between supporting the protesters and backing the Lebanese Armed Forces, which played a role in quelling demonstrations (Karam, Majed 2022: 93-95)

Understanding the regional and international dimensions of counterrevolution is essential because it sheds light on why Iran and the U.S. acted as counterrevolutionary forces, supporting unpopular regimes to maintain status quo; and it helps situate the uprising within the broader context of the Arab uprisings.

Recognizing Lebanon's uprising as part of a wider global context of mobilization is crucial. The revolutionary actions resonate with similar uprisings in the region, and these movements often stem from economic grievances and sociopolitical mismanagement.

Iran's role in the 2019 uprising

During the 2019 uprising, the Iranian regime, despite its self-proclaimed "revolutionary" identity, played a notable counterrevolutionary role. Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, offered criticism of the protests, vacillating between attributing them to a Western-led "hirak" and recognizing legitimate socioeconomic grievances. Supporters of Hezbollah took to the streets to challenge and intimidate protesters, resorting to violence particularly in areas with a Shiite majority. Iran's actions during the Syrian uprising in 2011, where it supported the Assad regime to suppress opposition and maintain the existing order, influenced Hezbollah's decision to intervene militarily in Syria and their approach to handling the uprisings in Lebanon and Iraq in 2019 (Turkmani, Alkinani 2019).

Iran interpreted the revolutionary movements in Lebanon and Iraq as potential challenges to its strategic interests and regional influence, much like how it perceived the Syrian uprising. Taking cues from its previous tactics, Iran issued warnings against the emergence of any political vacuum and stoked fears of civil war, unequivocally supporting the suppression of the revolutionary situation in Lebanon. Although the violence in Lebanon was less severe compared to Syria or Iraq, Hezbollah aligned its counterrevolutionary narrative with Iran's accusations of Western-led conspiracies. Nasrallah's rhetoric of a Western plot stemmed from Iran's backing of Hezbollah and its broader efforts to spread revolutionary ideas across the Middle East, challenging the interests of the United States and Israel (Salloukh 2019; Turkmani, Alkinani 2019).

Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, bolstered Hezbollah's counterrevolutionary position by citing Iran's past success in suppressing opposition. He attributed the unrest in Lebanon and Iraq to the influence of the US, Saudi Arabia, and their allies, while urging protesters to

pursue change through peaceful methods. Nasrallah commended Khomenei's support and alignment with Hezbollah's core principles and objectives (Yahya 2017).

The involvement of Iran in supporting Hezbollah's counterrevolutionary efforts in Lebanon reflects the larger regional power dynamics and international impact on revolutionary movements in the Middle East. Analyzing Iran's actions during the 2019 uprising adds valuable insights to the ongoing discussions about how foreign states employ counterrevolutionary tactics to uphold the existing order in the region.

The role of the U.S. in the 2019 uprising.

Following the 2019 uprising in Lebanon, the U.S. faced a nuanced and sensitive scenario. U.S. authorities acknowledged the legitimate concerns of the demonstrators who sought economic reforms and an eradication of corruption in the country's political system. The U.S. government openly supported the right of the Lebanese people to engage in peaceful protests and acknowledged their desire for meaningful improvements (Karam, Majed 2022: 95-96).

However, the U.S. also grappled with the task of preserving stability in a nation with a history of political volatility and sectarian divisions. The concern of a potential political void, capable of creating turmoil and providing fertile ground for extremist elements, was a significant consideration for U.S. policymakers (Karam, Majed 2022: 96-97). They were cautious of any events that could upset the delicate equilibrium of power in Lebanon and potentially undermine its reputation as a relatively stable Arab country.

In this context, the U.S. sought to strike a balance between supporting the protesters' demands and safeguarding the existing political order. U.S. officials encouraged Lebanon's political elite to introduce reforms and address the people's grievances but at the same time,

they also called on the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain order and prevent violence on the streets (El Sammak 2022).

For the U.S., Hezbollah's involvement in the protests further complicated matters. As a group designated as a terrorist organization by the US government, Hezbollah's presence among the demonstrators raised concerns about the potential for violence and the group's wider regional agenda. U.S. officials were careful not to take any measures that might inadvertently bolster Hezbollah's standing within Lebanese politics and, consequently, amplify Iran's sway in the region.

Amid this duality of supporting dissent and coercion, US officials carefully monitored the developments in Lebanon. The embassy also issued security alerts and closely followed the evolving situation on the ground (Karam, Majed 2022; U.S. EMBASSY BEIRUT 2020).

Throughout the various phases of the uprising, U.S. policymakers aimed to calibrate their responses, weighing the demands for change from the people against the need to ensure a stable and secure Lebanon (U.S. EMBASSY BEIRUT 2020). They aimed to strike a balance between endorsing genuine protests and taking measures to avoid the escalation of violence or further destabilization.

The U.S. approach to the 2019 uprising in Lebanon was characterized by a delicate balancing act between supporting the aspirations of the protesters and preserving the stability of the political system. Faced with the fear of potential disruptions and the influence of Hezbollah, US officials navigated the situation with caution, seeking to uphold Lebanon's stability while acknowledging the people's legitimate demands for change.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, we explored the pivotal role of civil society organizations and social movements in post-2011 Lebanon. Our investigation revolved around the core research question: How does the active engagement of these movements contribute to Lebanon's security dynamics, societal changes, and the contestation of sectarianism, through the lens of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)? Our exploration led us to significant findings that shed light on the multifaceted impact of these movements in shaping Lebanon's political landscape.

The mobilization of civil society organizations and social movements in Lebanon has been a driving force behind the push for political reforms and conflict resolution. Through their tireless efforts, these movements have put pressure on the government, advocated for policy changes, and rallied public support. As a result, new laws and reforms addressing societal grievances have been adopted, leading to positive implications for conflict resolution within the nation.

The emergence of social movements in response to regional uprisings and the Syrian displacement has presented Lebanon with both challenges and opportunities. While existing power structures and resistance to change posed obstacles, the interconnectedness of these movements through digital technologies and shared goals has amplified their ability to mobilize and shape political discourse. Consequently, these movements hold the potential to bring about transformative change and create opportunities for a more inclusive and democratic society.

Applying the Regional Security Complex Theory has provided profound insights into Lebanon's security dynamics, particularly in the context of social movements and their

interactions with regional actors. RSCT's framework has underscored the interplay between internal and external factors, the influence of regional rivalries, and the impact of transnational networks on social movements. This newfound understanding enhances our grasp of how these movements contribute to the nation's security dynamics, extending its implications beyond Lebanon's borders.

Social movements in Lebanon have exhibited a profound commitment to challenging sectarianism. By promoting inclusive narratives, advocating for non-sectarian political reforms, and questioning sectarian-based politics, they have posed a transformative force within the country. However, we must remain cautious of the risk that some movements may become institutionalized political projects, possibly losing their original objectives and perpetuating sectarian divisions. Acknowledging this intricate relationship between social movements and sectarianism is vital for safeguarding the progress they bring.

This dissertation has unraveled the significant impact of civil society organizations and social movements in post-2011 Lebanon. By influencing political reforms, contributing to conflict resolution, challenging sectarianism, and driving societal changes, these movements have become catalysts for positive change within the nation. Furthermore, the application of the Regional Security Complex Theory has enriched our understanding of the interconnectedness between these movements and regional actors, illuminating the broader implications of Lebanon's security dynamics.

As we move forward, it is imperative to recognize the transformative power of civil society in shaping Lebanon's future. Empowering these actors and supporting their endeavors will be instrumental in fostering a more democratic and equitable nation. " لكم لبنانكم بكل ما فيه من الأغراض والمنازع، ولي لبناني بما فيه من الأحلام والأماني" is a famous quote by Lebanese writer, Khalil Gibran. It roughly translates to "Yours is Lebanon with all its purpose and disputes,

and mine is Lebanon with all its dreams and aspiration" (Khalil Gebran, n.d.). This saying resonates with my experience personally. On the 20th of October, I witnessed the resistance of a population that abandoned the sectarianism of the past for the sake of a simple dream of building a contemporary homeland that would grand citizens a life of dignity, free of corruption and divisions. That same day, I witnessed the anger of the people, as well as their hope and love for life. I witnessed the beginning of the march towards a promising future, where the mobilization of citizens showed that not all is lost.

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