AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE ROLE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN MONITORING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF 2018 IN LEBANON AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE GOVERNMENT

by
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To fellow protestors and activists, who continue to resist and persist amid the unbearable circumstances imposed on us by our government, you are warriors and heroes in civilian clothing. Thank you for the continuous inspiration – we shall overturn the current system and rebuild a just, equal, and secure society for generations to come.

ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: The Role of Non-Profit Organizations in Monitoring the Parliamentary Elections of 2018 in Lebanon and their Relationships with the Government.

This research examines the role of Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) in monitoring the parliamentary elections of 2018 and their relationship with the official monitoring body, the Supervisory Commission of Elections (SCE). The research takes into consideration three case studies of NPOs: The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), Social Media Exchange (SMEX), and Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) with an objective to analyze their relationships with the SCE through Coston (1998) framework, which was developed to define the relationship between governments and NPOs based on a list of criteria such as linkage, formality, institutional pluralism, access to information, among others.

The main question that this research aims to answer is as follows: What role did NPOs play during the monitoring of the 2018 Lebanese Elections**?** The methodology adopted in this research is qualitative, primarily based on the thematic analysis of interviews conducted with government officials and representatives of the NPOs. It is also based on a secondary data analysis, that rely on the analysis of articles from prominent newspapers and informal studies following the elections.

It is important to look at the role of NPOs during the elections of 2018 as the country witnesses, almost three years later, an emergence of activism grounded in NPOs and civil society. Following the October 17 uprising, it has become crucial to further delve into the role of NPOs and understand how their presence can be extended.

The Elections of 2018 took place in a unique and complex political climate. While the elections were the first to have taken place after 9 years of no-elections, they also witnessed the emergence of new political, independent candidates detached from the long-ruling political elites. While the three NPOs were able to fulfill their mission in monitoring the elections and their relationships with the government was one of "cooperation", they faced challenges accessing information, and were able to make little to no policy change following the publication of their reports. Findings of this research open an array of speculations about the attempts of the government to hinder the mission of NPOs and conclude in the necessity of analyzing the relationship within the political climate and not separately from the complexity of the situation in which the elections took place.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Non-profit organizations (NPOs) across the world are working on various aspects of institution development, such as, but not limited to, establishing competitive political parties, involvement in elections, creating independent media, starting civic advocacy groups, as well as reducing conflict in society (Mendelson; Glenn, 2002). When it comes to Lebanon, NPOs have also played a role in activism over the years. Overall, the presence of the NPOs is protected by the Lebanese Constitution, notably, Article 13 which states: “The freedom to express one's opinion orally or in writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association are guaranteed within the limits established by law”. In Lebanon, NPOs are governed by the Law of Associations which is seldom referred to as the 1909 Law of Associations as it was first developed during the Ottoman Empire in 1909 (Abou Assi, 2014). The Law includes a set of key progressive articles which define associations, their formation and legal action in case of a breach of the Law. Despite some few changes issued through decrees over the years, the 1909 Law remained, to a large extent, the same. This situation is perceived differently by active NPOs and scholars in Lebanon. While one group considers the Law to be very ambiguous and easily used by the Government to interfere in the work of the NPOs (Rammal, 2010), other groups consider its ambiguity a positive aspect that allows NPOs to have more flexibility (Haddad, 2016).

NPOs played various roles in the 2018 elections; this research focuses on the role of NPOs in the monitoring of the elections during the campaigning process, election day and post-elections through publishing reports denouncing malpractices. In other terms, this research aims to analyze one role played by NPOs during the 2018

Lebanese Parliamentary Elections. The last elections that were held were prominent because the parliament, each year, had decided to extend its term. In addition, a new law had been passed which adopted proportional representation to cover votes into seats whereas in previous elections, the electoral laws were majoritarian. With proportional representation, the percentage of seats held by a list will be approximately equal to their ratio of seats.

Despite the presence of an official monitoring body appointed by the parliament to oversee the elections, the Supervisory Commission for Elections, NPOs, mainly the Lebanese Associations for Democratic Elections (LADE), the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), and Social Media Exchange (SMEX), took on the role of monitoring the elections which included the voting process, the media content and the electoral spending. In this research, I study the role of NPOs in monitoring the elections and analyze their relationship with the government as they take on this role.

Over the years, the relationship between the Lebanese government and the different NPOs on the ground has varied; it is discussed in the background section of this research. The importance of this research is that it adds to the literature by analyzing the relationship between the government and the NPOs who are involved in watching and monitoring the elections. These NPOs presented a valid alternative to the governmental bodies that were tasked with overseeing and then reported thousands of breaches previously to and during election day. By analyzing their work and the response of the government to it, this research aims at understanding the type of relationship between the government and the NPOs.

The main research question that this research aims to answer is: What role did NPOs play during the monitoring of the 2018 Lebanese Elections?

In order to answer this question, I have looked at three sub-questions:

- **What were the methods and procedures for the monitoring process?**
- **What type of relationship did NPOs have with the government?**
- **What was the impact of this exercise on policy post-elections?**

These questions were answered through a series of interviews conducted with actors of NPOs and actors from the government with the support of secondary data analysis focused on articles and informal studies published following the elections. The researched is based on a theoretical framework developed by Coston in 1998 that aims to define the relationship between NPOs and the government following a set criteria including acceptance of institutional pluralism, government–NPO linkage, relative power relationships, degree of formality, favorability of government policy toward NPOs and other type-specific characteristics. The research is also based on a contextual background defined in the following, which aims to understand the political climate, the development of NPOs in Lebanon vis-à-vis their role in activism, and by the characteristics of the elections of 2018. The terminology of "NPOs" used in this research is most suitable to define LTA, SMEX, and LADE as all three are registered entities that are institutionally structures, according to their websites[1]. The terminology "NPOs" was chosen instead of "Civil Society Organizations," that encompass a bigger umbrella of activists, organizations, movements, etc., which are not necessarily registered or structured.

The research greatly factors into the Lebanese political and social scene today, especially as the country witnesses a dawn of a political change that is affecting all its regions. On October 17 2019, Lebanon witnessed its popular uprising, calling for the overthrow of the current political system. Lebanon is currently going through a crisis in representation, where activists and protesters on the street renounce the current parliament as representatives of the people. Hence, it is important to analyze the parliamentary elections to understand the implications of it on the recent events in the country. I aim to present conclusions that allow activists to build on in the sphere of inducing policy change and holding the government accountable in Lebanon.

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[1] www.transparency-lebanon.org; www.smex.org; www.lade.org

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section of my dissertation, I attempt to review a plethora of relevant and pertinent pieces within the literature which converse with and discuss the role of NPOs in advocacy and elections. As we are discussing the role of NPOs in monitoring the elections, it is essential to explore and contextualize the role of NPOs in advocacy on one hand, and their extensive role in the electoral process on another. Non-profit Organizations (NPOs) involved in advocacy-related activities are one of the essential and increasingly salient component in developing transparency and efficient governance in democratic countries. This is executed primarily via promoting and engaging in public debates on numerous issues concerned with the drafting and implementation of government policy (Mlambo et al., 2019). Not limiting themselves to the former, they scrutinize public revenues and actively fight for public rights. NPOs have developed a multitude of strategies to hold the government accountable, notably, when it's related to corruption, human rights abuses and other issues. They have helped ensure transparency, accountability and development (Mlambo et al., 2019). Nonetheless, in order to properly function, there must exist strong structural arrangements and viable institutional capacity that allow these particular instrumental organizations to be favored legislatively, functionally and politically.

The capacity of NPOs to properly operate is linked to their inter-organizational deficits, their current political regime, their relations with their donors and their ability to sustain themselves as non-profit and resist tempting offers from the government (Fourie; Kakumba, 2011). Another issue NPOs face is the reality of scarce funding and limited financial/material and (subsequently) human resources. As it is quite difficult for NPOs to sustain themselves without external support, Carothers (2013, p. 70) argues that NPOs in specific contexts such as Eastern Europe seem to heavily depend on foreign support from government agencies and grant organizations that are in favor of directing them in a specific direction. Carothers (2013, p. 65) also stresses that despite the prevalence of foreign aid, not all NPOs are prioritized in a direct sense. For instance, U.S. assistance programs in Eastern Europe are mainly interested in financing NPOs with certain normative political goals; socio-economic-leaning NPOs are on the bottom part of the ladder. All in all, policy-oriented NPOs are the main players for many funding agencies. The author highlights the case of Romania - while some have made an effort to amplify membership contributions and other more sustainable sources of funding, the "resource curse" of NPOs remains quite prevalent in the country.

Funding also brings about the idea of local national suspicion. In other words, the more funding an NPO has from foreign agencies, the less authentic it seems in terms of containing a domestic social base, says Carothers (2013, p. 72). More authoritarian societies raise this extensive distrust with the 'foreign' in favor of more 'local' enterprises. Hence, the ideas and policies being proposed become reduced to externalized accounts that simply share no local support. Overall NPOs' political interactions are neither limited to (nor should they be analytically reduced to) influencing decisions by lobbying, drafting and advocating for certain laws, mobilizing the civil population and boycotting certain products. They are much more complex than evident at first glance. The interactions are based on historical norms, international support and recycling previously successful strategies (Fourie & Kakumba, 2011). Taking note of these complexities, Devarajan et al. (2014, p.20) conclude that the dynamics of civil society empowerment, relations to donors, etc. must entail some process of “learning by doing”. In other words, such a process must be backed up by a significant degree of experimentation concerned with a plethora of regions throughout the world.

Furthermore, Yaziji and Doh assert that advocacy NPOs aim to shape the social, economic, or political system to promote a given set of interests or ideologies. They engage in lobbying, serve as representatives and advisory experts to decision makers, conduct research, hold conferences, stage citizen tribunals, monitor and expose actions of others, disseminate information to key constituencies, set agendas, develop and promote codes of conduct and organize boycotts. However, Devarajan et al. (2014, p. 21) have expressed concerns about the limitations of “civil society”, also understood as NPOs, when it comes to altering state failure. This would involve an in-depth discussion on mechanisms and processes through which particular institutional gateways can be amended. Kirlin (2003, p. 23) looks at things in a considerably different way, attempting to locate the influence of bottom-up skill-building amongst individual participants on overall aggregate civic engagement in a particular society. In this sense, leadership, organizational strategy, normative commitment, alongside other “skills”, can pave the way for stimulating a different reality on the level of the country's civil society.

However, according to Thomas (1992), NPOs can oppose the government by acting as watchdogs; this can be accomplished through different methods such as lobbying, or by supporting groups in order to affect, stimulate, or inform the policies of government. It is important to mention that the role of NPOs as watchdogs fosters transparency and allows society to participate in the developmental process (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). In the same vein, Trumpy (2008) considered NPOs labelled as watchdogs or advocacy organizations a type of corporate reform because their goal is to change policies. Furthermore, Najam (1999) asserts that NPOs as watchdogs keep policy honest. In other words, they scan the policy horizon for activities which could interfere with their policy implementation and development in the future. By playing the role of watchdogs, they develop democratic accountability, and by extension, reduce corruption and fraud on a variety of national and local levels (Devarajan, Khemani & Walton, 2013). For example, when it comes to elections, the effectiveness of the electoral mechanism increases when independent bodies tend to monitor it (Kirlin, 2003). NPOs also play a vital role in empowering citizens, motivating them to vote, hold the government accountable and claim their citizenship right (Kirlin, 2003).

The importance of NPOs can be summarized by the following statement: neither transparent elections nor the existence of a vibrant civil society can make “democracy” on its own, but both are considered conditions of democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan 1996; Merkel & Puhle 2000). Devarajan et al. (2014, p. 28) suggest an expansive and malleable role for these NPOs, including but not restricted to: general advocacy, effective mobilization, utilization of the electoral process for particular gains (see below) and even intervention in particular institutional and bureaucratic sectors within the government. However, Fourie and Kakumba (2011) discuss the limitations and opportunities of such windows, taking note of the differing long-term/short-term perspectives of NPO activists, the relations between donors and NPOs, and the valuable dynamics between NPOs and government. They conclude that the inefficiency of the public sector plays an imperative role in creating external donor distrust in allocating funds to NPOs regularly collaborating with state institutions (Fourie and Kakumba, 2011, p. 65). However, Trumpy (2008) argues that an increasingly heavy distrust in state institutions and the public administration has created an avenue of neoliberal civil society predominantly focused on reaching out to corporations and other agents within the private sector. This presents a new method that is different from more conventional approaches to passive social transformation.

Muntean and Gheorghita (2010) give a more elaborate role of NPOs in political society, particularly and specifically at the electoral level. In other words, the two scholars posit three types of interaction between the political society and NPOs such as: directly involving themselves in elections, supporting certain political parties and monitoring and watching the elections. The first of them is the direct involvement. This method means supporting "anti-political politics" with mass mobilization of people, and advocating for political representation through forums and other organized movements that act like big "umbrella organizations."

An example could be taken from Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. NPOs in these countries played a very important role in shaping the first free elections in the region (Toka, 2004). Their presence in the political scene not only shaped NPOs' path to development during these changing times, but also impacted the rise of different political parties. These organizations were, for the most part, vehemently against the Soviet regime - as in they paved the way for democracy at the fall of the regime. The first political organizations that appeared in Eastern Europe were mostly all civil society organizations, and at their essence, they were politically active and promoted particular liberal values they believed in. However, they tended to separate office seeking and political gains from the goals themselves (Toka, 2004). Some of the reasons behind the initial resounding success of the NPOs were the organizations of political and civic dialogue with opposite voices encouraged to converse, and the resolute stance to organize free elections as soon as possible (Elster et al. 1998). One interesting example documented by Bjornlund (2004, 250) concerns the case of Serbia and the huge NPO-led movement that collaborated collectively to oppose Milosevic's rising authoritarian status in government; this was particularly important to create a pro-democracy consciousness in the electoral process.

Linz and Stephan (1996) map out the contentious debate and struggle when an authoritarian regime undergoes a transition into a more democratic and inclusive structure through elections. This debate usually takes place between democratic leaders running for office and civil society organizations, in which the former attempts to break the strict dichotomy between civil society and state. In other words, according to these democratic leaders, non-profit organizations must allow for traditional democratic politics to take place without interfering; the authors contest this by suggesting that this may be dangerous for the future of democratic rule. Contrary to what some of these politics-centered democratic leaders may say, Mlambo et al. (2019, p. 6) suggest that civil society groups actually indulge in efficient and productive work during elections. This particularly relates to how civil society groups can mobilize citizens to evaluate the promises put forth by democratic parties that win elections. In other words, if certain promises are made, these civil society groups can assess whether an adequate execution process has gone post-elections.

Muntean & Gheorghita (2010), on the other hand, suggest that certain limits are related to how these very NPOs and civil society organizations reach out to the public with their discourse in the midst of an election. For example, disputing opting to raise the bar against current political candidates in certain cases, there exists some kind of discrepancy between their discourse and what is generally expected from the mass population. The byproduct is that these election advocates generally become weaker when they transform into political parties following their integration into political society. In the African context, Devarajan et al. (2014, p.36) document how civil society groups established themselves as actors interviewing a variety of candidates so as to outline their policy proposals if elected to parliament. This allows constituents to take note of the developments of certain policies when proposed or promised by particular candidates. Another type of interaction between these two entities is the clear support that some civil society organizations such as NPOs have towards certain political parties. In other words, historically, trade unions before the Second World War stood up for the left-wing parties, while after WWII some of them directed their leanings towards more center-right parties.

The last type of interaction, which is the main focus of this research, is the monitoring of programs that NPOs conduct during elections. Merloe (2015, p. 90) gives monitoring elections an exceptionally high degree of importance to counter autocrats and authoritarian political leaders. This generally applies to despots who use rigged democratic systems to assume power. Accordingly, the author suggests that a complex learning process in order to innovatively improve and amplify citizen-based monitoring is crucial to create fruitful democracy conditions (Merloe, 2015, p. 91). It can be defined as “purposeful gathering of information about an electoral process and public assessment of that process against universal standards for democratic elections by foreign or international organizations [and domestic NPOs] committed to neutrality and to the democratic process for the purpose of building public and international confidence about the election’s integrity or documenting and exposing how the process falls short and intervening in the electoral process to correct imperfections caused by violation and ignoring of laws and standard procedures, while making recommendations for action" (Bjornlund, 2004, 36). Monitoring elections is a new form of civil activity that has only surfaced after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is, however, rather difficult to measure its impact, yet it is almost universally acknowledged to be very useful for different types of elections. There are several types of democratic elections assessed (1) in relation to the moment that they are taking place when a regime falls, and (2) in relation to their significance and effects on the development of democracy. There are four different categories of elections: regular, transitional, post-conflict and consolidating (Bjornlund, 2004, 36). Being able to classify the different categories of elections is highly crucial in order to assess the importance of election monitoring organizations both from the authorities (monitored) and from domestic and foreign Election Monitoring Organizations (EMOs) point of view. Another categorization brought about by Bjornlund (2004, 38) consists of a division between the "national" and the "international;" arguably however, these monitoring systems and associations regularly interact on a plethora of levels, further rendering this dichotomy increasingly difficult analytically. Monitoring elections saw a huge rise in popularity in the 1990s, and this was particularly the case for emerging democracies and developing countries; instead of maintaining a local dimension concerned with national NPOs, an international sphere of civic actors took charge in associations such as GERDDESS (The Study and Research Group on Democracy and Economic and Social Development) (Bjornlund, 2004, 221).

Such a paradigm involved a wide network of donors, recipients, activists, social workers, states, businessmen, and private organizations; it also involved the support of the United Nations and other state-led international bodies of influence (Bjornlund, 2004, 53). This, of course, did not replace the contextualized role of NPOs and CSOs in particular situations and countries. For instance, Romanian domestic NPOs immediately became involved in monitoring local and general elections in 1992. They had a much bigger and effective impact than international monitoring agencies due to the possibility of mobilizing a big number of domestic election monitoring organizations (EMOs) such as LADO and Pro-Democracy Association to work in these elections as opposed to international EMOs (OSCE and US based organization): the result was a better understanding of problems in polling stations, and an increase in motivation to have fair elections since it is their own fate at the end (Carothers, 1996). Another key stakeholder in Romanian elections monitoring was the Pro Democracy Association and its monitoring campaign with the 2004 election, which involved a far more accountability-directed complex process when contrasted with preceding observational policy.

International monitoring is indeed a complex phenomenon when looked at from a historical point of view. Kelly (2008, p. 221) discusses the very causal mechanisms that have induced the recurrent prevalence of international monitoring on several levels. Most importantly, she attempts to observe why international monitoring is institutionalized in various countries via interactive collaborations between governments and NPOs. She attributes this rise to various power shifts on a global level and emerging normative commitments that have produced a different form of politics (Kelly, 2008, p. 250). In terms of the issues and limitations accompanied by NPO international monitoring, Anglin (1998, p. 492) critiques the permanent reality of international monitoring in the African electoral scene. In other words, the author attempts to demonstrate how many of these monitoring agencies head in a direction that impedes radical transformation. Instead, agencies attempt short-term advocacy that doesn’t seem to open windows of opportunity in the pursuit of new rules for the game. The author goes further to suggest that a lot of these agencies are being sent to these countries a few weeks prior to elections (Anglin, 1998, p. 493).

Accordingly, Nevitte and Canton (1997) put forth, contrary to encouraging international monitoring, the case for empowering domestic actors as they are more in touch with the local realities of the context they’re examining and are henceforth more inclined to instill genuinely radical transformation. A similar note is emphasized by Lean (2007, p. 289), who suggests an interesting dynamic worth taking into account. According to the author, hard-line interventionism built on excessively polarized units and militaristic action and sanctions (often promoted by neoconservative geopolitical alignments) do not produce favorable conditions for domestic actors attempting genuine political change. Instead, diplomatic soft-power, alongside the promotion of normative principles, would allow for more reasonable and smoother internal negotiations between domestic reformers and those shaping the status quo (intra-elite politics) (Lean, 2007, p. 308).

On the level of “norm diffusion” specifically, Hyde (2011, p. 356) suggests that signaling plays a very crucial role here. That is to say, the author posits that once governments begin to democratize, inviting foreign observers to monitor the elections becomes an increasingly important norm. Furthermore, once this becomes more prevalent, “true democrats” start encouraging foreign observers even more excessively. This subsequently leads to the very fact of “having foreign observers” becoming, in of itself, a “signal” through which one learns how much a country has democratized.

The early 1990s also witnessed an extensive increase in domestic monitoring in African states which historically suffered from a great degree of halting to the democratic process (Bjornlund, 2004, 220). The impact this monitoring had on the number of alternative group formations and civil society organizations on a domestic level is astonishing; these bodies gradually transformed into more sophisticated and professionally-based associations that regularly created communities of people challenging and contesting government policy on a recurring basis (Bjornlund, 2004, 240). A more innovative online method in Russia is further highlighted by Bader (2013, p. 521). According to the author, the utility of website tools that contain significantly large databases proved its importance in documenting electoral violations in the 2011-2012 Russian electoral cycle. On that basis, using such platforms, it became more obvious that electoral politics in Russia is frequently manipulated by the political class. Gradually, the website has become an increasingly credible source amongst activists, democracy reformers, and civil society as a whole (Bader, 2013, p. 533).

In conclusion, the general literature on the topic of local NPOs demonstrates that these organizations play an important and major role in influencing policy, participating in elections, and monitoring the democratic process throughout the variety of electoral processes. The literature presented here tackles a plethora of important concepts, including but not restricted to ideology, foreign donors, sustainability, domestic versus external actors/players, the role of international observers, post-authoritarian system dynamics, and the role of monitors from within democracies themselves. The general and case-specific themes within this literature review produced credible and important theory-based insights for our input on the case of Lebanon. In other words, the critique and review presented above was useful for our research as we look at the role played by NPOs in monitoring the Lebanese elections of 2018, and how their reports and findings influenced policy post-elections.

A. Theoretical Framework

A major part of this research is to understand how the non-profit sector collaborated with the administration in monitoring the campaigning process leading up to the elections and their impact on policy change post-elections. It is essential to understand the different theoretical frameworks that govern the relationship between the NPOs and the government. In what follows, I outline some of the theories that explained this relationship throughout time. For the purpose of this research, I have adopted the Coston (1998) framework. I detail the theory and justify why it is most suitable for this research in the last part of this section.

Lester Salamon (1987) claimed that without clearly defining the relationship between NPOs and the Government, we will not be able to achieve a positive relationship between the two. There has been a variety of theoretical frameworks developed in attempts to define this relationship (McCarthy et al.; 1992) and those included comparative frameworks as well as defined ones that analyze specific questions (Salamon, Anheier; 1996) as well as organizational sociology (DiMaggio, Anheier; 1990). For instance, Bebbington and Farrington (1993) developed a framework that is mostly based on the government's acceptance (or resistance) of the presence of NPOs, the formalization in the relationship, in addition to the exploration of power symmetry in the relationship. Based on the five government linkage levels (autonomy, low, moderate, high, and direction) defined by Esman and Uphoff (1984), Coston (1998), whose theory will later be discussed in details, presented eight types of government-NPO relationships (repression, rivalry, competition contracting, third-party government, cooperation, complementarity, and collaboration), and each of them would be based on the following criteria: “government resistance or acceptance of institutional pluralism, government–NPO linkage, relative power relationships, degree of formality, favorability of government policy toward NPOs, and other type-specific characteristics,” (Xu; Lin Yu; Wang; 2017). Najam (2000), in his turn, attempted to define the relationship between the government and NPOs by presenting 4 main categories: (1) Cooperation: When both the nonprofit sector and the government have the same goals and use the same strategies to reach them. (2) Co-optation: When the government agencies and the Nonprofit sector have the same strategies, but not the same goals. This is often characterized by instability in society/nation. In this situation, the government, the NPOs, or both, will try to change the goals of the other. The relationship could develop into manipulation or confrontation. (3) Complementarity: This relationship is basically grounded when the sectors have convergent goals but different means to achieve them, resulting in having the NPO sector complement the work of the government. And (4) Confrontation: This happens when both the nonprofit sector and the government do not have the same ends, and do not use the same means. This includes coercive control by governments and policy defiance and opposition by NPOs.

Dennis Young (2000), in his turn, also developed a theory that explains thoroughly the relationship between government and NPOs. In his words, he stated “The formulation of public policy toward the private, nonprofit sector inevitably depends on how the framers of such policy view the nature of the relationship between nonprofit organizations and government.” His theory, inspired by the one postulated by Najam (1997), categorized the relationship based on the economic and social factors that govern the country in which NPOs operate. He defined the relationship as supplementary, complementary, or adversarial to government. In the supplementary model, NPOs are seen as agents that fill the gaps left by the government, especially the demand for public good. In the complementary view, NPOs are considered as partners to the government, and it relies mostly on the fact that the government finances the activities of NPOs. In the adversarial view, NPOs push the government to make changes to policy and hold the government accountable. One relatively recently developed theory presents itself as a comprehensive theory to analyze the relationship between NPOs and the government, that is of NPOs in Conflict Societies by Marchetti (2009). Marchetti asserts that civil society and NPOs play a key role in fostering democratic governance in peaceful societies. However, in the case of conflict, NPOs may play a bigger role especially in the mobilization of civil society. In times of conflict, NPOs allow the shift from top-down management and settlement to bottom-up social reconciliation through mobilization and inclusion of the members of the society by engaging them in activities targeting a wider audience. Conflict resolution thus entails the re-articulation of adopted satisfiers through a changed understanding of a group's identity and interests, in a manner conducive to the fulfilment of basic human needs for all, i.e., choosing mutually compatible satisfiers. According to Marchetti, NPOs engage in conflict resolution through three different ways. First, rather than power mediation featured prominently in conflict management approaches, the preferred conflict resolution means are non-coercive and based on dialogue, persuasion and problem-solving. Second, the emphasis in conflict resolution is placed on the involvement of non-elites and the wider society. This is viewed as necessary for veritable conflict resolution, which goes beyond the mere signing of a peace accord. Third, peace initiatives under this school of thought are normally long-term, unfolding both in stages of violent conflict and of post-settlement reconciliation. It is hard to argue that Lebanon was in conflict during the elections. Although there were tensions between candidates across the country, the general environment in Lebanon was rather peaceful with little conflict breaking out in local communities. For this reason, it is hard to apply this theory to the research that we are conducting about the role of NPOs in elections.

Presumably, the government-NPO relationship research throughout time can be divided into three main streams (Xu; Lin Yu; Wang; 2017). The first being the normative perspective by NPO advocates who argue that the relationship should be based on equality and inclusivity between the two sectors, and that NPOs should play role of watchdog when it comes to the work of the government. This relationship is built upon democratic values that include participation and empowerment, and promotion of mutual influence and reciprocal accountability (Brinkerhoff 2002). The second stream emerged in response to the first one. Being backed up mostly by international donors and the government, it mainly focuses on the role of NPOs as promoters of better public relations and has direct results visible as per the guidance of the government (Brinkerhoff 2002). The third stream mainly discusses pragmatic analysis . They view the Government-Non Profit Relationship (GNR) as instrumental in order to achieve effectiveness and efficiency as well as responsiveness , and divide the relationship into different categories based on the above (Bell and Shea 1998; Charles et al.) Most of these studies however have been analytically weak and have failed to provide recommendations on how to better this relationship (Xu; Lin Yu; Wang; 2017).

In complex environments, such as elections in a fragmented society, organizations tend to develop formal or informal relationships with the government (Kapacu, 2007). Organizations focus on delivering timely information during the times of relative uncertainty, and the reactions of the government define the relationship between them and the NPOs working on the issue. Following this analysis, this research tends to define the relationship between NPOs and the government as some NPOs acted as watchdogs during the elections of 2018 in Lebanon, monitoring and presenting facts about the elections.

As outlined above, various scholars and researchers have attempted over the years to define the relationship between NPOs and the government, basing their research on various factors, mostly the economic climate, the type of the regime in place, the presence of conflicts, and other societal factors. For the purpose of this research, we aim to objectively and independently analyze the relationship between the NPOs that monitored the elections and the government during the parliamentary elections of 2018 in Lebanon. For this reason, we have chosen a conceptual framework that allows me to first analyze the functions of these NPOs and then define the relationship between those NPOs and the government. The Coston model (1998) presented itself as a suitable framework for this purpose, as it allows me to analyze the role based on different factors, and then conclude the relationship at stake. Below I outline this framework and provide justification for using it.

1. Coston (1998) Theoretical Framework

The model developed by Jenniefer M. Coston (1998) is comprised of eight relationship types. The following paragraphs will discuss them.

The first and second type are Repression and Rivalry. Both can be viewed as a resistance to institutional pluralism where there is no NPO linkage to the government and the relationship flows in one direction. . For example, during the 1970s and 1980s, the military government in Ghana issued a law forbidding the establishment and operation of private voluntary associations (Coston, 1998). Rivalry comes as less extreme than Repression where the former can be a possible two-way relationships and possible sluggish provision of mandated supportive services. Moreover, there is no linkage between NPOs and government. Government can refuse, in some cases, to provide services that it believes will benefit NPOs.

The third type is Competition. It can be viewed as a resistance to institutional pluralism and, as mentioned in the two types previously, NPOs have no linkage with government. The government policy is neutral after it was unfavorable.

The fourth type is Contracting. This model is different from the previous three types because there is an acceptance of institutional pluralism. There is a relationship between the government and the NPOs with an increase of their influence.

The fifth type is the Third-party movement. As with the contracting model, there is an acceptance of institutional pluralism with a considerable relationship between the government and NPOs. The role of the government is to raise resources and set social priorities and the role of NPOs is to organize the production of goods and services.

The sixth type is Cooperation. In this model, NPOs have little ties with government and an increase of NPO influence. This type of relationship entails various activities: Resource sharing such as grants and budget allocations. At this stage the government policy is neutral towards the NPOs.

Last but not least is Complementarity where NPOs benefit from autonomy (symmetrical power relationship) and there is an acceptance of institutional pluralism. The government recognizes the advantages of NPO policies. This type is based on a mutual respect where the rights of Government and NPOs are acknowledged.

The last type is Collaboration. This type entails resource sharing and information as the government shares operation and responsibility with other actors such as NPOs which maintain autonomy. The NPOs participate in the planning of policy. It is important to know that it’s hard to reach this type of relationship as it entails a viable increase in mutual understanding. The mentioned relationships are studied based on the following criteria: government resistance or acceptance of institutional pluralism, government–NPO linkage, relative power relationships, degree of formality, favorability of government policy toward NPOs, and other type-specific characteristics, (Xu; Lin Yu; Wang; 2017).

This research uses the Coston model as a theoretical framework to analyze the NPO-Government relationship between the NPOs that monitored the elections, and the government entities, mostly the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities as they are the primary bodies charged with organizing and executing the elections in Lebanon. This framework was selected for various reasons. (1) It presents a framework that can be analyzed based on a set of criteria that throughout my research conclude to be defining of the relationships, (2) it can be applied objectively to the situation in Lebanon due to the fact that is outlined separately from the climate in which NPOs operate. Since NPOs in Lebanon have a relatively large degree of autonomy and freedom, it is important to define the relationship without taking into account external factors in order to fully understand its extent. (3) This framework presents room for recommendations. As I go forward with the research on the field, we can pinpoint the weaknesses and present recommendations for a better relationship between NPOs and government to ensure maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

B. Contextualization of the NPO Scene in Lebanon

In order to understand and fully analyze the research question at stake, I believe it is important to define which climate NPOs were operating in during the elections of 2018. First of all, I present an overview of the political climate in Lebanon in order to understand the context in which the NPOs operated during the 2018 elections. Second, I discuss the history of NPOs in Lebanon in the pursuit of understanding how they function, as well as their contested relationship with the government over the years. Third, I discuss the policy shift in the electoral law of 2018. The change in the law gave hope to a lot of independent players to arrive at different possibilities in these elections, so it is important to explore it before analyzing the role of NPOs as watchdogs in the 2018 elections. Finally, I discuss the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE) which is the official governing body tasked with observing the elections, and the governmental focal point that NPOs had to refer to while observing the elections.

1. History of NPOs in Lebanon

In order to get a complete view of the role that non-governmental associations play in Lebanon today, it is important to analyze the political, cultural, and historical settings that pushed for their development. The Ottoman Empire, Western foreign intervention, as well as religious missions, shaped a Lebanese population ever- juggling periods of peace and war. This led to the establishment of civil society organizations that are capable of acting in sections where the authorities have failed to act. These organizations slowly replaced the legitimate Lebanese government in the eyes of the people, a phenomenon never more evident than during periods of instability and conflict.

The emergence of civil society organizations, in their different forms outlined below, mirrors the formation of the Lebanese state. They both started out as small familial and communal organizations to major civil, social, and political movements capable of applying pressure on authorities. In the particular Lebanese context, organizations of a religious nature make up around 90% of much of these voluntary associations, collaborating with the government on a variety of projects and social engagements (Haddad, 2020). Political instability and external influences have continuously hindered the state and NPOs from achieving their full potential (Haddad et al., 2018). The rise of NPOs occurred during multiple and unique historical periods and in numbers of phases. It is important to note that there are at least five important phases that shaped the development of NPOs in Lebanon, starting from before the establishment of the former as an independent country (Haddad et al., 2018).

a. From 1840-1958

While civil society in Lebanon is rooted in developments pertinent to the 16th century, major advancements occurred in the late 19th century in a wider context of pluralistic confessional associations with regional backing; these group formations were later legalized in the early 1900s (Haddad et al., 2018). The Law of 1909, in fac,t still regulates NPOs in Lebanon and provides a basis for their governmental and communal registration. This granted these associations a significant amount of legitimacy in the midst of Lebanon’s early turbulent years (D’Aspremont, 2011). Although some of these associations acted as charities, this did not apply to groups that utilized this newly established space to call for increasing Arab autonomy from the Ottoman Empire (D’Aspremont, 2011).

Nevertheless, according to Haddad et. Al (2018), from 1840 till 1958, Lebanon was characterized by huge socio-political changes during which tribal and family associations began to take hold in society. The best way to describe NPOs' relationship with the state during this period is one of non-engagement (Haddad et al., 2018). The ruling regimes chose not to interfere in the work of the NPOs, most of which was in charity and education. This also prevailed during the Mutasarrifiyya era, which informed a dynamic of sectarian devolution and increased autonomy (D'Aspremont, 2011). In fact, the law did not require permission to form an NPO; instead, merely informing the authorities was enough to initiate a particular project.

b. From 1958-1975

The second chapter, spanning from 1958 till 1975, saw a big number of reforms implemented by the then Lebanese President Fouad Chehab, who paved the way for the birth of NPOs working and coordinating with the government in order to develop the country. We saw a boom in the 60s where 900 NPOs were established (Haddad et al., 2018), and they started shifting from welfare to advocacy and worked with the government to build a "modern Lebanese state." This had led to a complementary relationship between the government and the NPOs (Haddad et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the legacy of the Chehab era is routinely contested in regards to its relationship with free association, especially as it made sure to repress particular ideologies via the security apparatus, in collaboration with US power (Kuzmarov, 2012). This relatively statist framework, although having worked on re-evaluating the state's institutions and its relation to soft power private sectors and client networks, may have reinforced the state's militarized co-optation and hegemony over free associations. The prime rationale of the Chehabist era was to shield Lebanon from “foreign intervention”, which would have negatively affected the role of associations, given the degree to which foreign funds were instrumental to their functioning (Salibi, 1966).

c. From 1975-1990

The third phase lasted 15 years (1975-1990), extending throughout the period of civil war in Lebanon. The conflict broke governmental institutions and forced civil associations to shift towards emergency relief activities. The relationship with the government was difficult and tenuous, as the government and official offices attempted to control the role of civil society, especially those involved in politics, by issuing decrees limiting their flexibility in functioning (Haddad et al., 2018). During this era, an interesting formation of an anti-war movement, in collaboration with a plethora of NPOs, was launched to call for a halt in violence immediately (Kabbara, 2012). This was instrumental because it was able to give a large section of these NPOs a sense of spirit and purpose in the midst of the conflict.

d. From 1990-2005

The end of the civil war ushered the fourth phase (1990-2005). This phase first witnessed the Lebanese NGO Forum[2], which constituted the largest coalition of NPOs in the country; The Forum attempted to elaborate the criteria on what constitutes an appropriate NPO in civil society. During this phase, the government collaborated with civil society on different matters, including health issues and social inclusion. However, it was also viewed as a period of tension as civil society did not completely trust the government, and several decrees were also issued in attempts to regulate the work of NPOs. any NPOs regarded this move as an attempt to interfere in their work (Haddad et al., 2018). Nevertheless, many of these NPOs referred back to the decades-old law of 1909 to simply issue a notice informing the government of their founding; this phase also witnessed the creation of LADE and LTA during a time of recurrent corruption and electoral meddlings by the Syrian regime (Hardig, 2011).

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[2] The Lebanese Non-Governmental Organization Forum (LNF) was established in July 1991 to coordinate the activities of Lebanese NGOs concerned primarily with relief and development (social, health, and educational) issues.

Most importantly, NPOs played a crucial role in filling the incredibly terrible gap of de-politicization sponsored by the pax-Syriana era; accordingly, such associations were able to attract opponents of the status quo whom had increasingly felt betrayed by the party system over the years (Geha, 2016, p. 80). These two particular NPOs (LADE and LTA) made sure to counter the political reality with a “good governance” and “pro-democracy” discourse, unfriendly to the arbitrary ways the elections and public institutions were managed; they eventually played a role in the Independence Intifada of (2005 Hardig, 2011, p. 177). Such a role is often cited as one which takes the shape of an “accumulative process”, through which a plethora of activists were able to engage in some kind of socio-political self-activity (Geha, 2016, p. 81). This period also saw the resurgence of communal and family institutions that accompanied the birth of activist-oriented forms of associations that formed the backbone of social movements and advocated for electoral and political reforms.

e. From 2005-Present

The final period starts from the end of the last and is still ongoing. It saw the resurgence of civil associations dealing with multiple and different crises, like the July

War and the Syrian crisis, which had continued to affect Lebanon since 2011. This period is explored further in the following sections. However, prior to expanding on these developments, it’s important to take note of the ways in which NPOs recreated themselves as relatively autonomous entities because of the breathing space provided by the Syrian withdrawal. Immediately after the Independence Intifada of 2005, which was the popular social movement responsible for Syria’s ouster, a thirst of autonomous activism was coupled with an international interest to pour money into Lebanon’s activist scene, as noted by Geha (2016, p. 82). In other words, some kind of “fetish” for “good governance” and “pro-democracy” liberal platitudes increasingly grew popular within the domain of popular activity. Citizenship, in and of itself, gradually transformed into an alternative identity amongst minority activists attempting to speak a language foreign to the hegemonic common sense in the country (Geha, 2016, p. 82). In 2009, the existence of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) allowed that year’s election to be the first in Lebanese history to be monitored by transparent actors. The development of LADE since 2005 allowed for an extensive form of professionalization and efficiency, pushing the organization up to 3000 observers at the time (Yacoubian, 2009, p. 12). At the time, LADE was responsible for election assessments, recounting and evaluations, and commenting on issues such as vote trafficking (Cornstange, 2012, p. 499).

Also founded in the late 1990s, the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) professionalized gradually, commencing as a force campaigning for openly available information from the Lebanese government. It later opened up its legal services to those experiencing first-hand corruption (Hardig, 2011, p. 35). Together with LADE and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), the association founded the Civil

Campaign for Electoral Reform (CCER) after 2005; at the time the head of LTA claimed that civil society is embarking on a new path towards professionalization in terms of creating and advising for public policy in the country (Hardig, 2011, p. 199). One notable achievement was getting parliament to vote unanimously to lower the voting age, allowing CCER to garner significant credibility in the process (Hardig, 2011, p. 200). In an attempt to fast-forward our mapping of these organizations, the Social Media Exchange organization (or “SMEX”) represents a totally different dynamic, shifting the focus from aspects of “good governance” to a more contentious battle for digital rights in the context of excessive government co-optation and intervention within the social media sphere (El Helou, 2017, p. 48). The organization proceeded to map all attempts at mass digital surveillance in Lebanon in a report it published in 2016, raising awareness in favor of freedom of expression.

2. Political Climate and its Implications on NPOs in Lebanon

At the time of the elections, Lebanon was considered to be ruled by a confessional system where the power is shared by various sectarian leaders following the Taif Accord, which was the direct result of the end of the civil war in 1990. The Taif Accord (1989) basically divides the power between Chirstians and Muslims, where the President is Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister is Muslim Sunni, and the Speaker of the House is a Muslim Shiite (Salamey, Payne, 2008). This was also clearly reflected on the level of the society, as might be predictable under such systems. The different confessions developed their own welfare and educational services, each catering to the needs of their own community (Jaulin, 2014). Different political parties, mostly segmented by sects, negotiate among themselves for access and control over public resources, and hold their power through a political system, which accommodates a careful balance between the sectarian groups in government, parliament, and public administration. This is particularly important when attempting to understand the role of these NPOs and how they interact with Lebanon's political and electoral institutions, especially in the context of highly clientelist socio-political forces (Hamzeh, 2001, p. 167).

Especially in relation to the electoral process, clientelism entrenched the social fabrics of Lebanon in many ways, including but not restricted to: personalistic relations, public institutional patronage, state employment, and donor relations. An example of the second can be highlighted particularly in valuable ministries such as electricity, health, security services, and other major domains. The inefficiencies of the states are therefore complemented by services granted to loyalist electoral clients via their local and national patrons (Gardiner, 2015, p. 70). Interestingly enough, as a middle income country with little-to-no valuable resources, and that lacks a productive sector which may actually produce funds for these patrons, Lebanon's parties generally make use of high indebtedness and foreign funding, as well as corruption and state appropriation to fund their clientelism (Gardiner, 2015, p. 70). What's definitely the case is that this foreign-funded patronage doesn't come without strings and conditions pertaining to the relevant foreign policy measures; these measures generally relate to the existent strategic regional powerhouses that exist in contentious geopolitical turmoil (Gardiner, 2015, p. 71). These NPOs, henceforth, can either act in ways through which politicians co-opt communal services, or as "good governance" advocacy groups attempting to challenge or advise reforming the current dynamic (Makhoul & Harrison, 2004).

The former constitute scholarship programs and social welfare dedicated to a certain subset within a sect in exchange for political work. One example of such a phenomenon relates to ways in which student partisans of sectarian political parties generally gain higher education aid for their services for that party within the university campus. Confessional party politics henceforth attempts to intervene within youth sectors via clientalist services which in turn re-invest into sustaining and growing their influence for subsequent generations (Haddad, 2013; Cammet, 2011; Gardiner, 2015, p. 17). On a more general and regional level, Al-Masri (2015, p. 11) attempts to demonstrate the linkages between clientelism and securitization, exemplifying regions like Akkar and Bekaa. The immense poverty and securitized nature of these regions, particularly impoverished Sunni areas, drove the residents into the hands of their local sectarian patrons. On the other hand, Shiite residents of the South regularly depend on employment provided in private-public partnerships and the public sector, under the patronage of Shia-majority parties such as the Amal Movement (Zakaria, 2019, p. 83). Geha (2016, p. 52) provides an interesting historical context pertinent to the current patronage system in the country, rooted, according to Geha, in an Ottoman era collaboration between notable figures (Zu’ama) and religious leaders. Accordingly, each Za’im has the profile of a typical statesman in any country, acting as a state with institutions on his own. Subsequently, middle to high- rank public servants are thus appointed in positions orchestrated by an accommodating system spearheaded by a table which includes all the Zu’ama in Lebanon. Geha (2016, p. 53) goes on to describe ways in which the sectarian system positions a hierarchical preference for those appointed solely under the system itself, disallowing any form of exception which attempts to break the monopoly of the regime.

When it comes to civil organizations in Lebanon, they often take on local and "a-political aspects." Society ends up very resistant to change. Liberal consociationalism boasts rewarding already established groups and that these groups may change in time. However, the process in which new groups emerge into the scene is vague (Deets, 2018). Beirut Madinati and YouStink, who were mainly operating in Beirut, suggest that it may yet be possible to break through the established political status-quo. This shows that big cities are advantageous for mass civil mobilizations and the developing of a new political landscape. The formers are essential in mainly corporatist and liberal systems (Deets, 2018). The political climate in which the elections of 2018 took place was characterized by a continuous domination of the traditional parties and an uprising of civil campaigns that were gaining momentum at the time. It is important to note that a new electoral law took into effect during the 2018 elections. The law passed in 2017 is based on proportionality, which is what the NPOs had been advocating for since the 2009 elections (Harb, 2018). This has given the NPOs a possible grain of hope in achieving what they are lobbying for.

3. The Shift in the Law of the 2018 Elections

The 2018 elections came after a political vacuum that reigned for five years; the 2013 elections were postponed three times, mainly due to legislative issues in order to amend the electoral law. The electoral law issued in 2017 was the result of discussions around two major reforms: political and structural (Doumit, Geha, 2013). This law has allowed the civil society to take on a bigger role in the elections.

The electoral law of 2009 dissected Lebanon into districts mainly based on sectarian divisions, with each traditional political leader dominating in its respective district on sectarian bases; competition was disabled (Doumit, Geha, 2013). Those electoral laws have threatened democratization and ethnic harmonies especially through electoral alliances (Salloukh, 2006).

On the flip side, the law passed in 2017 (Law no.44/2017) is preferential by nature, and has reduced the electoral districts from 26 to 15; however, the law adversely dissected districts into sub-districts, and introduced the "preferential vote" which is limited per sub-district (Annahar net, 2017). The law also introduced "lists" as opposed to "individual running", meaning citizens can only vote for a l ist without being able to mix and match from different lists, which is a practice that used to happen in 2009 and prior. Preferential electoral systems, which allow voters to only vote for one list while ranking a preferential candidate, tend to promote interethnic accommodation since political parties are now relying on a larger pool of voters to gain seats (Salloukh, 2006). Counting the votes happens according to an electoral threshold calculated by dividing the number of voters by the number of seats, ideally allowing a better representation of minorities (Annahaer Net, 2017). Most importantly, the new law allows members of civil society to observe the elections in an official capacity and sit in on organizing and forming committees (Annahar Net, 2017). The new Lebanese electoral law is considered by some to be one of the most important domestic developments in the Lebanese democratic progress (Nassar, 2018).

4. Supervisory Commission for Elections

The Supervisory Commission for Elections (or SCE) is an 11-member commission that was formed by the Ministry of Interior in September 2017, 8 months prior to the 2018 parliamentary elections examined in our research. The supervisory body is comprised of three judges, a previous president of the Tripoli Bar Association, a previous president of the Beirut Bar Association, a deputy from the Press Association, a particular information and data expert, a previous president of the Lebanese Association of Certified Public, two experts with specific experiences in electoral competencies, and a representative of a plethora of civil society bodies and NPOs (The Daily Star, 2017).

While the commission is meant to be coordinating with the interior ministry, the entire purpose of the commission is to maintain a distance from the authorities and political players who hold leverage over Lebanon's institutions. In other words, the commission was founded on a bare minimum of independence in the pursuit of autonomously overviewing the performance of the electoral and democratic process of the state (The Daily Star 2017; Ahmad, 2018). For instance, one prominent role reserved for the SCE is "monitoring" campaign finances, which has posed a big issue for Lebanon over the years, primarily with the bigger role played by wealth in politics (European Union Election Observation, 2018). However, based on primary and secondary data, it was evident that the SCE was not independent from the ministry, but was rather viewed as an extension to the ministry – a body that is representative of the government to monitor the process of elections. During an interview with a member of the committee, it was evident that the commission was directly financed by the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and was not receiving the resources it needs to run independently; rather, the SCE was always reliant on the MoI to receive funds and other tools that would allow it to work independently.

In the past, similar committees have existed to indulge in such a monitoring process, albeit with very little authority and rights. The Supervisory Commission on the Election Campaign (or SCEC) was one prominent example which played a role after the

2010 municipality elections. Nevertheless, the campaign hardly had any authority over the expenditures of online campaigns (Ekmekji, 2012, p. 11) or their corresponding media coverage. In terms of the recent SCE, this dynamic has transformed dramatically in principle but little so in practice; this discrepancy is generally attributed to a plethora of top-down political and structural conditions pertinent to the foundations and characteristics of the Lebanese state and bureaucracy.

With an expansive representation table, it makes sense to grant the SCE a decent amount of authority to monitor elections in a competent, daring, and comprehensive manner. However, the limits of the SCE lie elsewhere, particularly in its lack of political independence and resources/executionary power; this has generally affected and displaced public and organizational trust in the council, further amplifying citizens' disillusionment in the election process all together (Transparency International, 2018; European Union Election Observation, 2018). The commission did not possess the authority to "make" the candidates present their financial bulletins, and the ministry and other judiciary bodies showed no cooperation in this issue according to interviews conducted with members of the commission.

This reality had paved the way for an alarming development just a month prior to election day, manifesting in the resignation of Sylvana Al-Lakkis, a member of the SCE. Al-Lakkis reportedly complained that such a committee was incapable of genuinely performing its role in terms of monitoring the abuses on the ground and marking the financial discrepancy between candidates, particularly those exploiting their wealth in pursuit of political power (Ahmed, 2018; "Report: Electoral Supervisory Commission Rebuffed by Resignation," 2018).

Al-Lakkis, during an interview for the purpose of this research, went further to complain about deliberate attempts to reduce the authority and powers of the commission in terms of ensuring that a fair and transparent electoral process is pursued by the state. In the same interview, she complained that the committee, which was supposedly established by the government and given regulatory and oversight authority, had now been limited by the same government from exercising the purpose of its inception, which in her opinion was done systematically in coordination with the ruling parties and threatened the integrity of the ballot. Interestingly enough, Lakkis also elaborated on ways in which the commission's jurisdiction would only apply to irregular mistakes committed by small lists. These lists were seemingly unrelated to the larger and more influential confessional political forces yielding power and leverage over the state ("Report: Electoral Supervisory Committee Rebuffed by Resignation," 2018). All in all, the limits demonstrated by the SCE have created a need and perceived legitimate space for NPOs to rise and influence the monitoring process. The next section will expand on the largest and most sophisticated of these observatory NPOs, while taking note of their limitations.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This research is qualitative and interpretative, focused on understanding the phenomena in a comprehensive way. It takes as a base a thematic analysis of interviews conducted for the purpose of this research, in addition to secondary data analysis based on newspaper articles and case studies conducted during and after the 2018 elections. I have conducted a series of interviews with two members of the Supervisory Commission for Elections and executives from each of the NPOs in question (LTA, SMEX, and LADE). Interviews, which were conducted through a semi-structured format, offer a chance to delve deeper into the topic and obtain in-depth information. It also allowed me to explain, better understand, and explore the interviewees opinions, behavior, and experiences.

The purpose of the interviews is to understand the process of monitoring the elections, which helped me to examine the relationship with the government. An important aspect is the implications of the reports published by NPOs, who followed up on the elections and affected policy making. The interview instruments allowed me to conduct a thematic analysis of the data based on the criteria developed by Coston (1998): Government resistance or acceptance of institutional pluralism, government–NPO linkage, relative power relationships, degree of formality, favorability of government policy toward NPOs, and other type-specific characteristics.

In addition to the interviews, the general climate of monitoring the elections was analyzed by referring to secondary data, primarily articles in official local and regional newspapers and studies conducted by observers, political analysts , and academics published during and after the elections. To understand the process better, I have looked at the reports that were later published by NPOs. It helped understand what areas NPOs had looked at during their monitoring process, and their influence on policy change.

It is important to note that the interviews were conducted after the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The interviewers were treated according to the International Review Board's rules and regulations which include explaining the objective of the interview and the process. The interviews were transcribed shortly after they were conducted.

Since my methodology is mostly qualitative, the research risks leaning towards subjectivity. To avoid this as much as possible, the interview questions were chosen to ask for facts, i.e. happenings and events that have occurred at the time of elections. Since the elections had already happened almost two years ago, the interviewees input can be threatened due to forgetting facts or misremembering them. Another limitation might be my own subjectivity to the topic as I feel strongly about it, due to my engagement in the topic and my work within the realms of NPOs in Lebanon. Being aware of this fact, I ensured that the questions were formed in the most objective way possible.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

The Lebanon elections process of May 2018 provides interesting insight on the role of NPOs, particularly the local ones extensively linked to civil society, in monitoring elections. This is particularly pertinent to the realities of the country pertaining to the limitations of the state, the consociational system around it, the prevalence of ethnic loyalties and gerrymandering mechanisms, issues of democratic consolidation and low-level violence, and recurrent violations (El Machnouk, 2018, p. 13; El Kak, 2019, p. 6; Arnous, 2018).

While it is inaccurate to completely leave the Lebanese state out of the picture when conducting this assessment, the purpose of this section is to outline ways in which certain NPOs, with local support (from the civil society and its many platforms) or international support (from the European Union and the United Nations Development Program) posed a critique of the state's institutions when it comes to issues of election monitoring. This not only assesses the contested relationship between NPOs and the state (to be further explored using the Coston Framework), but also poses questions about how these NPOs partly replaced the state's functions within certain spheres of accountability and influence.

Hence, **the monitoring bodies presented as case studies in this research are the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), and Social Media Exchange (SMEX).**

While other groups and committees have played similar roles, these bodies form the primary focus of our research. It is important to highlight however that INGOs

(International non-governmental organizations) such as EU EOM (European Union Elections Observation Mission), NDI (National Democratic Institute), the UNDP's Lebanese Electoral Assistance Project have also contributed to the supervision process ("European Union Election Observation Mission," 2018; "Preliminary statement of NDI's international," 2018; "Lebanese Elections Assistance," n.d.). While these organizations have indeed built relations with local networks relevant to the topic at hand, and have developed solid critiques, reports, and observation strategies whilst maintaining a strict non-interference strategy, they were not chosen to be the prime focus of this section.

In what follows, I outline the analysis of the three case studies primarily to relate the findings to the Coston framework, using the following criteria: the acceptance of institutional pluralism, the NPO-Government linkage and (in)formality of the relationship, the neutrality of the policy that governs them, the increasing influence of the NPOs, and the degree of information sharing. I also analyze the methodology and work modality of all NPOs to understand further the case of each. Finally, I look at policy change following the reports produced by the three NPOs.

A. Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE)

The first case study that is detailed in this thesis in the case of LADE. Primarily due to its rich history in the Lebanese electoral scene, alongside its growing technical capacity, LADE played an instrumental role in the monitoring process of the 2018 parliamentary elections (Gambil & Abou Aoun, 2000; Yacoubian, 2009). LADE first commenced as a campaign to demand and monitor the municipality elections of 1996, during a time when Syria's military presence eroded the democratic and electoral processes in the country's post-war period (Hardig, 2011, p. 35).

With time, the association's growing capacity, garnering of funds, and consistent training processes and skill-building rendered it far more capable than it once was decades before . In fact, the European Union Observation Mission classified LADE as the "main national observation group" during the 2018 election in terms of both numbers and sophistication ("European Union Election Observation Mission," 2018). The NPO proclaimed its goal as "raising the standards of elections" in Lebanon; accordingly, it provided a largely critical and daring assessment of the 2018 elections, claiming it to be largely organized by those exploiting their positions of power to garner electoral victories (Hovsepian, 2018; Ahmad, 2018). According to LADE's former executive director, who was responsible for the monitoring project in 2018, in the interview for the purpose of this research, LADE employed its resources to monitor not only the campaign itself, but members of the supervisory committee created by the MOI, which initially resisted LADE's efforts to hold the members to a certain standard, and tried to dictate their mission and their methodology. This implied that the state's lack of interest in a democratic process (at best, or its deliberate voter suppression at worst) could undermine the process of electing members of parliament and poses a threat to the most basic democratic right in Lebanon. The trajectory of LADE's work over the years, confirmed both by secondary sources outline above and the interview conducted with LADE's executive director, shows an increase in its influence and impact, which is one criterion defined by Coston to determine the NPO-Government relationship.

In terms of methodology, the association largely depended on a decent quantitative sample of 1,300 observers deployed across the country for a variety of purposes. These included but are not restricted to monitoring vote count and the ways in which stations/centers are being supervised by the state. In order to arrive at conclusive and comprehensive results and avoid sampling bias, the association adopted a random sample of 10% of all polling centers ("Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections Observation," n.d.). According to the interview with the executive director at LADE, the NPO had to obtain permits from the SCE to be able to access polling stations on election days. The fact that the government had allowed representatives from NPOs to access polling stations shows acceptance and recognition of institutional pluralism, which is also a criterion defined by Coston's theoretical framework. While LADE had to submit papers outlining their registration and legal status, they also had to detail where and when they would want to observe the elections, including the day of and before. The SCE tried to guide them by proposing some rules , which included refraining from taking pictures in polling stations and withholding any comments (or criticism) towards the committee or the MoI. With resistance from the SCE, they were later able to obtain the necessary permits and the observation process went smoothly from there, according to the interview with the executive from the NPO. LADE was able to fulfill its operations with no interruptions, including monitoring the work of the SCE, the preparations of the MoI, and the process of elections on e-day.

When it comes to the method of operations that LADE adopted during elections day, the observers deployed were divided into three categories: fixed observers, mobile observers, and observers monitoring the counting of ballots. Each of these categories were utilized in various ways in order to guarantee a scientific and evidence-based approach to whatever conclusion produced by the study. In addition, the association decentralized the sample even further by "popularizing" the monitoring process across the country by allowing anyone with a social media account to report these incidents to LADE in a semi-structured manner. Accordingly, LADE transformed from an NGO to a community project (Ahmad, 2018). As a result, LADE concluded that, all in all, the election recorded a total of 7,000 violations committed across the country. These "errors" largely constituted the violation of voter secrecy, such as using voters with special needs as a pretext for "helping them" cast their vote and consequently gaining leverage over the process ("Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections Observation," n.d.; Hovsepian, 2018).

Whenever these violations were confirmed, the next step for the association was to communicate any particular violations to the Ministry of Interior via the latter's hotline. Nevertheless, according to LADE's executive director, the ministry was largely unavailable when it came to issuing a director to local polling administrators responsible for the executory process and holding those committing these violations accountable, which shows that the government was not serious about the monitoring process, and this was also confirmed by LADE's director during the interview. The dichotomy between the behavior of the government towards monitoring and the seriousness in which LADE performed as they performed the same task, shows a low NPO linkage with the government, hence an informal relationship, two other criteria adopted in Coston's framework to define the relationship between NPOs and the government.

In other words, LADE demonstrated and articulated that the state was quite simply un interested in holding a fair and free election, especially when the SCE, the apparatus formed by the authorities, was said to have been inactive and vocally silent during the entire process ("Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections Observation," n.d.).

While one cannot answer such questions without careful scrutiny, a reasonable hypothesis behind this particular organizational characteristic is the political context in which LADE rose; after all, many activists within the association later joined the ranks of political forces in specific historic instances, such as the 2005 "Independence Intifada" against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon (AbiYaghi, 2012, p. 21). The unique experience of LADE as an "outlier NPO" in the country continues to raise questions amongst those analyzing the transformative capacity of these associations (Hardig, 2011).

Finally, when it comes to information sharing, the last criterion in the Coston framework, the executive director of LADE said in the interview that they faced difficulties obtaining the financial information of the candidates from the SCE, but were able to access other information provided by the commission, which shows that some information sharing is available but only to a satisfactory extent. In conclusion, it was evident in this case study that LADE persevered in the monitoring process and was rather faced with indifference by the government, and some cooperation from the SCE who extended the necessary permits to perform its operations. The next section highlights a more "traditional" NPO package which more or less lacked the "grassroots" function of LADE in its earlier history.

B. Lebanese Transparency Association

The Lebanese Transparency Association (or LTA) was founded in 1999 at a time when young activists and professional civil society actors were trying to locate ways to legitimize their critique of the political institutions which prevailed in the pax-Syriana era. Primarily focused on subjects such as “good governance” and “anti-corruption” on a variety of levels, the association grew to become a capable body with considerable capacity (Hardig, 2011, p. 35). As it is governed by the 1909 law of associations, the case of LTA also reflects acceptance of institutional pluralism and a neutral government policy.

In the 2018 elections, LTA pursued its role as an NPO monitoring body, albeit focusing primarily on campaign expenditures and working closely with the SCE. In fact, the main utility of LTA in the context of this election is the fact that one of its primary monitoring objectives was closely observing the performance of the SCE and holding it accountable. This allows for a critical perspective into understanding the ways in which NPOs replace state structures in a poorly-institutionalized state such as that of Lebanon (The Lebanese Transparency Association, n.d.).

While maintaining a close relationship with the commission, the association bluntly questioned the latter’s independence from the political authorities, hinting that the SCE lacked a daring touch to it when taking the role of an “observatory body”. Its chairman, Badri El Meouchi, explicitly commented on the double standards of application within the SCE, which he claimed treated sectarian partisans differently than non-confessional and “civil society”-related candidates (Transparency International, 2018).

Interestingly enough, the LTA has openly put forth the details and characteristics of its project for monitoring elections on its website, alongside the total budget needed to pursue all the necessary mechanisms. The association goes further to specify the NDI as the donor funding the project, attempting to remain consistent with the purpose of the association, i.e. to remain transparent to its constituents and followers (The Lebanese Transparency Association, n.d.). This shows two things, first, that foreign funding is made available for NPOs working in monitoring elections, which means that foreign institution are interested in topics related to transparency in Lebanon. It also shows that local NPOs are keen on remaining faithful to followers, despite receiving funding from associations that are international. Regarding the elections of 2018, an executive member of the LTA, said in an interview conducted for the purpose of this research, that the oversight process went smoothly enough, with minimal government and committee intervention with a focus on campaign finance. The LTA focused on how the caps on campaign funds were too high and provided a disadvantage for the candidates who were less financially capable of maintaining a campaign up to par with those of deeper pockets (usually affiliated with the confessional parties in the government). This poses a question around financial monitoring overall. While financial monitoring was absent, it seems that despite the lack of monitoring, candidates had plenty of leeway with their campaign funds. When the ceiling permitted is too high, it hints at having a system that is by origin rigged towards those are richer, and gives space to them to utilize their money towards gaining more vote. It also hints at the theory that the state tends to create policies that make it easier for the financially resourceful to win elections versus emerging candidates, whether it was through monitoring policies or spending caps allowed.

The observatory project outlined mainly revolves around three electoral districts: (1) Saida – Jezzine, (2) Tripoli – Mniyeh – Diniyeh, and (3) Zahle. Differing from the sample strategy provided by LADE, the LTA focused primarily on 43 long-term observers within these districts, and later monitored 105 polling stations in these very districts on election day. While LADE and other organizations focused more broadly on violations in the widest sense of the term, LTA's project only applied to scrutinizing campaign finances of a variety of candidates and lists (The Lebanese Transparency Association, n.d.; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2018).

After the election process had been completed, the LTA noted a "conflict" of interest on the level of finance monitoring, given that 16 of the ministers from the then current cabinet were in fact candidates during the elections; this particularly applied to the then Minister of Interior and Future Movement affiliate Nohad El-Machnouk, who was primarily responsible for the observatory process from the side of the state and its institutions (Chamoun, 2018; Kaskas, 2018).

Finally, the association demanded through the reports published on their website that the government of Lebanon dramatically amplify transparency and regulations which ought to revolve around campaign financing, as per the interview conducted. This includes but is not restricted to publicizing all their financial reports and account information about candidates participating in the elections in the pursuit of a seat, directly communicating the necessary spending ceilings in each district, and rendering the results from every polling station publicly available for those observing the process. The association goes further to suggest that the state not allow any current cabinet ministers from participating in the democratic process and running for parliamentary seats (Chamoun, 2018).

LTA’s monitoring processes highlight the importance of traditional concerns with campaign expenditures, which always remain an obstacle in front of challenging the hardened and concrete relationship between wealth and power. Nevertheless, with a lot of money being spent on social media, hidden bribes, and online transactions, traditional means of monitoring and assessing these concerns remain relatively outdated relative to the fast-pace developments within this domain, increasingly so in the developed countries. While the NPOs observing the elections had access to some information (including administrative information), LTA found many obstacles while trying to request information about electoral spending for each candidate. The SCE had access to financial figures and would not make them available to the NPO, arguing that the law does not permit making this information accessible . During our interview with LTA, the executive highlighted that there were many interpretations to the law, which makes the argument of the SCE against making the financial figures available weak. This reaffirms weak information sharing from the SCE. The next section elaborates on an experiment with a rather unconventional and modern understanding of election monitoring.

C. Social Media Exchange

With a more contemporary and “modern” turn relative to the two aforementioned NPOs elaborated above, the Social Media Exchange (or SMEX) primarily focuses on topics ranging from digital freedoms to privacy and surveillance. In other words, since 2008, SMEX has delved into creating an “autonomous regulation of information societies” in Lebanon, particularly with the growing influence of social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.” In a wider sense, these functions constitute ideas such as decent access to information and internet services given their contemporary importance, freedom of expression on a variety of platforms, and a critical assessment of acts of violation with regards to online freedoms and digital rights (Social Media Exchange, n.d.).

This primarily intersects with the 2018 election given the immense role played by social media in the campaigns and the reach achieved by most candidates. These agents relied on social media to reach out to youth social groups over the years by means of advertisements, shared campaign videos, and public personal pages (Marsi, 2018). Given this major transformation in “electoral information”, organizations like SMEX proceeded with interesting “monitoring schemes”. SMEX mostly sought to monitor deviant social media behavior and observed that many people were calling for violence if the party they were not affiliated with had lost. The executive director of SMEX expressed his observations in the interview for this research: candidates had equal opportunity to advertise themselves on social media (the platforms offer free-for-all plan) and that the accounts associated with violent or strife-calling were individuals, and were never endorsed by any one candidate.

One method of study conducted by the organization, in collaboration with the LADE, revolved around examining the candidates’ speech, characterizing it as either “negative” or “positive” (vis-a-vis the extent in which it is capable of affecting the democratic spirit of the electoral process) based on particularly delimited criteria. This criteria takes into account several principles seldom taken into account by candidates in the Lebanese context - sexist, homophobic, racist, confessional, and inflammatory speeches are classified as characters of “negative speech”, whilst their absence is promoted as either “neutral” or “positive” speech (“SMEX and LADE to Monitor

Candidates' Speech on Social Media," 2018). This also shows that NPOs have worked together on monitoring the campaigns, which shows collaboration amongst different NPOs, something that can be explored further in future studies.

This methodological significance slightly differs from the previously elaborated NPOs in the sense that the latter generally focused on particular technical criteria relevant to electoral transparency, ballot counting, and monitoring independence. Meanwhile, SMEX's particular specification within the "monitoring strategy" relied on certain normative assumptions considerably "alien" to the traditional Lebanese political landscape (with the exception of "confessional" speech). The relatively unconventional approach pursued by SMEX posits an added value to the monitoring process by understanding the "levels" of "hate speech" utilized by campaigners.

As a result, the study concluded that around 2% of electoral speech constituted "negative" speech in the as per what was specified above; nevertheless, researchers at SMEX acknowledge that there have been faults with this methodological approach, particularly given that much of the inflammatory speech used by candidates had generally been shared and displayed in partisan media channels. The report ends with the importance of a more holistic approach to speech navigation and content analysis (Social Media Exchange, 2018).

In addition to this form of monitoring, SMEX goes further to elaborate on issues of privacy-evasion and surveillance during the elections; this is manifested with the Lebanese embassy in the UAE sending a rather detailed email to all Lebanese residents in the country; the email contained an attached spreadsheet constituting the highly personal details of around 5,000 Lebanese citizens who had registered to vote in the elections process from the UAE (“Lebanese Embassies Expose the Personal Data of Registered Voters Living Abroad,” n.d.).

The most interesting element within SMEX’s monitoring process is the creative ways in which the organization proceeded to transform what it means to be an observer by adapting itself to the technological changes brought forth with the 21st century, particularly with the emergence of social media networking. This practically entails that all major observatory organizations over the world ought to conduct these abrupt changes in order to pursue the online track put forth by the vast majority of campaigns worldwide. This shows the increasing influence of the NPO as it adopted new and innovative methods for monitoring that were not under any of the criteria that the government had adopted or outlined for monitoring the elections.

SMEX’s executive director highlighted in the interview that they did not have any contact with the SCE or the government, as their role was strictly limited to monitoring online content, which did not require obtaining any permits. Although institutional pluralism is recognized as SMEX is officially registered under the 1909 Law of Associations, low-NPO linkage was evident and an informal relationship definitely existed, due to the absence of communication with the government. SMEX’s executive director did not seek information from the government. As the information does not exist since online activity is not monitored by the government, it is hard to determine whether or not information sharing would have been an issue in this case.

1. ***Reports Produced and Policy Changes***

All three NPOs discussed in this research, LADE, SMEX, and LTA, have published reports detailing their observations and presenting recommendations targeted at the government. Their reports are available online on their websites, making them available for the public to access . Through the interviews, all observatory bodies had commented that they did not receive any reaction from the government, primarily the Ministry of Interior (MoI), about the findings of the reports or the recommendation included, **which is another proof of low NPO-Government linkage**. LADE and LTA representatives mentioned during the interviews that some of the recommendations can only be applied in the future elections – hence there is some hope that they may be taken into consideration once the 2022 parliamentary elections talks are back on the table. The constitutional council asked for witnesses from LADE to give their testimonials during investigations about misconducts following the elections, which was considered by LADE a significant step towards policy change, as civil society had the chance to influence a possible legal verdict, **and shows once again their increasing influence**.

LADE and LTA presented recommendations linked to the spending ceilings for candidates and its need to be reduced, and how the SCE needs to be more independent from the government in order to fulfill its duties without pressure from ministries. In addition to presenting them online, the NPOs held a press conference in which they detailed their observations and recommendations to the general public.

D. A Cooperative Relationship

When it comes to analyzing the relationships based on the Coston (1998) framework, one may say that the most significant characteristic amongst this list of monitoring bodies is its cooperation nature (Coston (1998) presented eight types of government-NPO relationship: repression, rivalry, competition contracting, third-party government, cooperation, complementarity, and collaboration).

To summarize the analysis outlined below, the following figure is a table that highlights the criteria presented by Coston with a justification stemmed from the analysis to highlight the “cooperative” nature of the relationship:

Table 1 Summary of the findings according to the Coston (1998) framework

Criteria	**Justification**
Acceptance of Institutional Pluralism	- Guaranteed through the 1909 Law of Association - NPOs take seat in the governmental Supervisory Commission of Elections - Official permits were granted to NPOs to observe elections
Low NGO Linkage with the Government	- Lack of coordination between NPOs and the SCE - Absence of coordination between NPOs and the MoI - Little to no policy change following NPO recommendations
Informal	-Absence of rules dictating collaboration and coordination between NPOs and the MoI, SCE.
Increasing NGO Influence	- Media attention and popular support - NPO asked for testimonials by the

	Constitutional Council following elections day - NPOs widening scope of work in comparison to previous years
Government Policy: Neutral	-The 1909 law provides flexibility, a neutral policy towards NPO operations
Information Sharing	- NPOs allowed to sit in meeting with the SCE, had access to some information including polling stations and voters list - NPOs did not have access to financial information

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This research explores the role of NPOs in monitoring the elections and helps define the relationship between the government and the NPOs that had been acting as observing bodies in the 2018 elections in Lebanon. Hence, it adds to the literature further knowledge about the climate in which NPOs operate, in addition to information about elections in Lebanon. As we witness across the country a new dawn for political change following the uprising of October 17 2019, it is important to understand how NPOs can relate to the government on issues that are highly sensible to the values of democracy.

Following the analysis of primary and secondary data in this research, it was evident that NPOs played a major role when it comes to monitoring the parliamentary elections of 2018, which marked the first time in nine years that citizens in Lebanon voted for parliament. The political process was managed under another law that included relative representation and pre-printed voting forms. The process of monitoring the elections was delegated to the Supervisory Commissions for Elections, which was, although "independent" by law, more of an extension to the Ministry of Interior which was not involved directly in the monitoring process. The NPOs who were involved in monitoring the elections played a vital role in keeping track of the advertising campaigns, the disruption and malpractices on the ground, and the work of the SCE. Reports were published and advertised, however, no real change in policy has been witnessed. To this extent, it is important to note that the relationships between the government and the NPOs was defined as "Cooperative" as per the Coston (1998) model: the government saw in NPOs potential to fill the gaps in resources it has while the NPOs could operate in the complex climate of the elections with the government's apparent blessing.

This research concludes that despite having evidence that the relationship's definition falls under "cooperation," the government did not necessarily make the job of NPOs an easy one. The obstacles that were posed when it comes to accessing the information and the initial resistance before giving the permits all hint at attempts to hinder the accomplishment of the mission of NPOs. This adds to theory the necessity of observing the journey that led to defining the relationship, and not only the relationship itself towards the end of the project (here, monitoring the elections).

Elections in Lebanon are a complex web that operates on multiple levels, including the ministries, the judiciary systems, Non-Profit Organizations, the media, candidates, voters, among others. This research contributed in understanding a part of the relationship between NPOs and the government and the impact NPOs have. Although the relationship is defined as cooperative, it is impossible to understand the full picture without going back to the roots of the political and national climate at the time of elections. The SCE and the government gave the impression in many instances of trying to dismiss the role of NPOs, whether by limiting their access to information, creating some obstacles towards obtaining permits, or disregarding policy recommendations presented by the NPOs. The NPOs managed to pull through by persisting on accomplishing their mission. This poses questions on whether in the future government will attempt at resisting NPOs further and if that will have a heavy impact on their mission.

Future research should focus on the role of the judiciary system, the capacity of policies in protecting the existence of NPOs, and how the public opinion and other civil society organizations can play a role in supporting the mission of NPOs, in light of possible government resistance.

A. Recommendations

In what follows, are some recommendations to ensure further transparency and the continuity of the mission of NPOs:

1. The Ministry of Interior should ensure the work of the SCE is continuous and independent:

   As per the law governing the elections, the SCE should be a permanent body that continues its work after the elections and explores development areas for the following elections. It is also considered an independent governmental commission with independent terms of reference and distinct power. To establish this, an independent budget and resources should be allocated to the SCE to avoid referring to the MoI for funds and tools, which allowed the MoI more authority over the commission.

2. The Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Information, must ensure further transparency when it comes to the work of the SCE:

   Most of the work by the SCE was happening behind closed doors which was not the case for NPOs who were constantly publishing updates about the monitoring process . In order to ensure a transparent and credible monitoring process, there should be room for accountability by the people, hence arises the importance of ensuring transparency in the work of the SCE.

3. The parliament must revise the law of the elections to ensure NPOs have access to necessary information:

   As the current law is open to interpretation when it comes to access to information, it is recommended that the parliament revises the law to ensure NPOs who are monitoring the elections have access to information related to spending and financial data, as it is a crucial part of ensuring a transparent process to elections.

4. The government, parliament, and concerned judiciary departments must ensure a proper policy working flow for implementing reforms following the NPOs recommendations:

   With reports published and little policy change happening, the government and other official bodies need to establish a clear mechanism to take into consideration and implement the recommendations suggested by both accredited NPOs and the SCE into the next elections. This is also necessary to avoid “last-minute” reforms during the next elections.

5. The government must capitalize on the role of NPOs in monitoring the elections and ensure the work of NPOs is not met by obstacles that hinders the process of monitoring elections:

Although the role of NPOs is acknowledged in the electoral law, in practice, NPOs have faced some resistance when it comes to obtaining the necessary permits and when it comes to access to information. NPOs should be recognized as necessary bodies in the monitoring process of elections and should be granted further access and administrative facilitation to ensure they are empowered to fulfill their role pre, during, and post elections.

6. The Ministry of Interior must include social media in the criteria for observation:

   With the SCE monitoring the electoral spending and general campaigning of the candidates, there is little to no attention to behavior of candidates on social media, as outlined by SMEX. With social media taking further space and importance in running electoral campaigns, the next elections should include social media criteria, rules, and regulations in its laws and decisions.

7. Non-profit organizations must learn from previous experience and focus on support from the ground to advance their mission:

   As the civil society in Lebanon continue to grow and demands of transparency and equity continue to be made, NPOs with missions related to fostering transparency should rely on support of the social movement instead of validation from the government, as the government continue to be slow in responding to the demands of NPOs.

This research aimed at covering the opportunities and obstacles in the work of NPOs when it comes to monitoring the elections. Moving forward, it is important to continue to explore the role of NPOs in acting as watchdogs in Lebanon. NPOs with missions related to policy and advocacy continue to face resistance in Lebanon, and further research is important to understand the extent of being able to “challenge” laws and decisions by the government, in the field of elections and voting, but also in other fields including citizenship, civic spaces, and campaigning. The relationship between NPOs and the government in Lebanon is one that is not straightforward and lacks a framework as the law governing associations remains, to this date, vague. This concludes in NPOs facing discriminatory treatment from the government as it gives the government leeway to issue decrees and decisions that do not necessarily work in favor of the NPOs. With this being the context, and adding to what was mentioned above, further research is also needed to understand the relationship between the two in the context of Lebanon.

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