

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MAKING SENSE OF THE OCTOBER 2019 UPRISING IN  
LEBANON: COMPETING DISCOURSES AND  
CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

by  
LYNN ABDEL KADER ALWAN

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for the degree of Master of Arts  
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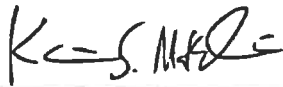
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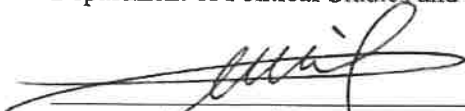
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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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High inflation rates, the devaluation of the Lebanese lira which was pegged to the U.S. dollar, and weak economic and social services contributed to the outburst of protests on October 17<sup>th</sup> of 2019, following a circulated decision by the government to impose a \$6 tax on the WhatsApp application. The Lebanese people perceived this decision as yet another burden placed on them by a government that was already failing to provide basic services and assistance and were outraged by it widely.

Some protestors gathered in the streets of downtown Beirut, chanting “All Means All” to symbolize the involvement of all politicians in the crises that Lebanon was in and demand for reforms beyond the empty promises of the same zu’ama and the same traditional political parties who failed to divert and save Lebanon from crises. But what started as a unanimous front of protestors from different backgrounds, classes, and identities fighting the same political class soon became a fractured front of various groups with their own respective varying understandings of what the movement stands for.

Through a discourse analysis of eight different participating actors in the uprising, the research question of how each group understood the uprising uncovers that these competing discourses resulted in weakening the movement. By introducing the first few weeks of the uprising, this research answers the question of how the uprising was later on conceptualized. The findings highlight different protesting patterns of different groups with different alliances, all claiming to move under the same slogan of “All Means All,” yet having different conceptualizations of who the “all” includes, what the uprising aspires to achieve, and what the ‘change’ advocated for actually looks like.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABL	Association of Banks in Lebanon
BDL	Banque du Liban
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LCP	Lebanese Communist Party
LF	Lebanese Forces
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and more
MMFD	Mouawatinoun Wa Mouwatinat Fi Dawla
MP	Member of Parliament
MTV	Murr Television
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNA	National News Agency
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SGBL	Société Générale de Banque au Liban
SSNP	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
US	United States

*To the people who believe in change and fight for it.*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL PROBLEM

“All means all” started as the rallying cry for people gathered in central Beirut to protest the Lebanese government’s approval of the so-called “WhatsApp tax” on October 17, 2019. This tax came on the back of a series of deeply regressive decrees and laws over several years that had enriched the few at the expense of the majority of the Lebanese. It was also the last straw for most Lebanese who use WhatsApp as a means to communicate on personal and professional levels.<sup>1</sup> Since the uprising, the Lebanese people's purchasing power had decreased; 34% of businesses had cut staff salaries and 49% of employers were forced to drop employee salaries by an average of 39.7%.<sup>2</sup> Also, an economic overview of Lebanon after the uprising noted a 10% inflation increase from the same month the year before.<sup>3</sup> It is anticipated that \$4 billion had been removed from the commercial banks and are being preserved at home since the Lebanese people no longer have faith in their government, leaders, or banks.<sup>4</sup> In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Lebanon and put a stop to the protests under the instructions to quarantine out of fear of spreading the virus further. Amidst the current economic crisis, the pandemic heightened many people’s fears of not being able to afford basic healthcare and therefore increasing the virus’ risk on the Lebanese.

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<sup>1</sup> Makdisi, Karim, “Lebanon’s October 2019 Uprising: From Solidarity to Division and Descent into the Known Unknown,” 437.

<sup>2</sup> Youssef, Jamile. "Economic Overview Lebanon," 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Almost a year later, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, a fire in one of the Beirut Port warehouses holding ammonium nitrate caused 2,750 of this substance to explode. This explosion ripped through Lebanon's capital and killed over 218, injured 7,000, and left 300,000 people displaced.<sup>5</sup> The day following the August 2020 explosion, protesters gathered in downtown Beirut were once again chanting "all means all," attributing the explosion to a corrupt, broken-down, and sectarian political system, joining the series of protests that erupted in October 2019 and continued after the Beirut Port explosion.

Following these main events and with the increasingly dire living conditions in Lebanon, people's apparent reluctance to protest in favor of their rights has been widely labeled as 'resilience' despite citizens' apparent resentment and widespread anger towards government representatives and parliamentarians.<sup>6</sup> Even when protestors did gather, their numbers were limited and largely unrepresentative of the majority view that was struggling but choosing to do so silently out of the conviction that voicing these struggles out will garner no positive outcome.<sup>7</sup> This selective silence based on despair and the lack of trust in government officials that was often coupled with the instinctive need to survive despite the many crises faced by the Lebanese became known as the 'Lebanese resilience.' This term was widely used to describe the citizens' perseverance and continuous survival throughout time, representing a romanticized version of suffering that insinuates that this survival was a choice rather than a need. Furthermore, understanding the protest participation patterns – who is participating, when and why—and contextualizing the variables of participation in the October 17

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<sup>5</sup> "Infographic: How Big Was the Beirut Explosion?" Al Jazeera.

<sup>6</sup> Berthier, Rosalie. "The Fabric of Lebanese Resilience."

<sup>7</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, "Lebanon's Thawra: Anatomy of a Social Movement," 8-18.

protests in relation to other relevant indicators within the participants becomes a means to concretely conceptualize the protests among many conflicting narratives that play a part in how protests and responses are shaped. That way, what is seen as protesting comes to encompass more than what visible and is perceived as a one-way resistance, and it ceases to be seen as a struggle of those who are not politically affiliated against those who are, or even between those of lower social classes against higher ones. In other words, this research conceptualizes the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising by understanding its nature and triggers in relation to the actors that participated in shaping the uprising by evaluating their discourses throughout the uprising. The first chapter introduces the existing literature on protests and social movements, the October 2019 uprising, the quiet encroachment, and other relevant concept, whereas the second chapter creates an overview of post-civil war political parties and the alliances they formed during and after the 1975-1990 war, in 2005, and during the October 2019 uprising. Understanding the involvement of the traditional parties through Lebanon's history aids this paper in providing context to the post-Arab Spring and anti-establishment movements in Lebanon since 2011. By exploring the various unidentified ways in which the Lebanese people are protesting in the fourth chapter of this paper, as well as what they are protesting for and against, the research also draws comparisons between what the October 17<sup>th</sup> movement has become in contrast with what it was, in light of what the widespread understanding of protesting and resistance is, and how it is actually manifested in this case. The research findings in the fifth chapter will then highlight the importance of contextualizing the uprising and identifying the roles of various actors that have directly or indirectly contributed to the mobilization of the Lebanese population. For this purpose, this paper uses October 17<sup>th</sup> as a vision of the first few

days, and October 17 as the resulting actions that took place after the uprising began interchangeably.

### **A. Literature Review**

The literature on protests is vast. For the purposes of this thesis on Lebanon, it is important to clarify conceptually what we mean by protests and locating it within the wider social movement literature. Starting with Karl-Dieter Opp's 2009 article, "Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: a Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis" refers to protests as a behavior that could be understood through general social psychological theories in social movement research. It suggests that protests can be "terrorist acts, complaints of a group of students about the syllabus of a professor, reports of a group of employees to the management of a firm about the discriminatory behavior of the head of a department, a tenant's objection to a rent increase, citizens' request to the government for a subsidy of a kindergarten, etc."<sup>8</sup> Social movements on the other hand are about groups or organizations working towards a cause. They are mostly identified by some literatures as a "collectivity of individuals" rather than a set of opinions and beliefs in organized efforts at the center of "sequences of contentious politics" with a set of goals they aim to reach. In social movements, Opp suggests that there is also usually an antagonist, a group of opposition that the social movement is trying to influence to join. In contrast, a protest group is, by definition, a collectivity of actors who want to achieve their shared goal by influencing decisions of a target. Therefore, what could be understood is that social movements aim to recruit while protests aim to target the source. Applying Opp's reasoning to the case of Lebanon's 2019 protest movement, we can conclude that it is both a "social movement"

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<sup>8</sup> Opp, Karl-Dieter, "Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis," 33.

trying to influence other people, and a “protest” trying to influence the target, the Lebanese government, by demanding change or by removing the whole political ‘elite.’ The significance of this book for my research is that it refers to social movement theories that both help in correctly conceptualizing the October 17<sup>th</sup> movement and also explain the participation patterns and behaviors that trigger and shape them.

In his 2009 article, “Political Sociology and Social Movements,” Andrew G. Walder states that several debates emerged during the post cold War period in the field of social movements and protests as triggers and consequences of political opportunity, organization and resources, strategy, collective identity, as well as emotions and cognitive frames.<sup>9</sup> Walder argues that these concepts of opportunity, strategy and ideology do not only serve as motives and strongpoints for social movements, but also act as frameworks that help in understanding them. In other words, the process of answering the pressing question of what mobilizes the mass of citizens starts by understanding that this same question is too narrow to encompass the scope of all previous and possible social movements. Therefore, he suggests that research into social movements should start by identifying what type of movement is being mobilized and go from there. This is a step that is often overlooked which might explain the presence of so many definitions of those same key terms yet the limited answers as to why they have occurred. Using the same logic of conceptualizing the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests based on opportunity, strategy and ideology among other factors, conceptualizing the relevant events that took place since then would serve as a starting point in looking for my thesis’ research findings in the right places.

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<sup>9</sup> Walder, Andrew G, "Political Sociology and Social Movements," 393-412.

Conceptualizing the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests needs to also address the faults in some concepts adopted to describe the movement, one of which being its label as a revolution. Jack A. Goldstone's 2014 book *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* introduces revolutions as a rare response to the common instances of oppression and injustice where "the rulers become weak and isolated, and elites begin to attack the government rather than defend it."<sup>10</sup> Social revolutions can then be understood as large-scale transformations of a society's political, economic and social structures and norms as opposed to "more common disruptive events that almost always occur as part of revolutions."<sup>11</sup> Goldstone argues in his book that revolutions are often confused with other disruptive events that could mark the beginning of a revolution or be a part of its course of events for the purpose of remedying local or group grievances. And in the cases where these disruptive events do end up overthrowing governments such as elite coups or coups d'état, they usually occur under the umbrella of restoring order through the production of new political institutions and systems, with the common promise of the coup leaders stepping down after accomplishing that goal.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, coups have the ability to become revolutions if the participants – being the leaders of the followers - present a vision of a reshaped society on new principles of justice and social order.<sup>13</sup> The significance of this book is to emphasize on how the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests were and continue to not represent what revolutions are, despite often being called that.

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<sup>10</sup> Goldstone, Jack A, *Revolutions: A very short introduction*, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Goldstone, Jack A. *Revolutions: A very short introduction*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



In his 2000 journal article titled “From ‘Dangerous Classes’ to ‘Quiet Rebels’: Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South,” Asef Bayat explores how the “urban grassroots” respond to their marginalization and exclusion in Third World countries by going over the prevailing perspectives on the culture of poverty, survival, and social movements in every day resistance. Bayat introduces the term “quiet encroachment of the ordinary” which he employs in his examination of activism of societies in the Third World cities. “Quiety encroachment” describes the gradual but widespread movement of the common people toward the wealthy and powerful in an effort to survive and better their lives<sup>14</sup>. In extention, this “quiet encroachment” replaces social movements or protests in the traditional way and moves the subjects to directly fulfill their own needs by themselves, “albeit individually and discretely.<sup>15</sup>” The significance of this shift in understanding how people protest against their own oppression is key to the reconceptualization of what protesting means. I will be using the argument that people can silently protest to argue that a lot more people participate in social movements than we think due to our inability to see them do so.

In their contribution to the 2019 volume *The Routledge Handbook to the Middle East and North African State and States System*, Larbi Sadiki and Layla Saleh introduce another important concept that is relevant for this thesis, namely that of “peoplehood.” Their chapter, “The Arab Spring is not lost: Moral protest as the embodiment of a new politics,” argues that “peoplehood” is not simply a matter of biological or cultural affinity, but is instead a social and political construct that is shaped by a range of factors, including historical experiences, shared values and beliefs, and political

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<sup>14</sup> Bayat, Asef. "'From Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels' Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South," 545.

<sup>15</sup> Bayat, Asef, "'From Dangerous Classes' to 'Quiet Rebels,'" 548.

institutions. They suggest that “peoplehood” can be understood as a dynamic and evolving process that is constantly being renegotiated and redefined in response to changing social and political contexts.<sup>16</sup> Similarly to the concept of citizenship, “peoplehood” is not limited to the matter of legal rights and obligations, but rather to an extension of the expression of “peoplehood” through the identity and sense of belonging shared by the members of the community.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the “peoplehood” concept represents both “the medium and the message,”<sup>18</sup> incorporating both the group of participants in social movements and the message they are trying to send, which is, in this case, one that is aligned with what was widely demanded through protests during the Arab Spring. And while the message could represent issues related to colonization, unequal distribution of power and wealth, and many more, the concept of protests I will explore in my thesis will include all that has been demanded on the streets or indirectly expressed by the Lebanese people. This would include but not be limited to questions of wealth, corruption, legitimacy, access to resources, among others. Additionally, linked with Opp’s “collectivity of individuals,” the concept of “peoplehood” will act as a starting point in my thesis to understand how the Lebanese people have participated in protests together as part of a joint community.

Building on the concept of “peoplehood,” my thesis also touches on the differences in demands and different groups’ understanding of some concepts related to the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising despite being part of a community with shared values and basic demands in regards to social justice. In his journal article “Lebanon’s October 2019 Uprising:

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<sup>16</sup> Sadiki, Larbi, and Layla Saleh, “The Arab Spring is not lost: Moral protest as the embodiment of a new politics,” 177-190.

<sup>17</sup> Sadiki, Larbi, and Layla Saleh, “The Arab Spring is not lost,” 177-190.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 177.

From Solidarity to Division and Descent into the Known Unknown,” Karim Makdisi argues that the uprising represented a powerful expression of solidarity among diverse groups of people in Lebanon, who came together to demand change and challenge the status quo. The significance of Makdisi’s article is to frame the uprising within the Lebanese context from its start as a consequence of the WhatsApp tax, all the way back to the post civil-war sectarian pact that set up the scene for politicians to “plunder public assets, wealth, and resources, unlawfully privatizing and destroying Lebanon’s famous coast-line and mountain peaks and ramming through a deeply regressive taxation system” that led to the October 2019 outburst of the Lebanese.<sup>19</sup> Makdisi’s article presents a summary of the main events that eventually triggered the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising and introduces neoliberalism as a variable that prepared the scene for politicians to oppress the Lebanese. This helps me understand the complexity of the start of the uprising and address the belittling of its start as a mere consequence of inaccessibility to WhatsApp.

Finally, after conceptualizing the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising and understanding the events that triggered its start and the theories that explain its variables and actors, I conclude my thesis by exploring an alternative to the currently reigning political system that people are opposing. In his 2022 article “Radical Secularism and Worldview Dilemmas in Countering Sectarianism in Lebanon,” Andersen argues that radical secularism faces significant challenges in the Lebanese context as it may be perceived as a threat to the religious identity of many Lebanese due to the interlinked political and religious identities in the political scene.<sup>20</sup> Despite the challenges, Andersen recommends that the

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<sup>19</sup> Makdisi, Karim, "Lebanon’s October 2019 Uprising: From Solidarity to Division and Descent into the Known Unknown," 441.

<sup>20</sup> Andersen, Lars Erslev, "Radical Secularism and Worldview Dilemmas in Countering Sectarianism in Lebanon," 489.

opposition in Lebanon unites around a political vision that acknowledges the necessity of recognizing the equality of all worldviews in public debates rather than advocating "leaderless resistance" or an alternative political system based on the European interpretation of secularism<sup>21</sup>. This vision, which is based on radical secularism and the idea that a democratic state is neutral, appears to be the only way to unify a sectarianically divided Lebanon into a nation with shared political aspirations for the future.<sup>22</sup>

## **B. Research Question**

In light of the literature review on protests and social movements, on the one hand, and that covering Lebanon's case on the other hand, this paper will conceptualize the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising by exploring its triggers, goals, and demands according to several actors ranging from media outlets to politicians and activists, while also addressing the contrasting concepts that have been employed to describe its various variables. My thesis answers the question of how we can conceptualize the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising by analyzing the involvement of each studied group in it, including how they describe its nature, goals, and other actors. By identifying the uprising's definition according to actors such as Marcel Ghanem, Riad Kobaissi, Megaphone, Legal Agenda, Citizens in a State, Depositors' Outcry, LiHaqqi, and Taqaddom, I analyze the uprising's triggers depending on the actors' needs and address the main concepts that have been employed to describe its nature, goals, and allies. My research first creates an overview of Lebanon's traditional political parties and the alliances they have formed throughout the

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<sup>21</sup> Andersen, Lars Erslev. "Radical Secularism and Worldview Dilemmas," 477.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,477.

post-war period. Then, it presents the historical background of disruptive behaviors starting from the 2011 movement in Lebanon, which was inspired by the Arab Spring and marked the beginning of anti-sectarianism movements in Lebanon, to the “You Stink” movement that introduced the “All means all” chants, leading up to the October 2019 uprising in light of how it has been labeled according to the main participating actors. Furthermore, it uncovers the on-the-ground participation patterns such as triggers, goals, alliances, and language across the uprising for each actor studied. Finally, by exploring several different protesting patterns – including the silent, private, and public ones, this paper reexamines the understanding of “protesting” – which is a term that has been widely used in different contexts and has come to mean different things for different actors.

## **C. Research Design**

### ***1. Research Methods***

The tools and procedures I use are based on qualitative methods to analyze the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising. My thesis primarily relies on both primary and secondary sources, such as literature on social movement theories, news articles, and interviews that have already been conducted with actors who were active in the uprising. These sources act as a reference in this paper’s attempt to understand the different actors studied and to contrast them with the participation patterns of others in the uprising. The actors include influential people with platforms that have been used to talk about the uprising and host other influential people, as well as groups that emerged from various events since the 2011 movement, including nontraditional parties that existed before the 2019 uprising, social activists, political campaigns, unions, and associations. In my

analysis, I examine eight groups that played a significant role in the October 2019 uprising in Lebanon and that represent the different conceptualizations created and adopted since the October 2019 uprising started. Firstly, I examine two mainstream media outlets, MTV Lebanon's "It's About Time" hosted by Marcel Ghanem<sup>23</sup> and Al-Jadeed TV's "Bring Down Corrupt Rule" hosted by Riad Kobaissi.<sup>24</sup> Both shows were widely watched and covered various aspects of the uprising, providing often opposing perspectives to what the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising meant. In addition to the mainstream media, I also investigate two other media outlets, namely Megaphone News<sup>25</sup> and The Legal Agenda<sup>26</sup> - and specifically its founder Nizar Saghieh - that gained popularity through alternative platforms such as social media, and grew popular in disseminating information during the uprising. Finally, I focus on four different political and activist groups, each with a unique experience of participating in the uprising. These include the Depositors' Outcry Association, a group formed by bank depositors affected by the financial crisis, Citizens in a State, a group formed by former Minister Charbel Nahas prior to the October 2019 movement, Taqaddom, a group of activists who emerged during the 2011 and 2015 movements, and LiHaqqi, an opposition campaign for the 2018 parliamentary elections. By examining these groups, I aim to illustrate the varying

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<sup>23</sup> Marcel Ghanem is a political talk-show host who started his television career in the 1990s. He first hosted a show titled "Kalam Ennas," and in 2018 started a new political show titled "Sar El Waet" meaning it's about time. In this show, Ghanem provides a platform for citizens and politicians to interact with each other by expressing their concerns, talking about their issues, debating with other guests, and sharing their opinions.

<sup>24</sup> Riad Kobaissi is a Lebanese show host of "Yasqot Hokm Al Fased," an investigative show that dives into notorious files of corruption of the elite and their circle in Lebanon.

<sup>25</sup> Megaphone is an online independent media platform producing digital content on current affairs and provides social and cultural commentaries. See "About Megapne."

<sup>26</sup> A non-profit organization established in 2009 by a group of lawyers, academics, and advocates with the aim of developing an analytical and interdisciplinary approach to law and justice in Arab nations. See Legal Agenda, "Who We Are."

conceptualizations created and adopted by each actor and showcase the diverse experiences of those who participated in the uprising.

By exploring each actor's backgrounds, ideologies, alliances, and goals, I conduct a discourse analysis which will help me showcase how different actors conceptualized the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising and consequently understand their actions and perceptions. The discourse analysis of each actor studied is done by looking at previous media appearances and interviews through YouTube videos and news reports, Instagram posts, website statements, and published reports, mainly after October 2019. In order to help me identify important statements and positions taken by each actor, I search Twitter using the name of the group or its leader, and keywords related to the uprising such as "thawra" and "October 17" for posts with high engagement after October 2019 that would help refer me to specific dates and statements that might be important in my analyses. Accordingly, I look up and watch the YouTube videos of these events filmed through media coverage, if available, or reruns of the episodes of the shows they were mentioned on.

In this research, I specifically look for ways in which the Lebanese have been protesting whether publicly or silently, peacefully or violently, from bank raids to running for parliamentary elections as a way to delegitimize or infiltrate the government's institutions and showcase their resistance against the current situation or the people in power, all in the context of how they define what the Thawra means for them. I base my analysis of these groups on the assumption that every participating actor studied is equal in its involvement in the uprising in terms of having its own definition of it, its own participation patterns, its own audience, and its own allies. According to my findings, I draw two figures: one questioning the alignment of the group's position with the

October 17<sup>th</sup> initial definition as an anti-sectarian movement based on how they define themselves in contrast with how their discourse analysis helps me define them, and another placing the groups on a scale of how clear they are in their positions throughout their participation in the movement.

## ***2. Limitations***

The absence of data that highlights some main positions and events related to the actors studied leaves no option but to search for what might be deemed important in this context and analyze its value accordingly. In the case of Marcel Ghanem's show, "It's About Time," the scarcity of the news articles and reports written about him and his role in the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, despite the widespread acknowledgement of his involvement on many levels can only be solved by analyzing his guest lists, looking at the dates of their appearance on the show in relation to important events taking place at the time, and then rewatching the episodes in hopes of finding some valuable statements and positions taken by him. The same applies to most of the remaining actors whose positions beyond the surface-level chants of "All Means All" encompass different versions of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, and often even different versions of what they think it means at different points in time. This method is necessary for the creation of the discourse analysis with unsorted data, but it leaves a margin of error due to the absence of entire narratives documented, analyzed, and even updated – due to the ongoing events within the uprising that has yet to end.



### *3. Significance*

The potential implications of the research will most importantly highlight the importance of context in understanding social phenomena and the inaccuracies of generalizations of a theoretical or conceptual framework on a global scale. Taking the literature review findings on what revolutions are, what mobilizes a nation and triggers change, as well as what it means for citizens to ‘protest’ will help in providing context to the October 2019 uprising and act as a base for further research on it.

The contribution to knowledge will come later on in the research as the literature findings are contrasted with the narratives and actions taken by each actor studied. That way, both aspects of what was already known and what is newly being discovered through my research will no longer be seen as two separate bodies but as a chain of interlinking ideas that properly represent the process of mobilization with all of its complexity within the Lebanese context during the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising. As a result, this will create a model of who participates in protests in Lebanon, how they do it, and why. In addition, the research findings will hopefully create a basis for further research on protests and social movements, and raise awareness within the very specific context of Lebanon which has shown over time to be exceptional in many different aspects. The goal would be to find a model that eventually proves to be successful in a society that has yet to recover from its civil war that further exacerbated the sectarian divide between its people.

## CHAPTER II

### OVERVIEW OF LEBANON'S TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AFTER THE CIVIL WAR

Lebanon has seen the emergence of three generations of political parties: the first generation during the French Mandate, the second following independence, and the third generation during the 1975-1990 Civil War. During the first half of the 1970s, Lebanon witnessed a peak in political party influence in local and national politics which had already been steadily increasing since its independence in 1943. Unlike parties in other Arab nations, parties in Lebanon represent a broad range of political, communal, and ideological platforms, reflecting the diversity of Lebanon's political landscape as well as that of the larger Arab region. This diversity played a major role in times of crisis by turning these political parties into militia groups as was seen during the six-month crisis of 1958<sup>27</sup> and the fifteen-year war in 1975. In this section, I provide an overview of the traditional political parties by highlighting some significant events that add more context to the October 2019 uprising, as well as the alliances they formed during the post-civil war period which extends until the present. This chapter will not only help in clarifying the political parties' roles as triggers, opposers, and participants within the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising but also provide context on the alliances formed between these groups as a result of movements that have taken place in the post-war period. The significance of this chapter lies within the historical significance of traditional political parties that have led to the birth of anti-establishment movements in Lebanon since 2011.

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<sup>27</sup> Duverger, Maurice. "Les Partis Politiques," 322-332.

### **A. Political Parties After the Civil War (1990-Present)**

More than fifteen political parties and organizations, including those on the Left and the Right, secular and religious, ideological and non-ideological, radical and moderate, were active and engaged in the recruitment, mobilization, and instigation of propaganda on a national scale. Two events defined this time period in terms of political activity: the political assertion of leftist parties, and the Palestine Liberation Organization's political and military activities in Lebanon following the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict. Revolutionary uprisings in the Third World and student activism in Western nations both had an impact on the quick expansion of leftist parties inside all groups. Radical parties with a range of ideologies have grown in popularity in Lebanon and were inspired by Marxist, Leninist, Maoist, and Trotskyite theories. These parties were represented by the Organization of Communist Action founded in 1971 and included the LCP, the pro-Iraqi Ba'ath party, and the SSNP which conducted a coup against President Fouad Chehab in 1961. This period preceding the war also marked the high politicization of university students and labor unions linked to political parties, as well as the militarization of Lebanese politics – as seen with the PLO's armed presence dividing Lebanese political parties into two groups that either support the PLO's presence and the PLO-Israeli warfare in the south or oppose it completely. The overlap between Lebanon's domestic politics and PLO's agenda resulted in clashes with the former's government, which was in turn paralyzed by the PLO on three different occasions in 1969, 1973, and 1975. The Lebanese communities had been at odds concerning the identity of their country since the early 1970s. The Christian parties were determined to retain the "special" status of Lebanon in the area, whilst the Muslim parties saw Lebanon as an Arab state and urged for the strengthening of connections

with the Palestinian "brothers" and the Arab world. The Christian parties did not see Lebanon as an Arab nation, but rather as the "eastern frontier of the Christian west," and believed in the need to preserve this status by standing against leftist groups that called for the change of the nature of Lebanon's regime.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the civil war was triggered by these two contrasting conceptions of Lebanon's identity.

Political parties had the resources to arm themselves and prepare their supporters and members for violent warfare. The militarization of the Lebanese political parties was noted in 1973, after an armed clash between the PLO and the Lebanese army, marking the turning point for parties into militias that acquired weapons. In 1976, the Lebanese Forces was formed as an umbrella organization for Christian parties that were involved in the war under the defined goal of liberating the Lebanese territory from all foreign troops.<sup>29</sup> Following the 1982 Israeli invasion, state institutions collapsed and power over each area was in the control of the militia controlling it; the Lebanese Forces was in East Beirut, Amal, the PSP, and other parties were in West Beirut.<sup>30</sup> Soon later, Lebanon saw efforts of ending the war through trials of integrating militias into the state. The Lebanese Forces, Amal, and PSP created a Tripartite Agreement whose sides aimed to help institutionalize Syrian domination over Lebanon. At the time, Samir Geagea was the Lebanese Forces' military commander, whereas Elie Hobeiqa was its chief of intelligence. The Lebanese Forces saw an internal divide in opinions among its leaders, as Geagea – in addition to President Amin Gemayel – was against the

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<sup>28</sup> Moumneh, Nader. "The Lebanese Forces: Emergence and Transformation of the Christian Resistance," 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Abu Khalil, Joseph. "Qissatal-Mawarinafial-Harb, Sira Dhatiyya [The Story of the Maronites in the War: A Personal Account,]" 365-404.

agreement, as opposed to Hobeiqa who helped broker it.<sup>31</sup> In an effort to ease the tension between Geagea and Hobeiqa who had different opinions on the Tripartite Agreement, the Lebanese Army commander-in-chief Michel Aoun issued a warning that he would intervene if the attacks were not put to an end.<sup>32</sup> In January 1986, the LF committee elected Samir Geagea as its new commander-general.

Throughout the war, militias were brought into violent conflict with one another within the same community, causing them to eventually cease to operate, such as the case of the Fatah-backed Sunni militia known as Al-Murabitun. At the same time, new organizations and militaries emerged, including the Sunni-based Harakat al-Tawhid (Unity Movement) which was backed by the PLO leader Yasser Arafat, and the Shi'i-based Party of God (Hezbollah), founded in 1985, with roots going back to the Da'wa party in Iraq and ideologies espousing from Ruhollah Khomeini's Wilayat Al-Faqih. The Israeli invasion in 1982 marked Hezbollah's first involvement in the civil war. Relations between the Amal party led by Nabih Berni since 1980 and Damascus were at a peak, and Hezbollah, which was armed and funded by Iran, fought against leftist parties and had a tense relationship with Syria. Hezbollah became Amal's principal competition in the Shi'i community as it was successful in gaining an ever-growing Shi'a following, initially from inside the ranks of Amal. This led to armed clashes between both parties, leading to the active intervention of Syria and Iran to put an end to the conflict in the late 1980s. The war was brought to an end after 62 members of the Lebanese parliament met in Ta'if from September 30 until October 22 of 1989. During the Ta'if negotiations, the Document of National Understanding emerged, ratifying the

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<sup>31</sup> El Khazen, Farid. "Political Parties in Postwar Lebanon: Parties in Search of Partisans," 610-611.

<sup>32</sup> Moumneh, Nader, 128.

National Pact with an emphasis on confessional compromise and inter-communal cooperation.<sup>33</sup>

The transition to peace during Post-Civil war Lebanon was abrupt, as political parties and military elites were not subjected to any sort of rehabilitation. The peace conference held under international supervision in Ta'if did not put an end to the conflict, as constitutional amendments based on the Ta'if Agreement were not ratified by the legislature, also known as the Chamber of Deputies, until August 1990. The “Ta'if clock” for the dissolution of militias and the retreat of Syrian soldiers to positions in the Biqa was scheduled to respectively happen six months and two years following parliamentary approval of the deal, beginning when the constitution was revised in September 1990. Political parties, including militias, had to immediately return to their political party status in order to adjust to the new reality. During this period, the Lebanese Forces were officially recognized as a political party known as the Lebanese Forces Party. In addition, all militias but Hezbollah were forced to disband. Hezbollah continued to field a highly developed military force that was given a special status allowing it to keep its arms due to the Israeli occupation in the South of Lebanon.<sup>34</sup> Following Michel Aoun's defeat in a military operation led by Syria in 1990 and his exile to France, his supporters marched in the shadow of their leader in Lebanon, founding what became known as the Free Patriotic Movement. Despite the numerous restrictions placed on the movement by the Lebanese political elite, the movement launched collective activity of protests and demonstrations and called for the freedom,

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<sup>33</sup> El Khazen, Farid, 605-624.

<sup>34</sup> Dingel, Eva. “Hezbollah's Rise and Decline? how the Political Structure Seems to Harness the Power of Lebanon's Non-State Armed Group,” 70-71.

sovereignty, and independence of Lebanon. However, this social movement not only persisted from 1990 to 2005 but also after Aoun's return to Lebanon in 2005, it even turned into an official political party.<sup>35</sup>

## **B. Post-Civil War Party Alliances**

Up until 2005, the fragmented party system in Lebanon had been made up of a number of parties that varied in how much they represented various confessional factions. The two coalitions that emerged from this multiparty configuration have their names derived from significant occasions that took place in 2005: March 8, referring to the date of the largest pro-Syrian demonstration in Lebanon, and March 14 being the day of the Cedar Revolution, in which Syria was driven out of Lebanon.<sup>36</sup>

The new alliances' boundaries crossed those of their established religions, as the cedar revolution was not only popular with Lebanon's Christians but also with Sunni and Druze communities.<sup>37</sup> Rather than unite the country, the Cedar Revolution reinstated the country's polarized sectarian sides with the majority of the Shi'a community opposing it. The March 8 Alliance, which included Hezbollah, Amal, and other pro-Syrian groups, was on one side and was also backed by Syria and Iran.<sup>38</sup> The March 14 Bloc, which included the Lebanese Forces, Kataeb, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Hariri Future Current, and the Free Patriotic Movement, was on the other,<sup>39</sup> gaining the

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<sup>35</sup> Helou, Joseph P. "Activism, Change and Sectarianism in the Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon," 3.

<sup>36</sup> Haddad, Simon. "Lebanon: From Consociationalism to Conciliation," 406.

<sup>37</sup> Norton, Augustus Richard. "Lebanon After Ta'if: Is the Civil War Over?" 457-473.

<sup>38</sup> Dingel, Eva, 71.

<sup>39</sup> Haddad, Simon, 406.

support of the United States as well as several European countries.<sup>40</sup> The political aspirations of Michel Aoun to become Lebanon's president were widely known.<sup>41</sup> Just before the 2005 legislative elections, he strategically removed his Free Patriotic Movement from the alliance as it became evident that the other leaders did not support him. This was to be the alliance's first significant setback. Aoun's desire to become president led him to leave the March 14 Alliance and later join the opposition that was backed by Syria and Iran. This action was perceived as a practical political attempt to win the opposition's backing in order to win the Presidency, a position he has desired at least since 1988. In addition to weakening March 14 and the Cedar revolutionaries, Aoun's political realignment also split and ultimately damaged Lebanon's Christian population. The Sunni community, led by the Hariri family and their Future Movement, now ruled March 14. On the other hand, Hezbollah and the Shiite community controlled the Lebanese opposition. Formerly dominant Christians in Lebanon became junior partners in both.<sup>42</sup>

In more recent years, specifically after the October 2019 uprising, the main March 8 parties remained together. Saad El-Hariri, the former prime minister and head of the Future Movement, stepped down from office in January 2022 and encouraged the other members of his party to do the same.<sup>43</sup> In this period, the traditional March 8 and March 14 alliances gained a more complex dimension within their involvement in the October 2019 uprising. This indicated that there were roughly four sorts of lists: March 8 and

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<sup>40</sup> Dingel, Eva, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Norton, Augustus Richard, 457-473.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Deets, Stephen. "To Hope Or Not to Hope: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Learning from Lebanon's 2022 Election," 102-113.



March 14 remnants, traditional opposition parties, and anti-establishment opposition groups.

## CHAPTER III

# HISTORY OF NON-SECTARIAN MOVEMENTS IN LEBANON

The well-known chant from the Arab uprisings of 2011 “The people want the downfall of the regime” and “All means all” have taken over the squares across Lebanon during the October 2019 uprising, mixed with many profanity-laced chants. The latter refers to the uniqueness of Lebanese sectarianism, where the regime requires a number of sectarian rulers who govern in a system of sectarian power-sharing—an outmoded form of what is known as consociational democracy—instead of a sole dictator to overthrow. Prior to the October 2019 uprising, Lebanon witnessed two waves of protest movements that used anti-sectarian slogans and criticized political leaders and the sectarian system. In this chapter, I use October 2019 and the “change movement” interchangeably to include both the uprising as a vision and the uprising in its post-October 2019 execution. I also divide the eight actors studied into groups of mainstream and alternative media, radical and liberal groups based on their mission and vision – when applicable – and their understanding and consequent actions towards and within the October 2019 uprising.

### **A. The 2011 Movement**

The region’s geopolitics have continuously had effects on Lebanon’s internal politics and operations as seen with the Arab uprisings in 2011. Beginning with the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia and the ongoing Syrian conflict, the Arab Revolutions that began in early 2011 sparked a string of subsequent events. Widespread public demonstrations in Lebanon demanding reform of the current sectarian system

were spurred by the Arab Revolutions' emergence and success in overthrowing the governments in Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>44</sup> In Lebanon, the 2011 movement gave meaning to the cry for more dignity through public demands for social justice, higher wages, and the need for power, running water, and other basic requirements that the state has mostly failed to supply.<sup>45</sup> The first movement that appeared in late 2010 was an anti-sectarian one with arguments that fell in line with other Arab social movements that targeted corrupt and authoritarian governments.<sup>46</sup> The movement's adoption of the term "anti-sectarian" had historical origins dating back to the 1950s civil marriage movement. The movement arose in light of Article 95 of the Lebanese Constitution which states that it is not possible to get married solely in a civil ceremony in Lebanon, stipulating that every citizen must belong to one of the 19 officially recognized sectarian communities. This article was perceived by the protestors as an effort to further strengthen the influence that each community's religious leaders have over personal status matters.<sup>47</sup> The second movement began in Saida in 2011 and included the radical Sunni mobilization centered on the well-known Imam Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir, sparking resentment towards Hezbollah for being complicit with the Syrian government. In his preaching, Al-Assir addressed the Syrian uprising as a threat to the Sunnis' 'honor' in light of the "Syrian-Iranian tutelage over Lebanon" and following the May 2008 events during which Hezbollah supporters took the streets of Beirut and

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<sup>44</sup> Assi, Abbas. "Lebanon's Protest Movements of 2015 and 2019: A Comparative Analysis," 2-3.

<sup>45</sup> Hermez, Sami. "On dignity and clientelism: Lebanon in the context of the 2011 Arab revolutions," 527-537.

<sup>46</sup> Meier, Daniel. "Popular Mobilizations in Lebanon: From Anti-System to Sectarian Claims," 176-189.

<sup>47</sup> Meier, Daniel, 178-180.

forced the Sunni leaders to turn back on a political decision.<sup>48</sup> With both movements, when the anti-sectarian mobilization subsided, the sectarian one rose. Both movements staged demonstrations of various kinds –from traditional marches to on-road sit-ins– starting from a completely different perspective and in a very different environment. Additionally, in order to avoid upsetting the various political parties and their supporters, the activists who were rising up against political sectarianism as a form of governmental organization made an agreement. They did this because they had to compete for widespread support even though they couldn't offer services or protection. Instead, they made an effort to include everyone, with the undertone that they hoped this movement would restore people's sense of dignity within the context of the entire nation and the state system.<sup>49</sup>

## **B. The “You Stink” Movement of 2015**

The trash crisis began after Na’ama residents protested against the continuous use of land in the area as a landfill, and blocked dumpsters from entering it. This issue goes back to 1997 when the Na’ama landfill was assigned as a temporary solution for the trash crises that hit Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Yet, after almost two decades of using this alleged temporary solution, and with no clear efforts to address this issue, Na’ama locals protested in July 2015, gaining media attention and successfully shutting down the landfill. But after Lebanon's primary landfill was closed without the presence of a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 179-180.

<sup>49</sup> Hermez, Sami, 534-535.

replacement, and with the expiration of Sukleen and Sukomi's<sup>50</sup> contracts, a garbage management crisis developed in Beirut during the summer of 2015, leading to the growth of trash piles on the streets and a wave of divisive politics. Early on in the crisis, a protest movement that became known as "You Stink" or "Tol'et Rihetkom" began to take place, headed by activists who use techniques that are reminiscent of activism in the Arab Uprisings.<sup>51</sup> Following the government's failure to address the mounting public waste issue, known as the garbage crisis, the slogan of the movement became associated with the foul smell of refuse in the streets with the corrupt politicians who were responsible for the crisis. The slogan "Kellon Yaani Kellon" which translates to "All Means All" first appeared during these protests and was also chanted in downtown Beirut and subsequently spread elsewhere. However, at that time, protesters were hesitant to name politicians, particularly the leader of the Shi'i Hezbollah organization, Hassan Nasrallah.<sup>52</sup>

The "Kellon Yaani Kellolun" protests signified a new general understanding that the governing class and their power-sharing plans are to blame for the nation's crises. The movement that began in 2015 in response to the garbage disposal issue has continued into 2019.<sup>53</sup> However, despite its best efforts, the movement in 2015 was unable to overthrow the ruling political class or pass a new electoral law or ban sectarianism. The civil society movements experienced failures in terms of elections. Even though they

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<sup>50</sup> Sukleen and Sukomi are private firms contracted by the Lebanese government to collect garbage, sweep the streets, and treat and dispose waste in Greater Beirut. See Geha, Carmen. "Co-Optation, Counter-Narratives, and Repression: Protesting Lebanon's Sectarian Power-Sharing Regime," 20.

<sup>51</sup> Kraidy, Marwan M. "Trashing the Sectarian System? Lebanon's "You Stink" Movement and the Making of Affective Publics," 19-26.

<sup>52</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Khatib, Dania Koleilat. "17 October (2019) Revolution in Lebanon: A Preliminary Analysis," 75-76.

were successful in winning the Engineering Syndicate elections in 2017 and a position in the Beirut Order of Engineers.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, during the municipal elections of 2016, the protest movement was not able to win the elections in Beirut, which was similar to the scene all over Lebanon. And in the 2018 parliamentary elections, despite the influx of independent candidates running for a seat in the parliament, voters chose stability over change and only one candidate from civil society was elected to parliament, which was Paulette Yaacoubian from the *Sabaa* party.<sup>55</sup>

## **C. The October 17<sup>th</sup> Movement**

### ***1. What the October 17<sup>th</sup> Movement Started As***

The October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising started as a protest of people from diverse backgrounds, religious and sectarian identities, genders, age groups, and social classes uniting together under the same slogan of “Kellon Yaani Kellon.” This slogan reflected the protestors’ nonpartisan and nonsectarian demand for the removal of all politicians currently in power and the traditional political parties they belong to, which was also transmitted through chants connected to other protests in the Arab world<sup>56</sup> such as “Yalla Erhal” – meaning leave now, and “Ash-Shaab Yourid Esqat Al-Nizam” – meaning the people want the downfall of the regime. The first few days of protests in the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising presented a noticeable shift in the way people spoke about their suffering. What once used to be a filtered speech became one that openly named, shamed, and even cursed the politicians in the streets, with no politician or leader exempt

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<sup>54</sup> Assi, Abbas. “Lebanon’s Protest Movements of 2015 and 2019: A Comparative Analysis.”

<sup>55</sup> “Lebanon 2018 Parliamentary Elections.”

<sup>56</sup> Assi, Abbas. “Lebanon’s Protest Movements of 2015 and 2019: A Comparative Analysis,” 2-3.

from the accusations. And the demands that started around bringing down the sectarian regime soon turned into ones on bringing down the entire regime, as the issues they believed to be plaguing the state were far beyond the presence of sectarianism alone.<sup>57</sup> But the language employed by angry protestors did not go unnoticed by the sectarian leaders, as the narrative of “the other” was created in this context in reference to moral and behavioral censorship that the leaders were trying to impose. Many Lebanese politicians took a similar stand as Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, by calling the chants “impolite” in an effort to muffle down the anger of the protestors who seemed to no longer care about the moral and legal censorship imposed on them amidst the crises they were living. In addition, the politics of presence<sup>58</sup> were prominent in Lebanon in October 2019, reflecting the grievances of the Lebanese people who are dealing with a variety of issues, such as high levels of debt, pervasive corruption, and declining living standards. The dominant sectarian order, perceived by the people as not responsive, was perceived by the protestors as the perpetuator of these crises. As a result, the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising merged several ideologies and demands, even taking a feminist front for women who are traditionally seen as responsible for caring for others but have reached a point where their grievances were preventing them from doing that. These women were taking care of their families and communities who were harmed by neoliberal policies that had made it challenging for individuals to live in Lebanon with dignity.<sup>59</sup> In the different protesting areas, feminist politics developed with the goal of tearing

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<sup>57</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, "Lebanon's Thawra: Anatomy of a Social Movement," 8.

<sup>58</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, 8-9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

down the connected forms of patriarchy, capitalism, and sectarianism.<sup>60</sup> From the banking sector's perspective, the spontaneous alliances that have formed in the streets<sup>61</sup> have also been directed against the "hokm al-masref" (rule of the Central Bank). This rule is correlated with the figure of Riad Saleme, the governor of the central bank of Lebanon and the architect of the post-war Lebanese financial system. His name came to be associated with the strong and steady macroeconomic performance of the Lebanese economy as a result of the frequently repeated claim that he was preventing the collapse of the Lebanese lira.<sup>62</sup>

All types of collective action have been destroyed by sectarian politics, including rigging syndicates and labor unions representing all types of professionals, from doctors, lawyers, teachers, architects, and higher education staff. Most unions and syndicates now represent the sectarian ruling class's interests. For instance, the labor unions got so monopolized that in 2011, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers opposed the proposed raise in the minimum wage from the Minister of Labor. That action says a lot about the difficulty of horizontal and interest-based collective organizing in a nation where the rulers want to ensure that people remain locked into sects and never identify collectively in ways that could threaten the rule of the established elites.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Referring to the unplanned alliances of protestors based on their chants and demands, without any regard to the members' sectarian or religious identities.

<sup>62</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, 9.



## ***2. What the October 17<sup>th</sup> Uprising Became***

In this section, I argue that in some conceptualizations of the groups studied, their supporters have remained locked in their sect, abandoning the spontaneous alliances they were forming during the protests, and opting to go back to the sectarian parties they identified with. The groups that appeared in 2019 are diverse and approach change and Hezbollah in various ways. Several organizations call for reform and are prepared to cooperate with traditional parties that are not corrupt. Others desire a complete break from the past and are unwilling to work with any currently dominant political party.<sup>63</sup> In this section, I explore several groups' approaches in defining and participating in the uprising according to four main categories: mainstream media outlets, alternative media outlets, radical groups, and liberal groups. I first explore two mainstream media outlets through two shows, the first being "It's About Time" hosted by Marcel Ghanem on MTV Lebanon, and the second being "Bring Down Corrupt Rule" hosted by Riad Kobaissi on Al-Jadeed TV. Then, I move forward to explore two alternative media outlets – as opposed to traditional TV channels – that gathered popularity over social media after the October 2019 uprising: Megaphone News, and The Legal Agenda. Finally, I focus on four different groups, with Depositors' Outcry Association being an association of bank depositors, while Citizens in a State, Taqaddom, and LiHaqqi have respectively started as a group formed by former Minister Charbel Nahas, a group of activists that emerged during the 2011 and the 2015 movements, and an opposition campaign for the 2018 parliamentary elections. The purpose behind choosing these groups is to showcase a wide range of experiences of actors that participated in the

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<sup>63</sup> Khatib, Dania Koleilat, 75-76.

October 2019 uprising, and to introduce the varying conceptualizations created and adopted by each respective actor.

a. Mainstream Media Outlets

i. Marcel Ghanem on MTV Lebanon

Marcel Ghanem is a talk show host who began his television career in the 1990s with the talkshow “Kalam Ennas,” meaning the people’s words. In 2018, he started a new political show on MTV Lebanon called “Sar El Waet” or “It’s About Time” offering a new method of hosting politicians on national television. The show entailed providing a platform for both politicians and civilians to sit in one room and address their concerns. The episode usually starts with the audience made up of civilians voicing out their concerns and sharing their hardships exacerbated by the crisis in Lebanon. Then, the show moves on to a section hosted by Georges Ghanem, Marcel Ghanem’s brother, where he discusses current affairs and offers his political analysis on the topics. Then, the guests that usually range from politicians to civil society activists and scholars among others are introduced with a video highlighting their most prominent academic and professional milestones and achievements. The episode then proceeds with alternating questions and responses between the guests and the audience, often including a debate among the guests on the topic discussed or the questions asked. The significance of “It’s About Time” lies within the guests it hosted and the narratives it adopted during some critical times for Lebanon starting in 2019 (i.e. the start of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, the Beirut Port explosion, the 2022 parliamentary elections, etc.). In addition, Marcel Ghanem’s position on the October 2019 uprising played an

important role in how it was conceptualized and portrayed to his audience that comes from different backgrounds and understandings of what the uprising entails.

Starting with an episode on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, less than three weeks after the start of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, Georges Ghanem went on his brother's show to present a theory on the correlation between protests on basic demands and civil wars. He started with a statement preceded by an apology to all the “dreamers of change” and “the poor and marginalized who believe that this uprising will provide them with bread, flour, money, and peace of mind” on how all wars in Lebanon started with basic demands. He goes on to state that he is not trying to scare anybody although war is coming, referring to the uprising's effects and his theory on how it will definitely lead to war. He continued his presentation with an overview of the history of the Lebanese civil war within the context of it being a demand-driven war that started with protests of Ghandour<sup>64</sup> workers in 1972,<sup>65</sup> three years before the start of the civil war, then the movement of the farmers in Akkar,<sup>66</sup> to the assassination of Maarouf Saad,<sup>67</sup> all the way

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<sup>64</sup> Ghandour is a Lebanese factory that produces and distributes biscuits and candy. See “Working Women and Men Strike for Their Rights at Al-Ghandour Factory.”

<sup>65</sup> Ghandour factory had a reputation for its maltreatment of its workers. In addition, the women working in the fa factory experienced wage discrimination as well as verbal and physical abuse. As a result, on November 3, 1972, about 1,500 employees went on strike until al-government Ghandour's adopted the recently passed wage law, which called for a 5% pay raise and a rise in the minimum salary from 185 to 205 Liras. The workers staged strikes in the Chiyah and Choueifat locations of the factory and used various forms of protest, such as walking tours through Beirut's streets. The strike's momentum persisted up until 11 November 1972, when police forces forcibly put an end to it by dispersing it with tear gas, batons, and live ammunition, resulting into several casualties and two deaths from the workers' side. See “Working Women and Men Strike for Their Rights at Al-Ghandour Factory.”

<sup>66</sup> Sajadian, China. “The Agrarian Question in Lebanon Today: A View from a Camp in the Bekaa Valley.”

<sup>67</sup> Maarouf Saad was leading the protests in Saida of fishermen against the creation of Protein Company, a Lebanese-Kuwaiti company that was planning on monopolizing the industry. Saad was the former mayor of Saida, former MP, and the founder of the Popular Nasserist Organization (PNO). In an sudden exchange of fire with the army, Saad was wounded and ended up passing away from his wounds on March 6, 1975. See “Maarouf Saad Assassinated in Saida,” Civil Society Knowledge Centre, October 12, 2018.

to the Ain Al Remmene incident<sup>68</sup>. The underlying context driving this presentation was an obvious effort to discourage the October 17<sup>th</sup> supporters from participating in the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests.<sup>69</sup> In parallel, the timeline of his episodes shows frequent guests that are considered “pro-thawra” – or pro-October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, portraying the image of a supporter of the uprising providing a platform for other supporters to question and criticize those included in the “All Means All” slogan.

The contrast between being with the *thawra* and against it is showcased in several other cases that I will be bringing to light. By focusing on episodes that are close in the timeline to significant events to the *thawra* and host guests that are known to have been active in the protests, the ambiguous narrative of Marcel Ghanem being pro-thawra becomes more apparent and often transcends into one that even feels responsible for whatever change gets implemented through the movement. One example of this phenomenon took place during the first episode after the parliamentary elections in May of 2022. During this episode, Marcel Ghanem hosted Firas Hamdan, Elias Jarade, Ibrahim Mneimne, Melhem Khalaf, Widah Al Sadek, Michel Doueihy, Najat Aoun, Mark Daou, Halima Kaakour, Yassin Yassin, Rami Fanj, Wasef Al Harake and Ali Mrad, 13 of the new “Change MPs” that won the 2022 parliamentary elections.<sup>70</sup> I mention this episode as a monumental one to note due to the conflicting

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<sup>68</sup> The Kataeb party leader was in a church in Ain El Remmaneh on the morning of April 13, 1975, when Kataeb militiamen stopped a bus that they thought was carrying Palestinians. A little while later, a second car that was allegedly carrying Palestinians broke over the Kataeb barricade. This resulted in an exchange of shots and led to the death of the Kataeb leader's bodyguard. In the afternoon of the same day, a bus carrying Lebanese and Palestinians was traveling back to the Tal Al Zaarar camp when it went through Ain El Remmaneh following a ceremony honoring one of the commando operations in Israel. Gunmen who reportedly belonged to the Kataeb militia then started shooting at all of the passengers, killing a total of 27 people and injuring 19. See Tabbarah, Riad B. “Background to the Lebanese Conflict,” 1-2.

<sup>69</sup> Rajeh, Rami. “The Horns of Civil War.”

<sup>70</sup> It's About Time. Season 5, Episode 43.

impact it had on people: some were overwhelmed with pride as this marked a new milestone for the uprising, and confusion and anger for others who felt that the narrative created in the episode gave Marcel Ghanem the credit for the success of these MPs in the elections. The introduction of the MPs began with the usual short video displaying their academic and professional journeys' highlights. After the presentation of the guests, the live cameras moved into the studio to showcase the MPs standing in a line in front of the guests who were reciting pro-thawra chants and clapping for them. During this staged performance that required everyone to be in perfect position for its execution, a lady, who Marcel Ghanem recognizes and greets, comes out of her seat among the audience and starts distributing white roses to the MPs. She ends the distribution by giving one to Marcel Ghanem and saying, "This would not have been possible if it weren't for you," referring to the success of the MPs in the parliamentary elections.

I mention this event not only due to its significance in terms of language and performance but also its ambiguity, noting that the episode preceding this one was hosting Samir Geagea and other members of the Lebanese Forces. The episode began as a form of an interview where Marcel Ghanem swapped the usual panel discussion with a solo broadcast of Samir Geagea with the Lebanese Forces flag as the backdrop of his video.<sup>71</sup> During the interview, Marcel would ask questions about the Lebanese Forces' plans during the elections, why people should vote for them and who people should not vote for, and even gave him the platform to address some of the most popular concerns about the party – such as their ties to Israel and the fear of not reaching any tangible change by voting for this party that is considered part of the group that "All Means All"

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<sup>71</sup> It's About Time. Season 5, Episode 42.

was against. Before welcoming Setrida Geagea, a video showcasing the achievements of the LF was displayed where they presented the many NGOs created by Setrida Geagea and the achievements they have reached. The video ended with a written sentence inviting people to “vote for those whose projects are for the future of [their] children.”

Accordingly, this leaves the question of whether the position of Marcel Ghanem specifically as part of MTV Lebanon is aligned with that of the Lebanese Forces whose political agenda published for the parliamentary elections of 2022 is divided into two sections: one on politics, governance and state building, and one on the economy, society and sustainable development.<sup>72</sup> The document published bases its solutions on one main problem to be addressed “democratically through parliamentary elections” being that of Hezbollah’s dominance over the Lebanese state, and its involvement in covering up corruption in the government and its institutions. The alternating narratives between being with the *thawra* and providing a platform for its actors, activists, and parliamentary candidates, and that of being with the Lebanese Forces represents a conceptualization of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising as a “Kellon Yaani Kellon – except the Lebanese Forces” movement. In extension, the “Kellon” or “All” that they are opposed to can be broken down to Hezbollah and its allies, specifically the Free Patriotic Movement.

## ii. Riad Kobaissi on Al-Jadeed TV

Riad Kobaissi emerged as a national symbol of Lebanon's 2019 widespread anti-government protest movement and the subject of political retaliation in the two years of

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<sup>72</sup> The Lebanese Forces. “How We Can: Solutions, Numbers, Actions.”

the country's economic collapse. He started his investigative journalism journey on corruption in the port since 2012. When interviewed after the August 4<sup>th</sup> Beirut port explosion, Kobaissi explained how shipping containers may enter or leave the country without being properly inspected – for the right price, containers would often be stolen and pass past security checks at the port, and large fines would often disappear or be significantly lowered in exchange for a bribe. Kobaissi even revealed that of the 25 customs officers at the port who were in charge of examining containers were caught on video accepting bribes, and even after eight people were charged and some were sentenced to prison, everyone kept their employment.<sup>73</sup> In an episode with Sarde After Dinner, a podcast based in Beirut where the guests discuss a wide range of topics from politics to art, Kobaissi claims that the Lebanese people have a problem even bigger than the presence of Hezbollah, and it is corruption. He goes on to address his journey of uncovering the corruption of Riad Salameh's financial engineering plan that started as early as 2016, a time when the lira was still pegged and stable at 1,500 for the U.S. dollar.<sup>74</sup> It becomes clear that Kobaissi considers himself to be “a soldier on the front line,” acknowledging both the risks and the importance involved in this line of work, and claims that many people in Lebanon turn to his investigative team – made up of five to seven journalists and a camera crew – for the truth.<sup>75</sup>

Kobaissi is known for his unfiltered statements on his show *Yasqot Hokm Al Fased* (translated into *Bring Down Corrupt Rule*) where he investigates notorious files of corruption and exposes the names of those who had a hand in each case. He calls

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<sup>73</sup> Abouzeid, Rania. "How Corruption Ruined Lebanon."

<sup>74</sup> "Riad Kobaissi: Everything You Need To Know About The 2020 Beirut Explosion."

<sup>75</sup> "Riad Kobeissi, Lebanon's very own Bob Woodward fighting corruption."

himself a "controversial" journalist because he exposes the corrupt elite of the nation, frequently confronting ministers and other high-ranking people live on television about proof of corruption.<sup>76</sup> During one of his episodes, he challenged the Chief of Customs Badri Daher to face him during a live report in 2019 that exposed widespread corruption at the Beirut port by teasing him with a line from the popular American series *Breaking Bad*. He beat his fist on the desk and screamed, "Badri, I am the one who knocks," with his eyes fixed on the camera, "Call if you wish to defend yourself."<sup>77</sup> His style is often confrontational, using strong language and the infamous 'finger-pointing' that politicians use when addressing each other in their speeches. Even when Kobaissi is not confronting anyone, but rather addressing an issue on his show and in interviews, the language he uses is often theatrical or performative, where his style usually involves objective truths based on his team's investigations, articulated in a subjective manner. His repetitions of impactful statements often serve to highlight the extent of the corruption discovered. During an interview with the *New York Times*, Kobaissi was asked about the corruption at the Beirut Port where he expressed: "Up until now, up until now, they have continued to work at Beirut Harbor! "Up to now!" said Kobaissi. "You want to know how the port experienced an explosion? Here's how."<sup>78</sup>

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, which falls on International Anticorruption Day, U.S. Ambassador Dorothy C. Shea hosted representatives from civil society and international non-governmental organizations that work in combating corruption. During the event

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<sup>76</sup> Iskandarani, Aya. "Let them be mad: Lebanese anti-corruption hero brushes off Hezbollah hate campaign."

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Abouzeid, Rania. "How Corruption Ruined Lebanon."



that was part of a Summit for Democracy working towards addressing what they call the “global decline in democratic institutions through real commitments and tangible outcomes.”<sup>79</sup> The attendees were celebrated for their “fight against corruption” whether by exposing, reporting, and tracking it or by creating policies and dialogues that encourage transparency and advocate for accountability. During the event, Riad Kobeissi was recognized for his work as the head of the investigative reporting unit of Al Jadeed TV as an “Anticorruption Champion for his integrity, leadership, and courage in confronting corruption in the public sector and exposing bribery and smuggling through his “accountability journalism” in Lebanon.”<sup>80</sup> During the distribution of the award, the U.S. Ambassador addressed Kobaissi by congratulating him for his work, and stating that “the United States is honored to be your partner now and going forward.”<sup>81</sup> The importance of this event goes back to a statement made by Kobaissi in an article with the New York Times in October, two months prior to his reception of the award, on how Western countries are “liars” when they claim that they want to fight corruption in Lebanon.<sup>82</sup> He also adds that if they were sincere, they would have supported the bodies responsible for accountability instead of offering loans and grants for projects such as the wastewater one which has a total of funds of up to \$200 million.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ambassador Dorothy C. Shea, “Remarks on International Anti-Corruption Day.”

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> “Riad Kobeissi, Lebanon’s very own Bob Woodward fighting corruption.”

<sup>82</sup> Abouzeid, Rania. “How Corruption Ruined Lebanon.”

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Kobaissi's reception of the Anticorruption Champion award instigated a coordinated social media campaign depicting him as a "foreign agent" for the U.S. government, which could have been intensified due to his previous positions on the West.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, Riad Kobaissi comes to represent another side of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising where the actors are aligned with certain goals in foreign agendas and get recognized for it, creating the public perception of these actors as agents of foreign embassies working towards infiltrating foreign agendas into the country.

b. Alternative Media Groups

i. Megaphone

Megaphone is an online independent media platform that produces explainer multimedia content in formats adapted for the digital media on current affairs and social and cultural commentaries.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of Megaphone is to engage audiences that are alienated or unrepresented in traditional media by introducing them to Lebanese politics. It started making a few videos a month, covering subjects that the mainstream media chose to neglect or offering a unique and critical perspective on big news. In order to develop alternative narratives, it eventually expanded to generate daily news coverage features and important investigative pieces.<sup>86</sup> It began creating more in-depth content two years after the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising and throughout the economic crisis,

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> "About Megaphone."

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

enabling the emergence of political ideologies reflecting both the entity's beliefs and its authors' while bearing witness to society's changes.<sup>87</sup>

I focus on Megaphone as an alternative media outlet, rather than an entity represented by a specific person whose opinions often reflect a clearer vision of the outlet's overall beliefs, and I explore Megaphone's conceptualization of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising by looking closely at its publications that became known for their unfiltered, informal, and often sarcastic delivery. Accordingly, I note varying degrees of informality in the writing style of Megaphone, reflecting its views on the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising and on the people it aims to reach. Accordingly, I group these levels into three, the first being the least informal, and the third being the most. Whether intentional or not, it reflects Megaphone's efforts to seem like a 'close to the people' and 'for everyone' outlet, and it serves to appeal to different groups of people who might enjoy different types of articles, as the language used ranges from the Standard Arabic written language, to one that is similar to the way Lebanese people informally text each other, with a mix of the formal Arabic language and the Lebanese dialect.

The first level of informality is the least noticeable and includes articles by authors such as scholar Samer Frangie.<sup>88</sup> In these types of articles, the usage of English or French words written in Arabic letters within brackets (e.g. "etiquette," referring to the manners of protesting) is used to break up the formal Arabic text and add a more informal note to the article. This mix of the formal style of writing and the use of correct grammar and syntaxes with the Arabicized words include snippets of informality that reflect the

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<sup>87</sup> Boutros, Joelle. "The Week of Hela Hela Ho."

<sup>88</sup> Frangie, Samer. "Welcoming the Counter-Revolution."

overall style of Megaphone.<sup>89</sup> The second degree of informality will be explored through an article titled “The Fall of the Rule and the Patriarchal System,” written by another author at Megaphone. At this level, informality is more prominent as it includes both Arabicized words and figures of speech based on apparent sarcasm. In this article, the formal Arabic language used is laced with figures of speech based on the title of President Michel Aoun as “everyone’s father.” The expressions include touching on President Aoun’s paternal side, questioning how someone who calls himself that can leave his children – being Lebanese citizens – hungry and needy, going on to develop the figurative image of a neglecting father.<sup>90</sup> The third level I note to be the most informal one, as it includes unfiltered opinions through sarcasm, cuss words, and incorrect Arabic grammar. In a commentary written by Joelle Boutros<sup>91</sup> titled “The Week of the “Hela Hela Ho”” referring to the chants against Gebran Bassil, the writing style is full of syntax and grammatical errors in Arabic. The language used is similar to the way Lebanese people informally text each other, with a mix of the formal Arabic language and the Lebanese dialect. In addition, the use of English words written in Arabic letters such as “the weekend,” the sarcasm in the usage of celebrities’ titles “the superstar Ragheb Alami”, and the informality of reporting by informing the readers at the beginning of the article that she is “restricted to 500 words” all reflect Megaphone’s efforts to seem like a ‘close to the people’ and ‘for everyone’ outlet. This helps create

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Tannoury-Karam, Sana. “The Fall of the Rule and the Patriarchal System.”

<sup>91</sup> Joelle Boutros is a researcher specializing in Arab and Middle Eastern studies at the Lebanese Studies institute. See The Centre for Lebanese Studies “Joelle Boutros.”

the narrative that the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising is for various groups of people represented by the different ways of expression reflected through Megaphone's writings.

## ii. The Legal Agenda

The Legal Agenda is a nonprofit organization established in Beirut with offices there and in Tunisia, as well as correspondents in a number of other Arab countries. It was founded in December 2009 by a group of lawyers, academics, and advocates for human rights who formalized their efforts to develop an analytical and interdisciplinary approach to law and justice in Arab nations with a focus on political, civil, social, and economic rights.<sup>92</sup> Acting as co-founder, executive director, and part of the editorial team in Legal Agenda, Nizar Saghieh is considered to be a leader in Lebanon when it comes to the use of strategic litigation to promote and defend causes pertaining to civil, economic, and social rights and liberties. In terms of social policy, he is a pioneer, particularly in connection to the environment, underrepresented groups, public and union freedoms, and judicial independence. Nizar has written articles and contributed to the creation of legislation on a number of different subjects, including workers' rights, drug usage, workplace harassment, the missing people from the Lebanese civil war, and judicial independence.<sup>93</sup> In this part, I will use Legal Agenda and Nizar Saghieh interchangeably, noting that both represent the same views that are reflected in the former's publications and the latter's interviews and writings.

In the context of Lebanon, the Legal Agenda's work revolves around addressing the gaps in the legal system and clearing up some misconceptions in political speeches,

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<sup>92</sup> "Who We Are." Legal Agenda.

<sup>93</sup> Legal Agenda, "Executive Management."

public demands, and actions made by politicians, opposition groups, and others who only speak about current legal and policy issues.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the Legal Agenda played a noticeable role in the international community, serving as a trusted entity in its analyses in international committees and boards.

In July 2020, during Lebanon's 3<sup>rd</sup> UPR review of the year,<sup>95</sup> the Legal Agenda was one of the groups participating in the examination of Lebanon's human rights records and discussing human rights around the world through this avenue for the global community.<sup>96</sup> The Legal Agenda reported on issues related to the right to life and security, migrants and refugees, identity, fair trial by an independent judiciary, freedom from torture, a private life (referring to the LGBTQ+ community), and more. Their assessment came with an acknowledgement of the main issues of human rights faced in the country and a set of recommendations to address them and alleviate the negative effects they have on society. The Legal Agenda's position against corruption is clear as it continues to highlight issues related to procedural and structural flaws within the judiciary, highlighted in many examples such as the case of the Beirut Port explosion, including blatant political interference, immunity for high-level political officials, disregard for fair trial standards, and other due process violations.<sup>97</sup>

The Legal Agenda has different formatting styles in its publications – whether magazines, articles, or studies, where it not only presents issues related to the rule of

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<sup>94</sup> Alef, "Civil Rights and Liberties."

<sup>95</sup> The Universal Periodic Review is a process that happens three times per year and is organized by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The goal of these reviews is to review the human rights records of all Member States, as well as to present a report of the conditions within the participants' borders. See "Universal Periodic Review - United States Department of State."

<sup>96</sup> "Universal Periodic Review - United States Department of State."

<sup>97</sup> "Lebanon: Undue Interference in the Beirut Port Blast Investigation Is Leaving the Legal System on the Brink of Collapse."

law, but also often adds its stance on the topic and even presents recommendations on how to overcome the issue at hand. In extension, I identify two categories in its writing style: one being subjective and the other being relatively objective in the sense that it presents the facts related to the identified issues without highlighting the Legal Agenda's position beyond its concern on the issue at hand as opposed to the former. In several publications, the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising is conceptualized as a revolution and proposes reforms on different levels: From a legal perspective, the Legal Agenda's call for reforms had been obvious and consistent, especially in the case of the Beirut Port explosion where it criticized the legal protection of the politicians and government employees who were involved in the corruption that led to the explosion. From a social aspect, it has called for reforms regarding issues on the rights to protest, freedom of expression, and dissent.<sup>98</sup> From a socioeconomic perspective, it also touched on the right to health as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the risks it poses in overcrowded prisons in Lebnaon.<sup>99</sup> In other publications, the language used is consistent in the approach that first presents the laws and articles that the legal system in Lebanon operates on, and then proceeds to address their shortcomings, creating an evidence-based argument that references international conventions, human rights, and more.

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<sup>98</sup> Haidar, Nour. "A Popular Uprising Met with Violence and Torture: Crimes against Protesters during Lebanon's Uprising."

<sup>99</sup> With the spread of COVID-19 and the increased concerns of its effects on the prisoners in overcrowded detention facilities, the MPs took this as a chance to vouch for the Amnesty Law they had been trying to pass since 2018. The subsequent amnesty measures put the pandemic at the forefront of their justifications without making significant changes to the broad amnesty they proposed. This attempt appeared to present COVID-19 and the risks it poses in jails more as a justification for supporting the MPs' case for a general amnesty law than as a problem important enough to be addressed on its own. See Saghieh, Nizar. "Lebanon's General Amnesty in the Age of Corona: The Right to Health as a Tool for Political Ends."

In addition, I note that the Legal Agenda uses the terms “protests” and “revolution” interchangeably, which I do not believe to be intentional since the terms refer to two different phenomena. By employing the term “revolution” when conceptualizing the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, the Legal Agenda appears to be magnifying the uprising beyond what it actually was and the reforms it needs to become an actual revolution. In an interview with the Arab Reform Initiative, Nizar Saghieh confesses that he does not think it would be “a good idea to jump to demand an international investigation and tribunal after every major crime,” advocating for the need to turn to Lebanon’s judicial system to solidify its momentum and evolution. In an article published by the Legal Agenda, the same notion was repeated regarding the need for the domestic judiciary to conduct the investigation in an effort to “develop the justice system and build public support.”<sup>100</sup> The trust in the presence of a group of uncorrupt judges and the call for certain reforms to the judicial system showcases an approach that is not necessarily ‘revolutionary’ but rather reformative.

In extension, Saghieh’s defense of the judiciary highlights some ambiguity in his speech that advocates for trust in the judiciary as he goes on to identify issues to beware of, during the same interview, such as the possibility of the usage of the victims’ identities by political actors for political gains<sup>101</sup> as well as the presence of corrupt judges.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Justice for the Beirut Port Blast: The Wall of Impunity and Beyond.”

<sup>101</sup> Judicial corruption is an umbrella term for different types of corruption within the judiciary. The most notorious one is that of financial corruption, referring to judges accepting bribes from litigants. Other forms of judicial corruption include administrative corruption that affect the practices within the institution in terms of advancement due to personal ties with senior judges or politicians. See “Judicial Corruption in Lebanon: The Big Political Picture.”

<sup>102</sup> In reference to MP Nicholas Sehnaoui claiming that the Beirut Port explosion targeted Christians specifically, just as Hiroshima and Nagasaki did. This attempt was used to both paint himself, a Christian, as a victim of the explosion, and therefore rid himself of the responsibility for this crime. See Saghieh, Nizar, and Jamil Mouawad. “Nizar Saghieh – No Society Disappears through Bankruptcy: Its Vitality Alone Can Ensure Accountability.”



Saghieh’s solution becomes to encourage the parents of the kidnapped or missing people in Lebanon to create their own cross-sectarian committee to ensure “judicial impartiality.” Here, I note that the contrast between the argument of not needing an international investigation despite the presence of corrupt judges<sup>103</sup> and the call for the victims to create their own committee to ensure justice is served is both aligned with Saghieh’s conceptualization of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising as a revolution and with his work within the Legal Agenda in exposing issues related to the rule of law. The conceptualization adopted by the Legal Agenda is one that perceives the *thawra* as a revolution in terms of what it hopes to achieve, despite its attachment to the current system in place with all of its flaws. It reflects Saghieh’s personality as both a lawyer who is part of this system and refuses to acknowledge that the entire system is corrupt and as an activist in the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising who bases his work on exposing and fighting corruption.

c. Radical Groups

i. Citizens in a State (MMFD)

Citizens in a State (also known as MMFD) is a socialist party that stands out from the rest of the change movement in a number of ways: they represent the left-most wing of the movement, they support centralization, and they think that the only way to truly change the world is to radically depart from the past by establishing a transitional government with extraordinary powers.<sup>104</sup> Charbel Nahas created the political party in

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<sup>103</sup> Saghieh, Nizar, and Jamil Mouawad. “Nizar Saghieh – No Society Disappears through Bankruptcy: Its Vitality Alone Can Ensure Accountability.”

<sup>104</sup> Awada, Racha. “Alternatives for Lebanon amid the Ongoing Crisis.”

2016, prior to the 2019 uprising, and it has recently grown in popularity as a result of its participation in the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests and for being among the first to predict the crisis before it occurred, stating that the political class will not be able to avoid it.<sup>105</sup> The agenda of the party has included putting up an alternative strategy based on creating a civil state that serves as a tool to ensure the basic level of social cohesion. This stems from Citizens in a State's understanding that controlling the state where sectarian resource allocation occurs and ending this postwar political economy are the only ways to create an alternative system free of sectarian narratives and subjectification.<sup>106</sup> Their strategy for a smooth transfer of power is based on an interim administration that is granted special legislative powers for a duration of 18 months, and it is divided into three parts: taking control of reality, minimizing the effects of bankruptcy, and creating a strong, defense-equipped society and economy.<sup>107</sup>

In terms of what the uprising means, MMFD along with other 'pro-revolution' groups such as Beirut Madinati, LiHaqqi, National Bloc, and Minteshreen, have similar criticisms of Hezbollah since they disagree with the sectarian political structure. Even if these organizations have different views on Hezbollah, MMFD and its leader Charbel Nahas have adopted a more nuanced strategy, inviting people with Hezbollah connections into their conversations on how to improve Lebanon. Ibrahim Halawi, a member of MMFD, stressed in an interview for this project that their strategy differs from other 'pro-revolution' organizations because they see Hezbollah members as human beings. They claim to understand why people back the group and are aware that

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<sup>105</sup> Awada, Racha. "Alternatives for Lebanon amid the Ongoing Crisis."

<sup>106</sup> Awada, Racha.

<sup>107</sup> Awada, Racha.

Hezbollah is a byproduct of the sectarian system.<sup>108</sup> In addition, and although Hezbollah is not explicitly called to give up its weapons, MMFD's political platform condemns Israel and suggests a gradual shift to a national system or incorporating the party into the armed forces as part of the intended shift to a more civilian state<sup>109</sup> that protects the society as a whole without any regards to people's sectarian identity.<sup>110</sup> However, in November 2019, Nahas made comments that some people found insulting, blasting Hezbollah supporters and saying they should dress in a way that alerts others to the fact that they are Shia.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, he called the ministers of Hezbollah "sheep" and asserted that some party members hailed from families who supported Israeli occupation. Supporters of the party and others who considered them offensive, particularly the section concerning Shias' clothes, reacted negatively to these remarks. As a response to the backlash, Nahas expressed regret for his remarks and expressed gratitude to those who battled against Israel in southern Lebanon.<sup>112</sup>

In addition, MMFD has been vocal about their opinions on the banking crisis as its members, along with other groups in the *thawra*, initiated the "Wen Sandou2ak" or "Where are your funds" political campaign that aims to form a balanced force in the face of bank owners and restore the actual value of their funds.<sup>113</sup> Although the campaign began its actual activity under the name "Where are your funds" after the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> "Citizens in a State', an Alternative Plan."

<sup>111</sup> Awada, Racha.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> من نحن؟ "وين صندوقك"

financial collapse in September 2021, it is, in fact, a continuation of a political path that preceded the crisis. In the context of monitoring and anticipating, not reacting or being dragged into the event, and with the frequency of international reports about the accelerating deterioration of financial and monetary indicators, the movement made a series of contacts and proactive meetings to urge social security and unions organized by laws (i.e. engineers, lawyers, teachers, pharmacists, doctors, etc.) in Beirut and in Tripoli to defend the social savings of its members. A year prior to the crisis, MMFD had taken the initiative to meet with the unions of several professions in Lebanon to warn them of the inevitable catastrophe and urge them to take the necessary measures to protect those savings. The campaign operated on three levels: confronting the banks first, imposing the state's participation in its negotiations with creditors and international financing institutions second, and confronting the authority that failed to assume its public responsibilities third. Eventually, the return was shallow due to the negligence of the unions and the pressures of their political "references."<sup>114</sup> At one point, members of MMFD organized several protests where vandalism of banks was prominent. In November of 2021, a campaign targeted SGBL bank where the emblem of the "Wen Sandou2ak" campaign was sprayed on every branch's forefront in Lebanon. This was a response to the physical assault that protestors of the campaign were victims of when protesting in front of SGBL bank. Soon after, a collage of pictures containing the emblems sprayed on was then posted by MMFD titled "As a response to the aggression of the bank owners: we will fight back."

Looking at MMFD now, over three years after the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, a wave of resignation of its members began. Nearly two dozen members resigned after

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

amendments were made to the party's bylaws that were considered contradictory to the internal bylaws themselves in the way they were introduced. Resigned members also expressed that this move showcases a lack of respect by Nahas for the bylaws he drafted himself.<sup>115</sup> These resignations came as a response to Charbel Nahas changing the bylaws to allow the extension of his term, and this amendment was put forward to the party council delegates whereas it should have gotten two-thirds approval for it to go through.<sup>116</sup> This left his supporters wondering how reformative would Nahas' system be if he were in power, as their immediate response was to leave the party and make public statements about their opinions on Nahas' move.<sup>117</sup> Despite the many structural changes and political goals working towards a more civilian state, the rooted belief of MMFD as the only correct answer for the crisis and its refusal to collaborate with parties from the change movement either shows Nahas' the lack of belief in any alternative solution to the one drafted by him, or that this transitional step in power is too critical to be handed over to anyone else who might not have the same expertise as him. In this case, many of his supporters were left wondering wonder how this differentiates him from the traditional parties' politicians who are constantly recycling the same positions of power and refusing to allow others to have the chance of working in these seats, while others remained firm in their belief that Nahas' actions are based on years of thinking and pre-planning and that the decisions he has made are for the best.

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<sup>115</sup> El Chamaa, Mohamad. "Mass MMFD Resignations after Amendments Allowing Leader's Term Extension."

<sup>116</sup> El Chamaa, Mohamad. "Mass MMFD Resignations."

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

## ii. The Depositors' Outcry Association

In the streets, there have been spontaneous displays of solidarity aimed at challenging the rule of the central bank (hokm al-masref), represented by the patriarchal figure of Lebanon's Central Bank governor, Riad Salemeh. Salemeh has been the mastermind behind Lebanon's banking system since the post-war era, and for the last two decades, he has been an omnipresent figure in the daily lives of ordinary Lebanese. His repeated claims that he was safeguarding the Lebanese lira from devaluation became so commonplace that his very existence became synonymous with the stable macroeconomic performance of Lebanon's economy.<sup>118</sup> The nature of the bank rule in Lebanon is one of dispossession, as the economy is entirely dependent on the US dollar and the global Lebanese diaspora who send money back to their families, with remittances alone making up 14% of the country's GDP and amounted to \$7.31 billion in 2016. This economic system, based on rentierism, has hindered the development of productive sectors since the end of the civil war and is sustained through debt, remittances, real estate, and an overly glorified banking sector.<sup>119</sup> Following the recent crisis in the banking system, and the decline of the banking figurehead Salemeh, who continues to prioritize the interests of large depositors over those of most Lebanese citizens by rejecting the official imposition of capital controls, haircuts, or loan forgiveness, the effects of the economic crisis have been unevenly distributed. The lower and middle classes have been particularly hard hit. During the first two weeks of the uprising, banks used the road closures as an excuse to remain closed and prevent small and medium depositors from withdrawing or transferring their

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<sup>118</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, "Lebanon's Thawra: Anatomy of a Social Movement," 9.

<sup>119</sup> Rima Majed and Lana Salman, 9.

funds, while large depositors, who were all closely connected to politicians, were given access to back doors to transfer their millions overseas and safeguard their capital.

When the banks finally reopened to everyone, chaos ensued in bank branches across the country, as the local commercial banks proceeded to impose illegal restrictions on withdrawals and transfers without the presence of any capital control laws to regulate them.<sup>120</sup> Since then, BDL has implemented a number of measures for depositors, enabling them to take minor withdrawals from their savings accounts at a variety of currency rates that are far less favorable than those of the parallel market.

Consequently, three main associations and unions (e.g. Depositors' Outcry Association, Lebanon Depositors Association, and Union of Depositors) were formed in 2019 from bank depositors that demanded to withdraw their savings from the banks after their accounts were frozen as a result of the financial crisis.<sup>121</sup>

I focus specifically on the Depositors' Outcry Association as a radical group that directs its anger and desperation at those responsible for its members losing their savings. As one of several groups that call for demonstrations and advocate for legal and financial awareness regarding banks, Depositors' Outcry Association has a slightly different approach in how it approaches the depositors' issue.<sup>122</sup> It can be seen that the approach of the protestors is radical as it reflects their anger and desperation towards those responsible for them losing their savings. In one of the protests, one of the depositors who had been working and saving up in the banks for years expressed that

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>121</sup> Opindi, Merab. "Lebanon: 'the Main Culprits of the Current Crisis Are Bank Owners and Their Greed for Profit!'"

<sup>122</sup> Hourany, Dana. "Who Protects the Depositors' Rights in Lebanon?"

she was against violence but had reached a point where she does not know what else to do anymore.<sup>123</sup> This is the case for many depositors who have been angered by the banking restricting access to their savings.<sup>124</sup> In one of the protests, one member of the Depositors Outcry Association said they were willing to do whatever it takes, including escalating the situation in order to achieve their goal.<sup>125</sup> The approach of the Depositors' Outcry Association has included protests, bank raids, vandalism, and attempts of break-ins of bank owners' houses. On several occasions, the depositors protested in opposition to the banks and the "corrupt,"<sup>126</sup> the Association of Banks in Lebanon (ABL)<sup>127</sup> and Riad Salameh,<sup>128</sup> among others. Acts of vandalism have also been part of the protests as in one day during February of 2023, a total of six banks<sup>129</sup> in Badaro, Beirut were set on fire by protestors asking for their savings. The act of vandalism was linked to the Depositors Outcry Association which was later confirmed by them.<sup>130</sup> Depositors have been carrying out bank raids, where they enter the bank armed and force the employees to hand over their savings. In 2022, a total of 27 bank holdups took place, and this "trend" seems to be continuing as it is proving to be a reliable method of depositors getting sums of their savings back.<sup>131</sup> But when protests

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<sup>123</sup> "Depositors Protest, Burn Tires at BDL: 'I Saved up My Salary and It Was Taken from Me'."

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> "Depositor Group Protests Banking Restrictions in Front of Beirut Justice Palace."

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ricour-Brasseur, Julien. "Violence against Badaro Banks: Abl Speaks out, BDL Keeps Low Profile."

<sup>128</sup> "Depositors Protest, Burn Tires at BDL: 'I Saved up My Salary and It Was Taken from Me'."

<sup>129</sup> The banks are Fransabank, Bank Audi, Creditbank, Byblos Bank, BBAC and Banque Libano-Francaise

<sup>130</sup> Ricour-Brasseur, Julien. "Violence against Badaro Banks: Abl Speaks out, BDL Keeps Low Profile."

<sup>131</sup> Hourany, Dana. "More Bank Raids as the Depositors' Rage Intensifies."



fail, and vandalism does not help in achieving any tangible goals, some depositors have opted for trying to raid bank owners' homes.<sup>132</sup> This came after a statement by the media coordinator of the Depositors' Outcry Association, Moussa Agassi, stated during an interview with the National News Agency (NNA) that they reached a point where they will not acknowledge any negotiations that partake without their presence and will escalate their actions to attacking the homes of the bank owners if the banks close.<sup>133</sup>

The Depositors' Outcry Association is perceived by its founder, Alaa Khorchid, as one that is not correlated to the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, and that it initially identifies as an apolitical group advocating for the rights of the depositors.<sup>134</sup> However, I argue that the association's conceptualization of both its campaign and the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising as two variables that can be separated in both definition and action is invalid. Taking a look at another interview with Alaa Khorchid asking him about the Depositors' Outcry Association's views of who is to blame for the situation the depositors are in, the answer consisted of pointing the finger at the same figures mentioned during the October 17<sup>th</sup> protests: bank owners, state authorities – starting with Riad Salameh, and the government that failed to apply laws on bank owners and force them to return depositors money out of their own pockets and also allowed them

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<sup>132</sup> Two depositors named Pascal and Valerie Al-Rassi attempted to break into the house of Nadim Al-Qassar, chairperson in the board of directors in BLC bank.<sup>132</sup> This was the couple's second break in attempt on Al-Qassar's home after the one in December of 2022 to protest against the illegal measures taken by the bank in holding up their deposits that have been reported to amount to around \$100,000.<sup>132</sup> These break in attempts are a response to the couple's failure to withdraw cash to settle medical bills due to the bank blocking them. See "الوكالة الوطنية للإعلام - Depositors Outcry Association: We Will Attack Homes of Bank Owners If Banks Close."

<sup>133</sup> "الوكالة الوطنية للإعلام - Depositors Outcry Association: We Will Attack Homes of Bank Owners If Banks Close."

<sup>134</sup> Hourany, Dana. "Who Protects the Depositors' Rights in Lebanon?"

to smuggle their money abroad.<sup>135</sup> In extension, the demands of the depositors were present during the protests within the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, and the depositors' actions were not exclusive to the members of the associations and unions, as a large portion of the Lebanese were affected by the financial crisis and could no longer access their savings at the banks.<sup>136</sup> In addition, the opposition of the state authorities, the government, the corrupt, and Riad Salameh were all among the “Kellon Yaani Kellon” chants. Accordingly, I consider the Depositors' Outcry Association to be aligned and interlinked in some of its demands with the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising, despite its founder's label as an apolitical independent one.

d. Liberal Groups

i. Taqaddom

Taqaddom started as a group of activists who formed the party,<sup>137</sup> as its founder, Laury Haytayan, became known for having a long history of activism for causes in favor of the secularization of the state in 2011, against the postponement of the elections in 2013 and the trash crisis in 2015.<sup>138</sup> The approaches of its MPs reflect the nature of its founders as activists who decided to develop this into a political party; in Taqaddom's Instagram posts, some of the videos reposting interviews of its MPs are edited to include the most impactful statements with suspenseful music playing in the background, zooming in on the ‘punch-line’ of the statement, and with black and white filters installed in that highlighted moment.

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<sup>135</sup> Opindi, Merab. “Lebanon: 'the Main Culprits of the Current Crisis Are Bank Owners and Their Greed for Profit'.”

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> BIC, “‘The Revolution in Lebanon Changed Everything.’”

<sup>138</sup> BIC, “‘The Revolution in Lebanon Changed Everything.’”

Taqaddom can be considered one of the most successful change groups as it secured two seats in the parliamentary elections with Najat Aoun Saliba and Mark Daou. Its conceptualization of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising was mainly based on addressing the corruption that Taqqadom believes to exist on three different levels. The first one is the absence of accountability where anyone can do anything and get away with it, highlighting the reason Taqaddom advocates for the independence of the Judiciary. This was seen in relation to the Beirut Port explosion and the need to have investigations that are not blocked or full of members of the Judiciary that are political appointees.<sup>139</sup> The second level addresses bribery in public administrations and faults in the appointment system that is based on political affiliations. The third level revolves around political leaders that have instigated and contributed to the persistence of corruption, which was made possible through the electoral laws that make it difficult to have fair competition. This is why Taqaddom calls for a new law that they call an “independent electoral management body.”<sup>140</sup>

In addition, Taqaddom’s position on Hezbollah revolves around wanting to push for short-term solutions that pressurize the party into handing over its weapons diplomatically.<sup>141</sup> The party believes that in order for the army to carry out its responsibility as border guardian, they need to give it additional authority and discuss Hezbollah's potential cooperation with the army. It is known that Hezbollah has amassed a great deal of militia expertise, and they resemble an army in the discipline

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> The Policy Initiative. “Lebanon’s Political Alternatives Report.”

they showcase. Additionally, they allegedly have "smart" weapons that Taqaddom wishes to place in the hands of the army.<sup>142</sup>

In terms of alliances, the change movement appeared to be split into two main camps before the start of the election campaigns for the 2022 elections: The Lebanese Opposition Front and April 13 Initiative. The Kataeb Party, Michel Moawad's Independence Movement, Taqaddom, Khat Ahmar, Aamiyet 17 Teshrin, Liqaa Teshrin, and several smaller organizations are all part of the previous front. The latter brings together fresh alternative organizations such as Tahalof Watani, Madinati, and Al-Marsad Al-Shaabi Li-Mouharabat Al-Fassad. The Kataeb Party was the main point of contention between the two fronts, and although both the National Bloc and Minteshreen are members of the April 13 Initiative, recent developments in the run-up to the vote suggest that both organizations now favor coalitions with the Kataeb Party.<sup>143</sup> With that being said, I note that Taqaddom considers itself to be on the Lebanese opposition front which includes political figures who were active in the past such as the Kataeb party. Yet, when asked about Taqaddom's support of them, Haytayan acknowledged that the Kataeb party was part of previous governments, which the October 17<sup>th</sup> movement targets in the "All Means All" slogans, but that she believes that they have been changing their direction in politics since 2017. During that same interview, Haytayan also acknowledges that the Kataeb party was a militia during the civil war, but that they took responsibility for what they did then and framed it as a survival effort to protect their communities, that they were exiled at some point and came back in 2005, and that they resigned from the government in 2020 – which

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<sup>142</sup> BIC, "The Revolution in Lebanon Changed Everything."

<sup>143</sup> The Policy Initiative. "Lebanon's Political Alternatives Report."

marked an important point for Taqaddom that perceived them as a potential ally for this move they made. In addition, in a statement that seems ambiguous, Haytayan mentions that since the Kataeb party was part of the government on a smaller scale than others, then “it would not be fair to blame them for everything that has happened.”<sup>144</sup>

## ii. LiHaqqi

Initially founded as an opposition campaign for the 2018 parliamentary elections before establishing itself as a political organization,<sup>145</sup> LiHaqqi identifies itself as a “grassroots progressive, political, and social movement that aligns its goals with those of the people and is committed to participatory democracy.”<sup>146</sup> The party believes that basic rights such as food, healthcare, and education need to be available to all citizens. It also prioritizes issues related to women’s rights and the environment, and values engaging the citizens in direct action on the streets through protests, sit-ins, and more. On the topic of sectarianism, LiHaqqi’s position emphasized the need to separate religion from politics as a political priority, and it has also taken several positions that prioritize the increase of nationalism in Lebanon such as the strengthening of people’s national identity, the nationalization of the banking sector, developing local solidarity networks among citizens as well as the non-interference of religion in politics.

LiHaqqi adopts the narrative of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising during its first night during which it considers itself to be among the first groups to have called people on the streets. The first night of the uprising holds the most value for them as it entailed people

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<sup>144</sup> BIC. “The Revolution in Lebanon Changed Everything.”

<sup>145</sup> Sawti. My voice. My Vote. “Lihaqqi Lebanon.”

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

who stood in the face of the political sectarian system that has been responsible for the collapse of the state. The party has also been vocal about its disapproval of other opposition groups accepting other traditional parties – that being the Kataeb – into the change movement. It is in principle opposed to working with them, as it considers them to be a controversial group for their role in the civil war and their participation in previous governments. During the 2022 parliamentary election campaigns, the change movement had two focal points being Nahwal Watan and Kulluna Irada. These non-party organizations were considered platforms to support other change groups in their political pursuits. The platforms' work included assisting the change movement in areas where they lacked the resources such as conducting surveys of the electorate, organizing trainings, fundraising, and advertising for the political parties it is helping. As these two platforms were set to merge by the end of 2022, differences in their definition of what is considered part of the change movement set them apart, as Nahwal Watan was considered a purist in its approach to the change movement, in contrast with Kulluna Irada which was more of a pragmatist. The former organization rejected working with traditional parties, whereas the latter was open to having alliances that would increase its chances in the parliamentary elections. The purist-pragmatist debate played a crucial role in the failure of the merger and represented one of the main arguments behind the divide of the movement. LiHaqqi was vocal about the issues of having these organizations manage the elections and ended up making the choice of not benefiting from the funding either of these platforms was providing. “All Means All” is the slogan that summarizes the stance that LiHaqqi has taken. Its decision to not form alliances with pragmatic groups who were more lenient in welcoming traditional parties into the change movement reflects its clarity in its position. For LiHaqqi, those evading

responsibility for the state that Lebanon is in are MPs, ministers, politicians, and other actors who participated in ruling the country and dividing it up. The party stands behind the “All Means All” slogan because it considers that all traditional political parties were either accomplices or witnesses in appointing corrupt managers, rulers, judges, and military apparatus. They are the ones responsible for wasting public funds, covering up for those involved in the Beirut Port explosion, drafting and implementing wrong financial policies that led to the economic collapse Lebanon is currently in, selling Line 29, and many more.

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the last day of registering electoral lists, LiHaqqi withdrew its candidates from Baalbek, Beirut II, and Chouf-Aley. The reasoning behind its decision was due to the absence of transparency in the process of choosing candidates within the groups it allied with. LiHaqqi claimed that what once was a transparent process of choosing candidates soon turned into one that held onto the traditional ways that these groups had allegedly been criticizing. These traditional ways were based on clientelism, shunning women out of the elections, and criticizing potential candidates’ families and their personal choices in life. Another crucial argument highlighted by LiHaqqi was about its disagreement with how the change movement was being portrayed: there were many efforts of merging change groups together, which LiHaqqi worried about its consequences removing each group’s political agenda and painting the change movement as “weak” with the absence of a concrete work plan in the parliament. The criticism of LiHaqqi against these efforts was in light of its vision of the change movement as different groups that should have worked cohesively together for the common goal of getting as many MPs in the parliament as possible.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYZING THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Throughout the protests, different groups have labeled themselves in line with what the uprising came to mean for them. I developed a figure (figure 1) to help me position each studied actor on a scale of how aligned they think they are with the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising in contrast with how aligned their discourse analysis made them out to be. For the Depositors Outcry Association, its founder's conceptualization of the uprising did not leave room for the depositors to be considered part of it. Instead, it labeled itself as "apolitical" and independent from the movement, despite its members' demands aligning with many *pro-thawra* chants. For actors such as Marcel Ghanem and Taqaddom, their understanding of the uprising did not come without exceptions to the "All Means All" rule. For Marcel Ghanem, the image he tries to portray is one that portrays him as an activist in the *thawra* and an opposing figure to the ruling elite. However, his clear affiliation to the Lebanese Forces and his portrayal of them as 'different' and *pro-thawra* – meaning they had no hand in the corruption that had been taking place and the state that Lebanon is in – invalidates this image. Yet, my positioning of Ghanem as somewhat with the uprising is also due to his affiliation with the Lebanese Forces, creating a clear image of his position towards Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, which aligns with some of the positions taken within the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising some groups. The case for Taqaddom party is similar to that of Ghanem, as it chose to collaborate with the Kataeb party and validate its claim to be part of the change movement. Despite this position being part of Taqaddom's identity as a pragmatist, and its reasoning for a bigger reach during the 2022 parliamentary elections, its exception to the "All Means All" rule made it one that was not completely



with what the movement started as. Finally, for actors such as Riad Kobaissi, Megaphone, the Legal Agenda, Citizens in a State, and LiHaqqi, their position on the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising had been clear from the beginning and remained consistent throughout their discourses.

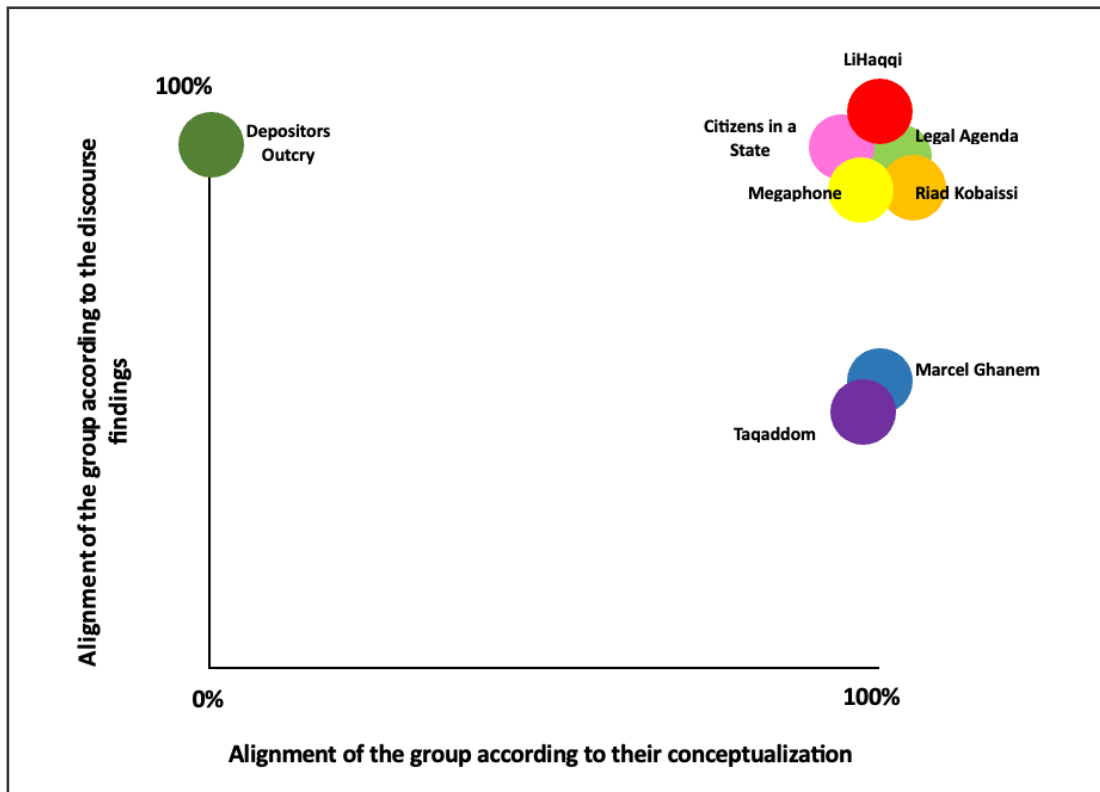


Figure 1: Alignment of the groups' position within the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising according to their conceptualization in contrast with their discourse's findings.

I also note several instances where the statements or actions of the groups contradict their mission within the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising. Accordingly, I developed a second figure (figure 2) that positions the studied actors on a scale of how clear they are in their position throughout the October 2019 uprising. Starting with Marcel Ghanem, his discouragement of the protests and trials of instilling fear in the protestors of starting a civil war, as well as his support of the Lebanese Forces, among many other positions

taken since October of 2019 have made him contradict the position he is trying to portray of himself as a creditor of the change. For Taqaddom party, its alliance with the Kataeb party was justified by its supporters. Yet, the acknowledgment of its leaders of the past that the Kataeb has, and deeming its collaboration with the latter as a ‘lesser sin’ due to its sheer size that would not have allowed it to contribute much to the corruption that traditional parties have been involved in is ambiguous by nature. The slogan “Kellon Yaani Kellon” that they claim to go by is one that does not only target those who participated in the corruption but also those who stood by and did nothing. Also, the slogan emphasizing the “all” part is not one that excludes actors according to size and draws conclusions accordingly on their involvement in Lebanon’s corruption, except in the case of Taqaddom. For Riad Kobaissi, Legal Agenda, and Citizens in a State, their discourse is aligned with their adopted narratives but still showcases instances of contradictory actions. In Kobaissi’s case, his blatant criticism of the international system and foreign aid and his correlation of their funds to corruption contradicts his award on fighting corruption and the alliance publicly made with the U.S. Embassy. In the Legal Agenda’s case, the contradiction uncovers an inner – and maybe even professional – dilemma between Nizar Saghieh the executive director and the lawyer who claims that the judiciary is full of corrupt people, then proceeds to encourage people to trust the system because of the presence of some non-corrupt lawyers, judges, and administrators. As for Citizens in a State, an alternative party to the currently existing ones that operates on the basis of imagining a new, more civilian state, the imitation of Charbel Nahas of the politicians who refuse to let go of their seats leaves question marks around how ‘different’ Nahas would be if he were elected to be in the parliament. In the cases of the Depositors’ Outcry Association, LiHaqqi, and

Megaphone, all three groups have been relatively consistent in their narratives and approach to the uprising. Despite calling itself “apolitical,” the Depositors’ Outcry Association has been clear in its approach to the issue of the bank deposits and the way it is planning on handling it. LiHaqqi also refused to form alliances with the Kataeb party during the 2022 parliamentary elections, did not benefit from the platforms’ funds, and dropped out once the elections became w repetition of the actions it criticized within the existing system. As for Megaphone, it has been clear in its unbiased criticism of “all,” without any exceptions of any party that it might have excluded from accountability in leading Lebanon to the point where it is now with its crises.

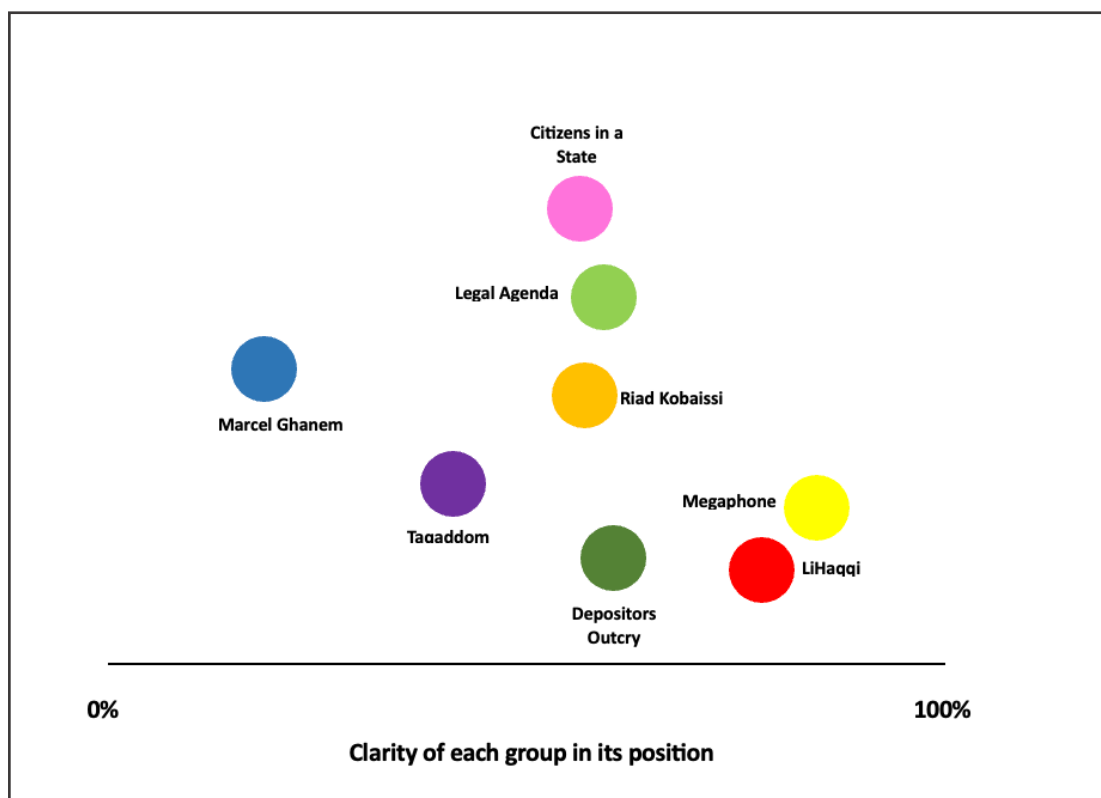


Figure 2: Clarity of each group in its positions taken throughout its participation in the October 17th uprising.

My research findings identified that the varying conceptualizations of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising have contributed to the formation of a non-cohesive group that chants the same slogans but means different things to each participating actor. From the difference in the uprising's nature, what it is opposed to, who is included in the opposition group, and how it relays its messages, each actor's definition came to identify a newer version of a movement that goes under the same unified name. These varying conceptualizations have both contributed to the growth of the movement and to its ultimate death. By including a more pragmatist approach, "All Means All" comes to include parties that should have been excluded from the change. At the same time, it comes to include a wider audience that might have not joined the protests without the inclusion of the parties they support. The danger of this narrative is that it strips the movement from its meaning and opens the doors for people from diverse political affiliations to correlate corruption with the parties they are 'supposed to' be against, according to their *zaa'im*. In this case, the "All Means All" of the Lebanese Forces which means Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement will apply to all other parties as well, with respect to the sides they are historically opposed to. The same slogan will be recycled by all parties and used on their adversaries, drowning out the initial meaning behind the movement that triggered people from different backgrounds to protest on the streets. This will further increase the tension among parties and push people to hold onto their *zaa'im* even tighter, as he would be the one seen advocating for the rights of his people who feel targeted by others. In these protests, participants could end up working toward separate goals when they have varying views about the protest's definition, purpose, and objectives, which leads to a lack of cohesion and unity. As a result, even while they might be protesting under the same banner, they might not

necessarily be cooperating to achieve a single objective, creating a movement that is more dispersed and less successful at attaining its objectives. Furthermore, if various factions within the movement hold conflicting opinions about the problems at hand or how to solve them, this can further undermine the movement's unity and make it more difficult to achieve a significant change. In the end, the dividing factor between all of the different conceptualizations seen could be labeled under sectarian reasons, whether in the actors' affiliation, their alliances, or their opposition. The "anti-corruption" demands could be concluded in each actor's stances in the *thawra*, making it a popular demand with others that push for better livelihoods, development, receiving their savings, and many more. When perceived in this way, one could argue that the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising had universal demands for all its protestors who simply wanted a better life. This leaves the question of whether the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising would have had a different outcome had it been and remained secular, keeping in mind that the attack on the *zaa'im* is translated into an attack on those affiliated to its party, and ultimately seen as an attack on the religious identity of its people, and perhaps even on their religious idols.

Therefore, I note the presence of a quiet trend witnessed among friends and members of my community, in which they participate in what is known as "quiet encroachment." This phenomenon refers to the gradual but persistent movement of common people onto the wealthy and powerful in order to survive and better their lives. It replaces social movements or protests and moves the subjects to directly fulfill their own needs by themselves – which oftentimes happens individually and discretely.<sup>147</sup> This concept is characterized by open and transient fights without obvious leadership,

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<sup>147</sup> Bayat, Asef, 548.

ideology, or formal organization. It also features silent, largely atomized, extended mobilization with occasional collective action. Even though the quiet encroachment cannot be classified as a “social movement” per se, it differs from survival tactics or “everyday resistance,” as the struggles and victories of the agents do not benefit other poor people or themselves, but rather the state, the wealthy, and the powerful.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Bayat, Asef, 545-546.

## CONCLUSION

The escalation of the situation from calling out the wrongdoings of a person in power – or group of people – to encompass questioning the existence of an entire religion would not have been possible had the movement either been – and remained – secular, or truly included “all” the *zu'ama* and politicians in its criticism, without any exceptions regardless of how justified they might have been. Sectarianism is used as a discourse to place the responsibility on the citizens who are believed to hold primordial beliefs that prefer adhering to a particular religious sect over all other forms of social cohesion. Meanwhile, the clientelistic style of government practiced by the political elite—which is based on exchanging respect for allegiance—is disregarded and held without accountability.<sup>149</sup> This leaves the question of whether those who refrained from participating in the protests did so out of a lack of faith in its goals, or out of fear of its consequences as a nation that has already gone through a civil war in its lifetime and is still trying to recover from it. In conclusion, protesting against the status quo in several aspects of the personal, public, and political lives of Lebanese citizens is seen as an act of resistance translated into active resilience despite the widespread adoption of the term ‘protest’ to be synonymous with social movements or physical on-street protests. I argue that protesting in this context could encompass more than what is public and visible, expanding the uprising from the protests that took place in Martyrs Square or Ring in Beirut and in Tripoli into several areas around Lebanon, and on many different scales. That way, the perceived “failure” of the October 17<sup>th</sup> uprising could be proven to

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<sup>149</sup> Hermez, Sami, 534-535.

be an inaccurate observation based on the absence of publicly made statements by silent protestors. The fear of the repercussions of standing against one's sectarian group is a variable that I believe holds significant weight in how the uprisings turn out. These feelings could be based on the fear of sectarian conflict and the reenactment of the civil war, or on the fear of becoming a minority with no representative in power amidst the sectarian system oversimplifies the concept and reflects a certain failure of the movement. Therefore, I argue that it is crucial that future research is able to highlight the importance of context in understanding social phenomena and the inaccuracies of generalizations of a theoretical or conceptual framework on a global scale. And by taking the literature review findings on what revolutions are, what mobilizes a nation and triggers change, as well as what it means for citizens to 'protest,' we could be able to more accurately define what it means to be resilient beyond the pessimistic views and restricted narratives.



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