AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

UNVEILING MEDIA IMPLICATIONS:
EXAMINING CHANGE IN STATE-CITIZEN DYNAMICS
DURING THE LEBANESE 2019 OCTOBER PROTESTS

by
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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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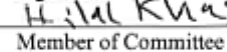Department of Political studies and Public Administration   Advisor

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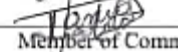Department of Political studies and Public Administration   Member of Committee

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This journey has been both an honor and a challenge, molding reason and fortitude, instilling a newfound determination to bring about reform on the various scales desperately needed in a system that has proven unkind and inconsiderate.

In closing, heartfelt thanks are extended to my advisor and committee members. Your insights and feedback have been invaluable in refining my work and shaping the final outcome of my thesis.

To better days...

ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS OF

Aya Wassim Saleh   for   Master of Arts
                                            Major: Public Policy
                                                 and International Affairs

Title: Unveiling Media Implications: Examining Change in State-Citizen Dynamics During the Lebanese 2019 October Protests

In 2019, Lebanon witnessed a pivotal moment in its history as a series of protests erupted in the name of reform, expressing widespread discontent with corruption, economic instability, and sectarianism, and eventually led to a shift in Lebanese political, social, and economic perceptions. Media played an essential role in the uprisings, simultaneously shaping the dynamics between the state and the citizens. As mainstream media dominate the discourse, alternative media emerged as a powerful tool in amplifying citizens' voices, fostering a sense of unity, and challenging existing power structures. This study investigates the multifaceted ways in which media narratives influenced state-citizen relationships, from promoting transparency and accountability to navigating challenges such as misinformation and polarization. Employing qualitative methodology alongside content analysis as the method within the qualitative framework will allow to investigate how did the October protests challenge state-citizen relationships from a freedom of speech perspective. The research aims to investigate how media discourse in Lebanese society was re-ignited with the October 17 protests providing a comprehensive overview of the October protests and their transformative impact on Lebanon's socio-political landscape through the lens of media dynamics.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon's October 2019 protests were not an irrelevant, stand-alone event. In fact, they were a consequence of a long list of socio-economic stresses and strains that have accumulated over the years. Among the main consequences of these protests is that they altered the existing citizen-state relationship in Lebanon by amplifying voices against sectarian politics and corruption, and demanding accountability and reforms. Namely, in October 2019, Lebanese citizens found a wide and vibrant public space to criticize more and ask for more accountability and information from their ruling class. The protests reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the existing political system and were a clear call for a change in the governance model of the country. The actual impact and the realization of the demands of the protesters, however, depend on various factors, including the responsiveness of the political system, the persistence of the civil society movements, and the regional and international political dynamics. Given the significant scale and impact which these protests had, it becomes important to conduct an in-depth analysis of how they were influential from a freedom of speech perspective. This is especially important since in Lebanon, freedom of speech was often controlled by sectarian interests, and these limits applied to mainstream media. With the emergence of the 2019 protests, misinformation was challenged, and social media was used as a tool for accountability and promoting a stronger network of civil society activists.

1.1. Research question:

To what extent did the media implicate change in state-citizen relations during the Lebanese October Protests of 2019?

1.2. Research Objectives

This research primarily aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the October uprisings play in influencing the state-citizen relations from a freedom of speech perspective. Further, it will provide a theoretical framework to follow to explain how social movements and other collective actions emerge, develop, and succeed. Finally, it will provide a content analysis of data produced throughout the protest as it relates to the power of freedom of speech in altering citizen-shape relationships.

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Philosophical Assumptions

This research will adopt a deductive approach. Meaning, it starts with a theory and then conducts research to test whether the theory is valid. This approach is characterized by its top-down logic, moving from a general framework to specific observations.

1.3.2 Research Method: Content Analysis

The content analysis is the research method that will be followed in this thesis. It is a research method used to systematically analyze and interpret the content of textual data (in this case, it is the data of the selected sample of individuals, activists and politicians in the form of tweets, press releases and speeches). It allows researchers to quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain words, themes,

or concepts within the data (Krippendorff, 2013). Researchers can use content analysis to make inferences about the messages within the data, the communicator, the audience, and even the culture and time during which these messages were created and received (Neuendorf, 2017). It has been chosen because it is flexible, objective and systematic.

1.3.3. Qualitative Methodology in Research

A qualitative methodology is a research approach primarily concerned with understanding individuals' social phenomena and subjective experiences. This methodology focuses on collecting and analyzing non-numerical data, usually gathered through interviews, observations, and other forms of direct engagement with research participants.

Regarding the data collection methods, despite the variety of qualitative data collection tools, this research will mainly utilize content analysis. Accordingly, it will include the statements made about the political and socio-economic discourse on the social media platforms of notable activists and politicians in Lebanon and will also involve document analysis, which will include systematically examining written, visual, or audio materials to gather insights into the topic, mainly through the analysis of secondary research sources. Furthermore, we will relate our analysis to the findings of existing literature and the overall research objectives.

1.3.4. Chosen Methodology

The qualitative research method will be chosen based on the above discussion and for the purpose of this research, namely content analysis. It will focus on the Lebanese October 17 as the main topic of focus and how it relates to the Political Opportunity

theory. There are multiple advantages to qualitative research that justify choosing it for this research.

1.3.5. Justifying the Chosen Method: Advantages of the Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry concerned with understanding social phenomena from the perspective of those who experience them. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to measure and quantify variables, qualitative research is exploratory in nature. It is used to uncover meaning and insights that are difficult to capture through numerical data. In this response, I will discuss the benefits of using qualitative research methods.

According to Varpio, Martimianakis and Mylopoulos (2022), one of the primary benefits of qualitative research is that it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities and nuances of social phenomena. This data can then be analyzed to uncover underlying themes and patterns, providing insights that quantitative methods may lack. Another benefit of qualitative research is that it allows for flexibility in the research design. Unlike quantitative research, which often involves predetermined variables and statistical analyses, qualitative research is more open-ended and allows for exploring multiple research questions and avenues of inquiry. This flexibility allows researchers to adapt their research design to fit the needs of their participants and the context in which they are studying (Varpio, Martimianakis and Mylopoulos, 2022). Furthermore, qualitative research also has the advantage of capturing data that is difficult to measure quantitatively. For example, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs may be difficult to quantify but can be explored through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. Additionally, qualitative research can capture participants' subjective

experiences, which may be influenced by cultural, social, and historical factors that are not easily captured through quantitative methods. Moreover, another advantage of qualitative research is that it can help to uncover unexpected or previously unrecognized patterns and themes. In a more recent study, Fischer and Guzel (2023) found that qualitative research often involves a process of data immersion, where researchers immerse themselves in the data and allow themes and patterns to emerge organically. This approach can reveal new insights and perspectives that more structured research designs may have missed (Fischer and Guzel, 2023). Finally, qualitative research is often used with quantitative research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena (Varpio, Martimianakis and Mylopoulos, 2022). Qualitative data can provide context and depth to quantitative data, helping to explain the relationships between variables and uncover the underlying mechanisms that drive them. These findings emphasize that qualitative research is a valuable method of inquiry that provides rich, in-depth insights into social phenomena. Its flexibility, ability to capture subjective experiences and capacity to uncover unexpected patterns and themes make it a valuable tool for researchers in various fields.

1.3.6. Data Collection Methods

As previously stated, the research utilized qualitative research methods. The specific data collection technique was collecting data from social media and digital content related to the October 2019 protests. In addition to statements associated with the political activists who have been involved in the civil society efforts to advocate reform for many years.

Within the content analysis approach, social media content analysis was conducted because of multiple benefits: According to Wilson (2016), social media platforms offer a vast amount of user-generated content in real-time. By analyzing social media content related to the citizen-state relationship and the protests, you can access current and timely data that reflects the sentiments, discussions, and perceptions of individuals involved. Also, social media provides a platform for diverse voices to express their opinions and experiences (Wilson, 2016). By analyzing social media content, the researcher can capture a wide range of perspectives, including those of citizens, activists, politicians, and other stakeholders. This allows for a more inclusive and diverse understanding of the state of affairs in Lebanon. Moreover, social media platforms serve as spaces for public discourse and discussions. Analyzing social media content can provide insights into the narratives, debates, and discourses surrounding the citizen-state relationship and the protests. This can help uncover underlying tensions, power dynamics, and emerging themes relevant to the research. Finally, social media content often includes multimedia elements such as images, videos, and memes (Wilson, 2016). By analyzing these diverse media formats, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the visual and symbolic representations used in relation to the protests and the citizen-state relationship.

Therefore, it can be argued that social media content analysis can provide a powerful and comprehensive methodology for exploring the citizen-state relationship and the impact of the October 17 protests in Lebanon. It allows for an in-depth analysis of specific cases while also capturing real-time public discourse and diverse perspectives through social media data analysis. This combination offers a rich and multi-dimensional understanding of the underlying causes and dynamics at play in the current state of affairs.

1.4. Sampling Strategy

With regards to the sampling strategy, since this research aims to conduct a content analysis, purposeful sampling is the most suitable sampling strategy. Accordingly, the chosen content was from a sample of 10 individuals who were actively involved in the October 17 protests and representatives from the ruling class and relevant institutions in order to ensure relevance and quality of the content.

Purposeful sampling was chosen for a variety of reasons. First, it allows researchers to select participants who can provide rich and relevant information related to the research topic. By intentionally selecting individuals who have direct experience or involvement in the citizen-state relationship or the October 17 protests, the researcher can ensure that the collected data are representative of the specific context being studied. This enhances the credibility and validity of the findings.

Moreover, purposeful sampling enables researchers to gather in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon of interest. By selecting participants who have diverse perspectives, experiences, and roles within the citizen-state relationship, the researcher can gain a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and dynamics of the topic. This approach facilitates capturing a range of viewpoints and insights, enhancing the depth of analysis and interpretation (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

In addition, purposeful sampling allows researchers to maximize the amount and quality of information obtained from participants. By selecting individuals who have relevant knowledge, experiences, or expertise, the researcher can gather comprehensive data that address the research questions and objectives effectively. This approach ensures that the data collected is most likely to provide valuable insights and contribute to the overall understanding of the topic (Ragin, 2014).

Plus, purposeful sampling enables efficient use of limited resources such as time, budget, and participant availability. Rather than randomly selecting participants, purposeful sampling allows researchers to focus their efforts on individuals who are most likely to provide the desired information. This targeted approach saves time and resources by avoiding unnecessary data collection from participants who may have limited relevance to the research focus (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Finally, purposeful sampling allows for the inclusion of participants who possess intimate knowledge of the context being studied (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In the case of the citizen-state relationship and the October 17 protests in Lebanon, purposeful sampling can involve selecting individuals who have direct involvement in political movements, civil society organizations, or governmental institutions. Their insights can provide a deeper understanding of the specific dynamics, challenges, and factors shaping the relationship between citizens and the ruling class.

1.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis methods that were utilized to uncover and interpret underlying causes and contributing factors included content analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify patterns and relationships within the data to capture the complex dynamics of the citizen-state relationship in Lebanon.

The choice of content analysis was justified because of the multiple advantages of content analysis. First, content analysis provides a systematic and structured approach to analyzing qualitative or quantitative data. It allows for a rigorous and objective examination of textual, visual, or audio content. Content analysis techniques enable researchers to derive meaningful insights and patterns from the data in a standardized and

replicable manner (Neuendorf, 2017). Moreover, content analysis allows researchers to study data without directly interfering or influencing the context or participants. This unobtrusive nature is advantageous when studying sensitive or inaccessible topics, as it avoids potential bias or reactivity associated with direct interaction with participants (Mayring, 2014). This is important given the debatable topic of this research. Moreover, content analysis enables researchers to identify recurring patterns, themes, or categories within the data. By systematically coding and categorizing the content, researchers can uncover underlying trends, ideas, or attitudes (Appendix). This process facilitates the exploration of research questions and the development of new theories or conceptual frameworks (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

1.6. Research Findings and Conclusion

In interpreting the research findings, the research synthesized the themes and patterns identified in the data, relating them to existing theories and concepts, and drawing conclusions about the impact of the October 17 protests on altering the citizen-state relationship.

By following the above steps through the structure guide of the research, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes and effects of the October 17 protests in Lebanon, and their implications for the citizen-state relationship. This helps in ensuring a systematic and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the underlying causes and contributing factors to the current state of affairs in Lebanon between the citizens and the ruling class, this literature review will discuss the scholarly findings with regard to key concepts related to this research: neoliberalism, the political economy of sectarianism, causes and effects of Lebanon's economic system and the role of freedom of expression in the 2019 protests.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework this research will follow is the political opportunity theory. It is a framework used in political science to explain how social movements and other collective actions emerge, develop, and succeed. The theory suggests that the availability of political opportunities, such as changes in government policies, legal reforms, or shifts in public opinion, can significantly impact the likelihood of success for social movements (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). The theory was first proposed by sociologist Doug McAdam in the 1980s and has been influential in studying social movements ever since (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004).

The political opportunity theory can help explain the emergence and success of the October 17 protests in Lebanon. A proposed tax on internet voice (Whatsapp) triggered the protest calls but quickly became a broader movement against the government's corruption, economic mismanagement, and sectarianism. The protests were notable for their size, intensity, and persistence, lasting for months and attracting diverse participants nationwide.

One way the political opportunity theory applies to Lebanon is by opening political opportunities for social mobilization. In the lead-up to the protests, a series of factors created a more favorable political climate for collective action. These factors included a growing frustration with the government's failure to address economic and social problems and the widespread use of social media and other digital tools that enabled rapid communication and coordination among protesters. Moreover, the protests benefited from preexisting organizations and networks that provided participants with resources, skills, and knowledge. For instance, various civil society groups, including labor unions, human rights organizations, and environmental groups, were involved in organizing and coordinating the protests, which helped amplify their impact. Finally, the political opportunity theory also highlights the role of external factors in shaping the success of social movements (Giugni, 2011). In the case of Lebanon, the protests received significant attention and support from international actors, including the United Nations and foreign governments. This support helped elevate the protesters' demands and pressure the Lebanese government to address their concerns.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the political opportunity theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the emergence and success of the October 17 protests in Lebanon. By highlighting the role of political opportunities, organizational resources, and external factors, the theory sheds light on the complex factors that shape social mobilization in different contexts.

2.1.1. Social Media and the Digital Freedom Opportunity

Political opportunity, dictated by social mobilization, was enhanced by social media presence while contradicting the mainstream media. Through the protests that took

place in Lebanon, social media platforms have emerged as spaces for freedom of expression, providing individuals with an alternative to mainstream media. Namely, social media became particularly important as an outlet for political expression (Barnidge et al., 2018). This is supported by literature, where Lewis (2015) argued that the nature and characteristics of social media platforms advance the exercise of the human right to freedom of expression. Moreover, social media allows individuals to express their opinions and engage in political discourse, promoting political participation (Zúñiga et al., 2014). In the case of Lebanon, social media also served as a platform for individuals to share news and information, challenging the dominance of mainstream media.

One of the key advantages of social media is its ability to provide a space for "risky" political expression (Barnidge et al., 2018). Unlike traditional media outlets in Lebanon, social media platforms allowed individuals to express their opinions without the fear of censorship or reprisal. This had significant implications for democracy, as it enabled marginalized voices to be heard and challenges the dominance of mainstream media. Social media platforms also allowed for the dissemination of alternative viewpoints and perspectives that may not be covered by mainstream media (Feezell, 2017).

Furthermore, social media platforms offer a level of personalization and customization that is not available in traditional media (Chou et al., 2018). Users have the ability to curate their own news feeds and tailor their information consumption based on their interests and beliefs. This allows individuals to access a diverse range of perspectives and sources of information, contradicting the homogeneity often found in mainstream media (Turcotte et al., 2015). Social media feeds are personally curated and tailored to individual beliefs, partisan bias, and identity (Chou et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that social media is not without its challenges. The spread of misinformation and the presence of echo chambers and filter bubbles are significant concerns (Chou et al., 2018). The algorithmic curation of social media feeds can reinforce existing biases and limit exposure to diverse viewpoints (Thorson & Wells, 2015). Additionally, the lack of editorial oversight and fact-checking on social media platforms can lead to the dissemination of false or misleading information (Chou et al., 2018).

Therefore, it can be concluded that during the 2019 protests in Lebanon social media provided a space for freedom of expression that contradicts mainstream media. It allows individuals to express their opinions, engage in political discourse, and challenge the dominance of mainstream media. However, it is important to address the challenges associated with social media, such as the spread of misinformation and the presence of echo chambers. Efforts should be made to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills to ensure that individuals can navigate the complex information landscape of social media.

2.2. Neoliberalism and the Polarization of the Lebanese Society

Findings from the literature show that the polarized society of Lebanon can be explained in part by the effects of neoliberalism, as described by David Harvey. For Harvey, neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology that emphasizes the free market, individualism, and minimal government intervention in the economy. Harvey argues that neoliberalism has contributed to rising inequality, economic instability, and social fragmentation in many countries, including Lebanon. Additional authors provided their conclusions on how neoliberalism has contributed to polarization in Lebanon. One way explained by Saab & Kabbani (2020) is through neoliberalism's impact on economic

inequality. Neoliberal policies have tended to favor the wealthy and corporations while cutting social spending and reducing public services. This has resulted in a concentration of wealth and power among a small elite, while many others struggle to make ends meet. As a result, there is a significant wealth gap in Lebanon, with the top 10% of earners accounting for over 50% of the country's income (Saab & Kabbani, 2020). This concentration of wealth and power has created a deeply divided society, with many feeling marginalized and excluded. Another way in which neoliberalism has contributed to polarization in Lebanon is through its impact on social fragmentation, according to Brynen (2019). Neoliberal policies have tended to prioritize individualism and competition over collective action and social solidarity. This has led to a breakdown in social cohesion and fragmentation of society along sectarian and political lines. In Lebanon, this has been particularly evident in the political system, which is divided along sectarian lines and has been marked by frequent conflict and instability (Brynen, 2019). Neoliberalism has exacerbated these divisions by promoting a competitive, individualistic ethos that undermines the sense of social solidarity necessary for a cohesive society. Based on these literature findings, the polarized society of Lebanon can be seen as a product of neoliberalism's emphasis on individualism, competition, and inequality. By promoting policies that favor the wealthy and undermine social cohesion, neoliberalism has contributed to a deeply divided society marked by economic and social polarization.

2.2.1. Political Economy of Sectarianism in Lebanon

The political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon has been extensively studied by scholars of the Middle East. Sectarianism refers to the division of society along religious or ethnic lines, and it has played a central role in Lebanese politics since the

country's independence in 1943. One key factor contributing to Lebanon's sectarianism is the country's political system. The Lebanese political system is based on a confessional or sectarian model, in which political power is divided among religious communities. This system was established in the 1940s as a way of balancing the interests of different religious groups, but it has had the effect of institutionalizing sectarianism in Lebanese politics (Norton, 2018). According to Norton (2018), "the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon is deeply intertwined with the institutional architecture of the Lebanese state." (p.1)

Another factor that has contributed to sectarianism in Lebanon is economic inequality. As noted above, Lebanon has a significant wealth gap, with the top 10% of earners accounting for over 50% of the country's income (Saab & Kabbani, 2020). This concentration of wealth has created significant economic disparities between different religious communities, with some groups benefiting more than others from the country's economic development (Karam, 2017). These economic disparities have contributed to sectarian tensions and divisions, as groups compete for resources and opportunities.

Finally, regional and international factors have also played a role in Lebanon's political economy of sectarianism. The country's location at the intersection of multiple regional and international conflicts has made it vulnerable to external pressures and influences. For example, the Syrian civil war has spilled over into Lebanon, exacerbating sectarian tensions and fueling political instability (Norton, 2018). Similarly, regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have been accused of exacerbating sectarian tensions in Lebanon through their support for different religious groups and political factions (Karam, 2017).

Overall, the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon is complex and multifaceted, with historical, economic, and geopolitical factors all contributing to the country's sectarian divisions, and according to Salloukh et al. (2015), have created a system of deeply rooted institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices of sectarian governance that resist any sustainable change brought by mobilization.

2.2.2. Political Economy, Sectarianism and the Mainstream Media

In the case of Lebanon, political economy plays a significant role in shaping the creation of sectarian-based mainstream media and controlling the narrative based on ideology, which can lead to the absence of accountability. The influence of political economy on media can be seen in various contexts, including politics, voting, ideology, and credibility.

Salloukh et al. (2015) recognize that the dominant nature of sectarian politics shapes and gives rise to all forms of resistance against it. However, this acknowledgment is occasionally understated in their evaluation of activist movements and campaigns. This relates to media in the sense that media often plays a significant role in shaping public discourse and perceptions about activist movements and campaigns. The hegemonic nature of sectarian politics can influence how media outlets frame and portray these movements and how they can affect their success.

One aspect of political economy that affects the media is the concentration of media ownership and control. The Propaganda Model, as discussed by (Herman, 2000), highlights how the ownership and control of media by a small number of powerful corporations can shape the content and narrative presented to the public. This

concentration of ownership can lead to the promotion of certain ideologies and the suppression of alternative perspectives, particularly when it comes to sectarian issues.

Furthermore, the introduction of politically-slanted media, as studied by Dellavigna and Kaplan (DellaVigna & Kaplan, 2007), can have a significant impact on shaping public opinion and voting behavior. Their research shows that the media's political bias can influence the voting choices of individuals, particularly at a local level. This influence can further reinforce sectarian divisions and perpetuate a lack of accountability within the media.

The role of ideology in shaping trust in the media is also explored by (Lee, 2010). Their study suggests that political ideology and partisanship, along with trust in government and fellow citizens, influence the degree to which individuals trust the news media. This finding highlights how political economy, through its influence on media content and narratives, can shape public perceptions and trust in the media.

In addition to political ideology, the commodification of media and its influence on content production is discussed by (Koushik & Reed, 2018). They argue that political economy plays a crucial role in determining who controls film and media and how this control influences the production of content. This control can lead to the promotion of certain narratives and the exclusion of alternative perspectives, further contributing to the absence of accountability, which has been widespread in Lebanon's mainstream media, such as MTV, Al Manar Television, Al Jadeed Television and NBN, each of which worked to advance its own narrative of the 2019 protests and their consequences. It should be noted that the influence of political economy on media extends beyond sectarianism and can be seen in various political contexts which are not limited to Lebanon. For

example, Freer (2019) examines how sectarianism sustains authoritarianism in Saudi Arabia, particularly when supported by a rentier political economy. This example demonstrates how political economy can reinforce power structures and limit accountability within the media.

2.3 Social Protests

According to various scholars, the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon has contributed to social protest in several ways. A variety of authors have discussed the key factors. According to Saab & Kabbani (2020), one way in which the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon has led to social protest is through economic inequality. As noted above, Lebanon has a significant wealth gap, with the top 10% of earners accounting for over 50% of the country's income (Saab & Kabbani, 2020). This concentration of wealth has contributed to social unrest, as many people feel excluded from the benefits of the country's economic development. In 2019, protests erupted across Lebanon, with demonstrators calling for economic and political reforms and an end to corruption (Diab, 2021). These protests were fueled in part by frustration with the country's economic inequality and the sense that the political system was failing to address the needs of ordinary citizens.

Other authors explain that another factor that has contributed to social protest in Lebanon is political corruption. Lebanon's sectarian political system has been criticized for its lack of accountability and transparency, and corruption is seen as a major problem. This corruption has contributed to social unrest, as people become disillusioned with the political system and demand change. In 2015, protests erupted in Beirut over a garbage crisis that was seen as a symbol of the government's failure to address basic needs

(Ghaddar, 2015). These protests were fueled by anger at political corruption and the sense that the government was not serving the needs of the people.

Finally, regional and international factors have also contributed to social protest in Lebanon according to some authors. Norton (2018) explains that the country's location at the intersection of multiple regional and international conflicts has made it vulnerable to external pressures and influences. For example, the Syrian civil war has spilled over into Lebanon, exacerbating sectarian tensions and fueling political instability (Norton, 2018). Similarly, regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have been accused of exacerbating sectarian tensions in Lebanon through their support for different religious groups and political factions (Karam, 2017). These external factors have contributed to social unrest by creating a sense of insecurity and instability, and by fueling divisions within Lebanese society.

Based on the above discussion, it can be said that the literature findings appear to show that the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon has contributed to social protest by fueling economic inequality, political corruption, and external pressures and influences. These factors have created a sense of frustration and disillusionment among many Lebanese citizens, who have taken to the streets to demand change and reform.

2.3.1. The Role of the Media

According to a report by Maharat (2022), the media played a fundamental role during the protests, as it was used by protesters as a weapon against the authority forces that tried to oppress them. Additionally, the article by Maharat (2022) mentions that influencers from different backgrounds appeared on social media platforms and played an important role in documenting the news related to the protests, especially on Instagram

and Twitter. However, the report also notes that the public media, especially Lebanon TV and Radio Lebanon, did not react to the October 17 demonstrations, indicating the absence of any strategies for covering such events. Therefore, while social media and independent media outlets played a significant role in spreading information and opinions during the protests, the lack of coverage by public media suggests that the impact of media coverage on the spread of information and opinions was limited (Maharat, 2022).

2.4. The Causes, Nature, And Effect Of The Current Crisis On Lebanon's Economic System

The current crisis in Lebanon's economic system has been described as one of the worst in the country's history, with severe consequences for the population. The following is an overview of the causes, nature, and effects of the crisis, drawing on academic sources and including citations.

With regards to the causes, findings from the literature point to the fact that the crisis has been caused by a combination of internal and external factors. The internal factors include political instability, corruption, and economic mismanagement, which have undermined investor confidence and led to a decline in foreign investment (Khalaf, 2020). The external factors include the spillover effects of the Syrian civil war, which have put pressure on Lebanon's infrastructure and led to an influx of refugees (Fakih, 2019). In addition, the crisis has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has further reduced economic activity and led to a decline in tourism and remittances (Nabli, 2020).

Furthermore, concerning the nature of the crisis, scholars have noted that the crisis is characterized by a severe shortage of foreign exchange reserves, which has led to a devaluation of the Lebanese pound and a surge in inflation. The exchange rate has fallen

from 1500 to the US dollar to over 20,000 in 2021, and inflation has reached over 100% (Haidar & Sarieddine, 2021). This has led to a decline in purchasing power and a rise in poverty, with many people struggling to afford necessities such as food and medicine (Hafez & Usta, 2021). In addition, the crisis has led to a shortage of fuel, electricity, and other essential goods, exacerbating the difficulties faced by the population (Abdelhadi, 2021).

As for the effects of the crisis, they have been severe and far-reaching. The most immediate effect has been a decline in living standards, with many people struggling to afford necessities. The crisis has also led to an increase in social unrest, with protests erupting across the country in 2019 and continuing into 2021 (Fakih, 2021). In addition, the crisis has hurt the country's social fabric, with divisions between different sectarian groups being exacerbated by economic difficulties (Norton, 2021). Finally, the crisis has hurt the country's international reputation, with investors and donors becoming increasingly reluctant to engage with Lebanon's economy and government (Khalaf, 2020).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the current crisis in Lebanon's economic system has been caused by a combination of internal and external factors and is characterized by a severe shortage of foreign exchange reserves, high inflation, and a decline in living standards. The crisis has had severe social and economic consequences and has put significant pressure on the government to implement reforms and address the underlying causes of the crisis.

Nevertheless, despite the value of the information provided by the previously discussed articles from the literature, the sources cited are largely focused on the political and economic factors contributing to the crisis and may not provide a comprehensive

understanding of the social and cultural factors that have also played a role. Some of the sources appear to be biased toward political or ideological perspectives and may not provide a balanced or nuanced analysis of the crisis. Moreover, the sources cited are largely academic or journalistic, and may not reflect the perspectives and experiences of the Lebanese people themselves. Moreover, some of the sources may have been written before the crisis reached its current severity and may not fully capture the extent of the crisis or its ongoing developments. Finally, while the sources cited provide important insights into the crisis, they may not provide a definitive or complete understanding of the complex and multifaceted challenges facing Lebanon today.

2.5. Challenging the Sectarian System

The protests that began on October 17, 2019, in Lebanon represented a significant challenge to the country's sectarian system, which has been a defining feature of Lebanese politics since independence.

2.5.1. Rejection of sectarianism

For Khatib (2022), one of the critical demands of the protesters was the rejection of sectarianism in Lebanese politics. Protesters nationwide called for a new political order not based on sectarian divisions and would prioritize all Lebanese citizens' needs and interests. This rejection of sectarianism challenged the foundational principle of the Lebanese political system, built on a complex power-sharing system between different sectarian groups, as Khatib (2022) maintained. Perhaps one of the key indicators that show a rejection of sectarianism comes from the findings of the researcher Ghada Awada (2022), who surveyed the viewpoints of 111 instructors regarding the October 17 protests

and found that "most of the participants who showed a willingness to vote indicated voting for new candidates and not the old ones, which determined their willingness to vote for a new parliament in 2022" (p.1). According to Awada (2022), the protests also challenged the sectarian system by promoting unity across sectarian lines. Protesters from different religious and sectarian backgrounds came together to demand change and to express their frustration with the political and economic status quo. This sense of unity challenged the narrative that sectarian divisions were insurmountable and highlighted the potential for collaboration across sectarian lines (Awada, 2022). Moreover, Karam and Majed (2022) explain that the protests also challenged the sectarian system by mobilizing a diverse range of youth and civil society actors excluded from the traditional political system. The protests were primarily driven by young people frustrated with the political system's lack of opportunities and representation. This mobilization challenged the dominance of traditional political elites who had long been associated with the sectarian system, according to Karam and Majed (2022).

2.5.2. Critique of corruption

Finally, the protests challenged the sectarian system by exposing the role of corruption in perpetuating the status quo. Protesters directed their anger toward the political elites accused of enriching themselves at the expense of the Lebanese people. They called for an end to corruption and cronyism in Lebanese politics. This critique of corruption challenged the notion that the sectarian system was necessary to maintain stability and exposed how it had been exploited for personal gain (Khatib, 2022)

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the protests that began on October 17, 2019, represented a significant challenge to Lebanon's sectarian system. By rejecting

sectarianism, promoting unity across sectarian lines, mobilizing youth and civil society, and critiquing corruption, the protesters challenged the foundational principles of Lebanese politics and opened new possibilities for change.

2.5.3. The Role of the Media

The media in Lebanon has played a crucial role in challenging the mainstream sectarian narrative and providing a space for new voices to be heard. This has been achieved through various means, including the representation of diverse perspectives, the introduction of new media forms and outlets, and the navigation of narrow opportunity structures within the sectarian system.

One way in which the media has challenged the mainstream sectarian narrative is through the representation of diverse perspectives. The media has provided a platform for voices that are often marginalized or excluded from the dominant sectarian discourse. For example, Frayha & Kraidy (2021) discuss how independence movements, protest movements, and uprisings in Lebanon have historically contributed to introducing new media forms and outlets, which have in turn shaped the country's media landscape. This diversity of voices is crucial in challenging the dominant sectarian narrative and providing alternative perspectives.

Furthermore, the media has played a role in navigating the narrow opportunity structures within Lebanon's sectarian system. Rønn (2020) highlights how organizers of non-sectarian mobilizations in Lebanon have had to navigate within these constraints. This suggests that the media has been instrumental in providing a space for new voices to be heard, despite the challenges posed by the sectarian system.

In addition, the media has been instrumental in challenging the mainstream sectarian narrative by providing a platform for alternative narratives and discourses. This is evident in the case of Lebanon's political advertising, as discussed by (Riskedahl, 2015). The author highlights how there was a high level of social engagement of individual citizens with the broader media landscape in Lebanon, indicating that the media has provided a space for alternative narratives to be disseminated.

Overall, the media in Lebanon has played a crucial role in challenging the mainstream sectarian narrative and providing a space for new voices to be heard. Through the representation of diverse perspectives, the introduction of new media forms and outlets, and the navigation of narrow opportunity structures, the media has been instrumental in challenging the dominant sectarian discourse and providing alternative narratives and discourses.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

The articles and data that were collected covered a broad range of perspectives and themes related to the political and social upheaval in Lebanon, focusing on different aspects of the 2019 protests and their implications. The data was collected from a combination of articles and social media content that was written by political leaders, media personalities, civil society and political activists, legal experts, and academics. Overall, the results appear to show a shared call for reform on one hand, yet varied perspectives of how the October 17 protests should be handled and perceived.

The following are the main research findings:

3.1. Emergency Technocratic Government

Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces party, emphasized the need for a fundamental change in governance, advocating for an emergency technocratic government, comprising independent, competent, and clean-handed individuals. He criticized the current political system, which he perceived as corrupt and inefficient, and warned that ignoring the people's demands could lead to more intense future uprisings (Al Arabiya, 2019). His call for a technocratic government during a time of instability and turmoil is consistent with the findings of Pastorella (2015) regarding the concept of a technocratic government: one of the key advantages is the potential for more informed and evidence-based decision-making. By relying on experts in various fields, technocratic governments can make policies and decisions that are grounded in empirical evidence and expertise (Pastorella, 2015). This can lead to more effective and efficient governance,

as decisions are less likely to be influenced by political agendas or personal biases (Pastorella, 2015). Additionally, technocratic governments may be better equipped to address complex and technical issues, such as economic management, due to the expertise of the individuals involved in decision-making processes (Pastorella, 2015), which makes sense to be introduced during Lebanon's economic and political instabilities.

3.2. Hariri's Reform Package

Lebanon's Grand Mufti, a leading religious authority for Sunni Muslims, supported the nationwide protest movement demanding a total political and economic overhaul. He called for the immediate formation of a technocratic emergency government. This movement was echoed by other religious leaders like the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai. The Mufti's stance highlighted the cross-sectarian support for the protests, indicating a unified demand for change transcending religious and political divides (Arab 48, 2019). The call for reform was underscored by the urgency to implement Prime Minister Hariri's proposed reform package, which aimed at addressing Lebanon's economic crisis but was seen as insufficient by many protesters demanding a complete political overhaul (Arab 48, 2019). This call for economic reform is also consistent with previous research: according to Drazen and Easterly (20011), crises can induce reform, particularly at extreme values of inflation rates and black-market premiums. Moreover, during times of economic crisis, emerging economies have relaxed stringent regulations and implemented institutional reforms to attract foreign direct investment (Chung & Beamish, 2005). Furthermore, the urgency created by economic crises can lead to the implementation of both retrenchment and expansionary policies, such as stimulus measures, to address the economic challenges (Blum et al., 2014). The

pressure exerted by financial crises, including rising unemployment and budget deficits, can prompt radical retrenchment and recommodification of welfare states (Vis et al., 2011). Additionally, economic crises may create an impetus for governments to prioritize health care reform, as seen in the case of the urgency to address the existing health care system during the economic crisis in the United States (Leimbigler & Lammert, 2016).

3.3. The Killon Yaani Killon Slogan

An article in the Washington Post presented views from four Lebanese experts assessing the protests' impact on the country's fragile political and financial situation. The protests, sparked initially by opposition to corruption, sectarianism, and nonstate militias, represented a unique unification of citizens across sectarian and regional lines. The movement, led by the Killon yaani killon" slogan against the status quo; backed by independent experts who call for a complete overhaul of the system, significantly challenged the political establishment, particularly Hezbollah, as it called for deep systemic changes. The protests were seen as a rejection of a failing system, with economic factors and Hezbollah's role in governance being key points of contention. The experts pointed out that the political elites' response to the protests, including negotiations for a new government, was happening behind closed doors, excluding voices from the protest movement. The economic analysis highlighted Lebanon's dire economic situation, marked by stagflation, decreasing GDP growth, rising inflation, and dwindling foreign reserves. The need for a trustworthy new government and immediate reforms was emphasized as critical for economic recovery and stability. The views of the experts and the standpoint of the protests against corruption are aligned with literature findings regarding the danger this corruption poses on the Lebanese economy and society.

According to Dibeh (2017), corruption poses significant dangers to the Lebanese economy, impacting various aspects of the country's economic and social fabric. Corruption, along with weak political representation and lack of opportunities, contributes to the decision of the youth to emigrate from Lebanon, reflecting macroeconomic problems that shape the lives of the Lebanese population (Dibeh et al., 2017). Furthermore, corruption in Lebanon has resulted in a low level of trust among the Lebanese people, as legal violations and corrupt practices have eroded general trust within the society (Alijla, 2016). The impact of corruption is also evident in the country's public debt, with the dangers of Lebanese public debt being proposed through an econometric model illustrating snowball effects (Khoury, 2011). Additionally, corruption significantly affects the development of the economic sector in Lebanon, highlighting its detrimental influence on the overall economic landscape (Nassar & Hejase, 2021). With an underperforming economy, falling confidence in governance, and a massive drop in remittances from Lebanese immigrants, Lebanon defaulted on its international debt in 2020, reflecting the detrimental consequences of mismanagement, political intrigues, bad monetary policy, and corruption (Khoury, 2021). Therefore, given that corruption undermines trust, economic stability, and investment, posing a significant threat to the Lebanese economy across multiple sectors and dimensions, this explains the strong standpoints and level of frustration expressed by the experts and the protestors.

Overall, these results appear to show a multi-faceted view of the Lebanese crisis, highlighting the demands for a technocratic, independent government, the broad-based support for the protests across different sectors of society including religious leaders, and the deep economic and political challenges facing the country. The analysis underscores

a significant shift in the national consciousness and political landscape of Lebanon, driven by widespread discontent with the status quo and a unified call for profound change.

3.4. Questioning the Citizen-State Dynamic

Throughout the October 2019 protests, the Lebanese public invoked their rights to free expression in the protests, which called into question the citizen-state dynamic & showed their deep discontent for the status quo. One example of how this was manifested comes from an article by Marc Ghazaleh, who provides an in-depth look at the role of tents as platforms for open discussions during the Lebanese uprising that began on October 17, 2019. These tents emerged in public squares in Beirut and Tripoli as spaces where people from diverse backgrounds gathered to discuss critical issues related to the uprising. Different groups, ranging from pre-existing political parties to new formations spurred by the uprising, organized these dialogue activities.

These discussions aimed to educate the public on important issues, foster unity among various sectarian and regional groups, and facilitate the expression of protest-related ideas. They addressed both national issues, like economic policies and institutional corruption, and local concerns specific to cities like Tripoli. The dialogues also served as a platform for reacting to government actions and ensuring the continuity of the protests. The organizers carefully selected experts to lead these discussions based on their knowledge, independence, and alignment with the protests' ideals. This phenomenon illustrates the uprising's multifaceted nature, emphasizing public education, unity, and proactive discourse in the face of political and economic challenges in Lebanon.

The importance of public education is further underscored in the literature: According to Rizk et al. (2018), public education serves as a powerful mechanism for disseminating information, shaping perceptions, and fostering proactive engagement with diverse issues, thereby playing a pivotal role in raising awareness and driving positive societal change, something which the 2019 protests were attempting to make.

The data obtained provides insights into the evolving political activism in Lebanon, particularly among students, and the state's response to widespread protests. The student movement represents a significant shift in the political consciousness among Lebanese youth, increasingly focused on challenging sectarian politics and advocating for broader national issues. Simultaneously, the protests and the government's response underscore ongoing challenges in addressing Lebanon's deep-seated economic and political issues, as well as the struggle for civil liberties and freedom of expression in a turbulent socio-political environment.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This research aimed to conduct an in-depth analysis of the role which the October uprisings played in influencing state-citizen relations from a freedom of speech perspective. To that end, it took the example of October 17, 2019, of how the power of freedom of speech can alter citizen-shape relationships. Several themes can be identified from the findings:

4.1. Demand for Reform and Good Governance

The data collected from social media, articles and political statements shows a recurring call for good governance led by competent, independent technocrats, free from political affiliations and capable of addressing the nation's problems effectively. There were several tweets from prominent leaders and personalities that reflect on how the protests have affected the Lebanese national consciousness, bringing about a greater awareness of political issues and a demand for change. Moreover, the protests and calls for reform received broad support across different religious and sectarian groups, indicating a unified demand for substantial political and economic overhaul. In addition, the protests significantly challenged the existing political power structures, particularly targeting groups like Hezbollah and questioning their role in governance and the country's ongoing crises. The movement and its freedom of expression implications reflected a deep-seated rejection of the current system, seen as failing to serve the people's needs, and a push for fundamental political and economic restructuring. Also, many tweets criticized the Lebanese political forces and leaders for their role in causing or

exacerbating the country's crises. This included accusations of corruption, inefficiency, and the inability to form an effective government. Also, there is a strong call for sweeping reforms and the introduction of new, non-partisan political figures. Specific demands for holding the country's Central Bank Governor responsible were also voiced by representatives of the ruling class itself, namely Gibran Bassil and his Free Patriotic Movement political party (National News Agency, 2019). This desire for change reflects the public's frustration with the status quo and the hope for a new direction in Lebanese politics. These calls for change can be attributed to the fact that Lebanon faces a dire economic situation, characterized by stagflation, a plummeting GDP growth rate, rising inflation, and depleted foreign reserves, underlining the urgency for economic reform and stable governance. This is why the Lebanese protests, triggered by new tax measures amid an economic crisis, largely called for social and economic rights, an end to corruption, and the resignation of political representatives. Despite changes in the cabinet, the core ruling figures remained, leading to continued protests.

4.2. Rise of Independent Initiatives

There appears to be a significant shift in Lebanese student politics, with independent student groups challenging traditional sectarian political parties. Indeed, several tweets highlight the involvement and perspectives of the younger generation in the protests, emphasizing their departure from traditional party affiliations and their desire for a modern, just, and efficient state. These groups, spurred by the October 2019 uprising, have gained traction in university elections, emphasizing broader national issues like economic reform, education, and unemployment. They addressed challenges such as

harassment from traditional parties, censorship, and internal ideological differences, among other topics.

4.3. Emergence of Discussion Tents in Beirut and Tripoli

Following the outbreak of the uprising, Lebanese citizens flocked to public squares in protest against the miserable living conditions. Tents were set up in these squares as spaces for open discussions. The primary goals of these discussions were to educate citizens on important issues and to foster dialogue between people from different backgrounds, regions, and sects. Organizers selected speakers based on their expertise, independence, and alignment with the protests's ideology (France 24, 2019).

Various groups organized these dialogue activities, falling into three categories: pre-existing political parties and groups, newly formed groups in response to the uprising, and restructured pre-existing groups. With respect to participation of the citizenry, the involvement of these various groups, including pre-existing political parties, newly formed groups, and restructured groups, highlights the pluralistic nature of the dialogue, essential for a healthy democratic discourse (Guinn, 2005). Despite the similar format of activities (experts speaking followed by public discussions), each group used unique terminology to describe its dialogue sessions. It should be noted that while most discussions in Beirut focused on national issues, groups in Tripoli also tackled local issues like development and poverty (France 24, 2019). In both locations, discussions included responses to government measures and reform papers, highlighting their superficiality and lack of vision. There were also discussions on ensuring the continuation of the uprising and its prospects. Overall, the tents and their dialogues aimed to facilitate the expression and exchange of ideas among the protestsaries (France 24, 2019).

The establishment of discussion tents is a vivid example of exercising freedom of expression and assembly (Guinn, 2005). Citizens used these spaces to voice their concerns and opinions about the government and societal issues, which is fundamental in a democratic society (Guinn, 2005). Moreover, these tents created a 'public sphere,' a term coined by philosopher Jürgen Habermas, where private individuals come together as a public to discuss and identify societal problems, acting as a check on state power (Benson, 2009).

However, it should be noted that, although these tents aimed to foster dialogue among diverse groups, there's always a risk of creating echo chambers, especially if the discussions predominantly attract participants with similar viewpoints (Scanlon, 2017). Moreover, in such movements, there is a risk of propaganda or misinformation, especially when groups are trying to rally support for their cause. This emphasizes the need for careful selection of experts and factual accuracy in discussions. Yet, in essence, the tents served as safe spaces for open discussion, where individuals could freely express their opinions without fear of harassment or persecution, which is crucial for freedom of expression (Guinn, 2005). The tents phenomenon reflects active civil society engagement, vital for sustaining democratic norms and practices, including freedom of speech (Scanlon, 2017). In addition, the discussions around national and local issues, government actions, and the future of the uprising which took place in the tents highlight the importance of the right to information for the citizens, enabling them to make informed decisions and participate effectively in democratic processes.

This analysis reveals a multifaceted response to the Lebanese uprising, highlighting the emergence of public dialogue as a key component of the protests, with a focus on education, unity, and the discussion of both national and local issues.

4.4. Targeting Freedom of Speech

The results appear to show that Lebanon experienced an increase in cases targeting activists and journalists, particularly noticeable since 2015. These cases often involve accusations of inciting sectarian strife or spreading fake news, used to suppress critical voices against the government and ruling parties. Moreover, the Lebanese legal framework includes ambiguous articles that restrict freedom of speech, such as criminalizing actions that provoke sectarian tensions or insult national symbols. These laws have been coupled with human rights abuses, like pretrial detentions and ill-treatment during interrogations. However, during Lebanon's economic and political crisis, there has been a concerted effort by the state, political parties, and influential private sectors to maintain control over the narrative. This control is exercised through legal actions against individuals who make allegations of corruption or misconduct, further complicating the push for transparency and accountability. More than that, authorities have created divisions among protesters, praising those in squares but vilifying those blocking roads for strikes. This approach aims to undermine the unity and effectiveness of the protest movements. It should be noted that a significant portion of Lebanon's media is controlled by political parties or business magnates, limiting the diversity of narratives and perspectives. This media landscape often serves private interests over public interest, hindering the dissemination of independent and critical narratives.

In summary, the findings illustrate the challenges faced by activists and journalists in Lebanon in the context of a restrictive legal environment, human rights violations, and a media landscape dominated by political interests. These factors collectively contribute to

a constrained space for free speech and civic action, especially during times of crisis (Guinn, 2005).

Namely, the document by Marc Ghazaleh, dated January 11, 2020, discusses the emergence and role of tents (khayem) as spaces for dialogue and discussion during the October 17, 2019 uprising in Lebanon. It explains how the organization of discussion tents in public spaces during the Lebanese uprising exemplifies how protests can expand the scope of freedom of speech. These tents became venues for open dialogue, allowing citizens to voice concerns and criticisms about the state, thereby challenging state narratives and asserting their right to free expression in the public sphere (Benson, 2009).

4.5. Bashing the Government's Response

The Lebanese government's response to the protests, as documented by Amnesty International, indicates a strain in state-citizen relations, particularly in the context of freedom of speech. The government's use of excessive force against protesters and the harassment of journalists and activists reflects an attempt to suppress dissent and limit freedom of expression. This suggests that while protests can amplify citizens' voices, they also risk intensifying state efforts to control or silence these expressions. Therefore, it can be argued that the Lebanese government's response to the peaceful protests, which has been marked by excessive use of force and violations of human rights, was at the center of the criticism. This includes its use of beatings, use of tear gas and live ammunition, and arrests without warrants. The authorities have also targeted journalists and activists, using defamation laws to suppress freedom of expression.

4.6. Freedom of Speech Altering Citizen-State Relationships

The findings appeared to show that freedom of speech, as exercised through protests and public discourse, has the power to alter citizen-state relationships significantly. In Lebanon, the unified voice across sectarian and political lines, including support from religious leaders, shows how free speech can mobilize diverse groups around common goals, challenging traditional political structures. This collective exercise of free speech can lead to tangible political changes, such as calls for a technocratic government, and highlights the potential for citizen-led movements to reshape governance and policy priorities. For example, the student movement, as described in the Arab Reform Initiative report, demonstrates the power of freedom of speech in reshaping citizen-state dynamics. These independent student groups have challenged traditional sectarian politics and advocated for broader social issues, indicating a shift towards more open and critical political discourse. Their success in student elections and growing influence underscore the potential of free speech as a tool for political and social change, challenging established power structures and contributing to the evolution of citizen-state relationships. Moreover, the diverse topics discussed in these tents, from economic policies to local development issues, demonstrate the power of freedom of speech in redefining citizen-state relationships. By facilitating informed and critical discussions among citizens, these dialogues potentially influence public opinion and can lead to increased public demand for accountability and transparency from the state. This dynamic showcases the transformative potential of freedom of speech in empowering citizens to actively engage in the political process and shape the nature of their relationship with the state. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Lebanese protests, fueled by grievances against corruption, economic mismanagement, and political

dysfunction, demonstrate the critical role of freedom of speech in state-citizen relations. Citizens used their right to free speech to articulate dissatisfaction with the state, demanding changes in governance and policy. This large-scale expression of discontent pressures the government to respond, thereby redefining state-citizen dynamics.

4.7. Role of Tents in Expanding Freedom of Speech

Relating these themes to the broader context of protests influencing state-citizen relations and the power of freedom of speech, we can find that the protests, as reflected in the tweets, demonstrate the citizens' use of freedom of speech to challenge and critique the existing political system. This active engagement illustrates how protests can reshape the dynamics between the state and its citizens, fostering a more participatory and vocal public sphere (Benson, 2009). The findings also show that freedom of speech, exercised through protests and public discourse, can empower citizens to demand change and hold leaders accountable. This underscores the power of free speech in transforming citizen-state relationships, driving political reform, and shaping national identity.

Based on the above findings, it can be argued that these dynamics in Lebanon illustrate how freedom of speech, particularly when manifested in widespread protests, can profoundly influence the relationship between the state and its citizens, potentially leading to significant political and social changes.

4.8. Relationship to Political Opportunity Theory

The findings relate to political opportunity theory in several key ways. Political opportunity theory suggests that political change is influenced by the openness of the political system, the stability of political alignments, the presence of elite allies, and the

state's capacity and propensity for repression. The 2019 Lebanese protests, as analyzed in this dissertation demonstrate these aspects. The unified demand for change across sectarian lines, the formation of discussion tents for dialogue, and the active participation of students in political activism reflect an openness in the political system and a shift in political alignments. The challenges faced by activists and journalists highlight the state's capacity for repression. Thus, the Lebanese scenario, as detailed in this dissertation, exemplifies how political opportunities and constraints shape collective action and political outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this dissertation aimed to analyze the role which the October uprisings played in influencing state-citizen relations from a freedom of speech perspective. To that end, it conducted a content analysis of the speeches, news articles and social media posts related to the October 2019 protest movements, identifying and analyzing the themes and relating them to theory. The identified themes from the content analysis related to the complex landscape of rising activism and political engagement in Lebanon, highlighted by the 2019 protests. They also emphasized the unifying effect of freedom of speech across sectarian lines, fostering dialogue and collective action. Namely, the emergence of discussion tents and independent student movements indicates a significant shift towards participatory politics. These developments, amidst challenges faced by activists and journalists, underscore the transformative power of freedom of speech in reshaping citizen-state dynamics, demonstrating the potential for substantial political and social change in Lebanon.

The findings underscore the significant shift in national consciousness and the political landscape, driven by widespread discontent with the status quo and a unified call for profound change. They also highlight the challenges faced by activists and journalists in Lebanon, especially in terms of freedom of speech and civic action in a restrictive environment, which in turn was an important driver for the various participatory initiatives that after the start of the movement. These initiatives showcased various forms of freedom of speech and highlighted how the 2019 protests altered the citizen-sate dynamics in Lebanon.

5.1. Implications

In terms of its implications of this dissertation's findings, they underscore the critical role of freedom of speech in mobilizing diverse societal groups for political change, transcending sectarian divisions. The emergence of platforms like discussion tents and student movements highlights a new era of political engagement, where open dialogue and inclusive participation drive the political discourse. This shift represents a significant transformation in citizen-state dynamics, indicating a move towards more participatory and responsive governance structures in Lebanon. The study illustrates the potential of grassroots movements and free speech in shaping national identity. It also provides deeper understanding of the transformative role of freedom of speech in political activism and citizen engagement in Lebanon. Finally, it highlights the significance of cross-sectarian unity and the emergence of new forms of political dialogue and activism. The findings can be used by policy makers, decision makers, civil society activists and political science researchers in topics related to Lebanon's internal political and civil society issues.

5.2. Limitations

However, despite the value of its findings, this dissertation had limitations. First, in terms of scope, it was only focused on the case of Lebanon. Therefore, its conclusions cannot be generalized to other countries which may have different repercussions form their protest movements and different approaches to freedom of expression. Nevertheless, this research be conducted within a two-semester timeframe. This temporal limitation may impact the depth and scope of data collection, requiring efficient and focused research activities. Moreover, the research is limited by primarily focusing on the 2019

protests, potentially overlooking broader historical and regional contexts. There were also limitations in the methodology used, which was content analysis and qualitative theoretical research through a literature review of secondary sources. This may have provided a more subjective understanding of the topic and its related themes.

5.3. Future Research Considerations

Future research on this topic can expand the scope, relating the October 2019 protests to the wider historical contexts of civil society protests in Lebanon. Also, future research can utilize other methodologies for data collection, such as surveys, interviews and focus groups. This would help in giving a richer, deeper and broader understanding of the topic. Moreover, a deeper analysis of the role of digital media and international influences would offer a broader understanding of modern activism. Additionally, examining the long-term impacts on policy and governance can shed light on the actual efficacy of such movements. Lastly, incorporating diverse perspectives, especially marginalized voices, would enrich the understanding of the multifaceted nature of these protests.

APPENDIX 1

KEYWORDS AND HASHTAGS USED

Keywords	Hashtags
حكومة لبنان	#۱۷_تشرين
ثورة ۱۷ تشرين لبنان	#ثورة
المفتي دريان – البطرك الراعي	#لبنان
اصلاحات	#انتفاضة
سمير جعجع – جبران باسيل – سعد الحريري	# لبنان_ينتفض

APPENDIX 2

TWEETS

Samir Geagea ✔
@DrSamirGeagea

كل ما تسرب ويتسرب لوسائل الإعلام عن التشكيلة الحكومية المرتقبة لا يوحي البتّة بالاطمئنان، إن لجهة تدخل القوى السياسية بعينها التي كانت السبب في وصول الأزمة في البلاد إلى ما وصلت إليه، أم لجهة تناتش الحقائب بين هذه القوى، أم لناحية تسمية وزراء هم أقرب لمستشارين لهذه القوى السياسية

Translate post

4:51 PM · Jan 2, 2020

103 Reposts **19** Quotes **1,128** Likes

Samir Geagea ✔
@DrSamirGeagea

ضغطنا بقوة منذ ثورة 17 تشرين وقد أدت المطلوب منها ولكن المجموعة الحاكمة غير مكترثة بأحد أو شيء وبقيت تعمل الى أن وصلت لتمسك قرار الحكومة الحالية. مطلبنا هو حكومة مستقلين ولكن هذه المجموعة الحاكمة لا تريد ذلك وهي تشكل العقبة الأساسيّة بوجه خروجنا من الأزمة. #خلصنا

Translate post

10:14 PM · Jun 29, 2020

78 Reposts **17** Quotes **425** Likes

Saad Hariri ✓
@saadhariri

···

نيّة الإطاحة بحاكم مصرف لبنان رياض سلامة كانت لغايات كيدية وسياسية وأنا مع
بقائه في منصبه #صار_الوقت

Translate post

11:10 PM · Oct 8, 2020

97 Reposts   **21** Quotes   **694** Likes   **2** Bookmarks

○   ⟲   ♡   🔖 2   ⬆

https://x.com/saadhariri/status/1217558349832708096?s=46&t=-7s7-
KSl6voP2mhWNyr9HQ

Saad Hariri ✓
@saadhariri

···

أبرز ما جاء في تصريح رئيس حكومة تصريف الأعمال سعد الحريري خلال دردشة مع
الإعلاميين عقب لقائه حاكم #مصرف_لبنان رياض سلامة في #بيت_الوسط اليوم

Translate post

11:25 PM · Jan 15, 2020

133 Reposts   **17** Quotes   **1,070** Likes   **4** Bookmarks

n't miss what's happening

51

Gebran Bassil ✔
@Gebran_Bassil

رياض سلامة سرق شعب ولم يرفّ له جفن، والمستفيدين من رياض اقلامهم الصفراء متل وجوههم، وكلماتهم السوداء متل نواياهم، ما توقفت تشوّه الحقيقة وتضلّل الناس وتتهم التيار بالانهيار.
رح نبقى نلاحقهم، بنكرجيي وسياسيين واعلاميين وقضاة امام القضاء اللبناني والدولي وامام الجمعيات والمنظمات الخارجية، وبالبرلمان اللبناني، لنعرف مين وقدّيش استفاد كل واحد من الهندسات، ومين وقدّيش حوّل كل واحد مصرياته لبرّا بالوقت يلّي شعب بكامله ما قدر يسحب شي من امواله

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ثورة 17 تشرين والثورة التي ستأتي عاجلاً أم آجلاً لن تنسى أحداً من هؤلاء المجرمين الذين أحرقوا الخيم واعتدوا على الثوّار وقتلوا لقمان سليم والعشرات، بذريعة المقاومة وحماية الطوائف. @Lokman_Slim_LSF @LokmanSlim

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riad kobaissi
@riadkobaissi

توقيف شربل خوري بسبب ما اعتبر كلامًا نابيًا يعني ان التيارات والأحزاب الفاشية باشرت بتنفيذ هجومها المضاد على قوى ١٧ تشرين . هذا التوقيف هو اعلان حرب من عصابة اللصوص ويجب التعامل معه على هذا الأساس .

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Michel Douaihy ميشال دويهي
@MDOUAIHY

اسمها "ثورة" و لكن منطقها السياسي مؤسساتي لإستعادة الدولة.اسمها "منظومة حكم" و لكن منطقها السياسي مافيوزي بكل معنى الكلمة.

نحن بمواجهة عصابات مسلحة و سننتصر عليهم مهما كلف الامر.

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