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BEYOND THE LOGICS OF IDENTITY POLITICS: VOTING BEHAVIOR IN LEBANON'S 2018 ELECTIONS

by
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ABSTRACT
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Due to the overriding presence of identity politics in the Lebanese context, analyses of voting behavior have focused on sectarian cleavages and clientelistic practices as the main determinants that shape the voting choice, often overshadowing other important dynamics at hand. To better grasp why the Lebanese masses follow and reproduce the sectarian political elites beyond essentializing arguments that consider Lebanese citizens struck by the "herd effect", this thesis presents a nuanced understanding of voting behavior in Lebanon's 2018 parliamentary elections, with a focus on Beirut I and II electoral districts. Based on raw data from the 2018 election results as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with 21 voters, this thesis contends that understanding co-ethnic voting from a socio-political lens, rather than a sectarian one, can help us make better sense of Lebanon's polarized politics. Looking at the apolitical discourse advanced by civil society voters, this thesis argues that the political is once again being buried alive in the context of an all-out rejection of politics by the anti-establishment voters. Finally, this thesis explores the intersectional ways through which sect, kinship, class, gender, geography, and milieu, among other social factors, mutually influence and shape individual's complex identities, and thus in turn, their political behaviors.

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INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction

The year 2018 marked the first parliamentary elections in Lebanon in nearly a decade of political turmoil that witnessed a presidential vacant seat for two years and unconstitutional parliamentary extensions for three consecutive times. The elections constituted an opportunity – the first one in nine years – for Lebanese citizens to hold parliamentarians accountable. However, predictions that the leadership of traditional establishment parties will be renewed once again (Chulov, 2018; Ghaddar, 2018; Hubbard & Saad, 2018; Majed, 2017a) proved accurate. Even worse, the 2018 elections legitimized and reinforced the stance of the traditional elites since the latter were able to stand their ground in the face of the civil society coalition that had threatened to shake their Lebanese formula. Outwardly, this seems like a puzzling conundrum. The country has been riddled with some of the highest rates of inequality in the world, due to vast concentrations of wealth (Fares, 2015). Decade-old rulers have proved their clear inability to address issues like corruption, unemployment, waste crisis, and government debt, or to provide the most basic services, from healthcare and education, to electricity and clean water. Yet, the fact of the matter remains that Lebanese citizens cast ballots in support of the same traditional leaders again. However, it is important to understand why people follow. The idea of "blind followers" is quite a typical depiction of the Lebanese masses. In recent scholarly discourse on voting behavior, much ink has been shed on sectarianism and clientelism as the main determinants of voting behavior (Cammett, Kruszewska, & Atallah, 2018). Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of

sectarianism and its influence on all aspects of Lebanese society often overshadows other dynamics at hand. This thesis seeks to advance a nuanced understanding of voting behavior in Lebanon, with a primary focus on the 2018 elections. The analysis aims to move away from identitarian analyses and delve into all of the different overlapping dynamics in an attempt to account to the multifaceted aspect of electoral behavior in Lebanon, which cannot be apprehended through grand sectarian claims. More importantly, it aims to bring back the 'political' to pave the way for a more complex understanding of voting behavior. Ultimately, it brings in social factors, such as kinship, class, sect, and more, to help lay bare all the different rationales at play. This introduction will present a comprehensive review of the literature on voting behavior; but prior to delving into that, the following section takes a closer look at the Lebanese power-sharing system.

1. Sectarian Representation in Lebanese Political Life

The beginnings of the practice of political sectarianism in Lebanon is rooted in an intersection of "European colonialism and Ottoman modernization" (U. Makdisi, 2000, p. xi), predating the practice of state-building. Historical accounts trace back the first manifestations of sectarian conflict to the inter-communal hostilities that broke out between the Druze notables and the Maronite villagers in 1841 (Hamzeh, 2001; U. Makdisi, 2000, p. 51), which would later usher in the violent clashes of 1860 and introduce an age of sectarianism in Lebanon.

Sectarian representation in Lebanese political life can be broken down into four stages: the 1861 Règlement Organique, the 1943 National Pact, the 1989 Taef Agreement, and the 2008 Doha Agreement. Some of the first written sectarian

manifestations appeared in the Règlement Organique of the 'mutasarifiyya' in 1861, which set the distribution of seats within the central administrative council on a confessional basis (Hamzeh, 2001, p. 170). With the independence of the country in 1943, political sectarianism came to be institutionalized through the National Pact, a Gentlemen's agreement between Maronite leaders (represented by Beshara El Khoury) and Sunni leaders (represented by Riad El Solh) that predetermined a sectarian quota that each religious group would occupy within the state (El Khazen, 2003). But more importantly, this event established corporate consociationalism - a system of sectarian representation based on predetermined power-sharing - as the de facto model of governance in Lebanon (Salamey, 2009, p. 83).[1] In his study titled "Consociational Democracy" (1969), Dutch political scientist Arendt Lijphart examines this governing system designed for so-called 'fragmented societies' and evokes Lebanon as one of its tour de force, arguing that the country met the conditions of a successful consociational democracy (Lijphart, 1969). But Lijphart's long-hailed consociational model fails to consider the 1958 crisis, and his theory would soon be disproved again with the eruption of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 (Wehrey, 2018).[2] The Taef agreement was an arrangement reached to end the war in 1989, an era that marked the outset of the Syrian tutelage in Lebanon. However, while Taef formally called for the elimination of political confessionalism, the agreement turned out to be a readjustment of the pre-war power distribution (i.e. sectarian proportionality), and a stronger reassertion of the

[1] On the difference between corporate and liberal consociationalism, see McCulloch, A. (2014). Consociational settlements in deeply divided societies: The liberal-corporate distinction. Democratization, 21(3), 501-518 ; McGarry, J., & O'Leary, B. (2007). Iraq's Constitution of 2005: Liberal consociation as political prescription. International Journal of Constitutional Law, 5(4), 670-698.

[2] The viability of Lebanon's consociational model has been countlessly debated in academic literature. Some have argued against it and some have suggested that it represents the best-case scenario for the country. Others have proposed partition, federalism and decentralization while such arguments have incited criticism and claims that this would increase risks of an ethnic cleansing.

corporate consociational model, which now integrated warlords as part of the system itself. All in all, the Taef's main changes were the parity in terms of Christian and Muslim representation and the increased prerogatives of both the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament, at the expense of the President of the Republic's decreased influence (Hudson, 1999, p. 27). Following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in 2005, the nature of Lebanese politics took a turn, with the establishment of the March 8 and March 14 alliances (S. Haddad, 2009), and came to be perceived through the lens of the Sunni-Shia divide, rather than the traditional Christian-Muslim historical rift that governed the country during the twentieth century. Two years after the July 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, tensions between Sunni and Shia exacerbated, as internal sectarian strife arose again in 2008, ending with yet another external intervention – this time by Qatar, and the setup of the Doha Agreement. One of the main provisions brought by the Qatari-brokered deal was guaranteeing 11 cabinet seats to Hezbollah, which granted them a blocking third veto power (Corstange, 2012, p. 484) and enabled them to block major government decisions.

2. Political and Social Sectarianism in Lebanon

In light of the historical context of the Lebanese system, the power-sharing consociational formula has come to be understood and presented, time and over again, as the only way to govern a "deeply-divided society" such as Lebanon, in order to preclude the outburst of an open-ended conflict (S. Haddad, 2009; S. Makdisi & Marktanner, 2009). Before calling the notion of a 'divided society' into question, it is relevant to understand why Lebanon has fallen under this free-for-all definitional

category. Indeed, Lebanon's so-called deeply-divided society is stuck in a system whose fate cannot be escaped; also known as, sectarianism.

The term sectarianism, or ta'ifiyya (طائفية) in Arabic, has been recurrently used as a negative connotation that stands at the root of all evil in the country. Tireless attempts by scholars to define sectarianism has resulted in a general incoherence and malleability around the very meaning of the word (F. Haddad, 2017).[3] Melani Cammett (2014) defines sectarianism as "a fundamentally political phenomenon rather than as the expression of essential cultural differences" (Cammett, 2014, p. 7). Kingston (2013) goes a step further and defines sectarianism as the result of an intricate amalgam of socioeconomic and political dynamics (Kingston, 2013, p. 22).[4] Similarly, this thesis shuns Orientalist understandings of sectarianism that explain it in purely cultural terms and considers sectarian identities to be fluid and malleable over specific time and context (Cammett et al., 2018). In line with constructivist and historically grounded understandings of sectarianism, this thesis adopts Ussama Makdisi's definition of sectarianism as:

> "[…] a modern constitutive Foucauldian socioeconomic and political power that produces and reproduces sectarian subjects and modes of political subjectification and mobilization through a dispersed ensemble of institutional, clientelist, and discursive practices. It is a holistic political economic and ideological system that permeates almost every nook and cranny of Lebanese life, undergirded by a clientelist patronage network and a symbolic repertoire that incorporates large segments of Lebanese society into corporatized sectarian communities." (U. Makdisi, 2000, p. 3).

[3] Fanar Haddad (2017) digs into the many meanings that the term 'sectarian' entails and the many definitions that it has been attributed by academics. One of his proposed solutions to the ambiguity over the term 'sectarianism' is to use it with an adjoining word, such as "sectarian relations", "sectarian unity", and so on (F. Haddad, 2017, p. 364). For more on this, see also Azmi Bishara's book "Sect, Sectarianism, and Imagined Sects" (2018) whereby he discusses, in his second chapter, the linguistic development of the term.

[4] In his book "Reproducing sectarianism: advocacy networks and the politics of civil society in postwar Lebanon" (2013), Kingston evokes the sectarianization from above and the sectarianization from below, highlighting how the interplay between both processes accounts to the reproduction of sectarianism in Lebanon (Kingston, 2013).

Yet, it is crucial to make a distinction between social and political sectarianism. Social sectarianism is defined as the "social system in which religious denomination rather than territory or national culture provides the most important basis for a sense of community and identity" (Naeff, 2017, p. 11). Anthropologist Lara Deeb refers to this notion to argue that sectarian identities are real and influence the daily life and personal relationships of the Lebanese (Deeb, 2017). Some scholars have discussed the transformation of social sectarianism into political sectarianism (Bishara, 2018), and others have argued that both social and political sectarianism are interconnected and equally reinforcing (Naeff, 2017).

In Lebanon, political sectarianism can be understood as a "system of power-sharing between religious communities" (Bahout, 2018, p. 1). Within this system, citizens' religious affiliations do not only dictate their entitlement to political and administrative functions within the state, but govern their personal status matters as well (Mikdashi, 2022). From marriage, divorce, child custody and alimony, such matters are governed by religious courts, each of which adopts a different set of laws. This places sectarian identity at the core of citizenship, since the rights and the laws differ from one sect to another (Mikdashi, 2022). This institutionalization of sectarianism has resulted in a sectarianized society whereby citizens are conditioned to play by the rules of the game, i.e. to think and operate along sectarian fault lines, in order to access rights as citizens. Nonetheless, should they opt out of the sectarian system, rights are not the only thing that citizens will not be able to gain access to. Indeed, in non-welfare states, the practice of non-state welfare burgeons. By this logic, access to resources, services and security, otherwise referred to as clientelism, becomes an integral part of sectarianism

(Majed, 2017b). Within this system, elites exploit their powers by requesting loyalty (through votes) in exchange for, or access to, resources and services such as jobs, healthcare, and education. But it remains important to understand why citizens are adhering to the rules of this game and contributing to this inherent reproduction of sectarianism. In fact, the upper ruling classes, on the one hand, exploit sectarianism to remain in positions of power, whereas the working classes, on the other hand, make use of sectarianism to access benefits and welfare (Majed, 2017b).

In this system, elites play a big role in power-sharing arrangements as direct political interaction among citizens is believed to result in sectarian strife. Therefore, the attitude of the elites may aggravate tensions, just as it could ensure stability and survival of the state (Lijphart, 1969). Indeed, it has been argued that local zu'ama in Lebanon had been able to contain sectarian hostilities, since political competition happened on an intra-sectarian level, except for the events of 1958 and 1975, when they chose to turn their militias against the other sects (Hamzeh, 2001). This importance granted to the elites in the consociational model puts them at the center of the model of governance by default, which they keep abusing to sustain the system and remain in power.

3. Electoral Laws for "Divided Societies"

On May 6, 2018, Lebanon held parliamentary elections under a new electoral law that provided proportional representation (PR) for the first time in the country, albeit a controversial one. While the elites lauded themselves for the adoption of a PR system in contrast to the previous winner-takes-all majoritarian electoral law, numerous scholars and researchers have stated that the electoral law was constructed in a way to

influence voting outcomes and restate the status quo, while also maintaining the clientelistic relationship unscathed (Atallah & El-Helou, 2017). Under the new electoral law, voters shall select one list and shall allocate a preferential vote to one of the candidates on that list.[5] The law divides the country into 15 electoral districts and 27 minor districts; a redistricting process that was carefully elaborated on the basis of sectarian demographic distribution, whereby the ruling elites hold patronage networks (Ghaddar, 2018). What makes this redistricting process work in the favor of the ruling class is the calculation method: In fact, the winners are not ranked according to the number of preferential votes that they receive in the electoral district, but by the number of votes they receive in the sub-district, most of which constitute homogeneous communities with loyal patronage links to the ruling elites (Ghaddar, 2018). This makes it specifically hard for candidates running on independent lists to secure seats. Khuri (1969) has previously evoked the act of exercising the voting right in the village of origin rather than the place of residence as a practice that preserves the ties of political allegiances related to the village (Khuri, 1969, p. 139). Theoretically, scholars have indeed argued that each electoral system has its biases, as it influences and shapes voter preferences by default, based on its built-in mechanism (Horowitz, 2003). In Lebanon, this aspect remains particularly under-explored given the unremitting focus on sectarian, ethnic, and conflict studies. An in-depth exploration of political attitudes thus remains crucial in the case of Lebanon in an attempt to de-sectarianize research and shift the focus away from "sect" to the "individual" as the unit of analysis, granting citizens much-needed legitimacy and agency. An in-depth analysis of voting patterns in

[5] The 2017 electoral law is also referred to as the Adwan law, which takes on the name of MP Georges Adwan of the Lebanese Forces party who designed the law. Ramez Dagher (2017) ironically points out that the Adwan law is also literally a 'adwan' (Arabic word for 'aggression') on the notion of fair representation (Dagher, 2017).

the Lebanese case would further help to demystify what is meant by sectarian attitudes and would serve to deconstruct stereotypes conceived around the political attitudes of Lebanese citizens.

B. Trends in Voting Behavior Studies in Lebanon

A brief overview of the Western literature reveals three main theories to explain voting behavior: The Columbia School, the Michigan School, and the Rational Choice theory (Adams & Agomor, 2015). Pioneered by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at Columbia university, the Columbia model appeared in the 1940s, stressing social and political characteristics as determinants of the vote choice (Bartels, 2010). The second breakthrough that could be registered in the field of electoral research came from the Michigan school, with the book titled "The American Voter", emphasizing attitudinal and psychosocial factors (Bartels, 2010). With the waning influence of the Michigan model, rational choice theory emerged in the 1970s, eliminating any type of action and thought other than the rational calculative ones (Scott, 2000).

The existing literature in Lebanon focuses on two main determinants of political behavior, namely sectarianism and clientelism; or, as referred to by Cavatorta (2020), the ideological and instrumental motivators for voting. In the below sections, I will explore both aspects whilst making some references to their interrelatedness, underscore their pitfalls in capturing the whole picture, as well as throw light on the missing piece of the puzzle.

1. Sectarianism and Co-Ethnic Voting

In Lebanon, arguments have accounted for sectarianism as being the main determinant of voting behavior (Arnous, 2018; Cammett et al., 2018, p. 15). A study on voting behavior in Lebanon has concluded that co-ethnicity still plays an important role in Lebanese politics, stressing on the argument of "in-group love" (Cammett et al., 2018, p. 16) as sometimes being reason in and of itself for people to vote accordingly (Cammett et al., 2018). It is also relevant to mention here that since the structure of political representation – that is, corporate consociationalism – is based on sectarian representation, it is almost impossible to avoid the conflation of co-ethnic voting with other variables. Nevertheless, in her book titled "Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India", Chandra suggests that voters are instrumental actors who seek to reach their objectives by resorting to the means that would help them maximize their benefits, even if such means come in the form of a given identity (Chandra, 2007). Indeed, just as Majed (2016) argues: "Far from being a question of emotions or fixed cultural identities, sectarianism is a rational phenomenon that functions to the benefit of its adopters, however irrational that might appear." (Majed, 2016). Undoubtedly, in the context of Lebanon's patronage democracy, acting on one's identity does function to one's benefit, including (and specifically) material ones. This is so, because people in Lebanon righteously believe that voting for their co-religionist could help them access higher-valued goods or services (Cammett et al., 2018, p. 4) or would provide them with protection and security (Naeff, 2017, p. 11). However, understanding the voter as having agency portrays a completely different image of the ethnic voting, one that does not necessarily entail cultural factors only.

But indeed, while identity and sect-based motives are real and constitute a salient structure in Lebanese politics, this might present itself, at some stages, as overstated: a study conducted by Corstange on illiteracy voting rights in Lebanon shows that while people often articulate identity-based opinions in discourse and public statements, they end up pursuing their material interests in private (Corstange, 2013). Brubaker has previously warned about over-ethnicized interpretations, and has evoked the misuse of ethnic frames as a façade to hide other (namely, class) interests, since such framing has been generally legitimized and validated as the most common unit of social analysis (Brubaker, 2004). Looking at Lebanon, the biggest pitfall is the assumption that religious affiliation is the sole unit of social analysis and main reference point. That one's religion is conflated with, and tantamount to, one's political orientations is essentialist in nature and misleading at best. In analyses of voting behavior, such categorization fails to explain the tendencies of intra-communal competition and cross-sectarian alliances. Once again, this lays bare the controversies that arise when grouping people on the basis of sects (Brubaker, 2004) and exposes the inaccuracy of adopting the notion of sectarianism as a sole determinant of voting behavior, independently and separately from other dynamics.

In a pluralist society such as Lebanon's, literature on ethnic management would argue that interethnic cooperation is a good tool for moderation and accommodation (Salloukh, 2006, p. 639). However, in the Lebanese context and since the end of the civil war, politics have assumed a new image of "mafism" (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 244), whereby cross-ethnic alliances have become part of the system as a tool to serve narrow, short-term electoral benefits, which reinforces ethnic loyalties rather than ethnic accommodation, and institutionalizes "the clientelistic confessional political system"

(Salloukh, 2006, p. 650) against candidates threatening to challenge the status quo. For instance, one could evoke the Beirut municipal elections of 2016 that witnessed a united front of all ruling elites from all religions against the Beirut Madinati campaign (Karam, 2017). Such trends of shifting alliances among political parties based on "Hobbesian motives of self-interest" (Corstange, 2012, p. 487) dominate Lebanese electoral politics, whereby short-term electoral coalitions mixing strange bedfellows are developed, and are instantly dissolved as soon as elections are over (Corstange, 2012). Such disconcerting alliances were witnessed in the 2018 elections and included former allies that had been competing against one another as well as other formerly opposed parties who were suddenly allying together (Moussa, 2018). Even more perplexing is that some political parties competed in certain districts, while they formed alliances in others (Moussa, 2018). In fact, the seven largest political parties all ran with and against another group (Atallah & Zoughaib, 2019). Apart from the cross-sectarian alliances, competition among co-ethnics is also very common in corporate consociations (Cammett, 2014), such as the intra-communal competition among Christian parties in Lebanon who ran on different lists. Amidst such a chaotic mess of intra-communal competition and cross-sectarian alliances, all of which appear to shift very swiftly, sects – in a primordial sense – do not fully account to an understanding of the problem at hand.

2. Clientelist Practices and Vote Buying

In quasi-democracies where state institutions are weak and fail to provide basic services for citizens, non-state welfare allocation grows into a ground of political contestation. Indeed, much of the scholarship on political behavior in developing

countries stresses the salience of clientelistic practices and the significance of such a factor in determining voter preference in patronage democracies. Chandra defines clientelism as a "dyadic transaction between traditional notables and their dependents bound by ties of reciprocity" (Chandra, 2007), which implies "voters and politicians to be connected by traditional status roles or traditional ties of social and economic dependence" (Chandra, 2007). Traboulsi, in part, attributes clientelism a more pejorative definition, interpreting it as an "'uneven exchange' and 'uneven distribution' between patron and clients", and labels it 'mafism'; which he considers to be the "highest stage of clientelism" (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 244).

Many scholars have long evoked vote-buying and one-shot transactions as driving voting behavior in patronage politics, with a study conducted in Lebanon showing that 50% of Lebanese sold their votes in the 2009 parliamentary elections (Corstange, 2012). More interestingly, this study shows that when asked directly, one quarter of the interviewed people confessed to selling their votes, whereas when asked indirectly through the experiment list, a half of them admitted doing so (Corstange, 2012). This reinforces an argument presented in another recent paper by Corstange arguing that there exists serious underreporting of direct vote-buying during elections due to social desirability bias in Lebanon (Corstange, 2018). One other study has distinguished between hardcore supporters versus marginal or uncommitted supporters, noticing that the former will naturally enjoy social protection and higher value of goods (including job provision, scholarships, and medical treatment) from their patrons, whereas the second category of people will benefit from shorter-term value goods, such as one-shot transactions (Cammett et al., 2018).

The roots of clientelism in Lebanon can be traced back to eighteenth-century feudal Mount Lebanon, whereby overlords let peasants use the land in return for undisputed allegiance (Hamzeh, 2001). In a patronage democracy where political sectarianism defines most aspects of society, non-state welfare allocation becomes sect-based as well. The neoliberal post-war economy of Lebanon forced the Lebanese to rely all the more on the resources of the elites to access healthcare and education, which laid the economic groundwork for sectarian clientelism (Baumann, 2012). Cammett looks at the political relationship between sectarianism and clientelism in Lebanon and links sectarian-based clientelism with non-state social welfare allocation (Cammett, 2011, 2014; Cammett & Issar, 2010; Cammett et al., 2018; Chen & Cammett, 2012). Today, non-state welfare allocation is a discriminatory practice, whereby commitment to a party ensures the provision of social assistance (Cammett, 2011). And while such welfare allocation often relies on sectarian affiliation, cross-sectarian welfare allocation in Lebanon is also a common practice, whereby sectarian organizations provide services to out-group members, albeit to varying degrees. Cammett and Issar (2010) studied the tendencies of the Future Movement and Hezbollah in catering for out-group members, and found such tendencies to be distinct, since the former appeared to serve the out-group members more than the latter did so (Cammett & Issar, 2010). Furthermore, Cammett digs into the reasons why some parties were more willing to cater for out-group communities, revealing that the political goals sought by the parties determine their welfare allocation strategy: for instance, political parties seeking to achieve power on a national level will more likely serve the out-group members, whereas parties working on ‘extra-state’ activities will only focus on serving their co-ethnics (Shoup, 2015). She also discusses the level of intra-sectarian competition as affecting the

likeliness of political parties to cater for non-members: When intra-sectarian competition is high and many political parties are claiming to represent and speak on behalf of a specific community, political parties will tend to restrict service provision to their community (Cammett, 2014).

Clientelism, however, englobes both aspects of sect and class. Beyond its sectarian facet discussed above, its class aspect is almost always concealed. Nonetheless, many studies have looked into the different types of benefits enjoyed by different types of supporters, with one such factor being their socioeconomic backgrounds (Cammett et al., 2018; Corstange, 2016). Moreover, results from another survey conducted on the Lebanese parliamentary elections of 2018 showed that people with low socioeconomic status have strong sectarian attitudes and are the most likely to resort to vote buying (Mourad & Sanchez, 2019). Since clientelism can account for both sectarian and concealed class factors, this makes it the most ideal explanation of voting behavior in Lebanon, which explains why voting behavior studies in Lebanon have largely focused on vote-buying and clientelism to justify voting attitudes during elections. All the above indicates a direct link between class and sect, and hints at an intersection of the material and the sectarian, which requires further historical exploration.

3. The Class/Sect Dichotomy

A brief historical overview aimed at contextualizing the relationship between class and sect remains crucial in order to unpack voting dynamics beyond identity politics. Going back to nineteenth century Lebanon, historians like Ussama Makdisi and Fawaz Traboulsi, among others, argue that the origins of the 1860 sectarian clashes that

erupted in Mount Lebanon were rooted in material factors and an elite struggle to control land and the taxation system (U. Makdisi, 2000; Traboulsi, 2012). This sectarian confrontation can be traced back to the earlier tax revolt of the commoners of 1820-21, during which Christian peasants started voicing dissent with regard to the unequal social division of labor and taxation system in comparison with their Druze counterparts (Cammett & Issar, 2010; Traboulsi, 2012). Back then, life in Mount Lebanon under Ottoman rule was based on the millet system, which gave cultural, economic, and social superiority to Sunni Muslims and Druze over the Christian (and Jewish) communities (Traboulsi, 2012). In practical terms, this meant that the latter were prohibited from performing certain professions, including being employed in administrative functions or joining the military. This social imbalance would prove to be, according to Traboulsi, "largely responsible for transforming social and political conflicts into sectarian conflicts." (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 4). The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the French Mandate in Lebanon saw a further boost to sectarian forms of governing and a new kind of sect-based favoritism emerging; that of the French's alliance with the Maronite community (Daher, 2016). In this new Greater Lebanon, the Maronite enjoyed higher political representation and were involved in international trade and import (Daher, 2016).

This favoring of one sect over the other by successive colonial and imperial foreign powers sowed the seeds of an uneven social demography that would be later manifested in sectarian conflict. But the base of such social and political problems could be clearly discerned back then, along with distinct intra-sectarian class-based patterns that clearly countered any argument that equated class with sect.[6] For instance,

[6] Here, I refer to one of the major class/sect correlations attributed to Lebanese society; that is, the concept of "community class" introduced in the mid-twentieth century (Daher, 2016, p. 22). Basically,

Traboulsi refers to the violent events of 1860 not just as a war between Christian commoners and Druze lords, but concurrently as a revolt of Christian commoners against Christian notables and their muqata'ji families (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 29). Similarly, another intra-Christian class aspect could be detected upon the announcement of the French Mandate. For instance, while the Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek and the Maronite population whose trade businesses with the west were dependent on French rule positively welcomed it, other Christian businessmen whose trade networks were operating within the region (especially through Damascus) opposed it. All this, and more, serve to complicate the idea of sect as a monolithic category, even from early on, and showcase how sect and class have been historically intersecting in Lebanon. But while certain benefits had been granted to the Sunni and Maronite bourgeoisie by the succeeding colonial powers, the Shi'a community had been altogether marginalized politically and economically throughout these time periods, which rendered them especially weaker than other sects at the dawn of independence in 1943. But with the growth of an affluent Sh'ia diaspora and an increasingly educated middle class Shi'a population who was relocating from the peripheries to the center, power relations underwent major transformations during this period. Intra-sectarian dynamics of class within the Shi'a community started to materialize clearly and quickly in the fifties and the sixties, as political power within the community came to be monopolized by six notable Shi'a families, most of whom were large landowners (Daher, 2016, p. 13). Although the wealth gap between the Christian population and their Muslim (especially

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the notion equated class with sects, and understood the Lebanese Christian elites as the bourgeoisie, while the Muslims (specifically back then, the Shi'a) constituted the poor and working classes: In such terms, sect struggles became a form of class struggle (Daher, 2016). Mahdi Amel was a strong critic of this concept, as he argued that it was inaccurate to assign class position solely based on membership in a sect, pointing out to the different class positions extant within different sects to shift the focus away from such normalizing analyses (Daher, 2016).

Shi'a) counterparts had narrowed down in the era between independence and pre-civil war, the Christian bourgeoisie still owned the majority of commercial and industrial companies as well as Lebanese banks (Daher, 2022). This in no way indicates that it is accurate, at any point in the modern history of Lebanon, to assign class position merely based on sect affiliation. Indeed, on the eve of the Lebanese civil war, the national wealth was concentrated in the hands of the very few, living expenses had doubled between 1967 and 1975, and vast disparities persisted between urban and rural areas (Daher, 2022). This meant that the working classes, across the sectarian spectrum, had a desperate desire for social and political change. Following an intense politicization of religious identities in the 15-year civil war, the already crippled state institutions were further weakened in the post-war period, an era that also witnessed an even tighter entwinement between the economic class and the political/sectarian class. This created an economic vicious circle where the ruling class develops policies to serve its interests and ensure its reproduction, while also ensuring that citizens "remain unequal sectarian subjects" (U. Makdisi, 2000, p. 2). That the bourgeois class has tried to maintain its power over state institutions and resources through its cross-alliances for decades proves indeed, as Traboulsi previously indicated, that the most class conscious people of all social classes are the ruling elites (Traboulsi, 2014).

Against this brief historical backdrop of sect and class in Lebanon, Fawwaz Traboulsi (2014) introduced some ideas to understand the intersecting relationship of class and sect. He acknowledges that sects intersect with and reflect the class interests but argues that sects remain governed by class so long as the latter maintains the grip on resources (Traboulsi, 2014, p. 12). He further argues that sects cannot be understood solely in political terms, since the political sphere has much to do with class power as

well (Traboulsi, 2014, p. 18). Most importantly, he stresses that sects and classes constantly overlap and share a relationship of reciprocal influence and impact (Traboulsi, 2014, p. 19). Traboulsi follows the footsteps of Dubar and Nasr (1976), who argued a few decades earlier in their famous book titled "Les Classes Sociales au Liban" that the Lebanese social structure is composed of two existing structures: the political-sectarian and the class (Dubar & Nasr, 1976; Traboulsi, 2014). However, some issues arise when adopting this binary model. First, it fails to consider other important social structures that overlap with class and sects to shape attitudes and behaviors, namely, gender and region. Second, it brings us back to the problem of adopting sect (and even class) as a static and separate unit of analysis, independently of other factors. In her review of Traboulsi's book, Majed (2015) provides two suggestions that can fully account as a meeting ground: either to analyze society by adopting the theory of intersectionality that recognizes the existence of several distinct social structures, or to study the intersection of the vertical divisions, namely sects, gender and race (i.e. identity) with the horizontal class division (Majed, 2015). Undoubtedly, there are important political, geographical, class, and gender dynamics that remain deeply unaccounted for, at the expense of sectarian explanations that focus exclusively on identity politics for studying voting behavior in developing countries.

All in all, the literature on voting behavior alone in Lebanon does not go beyond an identitarian analysis of the topic at hand. It fails to bring up class politics; even in analyses of clientelism, which is itself a facet of class politics. More strikingly, research on Lebanese elections has focused on the dynamics of clientelism from the perspective of political parties (Cammett, 2011, 2014; Cammett & Issar, 2010), party behavior and analysis of candidate profile (Atallah & Zoughaib, 2019), while very little has been said

on voter behavior and the people at the receiving end. Based on the above, it remains to be said that clientelism and sectarianism are interdependent, and the flourishing of one impacts the flourishing of the other, with clientelism reproducing the "culture of sectarianism" (Baumann, 2012). Kingston accurately points out that there exists "a broader set of factional dynamics within sectarian systems than those relating to religious communalism—the primary ones among them relating to ethnicity, kinship, and class." (Kingston, 2013, p. 23).

C. Research Question

Popular discontent among Lebanese citizens has been particularly growing in the last few years. In 2015, corruption and elite profit-making culminated in the garbage crisis, which gathered thousands of Lebanese in a united front under the framework of a promising campaign that called for better governance (Barnard, 2015). Four years later, in 2019, the country would witness its biggest revolutionary moment of the past decade, which came to be known as the October Revolution. But with the civil society movements gaining momentum following the 2015 protests and the Beirut Madinati municipal campaign, the long-awaited elections of 2018 offered high hopes for citizens whose public grievances were reaching unprecedented levels. Yet, votes reaffirmed the status quo, proving once again that the Lebanese voters keep re-electing the traditional leaders in spite of clear popular dissatisfaction. Thus, in an attempt to understand the voting behavior of the Lebanese citizens away from essentialist notions and identitarian determinants, this thesis looks into the following inquiry: **What explains voting behavior in Lebanon's 2018 parliamentary elections beyond sectarian cleavages and vote-buying?** In order to address my research question and contribute to a nuanced

understanding of voting behavior in Lebanon, I resort to both quantitative and qualitative analyses, based on raw data from the 2018 elections and in-depth interviews conducted with twenty-one eligible voters, later discussed in chapter 2 that lays out my research design.

Despite the availability of more recent electoral data from the 2022 elections, the decision to concentrate on the 2018 elections stems from contextual and logistical considerations. Initially scheduled for 2013, the 2018 elections marked Lebanon's first parliamentary elections in almost a decade of unconstitutional parliamentary extensions, which occurred in 2013, 2014, and 2017, as well as the first elections to be held following the three waves of political mobilization that took place in 2011, 2013, and 2015. Additionally, the 2018 elections hold particular significance as they marked the first instance of Lebanon's adoption of a proportional representation (PR) electoral law, as will be discussed later below. Lastly, and for logistical reasons, the fieldwork for this study was conducted between September 2019 and December 2019, making it impossible to analyze data from the 2022 elections.

Chapter 3, 4, and 5 form the main arguments of my thesis. In Chapter 3, I look into the high levels of co-ethnic voting in Beirut I and II electoral districts to advance an argument that moves beyond primordialist analyses. I argue that understanding co-ethnic voting from a political lens, rather than a primordial sectarian one, can help us make better sense of voting behavior in Lebanon’s polarized politics. Next, chapter 4 challenges arguments of the herd mentality, arguing that civil society votes, tactical voting, and the low voter turnout altogether attest to the citizen’s high level of awareness of the system in place, which in turn pushes voters to make their informed voting decisions. This chapter delves into the adoption of an “apolitical” discourse by

civil society voters to explain their voting behavior beyond the crude sectarian logic. Lastly, chapter 5 moves the analysis from a political to a sociopolitical dimension and explores the intersectional ways through which sect, kinship, class, gender, geography, and milieu, among other social factors, mutually influence and shape individual's complex identities, and thus in turn, their political behaviors.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN

For the purpose of understanding the drivers of voting behavior in Lebanon, this thesis resorted to quantitative and qualitative methods as its data collection tool. Based on raw data from the 2018 election results that includes data on division of polling stations and data on numbers of registered voters by gender and confession, the quantitative analysis provides descriptive statistics to break down voting behavior per sect in the selected electoral districts of Beirut I and Beirut II. On the other hand, qualitative work came to complement such quantitative results where semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 voters from the two selected electoral districts. While it is believed that the biggest pitfall of the in-depth interview method is the inability to generalize the findings to the larger population (Boyce & Neale, 2006; Dean, 2004; Poindexter & McCombs, 2000), the strategic choice of the case study can shed light on the micro-level mechanisms that shape voting behavior; thus complementing the macro-level analysis of the quantitative section.

A. Quantitative Analysis

Two sets of raw data on Beirut I and Beirut II electoral districts were extracted from the website of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. Given that voters who were registered in Beirut I and II districts were divided into polling stations on the basis of gender and sect/confession, this allowed for a deeper within-sect analysis of voter behavior.[7] The first set of data includes the official election results, including

[7] As per law no. 762 issued by the Minister of Interior and Municipalities on April 13, 2018

preferential votes per candidate from the registration committees in each polling station. The second set of data includes the sect and gender of the voters in each polling station (since, as mentioned above, around 90% of the polling stations in Beirut I and II electoral districts were specifically assigned to a particular sect and gender).[8] By combining the two data sets, I was able to generate the distribution of preferential votes per the voters' sect, allowing for the discerning of general trends relating to within-sect voting patterns. While the 13 remaining electoral districts fell outside the scope of the study, it is also worthy to note that (most of) the registered voters in these other 13 districts were not divided per sect and per gender inside the polling stations; hence, this data combination would not have been possible in the mentioned districts anyway. Given that I was only able to get hold of the scanned pdf format of the raw data since the ministry did not provide me with an editable version, a big chunk of the work first consisted in re-entering the data in Excel. Thus, I built my own data set from scratch by inserting the data from the two sets in one sheet, i.e. combining the data on the voters' sect and gender for each polling station with the data on the results of the preferential votes in each polling station. The graphs and plots that were generated, using the programming language R, will be discussed and analyzed in chapter 3.

B. Qualitative Analysis

The participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique, based on gatekeepers (i.e. people from the researcher's networks) who facilitated the recruitment of potential eligible participants to the research. The gatekeepers were identified in the different neighborhoods through my network of family, friends and

[8] It is relevant to note that some polling stations (less than 10%) in Beirut 1 and 2 electoral districts included voters from different sects. Some polling stations were also gender-mixed.

acquaintances. Gatekeepers informed potential participants about the study and provided them with my contact information (name and phone number) in case they were interested to participate or learn more about the study. When a potential participant got in touch with me, I introduced the research study and sought their approval to take part in the interview. The gatekeepers had no relationships of power over participants (since they are friends or family members of the participants), which guaranteed that the gatekeepers could not be able to exercise undue influence on the participants.

Between September and December of 2019, a total of twenty-one interviews were conducted in-person with participants aged between 23 and 65 years old, from diverse educational, professional, religious, class, and political backgrounds, which ensured a good level of representation. Twelve interview respondents identified as men, and nine of them as women. The sample included university students, wage-earners, and retirees. The qualitative semi-structured interviews aimed to understand the various determinants that shape citizens' voting choice from the perspective of the voter. The interview guide was divided into 7 sections. The first one looks at the profile and demographics of the voter, to help understand their profile. The second one pertains to the socioeconomic situation of the respondent in order to make sense of the effects of class on voting behavior, and to grasp how this factor affects and is affected by other factors that intersect to shape the voting choice. The third section examines the political attitudes of the respondent (which implicitly test their sectarian attitudes) by looking at their opinion and involvement in the Lebanese political life. The fourth section looks at the respondent's opinions on key social issues, such as feminism and gender equality, LGBTQ+, and secularism, in order to understand how the espousal of liberal ideas

would intersect with other factors to shape the voting choice. The fifth section explores the regional and familial aspects that affect the choice of the vote, including family pressure. The sixth section scrutinizes the clientelistic networks of the respondent, and how they retort to clientelism and sectarian-based clientelism, in order to understand the overlap of these two factors and the way they affect the voting choice. The interview wraps up with some concluding questions and asks interlocutors if they would like to share who they voted for in the 2018 elections. The interviews were semi-structured since such flexibility sets the path for the detection of information, tendency or behavior that had not been necessarily thought of by the researcher (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, p. 291). I presented the interview respondents with a consent form for them to read and sign prior to the start of the interview. The consent form clearly states the purpose of the study and how the data will be used. Interviews were audiotaped and each lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. They were conducted in Arabic and were later transcribed and translated into English. All recordings were immediately destroyed after transcription so as no data would link the interviewees to their responses. I imported all the interview data on Nvivo software and re-read all transcriptions, took notes, and made annotations to immerse myself in the interlocutors' thoughts and capture the full picture, as well as to preclude fixation and researcher bias. Exploring the interview transcripts prior to getting started with the coding scheme helped me distinguish and collect many potential common themes among the different transcripts. I also created a memo whereby I would store all my thoughts, reflections, and specific ideas that I'd like to come back to. This memo became like my research journal and helped me organize and expand my stream of thoughts as well as discern and record specific patterns worth investigating. I then entered all the social characteristics of the

participants (and their relevant values) on Nvivo, namely gender, sect, age, education, social class, profession, but also close-ended questions on topics that touched upon social attitudes/opinions on feminism, LGBTQI+, and religiosity, among others. Next, I started coding themes as they emerged, by selecting words or sentences that record specific concepts and ideas. In this regard, Nvivo was especially helpful in finding, analyzing, and recording insights in the unstructured and open-ended textual data, in a systematic and efficient manner. Then, common themes were identified and codes were sorted into meaningful categories based on linkages, while some codes were also organized into parent-child relationships to denote codes within codes. I ran text search queries and matrix coding queries to cross-examine the data and identify relationships and patterns or quantify specific topics and ideas that emerged; which were then used to create models and visualize the data. Nvivo software allowed me to exhaust my interview data in order to try to capture all the different complexities as well as uncover insightful patterns in the interlocutors' voting behavior. The names of the interview respondents have been omitted to ensure anonymity and full confidentiality.

C. Limitations

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the limitations of my research. Indeed, aspects of the personal identity of the researcher, such as age, gender and sect, do not go unnoticed in field research (Wax, 1979, p. 509). As a young female researcher conducting interviews with people from different sectarian and social backgrounds, I am aware that my profile might somehow have affected people's attitudes and responses to my interview questions. While this limitation cannot be addressed completely, restraining its effects was achieved by maintaining an informed and assertive attitude as a

researcher and being able to spot and analyze the interviewee's responses with intuition. On another note, while in-depth interviews are more suitable methods than surveys or focus groups when it comes to digging for truthful answers, social desirability bias will always be an aspect of any such fieldwork. Here, my role as the interviewer was crucial in breaking the ice, making the respondent feel secure, and building a relationship of trust with him/her in order to guarantee reliable answers. Additionally, one potential limitation of this study is the retrospective nature of the interviews, which were conducted a year and a half after the elections. While this temporal gap may have introduced bias as participants reflected on their voting behavior in hindsight, an interesting dynamic emerged and helped mitigate this limitation. Indeed, the interviews coincided with the October 2019 protests that drew over a million citizens to the streets to demand social and economic justice. This unique context provided an opportunity for participants to deeply reflect on their voting attitudes and political stances. It also fostered a climate of introspection and critical self-assessment, potentially enhancing the depth of insights into their voting behavior. Lastly, it goes without saying that voting behavior can be shaped by various social, economic, political and cultural interrelated factors, and that no single study can exhaustively account for every conceivable factor, especially given time and resource limitations. By combining gender, sectarian, political, and class dynamics (among others) through a mixed-method approach, I aim to build on interrelated factors to portray a nuanced understanding of voting behavior that goes beyond the logics of identity politics.

CHAPTER III

BEYOND CO-ETHNICITY: ON THE AMBIGUITIES OF MEASURING SECTARIAN VOTING ATTITUDES THROUGH CO-ETHNIC VOTES

Studies of electoral, political, and voting behavior in the Middle East emphasize religion and ascriptive identities as the main variables that sways voters, while evidence from other academic experts indicates that more important considerations in relation to political and economic interests affect voters' behavior (Cammett, Kruszewska, & Atallah, 2018). Given the recurrent use and abuse of sectarian frames in studies focused on Lebanon and the region more generally, greater complexities are supplanted by the ubiquitously ever-present "sectarianism" in all aspects of political and social life, including in studies of voting behavior through the prevalence of the notion of within-sect voting (also referred to here as co-ethnic voting). **But how can high levels of co-ethnic voting in Lebanon be understood beyond purely ascriptive identities? Moreover, how can one make sense of the discrepancies between high rates and low(er) rates of co-ethnic voting in some instances?** This chapter will attempt to answer these two questions, by going beyond co-ethnicity as a purely sectarian voting attitude. First, this chapter begins by situating studies of voting behavior in the Arab world within a generally Orientalist framework, characterized by what I perceive to be a primordialist understanding of co-ethnic voting. It also locates this thinking in voting behavior scholarship that looks at the region from the lens of "exceptionalism". Second, the chapter moves on to problematize co-ethnic voting and delineate the deeply-flawed interchangeability of co-ethnic/within-sect voting and sectarian voting. Third, it goes on to explore within-sect voting trends in Beirut I and Beirut II electoral districts in the

2018 parliamentary elections, with a focus on Armenian Orthodox and Shia voters in Beirut I and II districts. I chose to look at the Armenian Orthodox voters in Beirut I since, firstly, they represent the largest sect-based community in that electoral district (29% of registered voters in Beirut I) and since they exhibited the highest rate of co-ethnic voting in that district (with an overwhelming 71.53% of Armenian Orthodox voters who chose to cast their preferential vote to an Armenian Orthodox candidate). On another note, I chose to look at the Shia voters in Beirut II because there were many interesting observations at first glance: firstly, Shia voters in Beirut II recorded the highest turnout rate by confession in that district (which stood at 46%). Secondly, Shia voters registered the second-highest rate of within-sect voting at 86%, which came very close to the highest rate of within-sect voting recorded among Sunnis at 89%. Thirdly, Shia votes were overwhelmingly (specifically, 87% of them) concentrated in one list, which enables us to explore high levels of within-sect voting with the added layer of party politics. Moreover, I have added a small additional analysis on Shia voters in Beirut I district. Although they make up around 2% of the registered voters in that district and are not represented by a parliamentary seat in it, an interesting pattern was observed among Shia voters. More than half of them gave their preferential votes to one particular sect (that is, the Greek Catholic), shedding light on nuanced voting behaviors that warrant further examination. These case studies would underscore the potential for deeper understanding of both intra- and inter-ethnic voting dynamics beyond ascriptive arguments.

A. Primordialist Approach in Voting Behavior Studies: Reductionist Analyses of Co-Ethnicity

Today, studies of party politics and voting behavior remain largely overlooked in the Arab world (Cavatorta, 2020), and the paucity of such studies finds its roots in yet another form of Orientalist thinking that often features the notion of 'exceptionalism' attributed to the region (Cavatorta, 2020). Within this understanding of exceptionality, politics in the Arab world is deemed "'incomparable' with the theoretical tools that are used in comparative politics" (Cavatorta, 2020, p. 217), as it is characterized with uptaking unique paths and upholding much different shapes that are unlike any other place in the world.[9] This is likewise deemed true when it comes to voting behavior during elections. The latter is clearly illustrated through the claim that voting decision in this very part of the world is either ideological or instrumental (Cavatorta, 2020, p. 219). The former attribute refers to voting decisions on the basis of unthinking commitments to a party while the latter denotes a decision based on clientelist motives. The paradigm of exceptionality also features arguments of the "herd mentality" whereby Lebanese voters are considered "brainwashed" people who blindly follow their sectarian leaders (Majed, 2020a, p. 549). Academia aside, you would often come across this reasoning of the herd mentality in any typical conversation about political life in Lebanon. For many Lebanese citizens, "sheep" seems to be the ultimate explanation that justifies voting behavior; an argument often evoked with a sense of demean. I recall recently coming across a meme on social media of a flock of sheep sitting in a minivan,

[9] Cavatorta (2020) goes on to explain that while each case study might be somehow unique in a way, one would be mistaken to take this uniqueness to another level (that of exceptionality), which would lead to the loss of comparability. On the contrary, he advocates for the adoption of the same set of theoretical and methodological tools in comparative politics to study the Middle East, all the while looking at the specificities and peculiarities of the social, political, and cultural phenomena characterizing the region (Cavatorta, 2020, p. 218).

with a caption in Arabic that read: “When they take you out to vote”. These notions tend to flourish especially during elections.

Cavatorta (2020) argues that such forms of essentialism always find their way into social science research in the Arab world, but he deems this exceptional character to be quite misplaced:

> “Studies of political parties and voting behaviour across the Arab world represent quite well how the notion of exceptionalism has filtered down to the broader community of scholars of the Arab world, relegating unfairly a number of topics on the margins of the literature based on the assumption that ‘things in the Arab world work differently.’ The specific contention of most of my recent collaborative work on political parties and voting behaviour is that in reality, many things in the Arab world tend to work in very similar ways as in the rest of the world and that explanations tend to converge on similar factors.”

Other forms of Orientalist thinking also find their way in the general understanding of conflict and politics in the region. In his 2016 State of the Union Address, former U.S. President Barack Obama shared his contentious outlook on turmoil and war in the Middle East. In his own words, Obama signaled:

> “The Middle East is going through a transformation that will play out for a generation, rooted in conflicts that date back millennia.” (Adam, 2016).

Time and again, such ahistorical comments from US politicians - but also from well-informed Middle East ‘experts’ such as The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, and, to a lesser extent, from scholars within academia - have served to promulgate a certain rhetoric about a bewitched Middle East as well as inform policy circles how to perceive, approach, and treat conflict in the region.[10] Nonetheless, such

[10] In an opinion article around the Yemen war published by the New York Times, Thomas Friedman proclaims that “the main issue is the 7th century struggle over who is the rightful heir to the Prophet Muhammad — Shiites or Sunnis.” (Friedman, 2015). Also, see Hashemi and Postel (2017) for a more

essentialist and culturalist discourses have likewise emerged from within the region, and here comes to mind the infamous war on sectarianism declared by former Lebanese President Emile Lahoud when he first ascended to power. These self-serving falsehoods feed into the discourse of an "exceptional" and "deeply divided" region on the basis of vertical (identity-based) sectarian divisions, a depiction that has prevalently marked the literature on Lebanon. Indeed, looking at conflict as inherently religious/sectarian heavily impacts conflict resolution strategies (Majed, 2020a, p. 540) as well as policy prescriptions, and such a misdiagnosis can be traced back to academic circles. The Department of War Studies at King's College London, for instance, boasts a Master of Arts program on "Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies" that "compares case studies from the Middle East" to "offer a multidisciplinary, comparative study of national, ethnic and religious conflicts in deeply divided societies." ("Study at King's," n.d.). Interestingly, the webpage advertising the program evokes solely identity-based conflicts and has no mention of conflicts arising from political, economic, or class divisions. In this regard, Majed (2020b) warns about the dangerous implications of such an all-pervasive categorization of "deeply divided societies" that shapes policymaking and constitution writing and gives way to "special" typologies of governance, namely the sectarian power-sharing system in Lebanon.[11] She supplants the shortsighted paradigm with the idea of "deeply polarized politics"; a more precise depiction that effectively captures political polarizations in the country (ibid.). All in all, notions like "deeply divided societies", theories referring to the "ancient hatreds" myth, and specifically engineered types of governance like the consociational system, are some of

detailed review of the essentialist US discourse on conflict in the Middle East, ranging from academic circles to policy analysts and congressman/women.

[11] Nagle (2020) evokes "the zombification of power-sharing" to discuss the nature of consociationalism, which has become dead but remains dominant (Nagle, 2020).

the concepts that have pervasively governed the way politics is understood in the region within mainstream media, policy circles, and academic textbooks. In short, and in relation to the context of this topic, much of the studies on sectarianism in the region have been sectarianized.

In the social science literature, such discussions would fall within one of the three main ethno-nationalist schools of thought that have long dominated academic discussions on ethnicity and identity politics: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism.[12] While the primordialist approach to ethnicity (hereby, at times, used interchangeably with 'sectarianism') and conflict in the region, which carries ideas around the fixed nature of identities, has fallen out of favor after being shot down by critical interpretations introduced by constructivist and instrumentalist theories, this approach continues to infiltrate other domains of scholarship on the Arab region, namely voting behavior.[13] By now, studies of sectarianism in the Arab world have markedly asserted a more accurate understanding of sectarian identities beyond the perception of sectarianism as religion or religious hatred. However, in studies of voting behavior, one cannot but notice a persistently present "primordialist" analysis as to how people behave during elections, particularly in sectarianized contexts, such as the falsely-dubbed "deeply divided" society in Lebanon.

According to Chandra (2013), whenever political and social scientists hypothesize or theorize about the link between ethnicity and voting behavior, they

[12] For a deeper dive into the three ethno-religious schools of thought, see Morten Valbjorn's "Beyond the beyond(s): On the (many) third way(s) beyond primordialism and instrumentalism in the study of sectarianism" (Valbjørn, 2020).

[13] Muchlinski and Siroky (2016) argue that the extreme primordialist approach has been completely dismissed in academia, but it is still a credited viewpoint in journalistic media and newspaper articles (Muchlinski & Siroky, 2016, p. 17).

almost always presume that the ethnic identities that characterize communities and people are “singular, timeless and fixed for all time” (Chandra, 2013, p. 3). She goes on to say that “the very characterization of ethnic diversity as a “problem” rests on this assumption” (ibid., p.3). Indeed, primordialist assumptions of electoral politics and voting behavior advanced by Horowitz (2000) consider co-ethnic voting as a phenomenon that emerges in societies whereby ethnicity is politically salient. According to Horowitz, voting becomes “similar to a census, as electoral results depend primarily on ethnic demography” (Kiss, 2019, p. 133).

As part of a research project conducted by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies on the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections, a series of infographics visually portraying general voting attitudes and trends on a national level was published. One of the infographics displays the percentage of voters who cast preferential votes to candidates of the same confession. The numbers are, indeed, unsurprisingly high: The infographic, titled “votes for co-sectarian candidates”, reports that “[a]bout 78% of voters cast their preferential vote for a candidate of the same confession”, from which the report concludes that there’s a predominance of sectarian attitude in Lebanese voting behavior. Similarly, another study identified an attitude as “sectarian” by calculating the rate of within-sect voting (Cammett et al., 2018). Here, my main concern is definitional and lies in what we define as a ‘sectarian voting behavior’. In fact, one possible pitfall in measuring a sectarian voting attitude solely by looking at the rate of co-ethnic voting is that we are basically equating sectarian voting to co-ethnic voting. Nonetheless, co-ethnic voting in and of itself cannot be inherently indicative of a sectarian voting behavior, especially not in a country where political sectarianism is already institutionalized. When we equate sectarian voting to co-ethnic/within-sect

voting, we are considering sect as the unit of analysis that justifies sectarian voting behavior. This groupist logic assumes that sects are culturally homogeneous groups based on religion. This "conceptual and methodological trap" (Majed, 2020a, p. 543) in the study around sectarianism, which assumes sects as separate groups, is what Majed (2020a) labels as "neo-primordialism". Sects cannot constitute the explanatory variable when we study and measure sectarian attitudes (Majed, 2020a, p. 544). Rather, they are themselves a social phenomenon that need to be studied and explained (Brubaker, 2004; Farsoun, 1988; Majed, 2020a). There is never one simple independent variable that can explain social dynamics, and therefore, "understanding sectarianism requires a multidimensional (and multidisciplinary) approach" (Majed, 2020a, p. 550). This brings me directly to my second point. Such arguments claiming homogeneity fail to acknowledge the different layers of gender, class, cultural, political, and familial dynamics, which effectively highlight the complex heterogeneity of this presumed group formation. Perceiving such identity groups, such as the sect of the voter, as the (main) unit of analysis to measure sectarian voting indeed blurs other important factors such as intra-sectarian differences in terms of class, politics, and culture, as well as inter-sectarian solidarity based on political positions, class interests, or culture (Majed, 2020a) that are likely interacting with the sect of the voter to explain sectarian attitudes. The structure of the Lebanese system is also precisely the reason why such a measurement of sectarian attitudes is deemed inaccurate, not to forget that seats are already pre-determined on a confessional basis. Moreover, this adoption of same-sect voting as an indicator of sectarian behavior fails to account, for instance, to same-sect voting to non-sectarian party candidates running on independent or civil society lists. For instance, results from the LCPS study also revealed that around two thirds of

citizens who cast ballots to the civil society coalition lists 'Kulluna Watani' gave their preferential vote to a co-ethnic (El Kak, 2019, p. 5). But measuring sectarianism through co-ethnic voting in non-sectarian party lists remains open to debate, since citizens who voted for the anti-establishment civil society coalition have clearly and explicitly opted for a non-sectarian party list contesting the status quo, which might push us to re-evaluate a sectarian labeling of their voting behavior. But in that case then, how can we understand within-sect voting? In order to spell this out in a clearer manner, we need to ask ourselves how we understand, define, and measure sectarianism, and what we mean by co-ethnic/within-sect voting. Thus, my first concern in the following section is definitional.

B. Against the Elision of Religious and Sectarian Identities: An Analytical Distinction

Part of the problem of conflating religious identities with political/partisan ones stems from the fact that analyses of Lebanese politics normally associate the main political parties in the country to particular religious groups, given that the majority of a party's supporters usually correspond to that same religious community (Cammett, 2014). For instance, Hezbollah and Shia are, more often than not, almost always used in an interchangeable manner as two similar categories. Similarly, the Future Movement is almost always associated with the Sunni community. Cammett (2014) has herself previously warned about the recurrent conflation between religious and partisan identities in Lebanon, each of which constitutes a distinctive form of identity (Cammett, 2014). Looking at the percentage of in-group partisans for each of the three main sects in Lebanon (being Sunni, Shia, and Christian), the general trend does point out to a

correlation between partisan and religious identity.[14] However, Cammett (2014) sheds light on this "partial mismatch" (ibid.,p.123) between religious and partisan identities, given that not all citizens support the traditional political parties, whether they were co-religionists of that party or otherwise (ibid.). Analytically, this partial mismatch is the mixing between sectarian religious belonging with sectarian political attitude, which I attempt to unpack in this section. While these two levels can overlap, as we will see later on, they are very different from an analytical lens, and not being attuned to this can lead to wrong analyses. Following Majed (2020a), I consider sectarian identities to be distinct from religiosity. Religious identities simply reflect the practice of piety, religious observance, and religious beliefs and practices, while sectarian identities are rather interpreted as the politicized manifestation of innate religious identities (Majed, 2020a, p. 541), otherwise also defined as sectarianism. On one hand, we cannot entirely dissociate sectarianism from religion since the process of sectarianizing/politicizing such identities cannot occur if these religious identities do not exist in the first place. On the other hand, it would be short-sighted to completely reduce sectarianism to religion (Majed, 2020b). The sectarian is linked to the religious as a political identity and it uses religion to manifest such sectarian attitude, but the sectarian is not equivalent to the religious. Being mindful of this nuance also helps to eschew primordialist notions of age-old religious hatreds, often brought up when thinking about sectarianism as religion (Makdisi, 2008, p. 559). But how should we think of sectarianism, and more importantly, how should we seek to measure it? In looking at the sectarian phenomenon, Makdisi (2008), from his end, urges academics not to focus on the

[14] The study reveals an 83.3% of the Sunni community to be associated with the Future Movement, an 82.6% of Christians to be associated with Christian parties, a 63.1% of the Shia community to be associated with Hezbollah, and a 31.6% of the Shia to be associated with the Amal Movement (Cammett, 2014, p. 123).

religious aspect of sectarianism that feeds into "distorted and historically untenable comparisons" (Makdisi, 2008, p. 559), but instead, to bring politics to the fore of the discussion "in order to think of sectarianism as what it is: politics organized along sectarian lines" (Makdisi, 2008, p. 559). Joseph (2008) likewise agrees on the need to shift the focus away from the religious towards the political and draws a nuanced analysis of how to study the sectarian question:

> "We must learn how to think "sectarianism" while thinking of all that it is not, how to deploy categories of analysis while asserting their instability, how to capture the materiality of the moment while historicizing it, and how to grasp the power of religion while demystifying it." (Joseph, 2008, p. 554).

But in the absence of definitional boundaries for the term sectarianism, Haddad (2017) argues that this fluidity allows for the term to be used haphazardly to anything that is sect-related (Haddad, 2017). When it comes to analyses of voting behavior, 'co-ethnic' or 'co-sectarian' also carry the same intricate definitional fluidity that can sometimes lead to distinct layers of conflation in the framing, which then leads up to wrong analyses. In the spirit of Makdisi (2008) and Joseph (2008)'s calls to shift the focus from religion to politics in studies of sectarianism, we unpack this conceptual distinction.

1. Co-ethnic/Within-sect Vs. Co-sectarian

First, and before debunking this layer of conflation between co-ethnic/within-sect voting and sectarian voting, it remains imperative to distinguish between ethnicity and sect. In theory, sectarianism falls within the broader political literature on ethnicity and the latter may denote any form of identity manifestation (be it race, ethnicity, religion, sect, or tribe). However, in the Lebanese context, sect refers to religion (such

as Shia, Sunni, Christians, or Druze, among others) while ethnicity refers to ancestral origins (Armenian, Arab, Phoenician). Nonetheless, the terms 'sectarian' and 'ethnic' are used interchangeably in most scholarly work on sectarianism in Lebanon (Cammett & Issar, 2010; Corstange, 2013; Marshall & Paler, 2021; Nagle, 2018; Paler, Marshall, & Atallah, 2020). It is relevant to point out here that political cleavages in Lebanon are understood in terms of sect (Cammett & Issar, 2010, p. 1), while ethnicity is not politically salient in the country. Following the literature and in light of the Lebanese context dominated by sect-related cleavages (rather than ethnic ones), I will use the two terms "within-sect" and "co-ethnic" interchangeably in this chapter, while attempting to highlight the ethnic identity, in terms of ancestral origins, when/if needed.

More often than not, academic scholars unintendedly feed into the sectarianizing discourse, and the interchangeable use of co-ethnic/within-sect voting and sectarian voting is a striking case in point. In studies of voting behavior, the term co-sectarian has been recurrently used to refer to the term co-ethnic (Corstange, 2016, 2018; Paler et al., 2020), also sometimes referred to as within-sect or co-religionist (Cammett, 2014). But the understanding of co-ethnic voting as a sectarian attitude is a sectarianizing tool per se, given that it encourages individuals to analyze sectarian politics in terms of religion instead of party politics. Following this logic, and to echo abovementioned calls in the literature that eschew religious explanations and stress the political, this study considers co-ethnic voting as simply referring to the votes cast to a candidate who shares the same sect as the voter's, while it depicts a sectarian voting attitude as a vote cast to the traditional sectarian parties, broadly speaking, regardless of whether it is a co-ethnic vote. By traditional sectarian parties, we refer to the parties that operate on a sectarian logic, promote sectarian rhetoric, and/or make commitments targeting specific sectarian

communities.[15] Such parties are widely recognized as part of the March 8 and March 14 alliances that dominate the arena of party politics in Lebanon's post-2005 era. But then, how would one analyze the co-ethnic votes to non-sectarian party lists, if not in sectarian terms? The following section attempts to address this matter.

2. Political Sphere Vs. Sectarian Sphere

Building on the distinction between social sectarianism and political sectarianism evoked in the previous chapter, I wish to further elaborate on this social relevance in an attempt to understand how it affects voting behavior and our analysis of co-ethnic voting beyond sectarian assumptions. Fearon (2008) postulates that "ethnicity is socially relevant when people notice and condition their actions on ethnic distinctions in everyday life. Ethnicity is politicized when political coalitions are organized along ethnic lines, or when access to political or economic benefits depends on ethnicity" (Fearon, 2008, p. 2). He goes on to argue that while these ethnic identities can be socially relevant without being politically salient, the reverse does not hold true (Fearon 2008). This same argument applies to religious identities in Lebanon. And having established in the previous section that religious identities are politicized in the Lebanese context, this indicates that they are relevant both socially and politically, which automatically blurs the lines between the political and social spheres. Here, it is relevant to point out that a socially relevant religious identity is not the same as religiosity. One's attitudes or behaviors can be based on the religion they belong to - or more accurately, the religion that's been imposed on them since birth - without being much of a pious person.

[15] Paler, Marshall & Atallah (2020) make a similar distinction between support for ethnic politics versus support for cross-ethnic programmatic politics.

And when trying to interpret the attitude of voters who cast a ballot to a co-religionist from a non-sectarian party list, a discussion around the social relevance of sectarianism can be pertinent. Indeed, it is by looking into the everyday experiences and practices of people that we can start understanding how attitudes are shaped. Again, this is not to draw a clear-cut line between the social and political relevance of sectarianism; indeed, the latter cannot hold as the two spheres are entangled. Therefore, and owing to the fact that there isn't a clear-cut division between the "social", "sectarian", and "political" spheres in Lebanon, we cannot draw a clear-cut distinction between sectarian, religious, and political voting attitudes. This distinction will remain vaguely nebulous, as the two are closely interconnected and interdependent. In chapter 5, I will delve deeper into the social relevance of sectarianism and its impact on voting behavior. As for the following sections, the analysis will focus on the two electoral districts that were taken as case study for the purposes of this research study: Beirut I and Beirut II districts.

C. Beyond Ascriptive Identities: The Overshadowed 'Political' Factor

1. The Case of Shia Voters in Beirut I Electoral District

In Beirut I district, candidates competed for 11 seats out of the 128 parliament seats, with the following confessional representation: Three Armenian Orthodox, one Armenian Catholic, one Greek Catholic, one Maronite, one Greek Orthodox, and one minority Christians. In contrast to other districts, Beirut I is not dominated by a specific group in terms of sect/confession and displays a high rate of confessional heterogeneity, with the following confessional representation: The Armenian Orthodox community stands at 29% of registered voters in Beirut I, followed by the Greek Orthodox at 18%,

Maronite and Christian minority groups at 13% each, Sunni and Greek Catholic at 10% each, Armenian Catholic at 5%, and Shia at 2% (Dagher, 2021a, p. 4). The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities reported that Beirut I registered the lowest turnout rate of 33% (MoIM, 2018). Below, I take a closer look at the breakdown of votes per sect in Beirut I district.

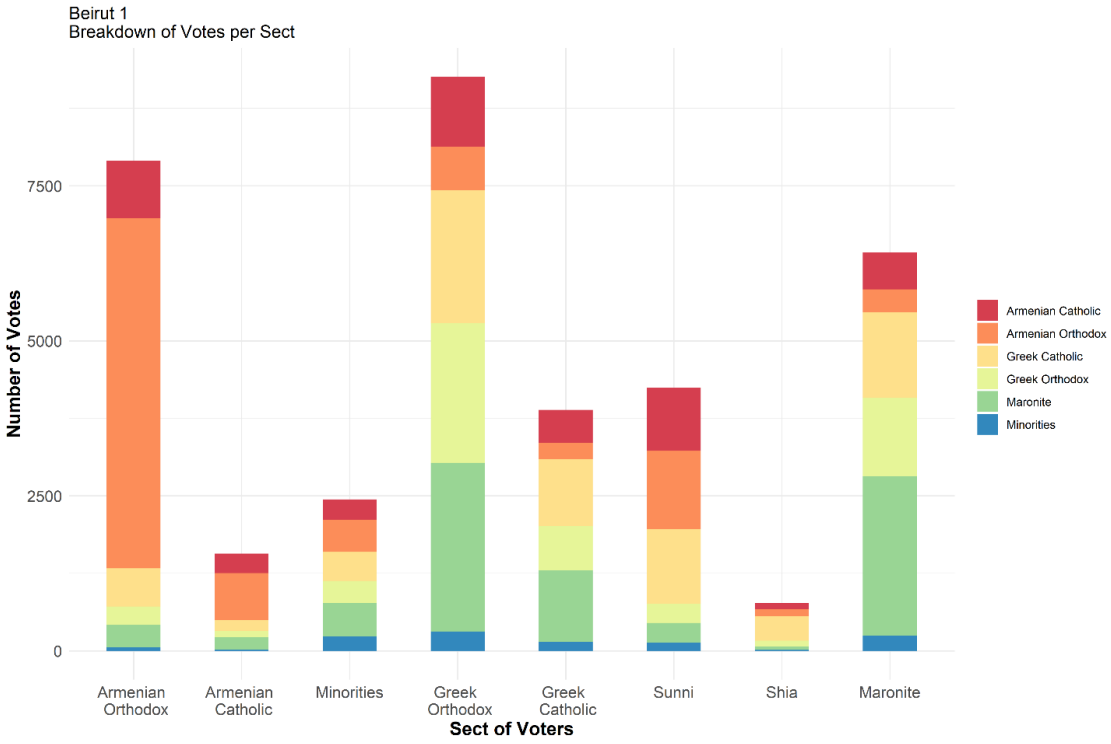

Figure 1. Breakdown of Preferential Votes per Sect in Beirut I Electoral District.

The results in Figure 1 display a high rate of co-ethnic voting among the Armenian Orthodox sect, but there does not seem to be an apparent high-rate of co-ethnic voting among the other Christian sects. In fact, Beirut I district registered the lowest percentage of votes cast to co-ethnic candidates among all 15 districts (Dagher, 2021a). This could be due to the fact that the Christian community is not characterized by intra-sectarian political homogeneity (in contrast to the cases of the Shia and

Armenian communities that I will discuss below). Indeed, in post-2005, the main political parties that claim to represent the Christian community in Lebanon have been politically split between the March 8 and March 14 camps, and such an intra-sectarian political division automatically eliminates the intersection between the political fault-line and the sectarian cleavage (Majed 2020b). This, once again, denotes the importance of political dynamics, even more so than sects and religions, in understanding voting attitudes. Such political factors also help to explain the high rates (in some cases) of inter-ethnic voting. In the below, I take a look at the Shia voters in Beirut I district.

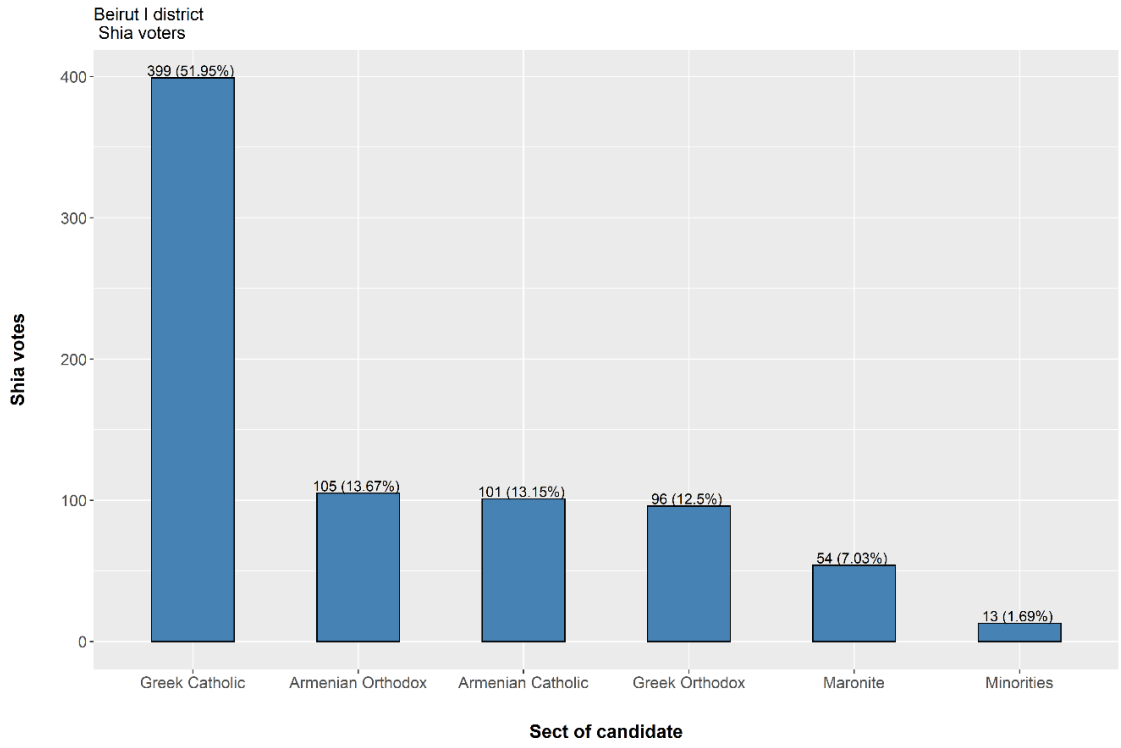

Figure 2. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes per Sect in Beirut I Electoral District.

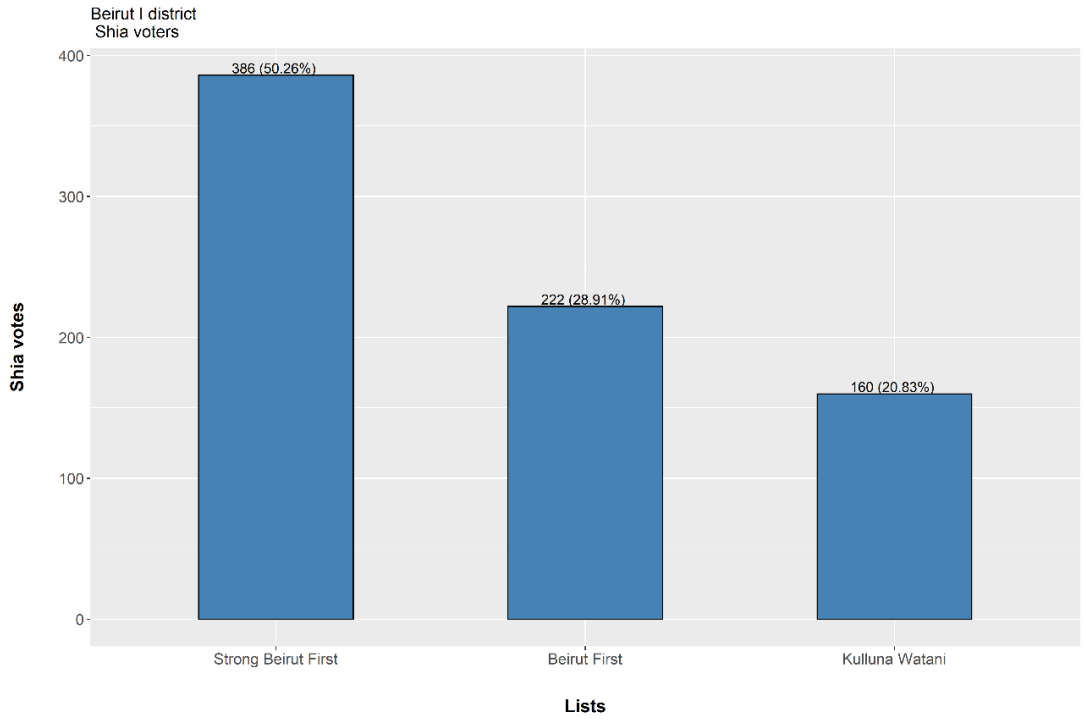

Figure 3. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes per Party/List in Beirut I Electoral District.

Examining Figure 2 above reveals an intriguing finding: 52% of Shia voters (equivalent to 399 votes) gave their preferential vote to a Greek Catholic candidate. Figure 3 further delves into the breakdown of the Shia preferential votes per party/list in Beirut I district, showing that half of the Shia voters in Beirut I chose to support the 'Strong Beirut' list, formed by FPM and Tashnag, hinting at clear political dynamics at hand. But in order to accurately establish a correlation between the high rates of Shia votes to Greek Catholic candidates and to the 'Strong Beirut' list in Beirut I, I broke down the Shia preferential votes per Greek Catholic candidates in that district in Figure 4.

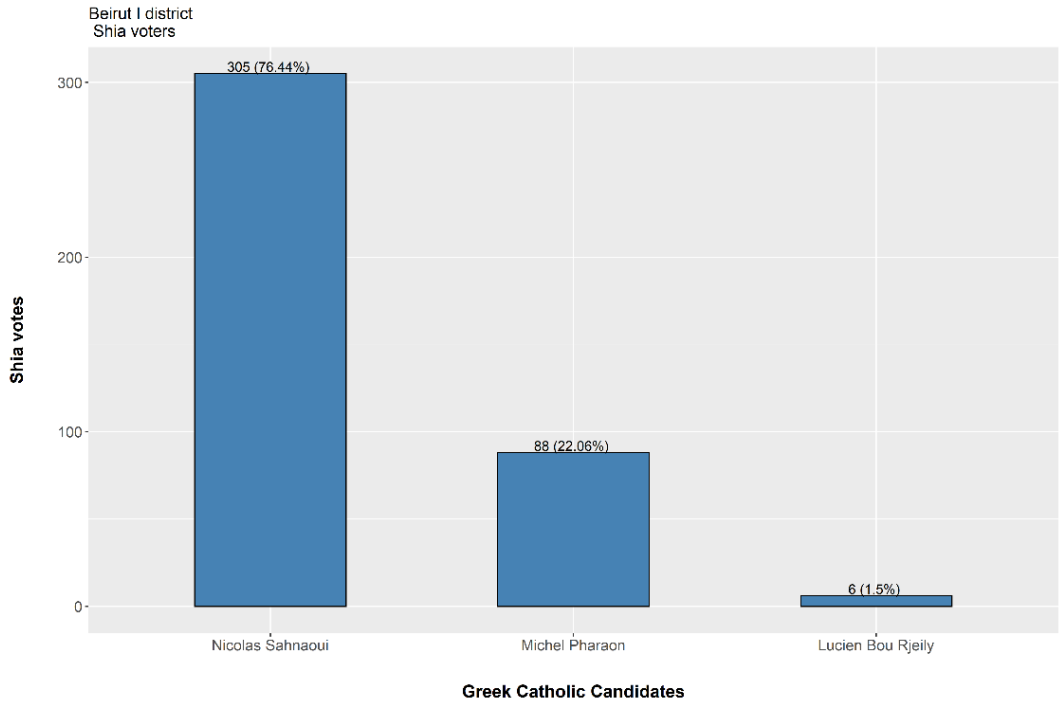

Figure 4. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes per Greek Catholic Candidate in the Beirut I Electoral District.

The latter indeed lays down an interesting finding: three Greek Catholic candidates ran in Beirut I electoral district: Nicolas Sehnaoui (who ran with FPM-Tashnag on the 'Strong Beirut' list), Michel Pharaon (who ran with LF-Kataeb on the 'Beirut First'), and Lucien Bou Rjeily (who ran with the civil society coalition 'Kulluna Watani'). Nicolas Sehnaoui, who won the Greek Catholic seat, received a significant share of the Shia votes. In fact, a total of 77% (305 out of 399 votes) of the Shia voters who cast a ballot to a Greek Catholic candidate specifically supported Nicolas Sehnaoui, an FPM member. Here, the political alignment between the Christian-based FPM and the Shia-based Hezbollah and Amal parties helps explain this voting trend of Shia voters in Beirut I and sheds light on the importance of examining political dynamics to understand voting patterns.

2. The Case of Shia Voters in Beirut II Electoral District

In Beirut II district, candidates competed over 11 seats, divided as follows: Six Sunni, two Shia, one Druze, one Greek Orthodox, and one Protestant. Similar to Beirut I, Beirut II also manifested a high degree of confessional heterogeneity: Sunni were the largest sect with 63% of registered voters, Shia stood at 20%, Greek Orthodox represented 5% of registered voters, Maronite and Christian minorities represent 3% each, and the remaining 5% goes to Druze, Catholics, Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Jewish, and Alawite voters (Dagher, 2021b). The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities reported that Beirut II district recorded the second-lowest turnout of 41% (MoIM, 2018), after Beirut I district. Below, I take a closer look at the voting results per sect in Beirut II.

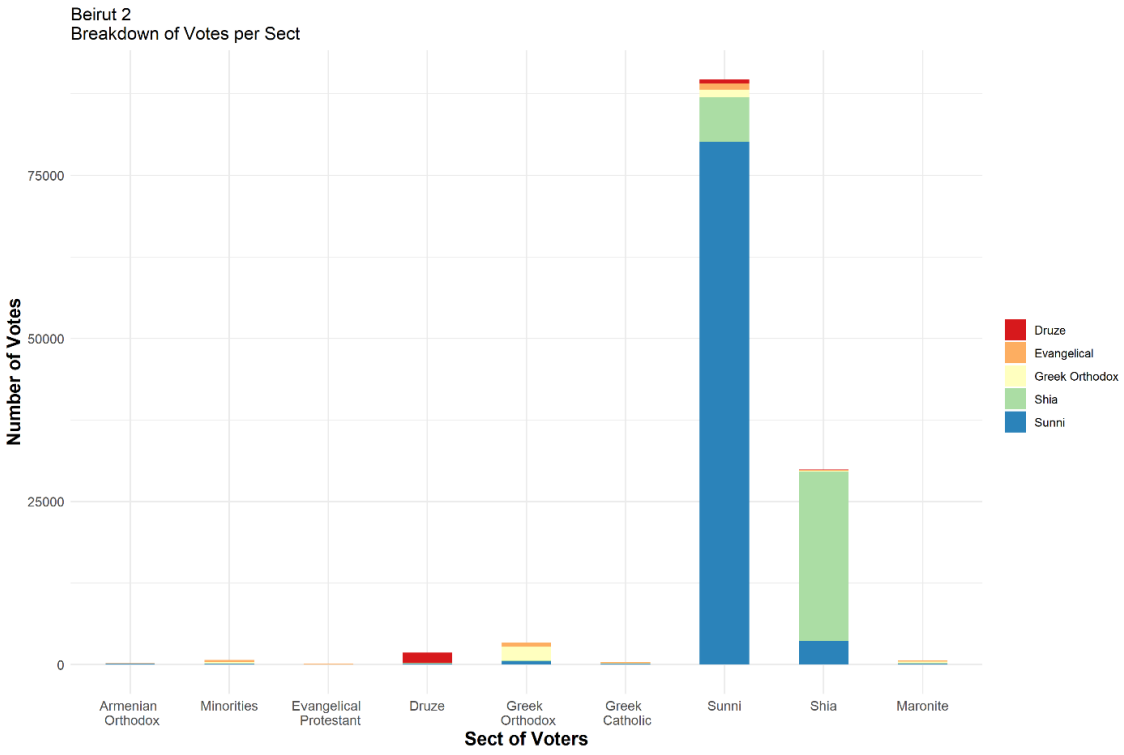

Figure 5. Breakdown of Preferential Votes per Sect in Beirut II Electoral District.

Looking at Figure 5, the graph above shows that a total of 87% (or 26,135) of Shia voters in Beirut II gave their preferential vote to a Shia candidate. This high rate of co-ethnic voting forms the tip of the iceberg that might mislead analysts into directly jumping to conclusions and dismissing this pattern as a sectarian attitude, and generalizing on the assumption that people vote solely based on ascriptive identities. In order to dig deeper into the high co-ethnic voting of Shia in Beirut II district, I took a closer look at the data.

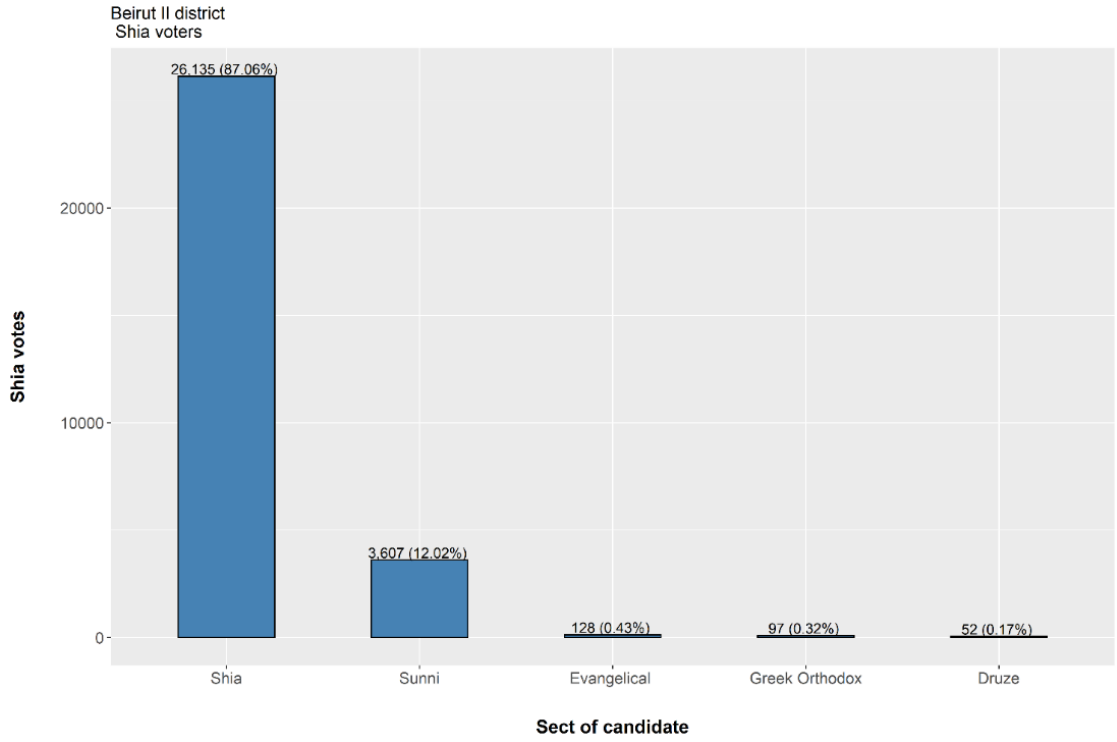

Figure 6. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes per Sect in Beirut II Electoral District.

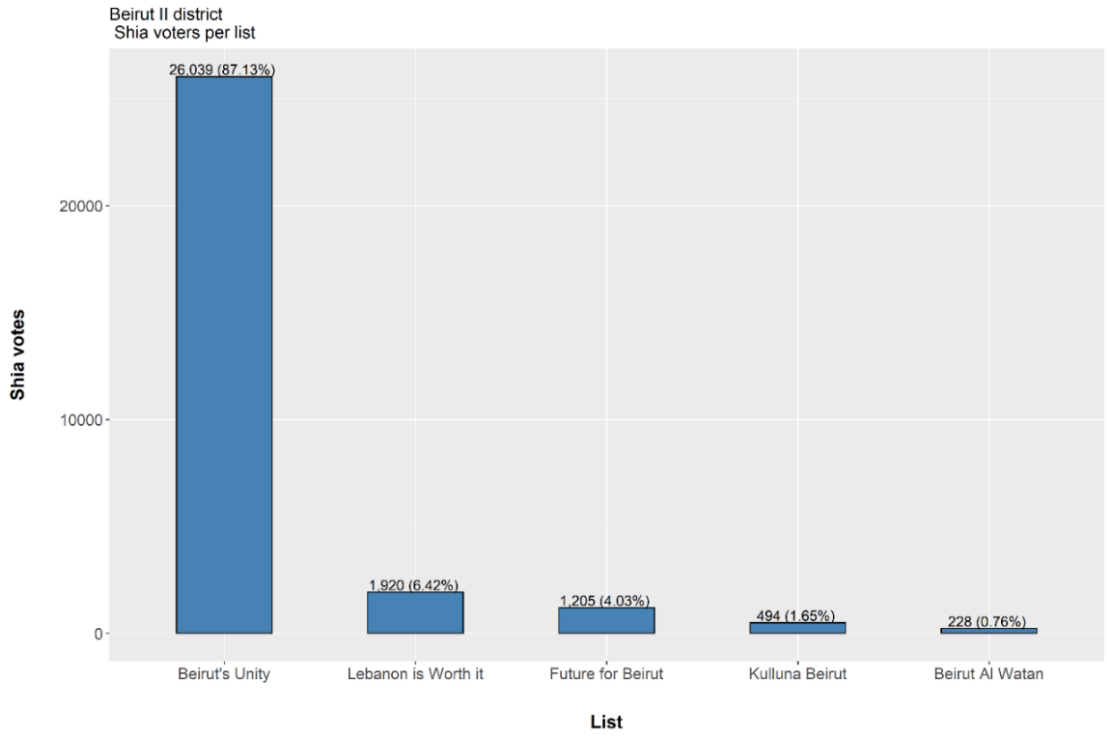

Figure 7. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes per Party/List in Beirut II Electoral District.

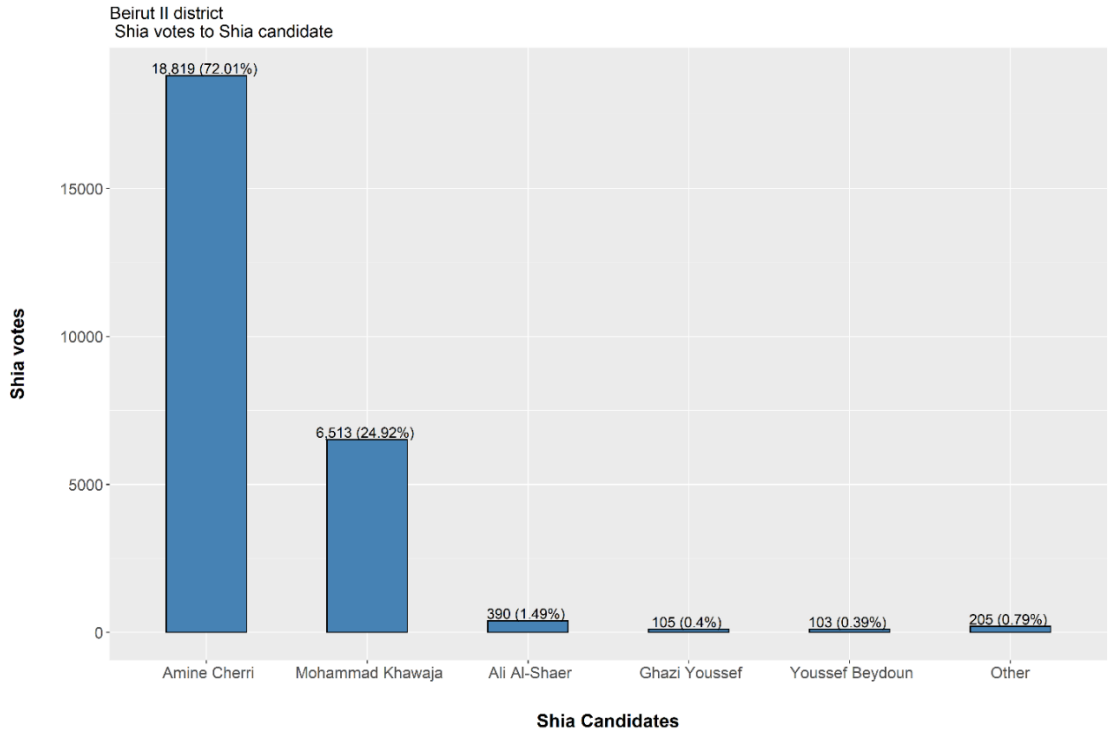

Figure 8. Breakdown of the Shia Preferential Votes to Shia Candidates in Beirut II Electoral District.

The 3 figures above lay down a nuanced complexity. Indeed, while most Shia voters did cast a ballot to a Shia candidate in Beirut II district (as per Figures 5 and 6), a whopping 87% of them voted to the list "Beirut's Unity", according to Figure 7. Moreover, what is peculiarly noteworthy in Figure 8 is that among all 13 Shia candidates who were running on 9 different lists in the Beirut II electoral district, almost all of the within-sect (Shia-Shia) votes (i.e. 97% or 25,332) were cast to the two candidates who were running in the "Beirut's Unity" list, the joint list set up by the Shiite duo Hezbollah and Amal and their Christian-based ally FPM. Had the within-sect votes been dispersed among the 9 lists and the dozen Shia candidates who ran in Beirut II, this could have suggested an attitude of within-sect voting on the basis of social sectarianism. However, the concentration of votes on this one specific list clearly suggests that sectarian cleavages alone do not explain the high rate of within-sect voting among Shia in Beirut II. Co-ethnic voting, in turn, cannot be automatically construed as a sectarian voting attitude on the basis of ascriptive identities, given that Shia voters who gave their preferential votes to a candidate of the same sect did so out of political motivations rather than (just) sectarian drives.

3. The Case of Armenian Orthodox voters in Beirut I electoral district

Looking back at Figure 1, and as mentioned above in section 4.1, an interesting case in point is the high rates of co-ethnicity that were recorded for the Armenian Orthodox voters in Beirut I electoral district. Below, I break it down in a clear manner by looking at the Armenian Orthodox preferential votes per sect.

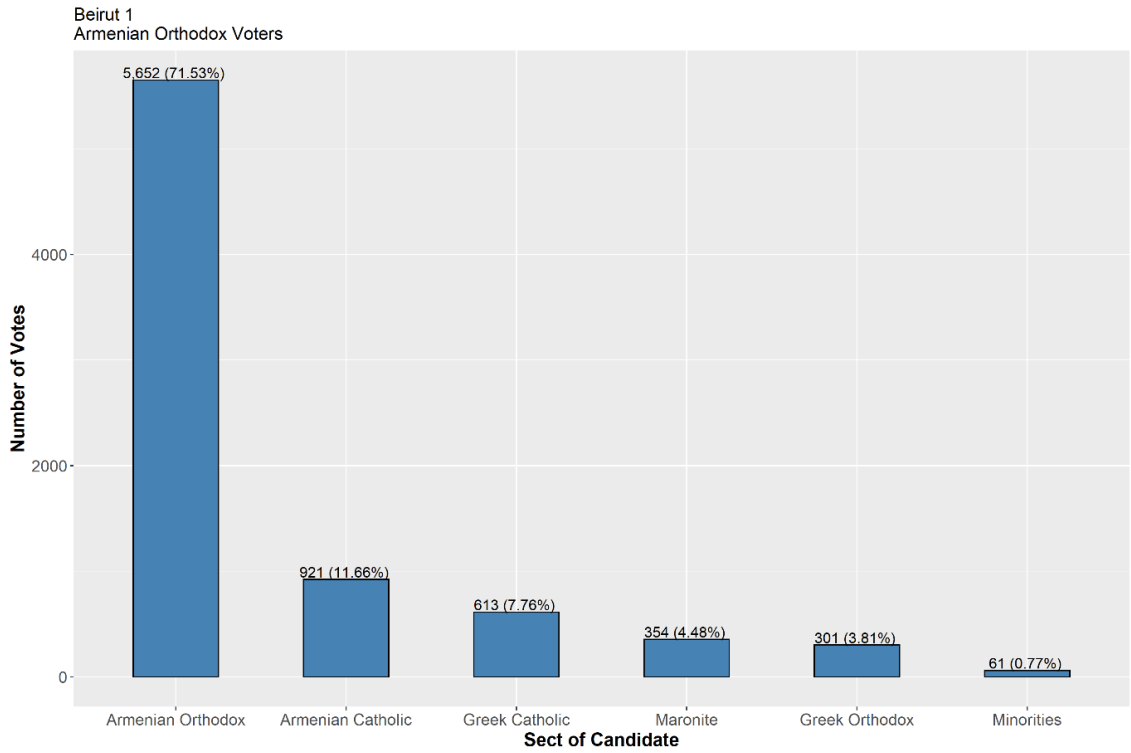

Figure 9. Breakdown of Armenian Orthodox Preferential Votes per Sect in Beirut I Electoral District.

Figure 9 shows that 71.5% of Armenian Orthodox voters gave their preferential vote to an Armenian Orthodox candidate, suggesting a sectarian pattern in voting behavior based on religious belonging. In Figures 10 and 11 below, I broke down the co-ethnic votes cast by Armenian Orthodox voters in Beirut I per party/list and per candidate consecutively.

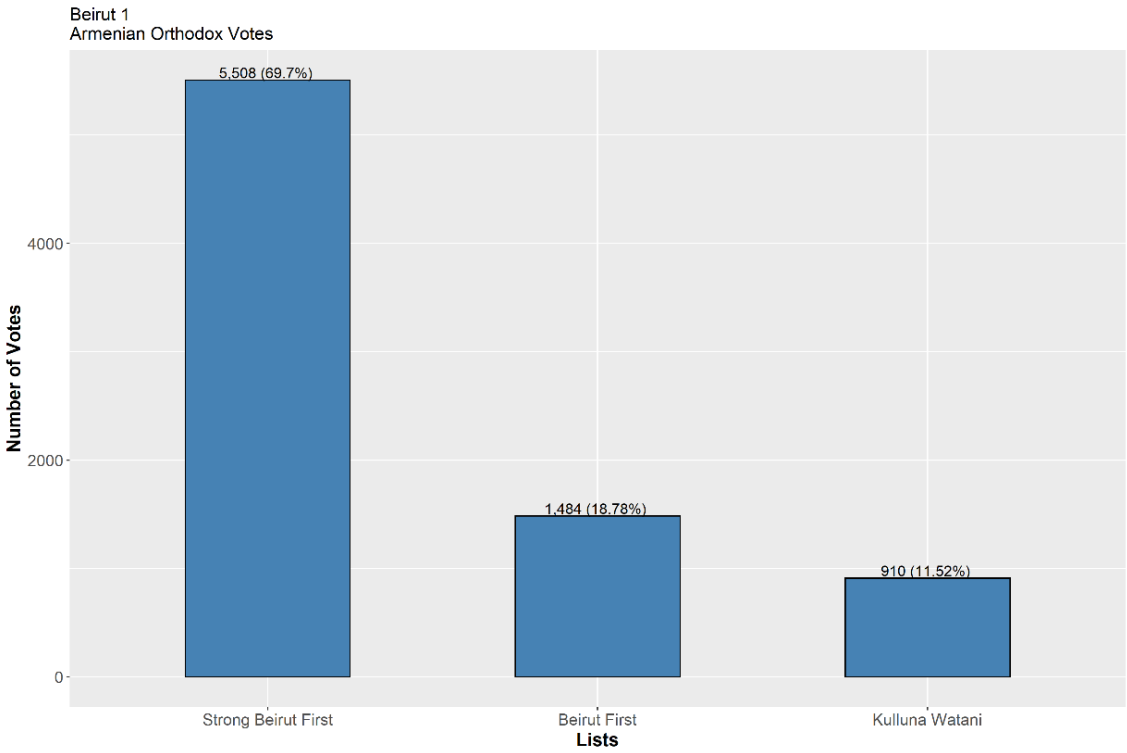

Figure 10. Breakdown of Armenian Orthodox Preferential Votes per Party/List in Beirut I Electoral District.

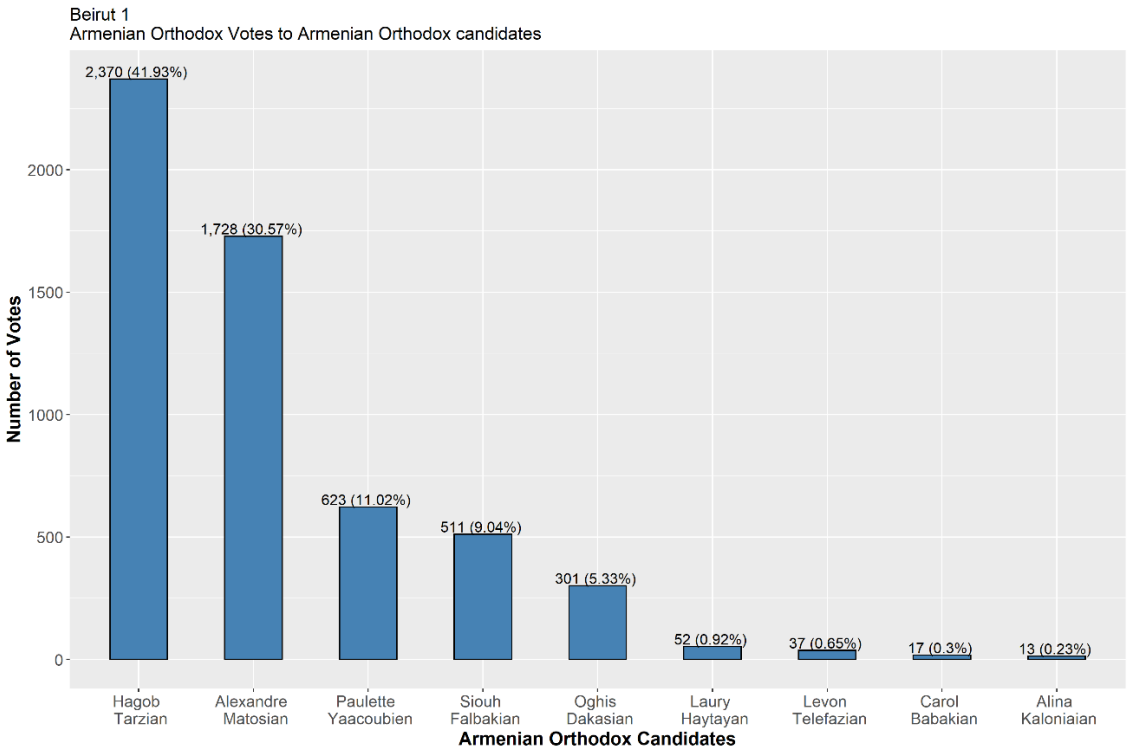

Figure 11. Breakdown of Armenian Orthodox Votes to Armenian Orthodox Candidates in Beirut I Electoral District.

As per Figure 10, we observed that close to 70% of co-ethnic votes within the Armenian Orthodox sect went specifically to the FPM-backed list “Strong Beirut First”, which has been a close ally of the Armenian-based Tashnag party ever since the formation of the March 8 alliance in 2005. Furthermore, according to Figure 11, slightly more than 70% of the within-sect votes among the Armenian Orthodox sect was cast to the two candidates Hagob Tarzian and Alexandre Matosian, both of whom are official members of Tashnag party and both of whom were running on the ‘Strong Beirut First’ list. Once more, co-ethnic voting within the Armenian Orthodox sect is not dispersed among the 9 different same-sect candidates and were rather concentrated on the ones who ran on with the list officially supported by the Armenian-based Tashnag party.

This reinforces the argument presented with the case of Shia voters in Beirut II, which highlights the importance of political dynamics in accurately understanding voting behavior. Stressing the overshadowed political factor also serves to shed light on the pitfalls of mixing sectarian political attitude with sectarian religious belonging by measuring sectarian attitudes solely through looking at co-ethnic votes. To solely rely on the rate of co-ethnic voting to measure sectarian voting attitudes is to basically perceive sectarian groups as homogeneous entities formed on the basis of religions, irrespective of all the different layers of class, gender, sexuality, and even political views that overlap and shape the voting choice. Acknowledging the political factor in voting behavior studies also reinforces recent efforts in the wider literature aimed at highlighting the importance of political dynamics and local political actors, rather than merely sects, in shaping the political behavior of citizens (Majed 2020b).

While we have established that political dynamics are clearly relevant in understanding co-ethnic voting, here comes the tricky part in this analysis. The intricacy

to examine this pattern lies in the apparent overlap between the political and the sectarian dimensions, which occurs in cases of intra-sectarian political unity (Majed, 2020c). Indeed, in post-2005 Lebanon, the two main Shia-based political parties (that is, the Shiite duo) have been aligned on the same side of the political spectrum, which blurred the lines between the sectarian and the political. The same applies for the traditional party "Tashnag", which has been the most prominent (and only) political party representing the Armenian community in Lebanon among the traditional sectarian parties. Thus, the Armenian community as a whole has been on the same side of the political divide, as it has been politically aligned with March 8 for almost 15 years. In such instances of within-sect unity, whereby one sect-based community is united in one political bloc – or whereby "the boundaries of the political fault-line overlap with a sectarian cleavage" (Majed, 2020c, p. 3) - we witness high-rates of co-ethnic voting due to increasing sectarian overturns. As accurately framed by Majed:

"In other words, when the main political parties representing a certain sectarian community are all on the same side of the main political divide (or when a community is represented by one hegemonic sectarian party), sectarian and political boundaries become easily interchangeable." (Majed, 2020c, p. 3).

D. Conclusion

The approach of measuring sectarian voting attitudes through co-ethnicity entails some deep flaws. This chapter argued that it is in fact political polarization, rather than sect-based identity, that forms political salience in Lebanon. I underscored the ambiguities of measuring sectarian voting behavior through co-ethnic votes, which emanates from the problem of perceiving sectarian groups as homogeneous entities. I

explored ways to properly understand, define, and measure sectarianism, by focusing on the aspect of defining and differentiating between several concepts: Firstly, co-ethnic/within-sect voting versus sectarian voting; secondly, the political/partisan identities versus the religious identities; thirdly, ethnicity versus sect; and lastly, the political sphere versus the social sphere. I then turned to the oft-overlooked political factor to explain the high rates of co-ethnic voting in some instances, and the lower rates in others. By breaking down the votes by sect, by party/list, and by candidate, I untangle the co-ethnic vote, stressing on the lines that have been blurred, at times, between the sectarian and the political dimensions.

In this chapter, I argued that co-ethnic voting in Lebanon goes beyond ascriptive identities and entails an important underlying political factor. This political dimension first helped to better explain why, in some instances, we witnessed lesser rates of co-ethnic voting, as displayed throughout this chapter in the case the Christian communities in Beirut I, in light of intra-sectarian political polarization. Second, the political factor also shed light on why, in other instances, we observed high rates of inter-ethnic voting, as seen with the Shia voters in Beirut I who tended to favor the FPM-backed Greek Catholic candidate Nicolas Sehnaoui, as a result of a clear political alignment. Lastly, by exploring the political factor, I debunked sectarian assumptions around high rates of co-ethnic voting and went beyond ascriptive identities, as portrayed by the case of the high rate of co-ethnic voting among Shia voters in Beirut II as a result of the intra-sectarian political unity among the Shia community. Like sectarianism, sectarian voting attitudes can better be understood when measured by political parties, rather than sects. By this logic, the sectarian political parties, rather than sects, are considered to be the unit of analysis. Shifting the focus away from sects and onto

political actors represents the first of many steps to de-sectarianize studies of voting behavior. In the following chapter, we further unpack the political factor by looking at the civil society votes.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING THE CIVIL SOCIETY VOTES: IS THE POLITICAL BEING BURIED ALIVE?

Kauffman (2001) writes that the ubiquitous salience of the politics of identity has led to "an unprecedented politicization of previously nonpolitical terrains" (Kauffman, 2001, p. 23). This might refer to religion, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and other socio-cultural aspects. He warns, however, about the 'anti-politics of identity' (Kauffman, 2001, p. 23) that draws towards an apolitical understanding of politics. This chapter enquires into this apolitical aspect in the context of the 2018 parliamentary elections in Lebanon. In light of deep disaffection with Lebanon's ruling political elites and exacerbating wealth inequalities in the country over the past decades, social mobilization had been on the rise and independent and civil society activists had a growing sense of belief that such mobilization would materialize at the ballot box (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021) – albeit, a quite misplaced optimism it turned out to be. A plethora of research has analyzed the reasons behind civil society's failure to gain momentum in the 2018 elections, evoking the robustness of the system and the organizational challenges they faced (Arnous, 2018; Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021; El Kak, 2019). In this chapter, I examine the people's perception of civil society in the 2018 elections in an attempt to grasp how citizens who opted for the civil society made their voting decisions at the time. Building on the results of my in-depth interviews conducted with 21 eligible voters in Beirut I and II, as well as on an extensive review of the literature, I argue that the 'political' factor is being buried alive in the context of an all-out rejection of politics and political parties (in their sectarian forms) by the anti-

establishment voters (as well as by those who abstained). This depoliticization of oppositional politics has led to a liberal political climate in individual voting behavior, manifested by culturalist arguments of the herd mentality and individualization of accountability, that proved to be very much present and alive in the rationale of the citizens' voting behavior. In looking at civil society votes, tactical voting, and voter apathy, I find that all of these phenomena were exhibited by voters who did not believe in the power of the civil society to change the system in place. Here, I argue that contrary to arguments of the herd mentality, Lebanese voters exhibited a high level of awareness of the system in place and made their informed voting decisions accordingly. Lastly, I challenge this binary of civil society and sectarian politics, arguing that the former has served to empower and legitimize the latter through an accommodating discourse. I conclude by reflecting on the need to repoliticize spaces of resistance and relocating oppositional politics in the heart of the political, where it should belong.

A. Brief overview of the Lebanese civil society

In the early postwar era, the country witnessed a substantial growth of the civil society sector, at a rate of around 250 associations per year (Kingston, 2013, p. 55), while Islah Jad (2004) reported that the Arab world alone comprised of more than 70,000 NGOs in the 1990s. But the development of civil society in Lebanon and the Arab world at the end of the twentieth century was not merely a regional phenomenon and was completely in tune with the global rise of advocacy groups and NGOs that increased dramatically since 1980 in all parts of the world (Chandhoke, 2001; Harvey, 2007, p. 177), with the onset of the neoliberal turn. Thus, the proliferation of civil society organizations in postwar Lebanon fell well within the lines of state retrenchment

and the bourgeoning of unruly capitalism, and the CSOs stepped in to fill the gap left by a weak state, providing modest (sectarian-based) services to citizens (Kingston, 2013, p. 58). Sectarian elites were already resorting to different tactics to infiltrate, tame and neutralize the civil society sector as well as use it to reproduce sectarian subjects. The postwar political ruling elites went ahead and appropriated some of these associations, strengthening their clientelist grip and thus "deepen[ing] the political economy of neoliberalism upholding the sectarian system" (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015, p. 54). This, in addition to its dependence on aid agencies, served, from the beginning, to erode the civil society sector's prospects of emerging as an agent of disruption of the neoliberal sectarian system. But civil society was nonetheless gaining foothold among disgruntled Lebanese citizens, as a result of decades of disastrous economic policies and the sectarian political system in place, with waves of political mobilizations erupting in 2011, 2013, and 2015, and 2019 (Karam & Majed, 2022, p. 77). In the following section, I analyze the civil society votes based on results from the in-depth interviews that I conducted with eligible voters in Beirut I and II districts in the fall of 2019. The interview process coincided with the October 2019 protests that drew over a million Lebanese citizens to the streets to demand social and economic justice.

B. Unpacking the 'Apolitical'

Out of the 21 interlocutors that I interviewed, 9 opted to vote for one of the civil society lists, 7 chose to support the establishment parties, and 5 abstained from casting a vote in the elections. The main determinants of the vote were clustered under the following five major common themes: 1) the voter's apolitical stance, 2) familiarity

with the party or candidate, 3) the party/candidate's community engagement, 4) ideology, and 5) tactical voting. One compelling observation from the interview results is that the main determinant behind the voting choice of respondents who cast a vote to the civil society was in relation to the 'apolitical'. In fact, 7 out of the 9 interlocutors who cast a ballot to the civil society evoked the "apolitical" aspect as being the driving factor of their voting choice. When asked about why they voted for the civil society coalition in the 2018 elections, these were some of the answers of my respondents:

> "Because they don't have any political affiliation." (Interview 3).

> "There is no way I would be convinced by a candidate who is running with one of the political parties. So I supported one of the independents, not sure if he was part of the civil society." (Interview 15).

> "I voted for civil society. All my family did. We are all apolitical." (Interview 20).

One of my respondents who did not cast a vote in the 2018 elections similarly attacked the 'political' aspect of politics in Lebanon:

> "If all people unite and put the political parties aside, we could make a change. But the problem is that the majority of people are political." (Interview 5).

Here, it is pertinent to clarify what is meant by terms like "political" and "apolitical". For the Lebanese layperson, when one is labeled as "political" (which, in Arabic, was referred to by my interlocutors as "مسيّس") or "politically affiliated", it is meant that they support one of the establishment parties. Emanating from this logic, stating that you are apolitical denotes a rejection of the patronage-based and sectarian-based traditional political parties (Hodeib, n.d.). But this discrepancy goes beyond mere

semantics and reflects upon a broader discourse of the interchangeability between the political and the sectarian that has resulted in a complete rejection of politics altogether.

Another common theme that was mentioned by my interlocutors was the familiarity of the party/candidate. But interestingly enough, while voters who cast a ballot to the establishment parties brought up the familiarity with the party/candidate as an important determinant to their voting choice, respondents who cast a vote to the civil society evoked, conversely, the lack of familiarity with the party or candidate as a driver of voting behavior. In fact, two of my respondents who voted for the civil society actively sought to look for unfamiliar candidates to whom they would cast their vote:

> "As a rule, in the 2018 elections, I had a veto on any candidate I previously knew or who was previously in politics." (Interview 15).

> "I voted for the independents because I don't believe in politics at all. […] I wanted fresh blood and people who have never been involved in politics before. I wanted someone who was not political." (Interview 10).

Another interlocutor similarly evoked the importance of having "new people" in Lebanon's political scene:

> "Before 2018, I never cared for politics and I never voted either at university or for parliamentary elections. But during the last elections I realized that there are many things going wrong in this country so I did my research and I felt like I should vote to new people. So this was my main thinking process: new people, new blood." (Interview 12).

Another one of my interlocutors who voted for the civil society likewise related to this aspect of a lack of popularity as a determinant swaying their voting behavior:

> "If I learn that a candidate is politically affiliated, I directly cross them off in my mind. […] The more popular they are, the higher likelihood that they are corrupt; and the less popular they are, the more I feel like I want to give this candidate a chance. (Interview 19).

When asked about why the popularity factor would impact their voting decision, one of my interlocutors simply replied with “it means they’re still new to politics and more likely to have good ethics”. This brings to mind Nour Hodeib’s article that discusses the impact of sectarian politics on Lebanon’s cultural scene, the author argues that culture is almost always framed “as a category devoid of any political significance” (Hodeib, n.d.). He goes on to explain how, in the post-war era, many artists sought an impartial and non-political ground to express themselves, their art, and their work, in an attempt to present culture as a unifying facet, unlike the divisive aspect of “dirty politics” (Hodeib, n.d.). Similarly, this act of suspending and neutralizing the political transcends the cultural realm and has sharply infiltrated the sphere of civil society and oppositional politics in general. Following Hariri’s assassination in 2005 and the subsequent polarization of Lebanon’s political scene into the two camps of March 8 and March 14, the only way to articulate one’s opposition to traditional politics in Lebanon was to oppose politics altogether, since the political had intrinsically become synonymous to the sectarian. Nonetheless, it remains to be said that this all-out rejection of politics and political parties in their sectarian form, by the civil society voters, is itself a political act par excellence.

Hermez has likewise examined this trend, reporting that one frequently hears in Lebanon statements like “we don’t want politics anymore” and complaints about “being fed up with politics” (Hermez, 2015, p. 507). According to Majed (2021), citizens - but especially the youth – have learned to rebuff party politics and eschew political organization and leadership in all its shapes and forms. She recently dubbed this phenomenon the “anti-politics approach” as she explained:

> "A new generation had grown to perceive party politics as bad, and to distance itself from political organization or leadership aspirations. For most people, being patriotic and honest meant staying away from politics."

Mona Harb extensively elaborates on the different ways through which NGOs, public officials, the main sectarian political groups, and the private sector have depoliticized youth in Lebanon (Harb, 2021). The depoliticization of youth was likewise observed in my interviews, as most respondents who expressed apolitical attitudes were in the 18-30 age group. This depoliticization of youth has been manifested in their rejection of anything that relates to the political, as being political in the slightest would strip away one's legitimacy and invalidate their stance since they would be engaging in dirty politics.

C. Culturalist Accusations and the Individualization of Accountability

A critical body of literature has sharply criticized the role of NGOs in advancing neoliberal ideas and neo-colonial and orientalist beliefs of Western superiority (Nagel & Staeheli, 2015, p. 226). This gives rise to culturalist arguments that stress Lebanese backwardness and inferiority on one hand and glorification and admiration of all things West on the other hand (Saghir, 2017), which was depicted in one of my respondents' thoughts:

> "I am not active in politics in Lebanon. I don't even listen to the news. But I follow French news sometimes. Politics in France is more interesting." (Interview 21).

This Orientalist mode of thought exhibits the "internalization of inferiority", a term famously coined by Frantz Fanon in his book "Black Skins, White Masks" (Saghir, 2017). This was also very much palpable in the answers of many of my interview

respondents who evoked arguments along the lines of the herd mentality and placed blame on citizens for reproducing the status quo. The following are excerpts from my interviews that were brought up by some respondents:

> "The people are puppets. C'est des marionettes qu'on tire du bout du nez *(Translation: They are string puppets)*. They don't deserve a good country." (Interview 21).
>
> "The root of the problem in this country is its people. The people are corrupt. We need to be governed by a dictatorship or by a military regime because there is no other way to deal with the stubbornness of the Lebanese citizen." (Interview 14).
>
> "The people are still subjects and not citizens. When people become loyal to the state and not to the political party, they start acting like citizens. Otherwise, they are still subjects. Including myself. We are controlled by someone or something." (Interview 17).
>
> "Most people who vote are ignorant." (Interview 19).

When my respondents expressed such beliefs that characterize voters as puppets, ignorant, or corrupt, I tried to follow up on these thoughts and probed further to encourage them to elaborate on their perspectives. Here, one of my interlocutors replied:

> "People have been reelecting the same corrupt political leaders for 30 years now. This is why I don't see much hope in this country." (Interview 19).
>
> "Look at the thawra today. Every Lebanese is protesting all parties except for the political party that they support. The problem is that we don't learn from our mistakes. When you keep repeating the same mistake, you are clearly the problem." (Interview 21).

Another noticeable theme that was mentioned by interlocutors who voted to the civil society centered around catch-words like "reforms" and "technocracy". This discourse, which presents corruption as the main problem and advances a culture of technocratic expertise (Kosmatopoulos, 2014) as the magic wand, argues for the replacement of

corrupt elites by new, skilled, and apolitical ones referred to as 'technocrats'. Two of my interlocutors pointed out:

> "I chose the civil society because I felt they are most competent to do reforms in the country, much more than anyone coming from a political party." (Interview 20).

> "I am not much into people who are political. I prefer technocrats and people who have the technical expertise related to their field." (Interview 10).

When asked what they mean by technocrats, one of my interlocutors replied:

> "Someone who is independent, isn't affiliated with any of the political parties, and is competent in their field of work." (Interview 10).

In this particular framing of the discourse, a distinct binary emerges between the political and technocratic spheres. Here, interlocutors were not merely referring to them as separate but instead portrayed them as inherently opposed to one another. This characterization suggests that the principles guiding the political realm are fundamentally antithetical to those governing the technocratic realm. This binary of the political and the technocratic can be understood in the context of the global neoliberal turn, which steadily took its shape in Lebanon in the postwar period, and came to reinforce the proliferation of civil society organizations in Lebanon at the time. This mushrooming of NGOs – and the "NGOization of politics" to borrow from Salloukh et al. (2015, p. 53) has been a clear outcome of neoliberal practice to boost state retrenchment (Harvey, 2007, p. 177). This predicament has not been particular to the Lebanese case, but has rather fell in line with the global neoliberal turn, where NGOs operate as subjects of governmentality (Palma Carvajal, 2022) and neoliberal rationality (Harvey, 2007; Palma Carvajal, 2022), further strengthening the state's sphere of influence. Against this backdrop, the discourse of techno-politics and technical experts

flourished along with the depoliticizing discourse, thus ensuring that politics remain excluded from the sphere of discussion.

Once again, it is the country's sectarian system – which has been reproducing itself for decades – that has given rise to a phenomenon whereby disgruntled citizens tend to portray political affiliation, in and of itself, as a sign of corruption and dishonesty, since politics only exists within the boundaries of March 8 or March 14. To protest the system that seems inescapable, they consider their anti-establishment votes as non-political. But while most interlocutors who opted for the civil society lists stressed this apolitical factor as a driver of their voting choice, their vote was, however, a clear political stance against the establishment parties.

D. No trust in the Alternative: Understanding tactical voting and voter apathy

Another theme that emerged in the interviews was voters' mistrust in the civil society. Here's one of my interlocutor's response that highlights this aspect:

> "I know that civil society might not bring about any change but I deem it fair to at least give them a chance. My friends and acquaintances who are also against the political parties did not vote in the recent elections because they didn't believe that the civil society will bring any change. I think that most people still vote for traditional parties because although they know they are corrupt and incompetent, they still know them nonetheless." (Interview 1).

This brings to mind Deets and Skulte-Ouaiss' argument that "voters needed to believe that the civil society lists were going to stick around and fight for them over the long term, and there was not sufficient evidence for this" (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021, p. 25). Hermez also discusses how Lebanese citizens feel torn between opting for an alternative or keep interacting with politics as they have for decades (Hermez, 2015, p. 507), and being able to trust the alternative plays a crucial role in whether citizens

decide to step outside their comfort zone and vote differently or not. In that sense, the lack of political clarity in the statements and the anti-system rhetoric introduced by the campaigns of the independent groups laid bare an unassertive nature that could simply not convince voters that they could bring about change (Talhouk, 2018) and "deliver on campaign promises" (Arnous, 2018). In that case and in light of voters' mistrust in the civil society, many voters pragmatically resorted to tactical voting and decided to opt for what many of my interviewees implicitly referred to as "the lesser evil". By definition, tactical voting is the act of voting for a candidate in order to preclude another one from winning. This argument was brought up by some of my interviewees who opted for the traditional parties:

> "I feel like most, if not all, of them are bad politicians but there still remains some people that are less corrupt than others." (Interview 16).
>
> "My parents don't support anyone but still think that there is someone that is better than the other; although they believe that all of them are bad." (Interview 1).
>
> "Le moindre mal. It's the lesser of two evils. I criticize all parties and then I choose the one that is the least bad. […] I wanted to give my preferential vote to Paula but I couldn't do so because I would have to change the list and changing the list was risky since the 'others' had high chances of winning. Paula already didn't have a big probability of winning, voting to her was already risky. So I was forced to. I had to vote for the Lebanese Forces." (Interview 4).

This demonstrates both the ethnic security dilemma and the political security dilemma. The former exemplifies the voter's fear that everyone else is voting according to sect and so they feel a kind of pressure to vote along the same lines so that they would not be left without a protector (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021). The latter refers to tactical voting in a sense that the voter would cast a ballot to a party so that a particular party wouldn't win. Thus, in the absence of a credible alternative that would challenge the core of the system, citizens might end up choosing the lesser of two evils, a decision

that does entail a form of agency (Hermez, 2015, p. 515). Emanating from this logic, voters at the time made their own informed decisions to distrust the newcomers who were not speaking their language and opted to remain on the clientelistic and patronage system instead (Khneisser, 2019). Alternatively, in the absence of a viable alternative, voters could also opt to abstain from voting altogether. One of my interlocutors, who chose not to vote in the 2018 elections, stated:

> "I didn't vote because it wouldn't have changed anything. The big bosses would still be in power. This is how Lebanon functions." (Interview 5).

In fact, when I asked my interview respondents who did not vote in the 2018 elections about the reason for their abstention, all 5 of them said that they did not think that any list, group, party, or individual would bring about change. The fact that respondents mentioned their dissatisfaction with the ruling elites and the system in place is yet another proof that the low voter turnout of 49.2% (Arnous, 2018) reflects the disillusionment of citizens who were simply not convinced by the power of elections in overhauling the system. In this context, Lara Bitar (2018) states:

> "Slightly over 50 percent of eligible voters refused to grant legitimacy to the next parliament and to the electoral process itself. In this instance, non-cooperation and the refusal to be complicit in the state's self-preservation attempt is one of the few acts of resistance the working class could engage in without fear of vengeance by the state and its militias."

In sum, voters who believed that the elections would not change the status quo decided to protest the very core of the electoral system by abstaining from voting. This highlights, once again, two things: firstly, that voters who abstained from voting to protest the sectarian system entrenched within the electoral system made, in fact, a politically charged choice that isn't a mere act of voter apathy. Thus, through their abstention, voters signal a rejection of the status quo. Secondly, that voters are actually

aware of the structural and systemic cracks in the system. Indeed, as Majed (2017a) noted in her article published ahead of the 2018 elections:

> "This is not because voters are naive, blind followers or are unaware of the corruption of their leaders. This is rather because voters are very aware of the structure of the Lebanese system. They see that voting for a few independent candidates is unlikely to solve any problem within the current structure of the Lebanese system."

This clearly exemplifies how the Lebanese citizens feel trapped in this system. This entrapment can be evoked both in the context of the reproduction of the status quo (tactical voting), as well as voting abstention. This was very evident in the answers of my interlocutors who evoked feelings of hopelessness and alienation, but also, desires for immigration. In reflecting on this entrapment, it is clear that 'sectarian neoliberalism', to borrow from Majed (Karam & Majed, 2022), has become so deeply engrained in the political consciousness of Lebanese citizens that there is no space left in people's political imaginaries for alternative means of agency. On the other hand, the NGO-style activism focused on anti-corruption, reforms, and governance, has further contributed to the restriction of people's political space of thinking and mobilizing for an alternative by separating the secular from the political. In this context, I wish to critically tackle this binary of the civil society and the establishment in the following section.

E. Binary of Civil Society and Sectarian Politics: Is the Former Really Challenging the Latter?

The depoliticization of civil society was a tacit strategy deployed by the self-serving elites to reproduce sectarian identities in postwar Lebanon (Salloukh et al., 2015). A critical body of literature is replete with glaring examples of how the

associational sector in Lebanon has had damaging effects on activism and oppositional politics and how it had inadvertently served to reinforce, rather than challenge, state control (Clark & Salloukh, 2013; Kingston, 2013; Palma Carvajal, 2022; Salloukh et al., 2015; Wiktorowicz, 2000), and this argument has likewise been advanced in other parts of the world. In his study on NGOs' reproduction of Chilean neoliberalism and the role they play in extending the state's hegemony, Palma Carvajal (2022) demonstrates how civil society organizations use their social image to pacify demands for structural and radical changes, thus "allowing the government to govern the social sphere at a distance" (Palma Carvajal, 2022, p. 738). By doing so, governments legitimize their own political agendas through civil society, which in turn, is allowed to operate its activism, so long as that remains within the bounds outlined by the state and so long as the core of the state's authority goes unchallenged (Palma Carvajal, 2022). In Angela Davis's book "Freedom is a constant struggle", Frank Barat writes in the introduction:

> "Everyone and everything tells you that […] we live in an epoch where a revolution cannot happen anymore. Radical changes are a thing of the past. You can be an outsider, but not outside the system, and you can have political beliefs, even radical ones, but they need to stay within the bounds of the permissible, inside that bubble that has been drawn for you by the elites." (Barat in Davis, 2016, p. x).

Barat's line of argumentation resonates much in the Lebanese context, where the civil society coalition has been conditioned to discipline itself to accommodate the very system it had set out to challenge. The most glaring example of this accommodating discourse is the fact that such opposition movements took part in otherwise highly illegitimate parliamentary elections, since the electoral law designed by the ruling elites is inherently predisposed to their advantage and represents the core of the sectarian system that civil society intended to dismantle. In that sense, operating "within the

bounds of the permissible" in the context of Lebanon was exemplified by the fact that civil society candidates ran on sectarian quotas under an electoral law that is redistricted on the basis of sectarian and demographic distribution, all of which represent the very root problem of the system that they wish to challenge. Deets and Skulte-Ouaiss (2021) likewise highlight that "Beirut Madinati felt compelled to create a list that was nominally twelve Christians and twelve Muslims" (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021, p. 6) in Beirut's municipal elections. Nagle (2018) calls this instance the "hegemonic compliance" (p. 1372), when referring to non-sectarian social movements who replicate the logic of the power-sharing system. Indeed, the mere fact of taking part in such elections does not serve to disrupt the sectarian power-sharing system, but rather, in a way, adds to its legitimation. Thus, by orienting their discourse towards accommodation of the system, rather than its overhaul, the civil society diverted the attention away from structural problems towards mere reforms that do not begin to scratch the surface. By this, they ended up playing by the rules of the game. Many studies have carefully reflected on the reasons why civil society failed to garner support in the 2018 elections (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021; El Kak, 2019; Talhouk, 2018). Some have stressed that the civic parties were catering to the middle class and did not exert efforts to articulate a credible discourse that pays heed to the concerns of the lower classes (Deets & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2021), which backfired at the ballot box. Others argued that the apolitical accommodating discourse adopted by the civil society, which swayed away from taking clear and unapologetic political positions on many matters, was "effectively complicit in sidelining the most disadvantaged communities in Lebanon" (Talhouk, 2018). Looking at the municipal electoral campaign of Beirut Madinati (which translates to 'Beirut, My City') that was led by the 'alternative' and 'opposition' parties in 2016,

Khneisser (2019) contends that the campaign effectively suspended antagonistic political issues that would address structural realities and systemic inequalities in favor of an issue-centric and technical developmental discourse. She asserts that their campaign program alienated the livelihood concerns of the lower classes and focused on lifestyle and livability issues that only the middle and upper-middle classes could relate to (Khneisser, 2019, p. 8); an elitist approach that once again undermines socioeconomic realities and class struggle.

The apolitical discourse adopted by anti-establishment voters is a clear outcome of the depoliticized space of oppositional politics, which has served to turn people's political imaginaries into dystopic visions. Here, it remains crucial to begin by expanding our political imaginaries beyond what is merely permissible by the state. It begins by re-politicizing spaces of resistance that have been plagued by an NGOised approach to oppositional politics and conceiving a renewed sense of the political. This entails acknowledging that tangible political change will only transpire when collective action starts operating in the realm of the political. Along these lines, challenging the confines of our imagination is also about breaking free from a capitalist conception of the world and envisioning a world beyond the liberal hegemony (Green, 2020).[16] Likewise, it begins by acknowledging that the sine qua non of building radical movements lies in our political imaginaries, and only such movements will be capable of effectively challenging the system.

[16] Here, see Wendy Brown (2015) on how neoliberalism undermines people's political imaginaries and their capacity to conceive an alternative.

F. Conclusion

In analyzing the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with eligible voters in Beirut I and II districts in the 2018 elections, coupled with a broad review of the literature on civil society and electoral politics, this chapter begins by examining this apolitical discourse advanced by interlocutors who evoked their admiration for unfamiliar and apolitical candidates. I argue that the 'political' was buried very much alive by anti-establishment voters who voiced their rejection of all things politics – yet very clearly and politically opposed this sectarian form of politics by voting for the anti-establishment civil society list. I advance the same argument when looking at tactical voting and the low voter turnout, concluding that it is voters' mistrust in the civil society that led them to either abstain or support the establishment – which highlights, once again, the political, as well as debunks arguments of the herd mentality. Along these lines, I address this binary of civil society and sectarian parties, revealing that it is not so clear-cut.

In reflecting on the need to repoliticize the anti-establishment bloc, the following thought comes to mind: when we reject the political along with the sectarian, we are handing over the political space to the sectarian scene and compromising on any alternative paradigm of thinking, mobilizing, and resisting that might emerge. Reclaiming political agency will have to start by re-imagining a new civil society that is not detached and disconnected from the very people and movement that started it. Here, I wish to conclude by reflecting on this shrewd statement by anthropologist David Graeber during the Occupy movement:

> "But if the occupiers finally manage to break the 30-year stranglehold that has been placed on the human imagination, as in those first weeks after September 2008, everything will once again be on the table – and the occupiers of Wall

Street and other cities around the US will have done us the greatest favour anyone possibly can." (Graeber, 2011)

CHAPTER V

TOWARDS AN INTERSECTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF VOTING BEHAVIOR IN LEBANON: REFLECTIONS ON GENDER, CLASS, SECT, AND BEYOND

In social theory, intersectional approaches have succeeded in portraying the complex interrelatedness of different dynamics (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) – such as class, gender, ethnicity, and many other factors – and uncovering the intricacies of lived experiences among individuals and particular social groups "at neglected points of intersection" (McCall, 2005, p. 1774). In their 2016 book on intersectionality, Collins and Bilge define intersectionality as follows:

> "Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves." (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2)

Such analytical intersectional frameworks have made significant advances in different sub-fields of the social sciences, but the study of voting behavior has been mainly analyzed through single traits. In this chapter, the adoption of an intersectional analysis thus aims to fill a gap in the literature on voting behavior in Lebanon. It does so by moving beyond the study of single traits in affecting voting behavior and by taking into account how the intersection of various social markers shapes the voting choice, while bringing in the often-ignored and understudied class aspect in voting behavior, but also evoking dynamics of gender, region and geography, and sectarianism at the

affective level. By exploring the interdependence between such dynamics, the chapter attempts to gives value to the complexity of matters that come in such volatile contexts instead of trying to unify them, universalize them and define them in restricted clear-cut typologies. Another argument that this chapter tries to push for is the adoption of intersectional analyses in future studies of individual voting behavior in Lebanon. This chapter sheds light on the importance of social aspects, such as class, gender, kinship, language, age, geography, sect, milieu, and many others, whose intertwinement could more properly grasp the social and political realities that accompany such voting choices. More importantly, this chapter hopes to bring back the class structure as an important aspect that has been long forgotten in the context of social analyses of the Arab world generally, and of Lebanon more specifically. While this study cannot draw clear patterns of intersectionality of social factors in the voting behavior of citizens in the 2018 elections, I resort to the in-depth interviews conducted as part of this thesis, coupled with an extensive review of the literature, to reflect and draw on observed patterns that would be worth exploring in future research.

The first section of this chapter sheds light on the impact of kinship and family ties on individual voting behavior, evoking Suad Joseph's concept of "patriarchal connectivity" within families to showcase how it often leads them to a (forcibly) shared political identity, as exemplified by individuals who express collective family voting decisions. In this section, I introduce age and gender as important social markers that add additional layers of familial pressure to the advantage of authoritative male figures in the family. In the second section, I examine the role of clientelism and class in shaping voting behavior, highlighting how socioeconomic and labor conditions might impact an individual's susceptibility to clientelist practices. In the final section, I

explore the intertwinement of sect, class, and social status, emphasizing the ever-changing temporal and spatial aspects in shaping social sectarianism at the affective and interpersonal level. In this context, the examination of monoethnic and polyethnic milieus reveals the nuanced ways in which spatial and temporal facets interact with other social factors to perpetuate sectarian biases.

A. Kinship Pressure

In the context of Lebanon, anthropologist Suad Joseph understands patriarchy as a social structure of kinship, defining it as "the privileging of males and seniors and the mobilization of kin structures, kin morality, and kin idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and aged domination." (Joseph, 1993b, p. 468). She goes on to explore the relationship between the family and the state in Lebanon and introduces the concept of the "kin contract" to refer to formal and informal agreements of how familial allegiance is considered to take precedence over loyalty to the state (Joseph, 2011, p. 152). She evokes the enmeshment of local patriarchy and connectivity to produce what she dubs "patriarchal connectivity" (Joseph, 1993a, p. 453). By connectivity, she refers to the relative fluidity of people's boundaries in their relation with others, whereby they perceive each other as an extension of their selves. (Joseph, 1993b, p. 467). This connectivity extends into the realm of politics and voting behavior. When asked who he voted for in the 2018 elections, one of my interviewees responded:

> "Us as a family we vote for Kataeb" (Interview 7).

When asked if he thinks family can put pressure and influence voting behavior, another one of my respondents answered:

> "We all support March 14 in the family. All of us in the family vote for the least of all evils". (Interview 4).

These responses exemplify how voting choices often become a collective family affair, whereby political positioning and voting decisions are shared and shaped within the family unit. It also highlights the fluidity of intra-familial and inter-familial relationships (Joseph, 1993b) whereby the patriarchal family structure intersects with other social drivers to shape voting behavior. In fact, when asked whether they share the same political views with their family, more than half of my interlocutors acknowledged that they do, pointing out to the important role of the family in shaping voting behavior. When asked about whether they share the same political views with their families, my interlocutors' responses further illustrated this pattern:

> "I share the same opinions on politics with my family and daughters and I try to influence and help shape their opinions." (Interview 3).

> "I share the same views with family and I think that sometimes this can, to some extent, affect family members' political views and opinions especially if we are indebted towards one of our family members to vote for someone specific." (Interview 7).

> "I share the same political views with my family and I acknowledge that they can influence our ideas and views. My parents have never been involved in politics but they are both strongly opinionated and supporting the FPM. […] I have taken part in some municipal campaigns and have participated in some campaigns for FPM." (Interview 2).

> "I share the same political views with my family. I learn from them and from their experiences and we were in sync in the recent elections on who to vote for." (Interview 10).

> "I think parents can affect their kids' opinions. When I was young, my father pushed me to join the youth movement of the Tashnag." (Interview 17)

In patriarchal societies like Lebanon, this key importance assigned to the family in social and political life is illustrated by age-based and gender-based principles of hierarchy whereby male kin and elderly kin perceive other kin members as an extension to themselves. As such, the family unit acts as a conduit for political socialization, with older generations trying to pass down their political affiliations to younger members of the family. However, this intergenerational transfer of political values – or at least of voting patterns – is not a clear-cut pattern. It is rather a complex and fluid one that takes different shapes and forms as it intersects with other social variables, notably class, religion, religiosity, ethnicity, nationality, and geographical location i.e. rural vs urban, among others (Joseph, 1993a, p. 460). In the following sections of this chapter, we examine these age-based and gender-based principles of familial hierarchy through the lens of voting behavior in Lebanon.

1. Dynamics of Kinship and Age

Out of 15 interviewed persons aged between 18 and 30 years old, 13 acknowledged that they were subject to some kind of family pressure to cast a ballot to a specific party. Below are some excerpts from the testimonials of parental and/or familial pressure that interview respondents evoked:

> "I don't share the same political views with my family. They try to pressure me or sometimes to impact my voting decision and convince me but they don't get through. Some of my family members like uncles are strongly opinionated and have clear allegiances to specific parties: my uncle from my mother's side are strong supporters of Hezbollah and my uncles from my father's side are strong supporters to Future Movement. I got many phone calls to vote for specific parties from my family members." (Interview 12)

> "During 2018 elections, everybody asked me if I wanted to vote and I always said no because I never felt that anyone would make a change. But at the last minute, my family got pressured to go and vote so we voted in the end because I would have voted for them anyway if I were going to vote. The pressure was

> imposed on us by our cousins who are affiliated with the Future Movement and we feel like we kind of owe it to our cousins. I feel like family members can put pressure on others in the family to cast a vote for someone." (Interview 16).
>
> "I argue a lot with my parents when it comes to politics. We had a huge argument at home during elections and we fought. I wanted to vote to Paula Yaacoubian but my dad is a huge supporter of Kataeb and he has always pressured me to support them since I was young." (Interview 15)
>
> "My father knew one of the candidates who were running in the elections in our district and he asked me and my siblings to vote for him, so we did." (Interview 19)

The above showcases that age-based familial hierarchy – i.e. male kin and elderly kin – plays a role in affecting and shaping voting behavior of younger members of the family. This patriarchal family structure, which places older male kin as the authority figures and decision makers of their families, significantly impacts the voting behavior of younger kin members. As such, young voters are often made to feel a sense of duty towards their male elderly family members, such as that they owe it to them to vote for a particular party to preserve the family's political allegiance.

2. Dynamics of Kinship and Gender

Much like Crenshaw has argued that the experiences of black women cannot be subsumed under the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination alone, the experience of female voters in Lebanon cannot be understood under the banner of kinship pressure alone, and a failure to grasp the two intersecting systems of oppression based on age and gender leads to a marginalization of female voters' experiences. Two of my female interview respondents shed light on this pattern:

> "There is tension between my father and my husband. My husband is inclined towards the civil society and my father is old school pro Hariri guy, a hardcore supporter. During the elections, we had a big argument at home between my husband and my father on my vote especially since there was Roula Tabsh

> running with Hariri and she is a relative to the family (not a close one but still) and I kind of thought it would be good to vote for her but wasn't sure and didn't want to make a problem in the family, so I gave them the excuse that I was pregnant and didn't want to go and vote. Personally, I didn't know who I wanted. […] In the municipal elections, I voted to Hariri list because my father put a lot of pressure on me so I voted to Hariri and removed some names from the list (which he had told me to remove). […] My mother always votes according to my dad's wishes as a favor to him." (Interview 11).

Another female respondent had a similar experience, as she went on to explain:

> "My husband is pro thawra but my parents are very much pro Hariri. I grew up in a family where everything was in blue. Some of my family members are politically affiliated with Hariri on an official level. But I am not interested in voting. My father wanted me to vote to Hariri but I didn't want to. So I chose not to vote for anyone." (Interview 14).

This highlights the nuanced intersection of kinship and gender that forms a double pressure on women to cast ballots according to the family's traditional political allegiances.

B. Clientelism and Class

While research on class voting has been scrupulously debated in Western democracies, it remains astoundingly understudied in other parts of the developing world, namely in Lebanon. What is bewildering - not just in the case of Lebanon but in the Arab world by and large - is the seemingly insignificance of class in studies of elections as an element shaping political behavior. This near-irrelevance can be evidently portrayed by the mere fact that almost all models that have been offered for studying voting behavior in Lebanon in particular, and in so-called 'deeply divided societies' in general, do not raise arguments of class dynamics, not even to discredit or acknowledge their influence. This is so, perhaps as a result of this overriding presence of identity politics in such contexts whereby analyses of political behavior have focused

on sectarian cleavages and clientelistic-patronage conceptions. But teasing out the dynamics of clientelism and vote buying in the context of elections could reveal some interesting patterns that hint at class voting. Studies on clientelism and vote buying have long looked into the lower-income voters to suggest that they make more attractive clients than their upper class counterparts since their votes would easily be swayed in exchange for small material benefits (Cammett, Kruszewska, & Atallah, 2018; Corstange, 2016). One of my lower middle-class interlocutors stressed their family's financial struggles and admitted receiving material benefits in return for party loyalty:

> "They have been taking care of my father's hospitalization bills for years." (Interview 17).

Another one of my interlocutors also disclosed the following:

> "The LF offered my dad that they would pay the tuition fees for my sister's education in a private university if he secured the votes from the family but he couldn't so they didn't end up giving him the scholarship. He was furious at us." (Interview 15).

Arguments suggest that the middle classes evoke moral dilemmas about selling their votes and usually require more than trivial material benefits to sway their votes, namely getting someone a job (Corstange, 2016). This was specifically mentioned by one of my middle-class interlocutors:

> "I hold on to my personal beliefs and ethics against clientelism. But honestly, sometimes you are forced to do it. Recently, my daughter was applying for a job vacancy and I was forced, as always, to resort to a specific party whose politics are very far from mine. It didn't work out anyway. I don't know what I would have done in case they were able to provide me the job and I don't know if they would have wanted me to vote to them." (Interview 4).

Another middle-class interlocutor spoke of vote buying attempts as counterproductive:

> "If a party offers to pay for my vote, that would piss me off and offend me." (Interview 9)

However, it is relevant to mention here that the above interlocutor also indicated not receiving any services or benefits from the ruling establishment parties. And while individuals with lower socioeconomic status may face greater constraints that limit their ability to prioritize ethical considerations and personal convictions, their wealthier peers would be more tempted to drop this narrative if their interests are at stake. This is where labor conditions come into place with clientelist practices. Indeed, when we consider voters who are salaried employees, a certain degree of opposition (or alternatively voter apathy) can emerge since their mode of subsistence does not fully depend on it. This can explain how some middle-class voters who are employed at NGOs or private companies might often find themselves able to escape clientelism, since their main source of livelihoods are not directly tied to political patronage. This reasoning goes in line with arguments made by Wantchekon (2003) and later by Cammett et al. (2018) who maintained that some voters may not be liable to clientelism because they are either left out of these patronage networks or are enrolled in lines of work that do not profit from patronage. Additionally, Deets and Skulte-Ouaiss (2021) have argued that individuals who believe that none of the candidates can adequately address their needs or have managed to largely escape patronage networks often choose not to vote. This was also observed in the interviews, as all 5 of my interview respondents who did not cast a vote in the 2018 elections mentioned that they were not offered any clientelist services and were not part of any clientelist network.

But often more susceptible to clientelism are not just the poorer voters but also the business owners who have control over their means of production, as it is more financially advantageous for them to maintain loyalty to the party in order to maximize profits and guarantee a steady stream of business opportunities. One of my interview

respondents, whose father owns a large transportation company in Lebanon, explicitly stated that their business relies on their father's personal networks with the Lebanese Forces party:

> "Personally, I don't get any explicit material benefits such as cash payments but my father's family business is obviously affected in some way or another." (Interview 6).

This reinforces the argument presented in the previous chapter about how trusting the newcomers is a risky business, especially for long-standing supporters of the establishment parties who must weigh in the potential risk of losing everything against the unlikely prospect of gaining anything substantial by moving away from their traditional party lines. In the absence of a credible alternative, voters – the lower-income ones and their higher-income peers alike – make their materially-informed decisions to preserve their patronage networks instead.

C. Class, Sect, and Everyday Social Sectarianism

While much ink has been shed on the political, institutional, and legal aspects of sectarianism, Deeb (2017) argues that its social and interpersonal facets have gone, for the most part, unnoticed. She delves into the reasons accounting for the dearth in analyses of social sectarianism, conceding that we might be deliberately circumventing this social realm. As scholars of the region who have long witnessed the recurrent use and abuse of sectarian frames that supplant greater complexities in studies of the Arab world, writing about the importance of sect at an affective and personal level is a tricky task and a risky business. Fearing that such analyses could be interpreted in ways that would serve primordialist accounts, we thus deem it part of our scholarly duty not to contribute to such academic work. Moreover, the shift towards a constructivist approach

in studies and analyses of identity politics might indeed, at times, downplay the significance of ascriptive identities in driving political behavior (Cammett et al., 2018; Chandra, 2012). In her own words, anthropologist Lara Deeb critically contemplates on this:

> "Perhaps acknowledging that people care about sect feels a bit like airing a family secret, or venturing into the messiness of discrimination and prejudice that we wish didn't exist, or a betrayal of activist efforts that we support. Perhaps we fear that writing about how sect matters at an interpersonal or affective level will contribute to those seemingly intransigent assumptions that sectarianism is unchanging or primordial. But much as we want to escape or deny it, the fact remains that sect matters to a lot of people in their daily lives, not only in relation to politics, networks, legal status, or the material realm but in their interpersonal interactions." (Deeb, 2017).

Indeed, in the everyday life of Lebanese citizens, sectarian identity bears a personal significance for many. In my interviews with eligible voters in Beirut I and II electoral districts conducted as part of this thesis, I test the effect of social sectarianism on voting behavior through an experimental question towards the end of the interview. The question addresses those interviewees who did not evoke co-ethnicity as a factor in the voting process and asks if they would take co-ethnicity into consideration when voting for a parliamentary candidate, if (hypothetically speaking) political sectarianism were to be abolished. More often than not, I would have to get into the details of explaining what the elimination of political sectarianism could entail in tangible terms. Basically, I explained that the parliament could be legitimately composed of 128 Alawite MPs for instance, and that it all depended on people's votes with no pre-set quotas for any particular sect whatsoever. While they had earlier spoken of the triviality of co-ethnicity as a factor affecting their voting choice, many were suddenly gazing at the floor, trying to think this through. Seven out of twenty-one interviewed eligible

voters acknowledged, in good conscience, that they would rather give their vote to a co-ethnic in that case. One of my interlocutors stated:

> "In Lebanon, we have around 70% of the population belonging to the Muslim community and the fact is that the majority of Muslims have a mentality that they wish to turn Lebanon into a conservative Islamic state and breed more Muslims. Even Christians say they want to breed more, and it's become a battle. So in case we abolish political sectarianism, we might have a majoritarian Muslim parliament and they might all have this mentality of the Islamic State. So yes, in that case, I would vote to a co-ethnic." (Interview 19).

Interestingly, this demographic fear wasn't particularly exhibited by my Muslim interlocutors. Another Christian interlocutor likewise expressed frustration with a perceived loss of authority by Christian leaders:

> "Look at the President today! He doesn't have a say in the country and no real authority anymore." (Interview 21).

In an attempt to begin understanding how social sectarianism, which is intrinsically intertwined with political sectarianism, manifests itself in the voting behavior of citizens, I dedicate this section to look at the interconnectedness of factors like sect, class, and social status, with ever-changing temporal and spatial aspects, such as neighborhood, geography, space, and time. This helps to set off new research that gives value to the social and interpersonal factors as shaping everyday practices of sectarianism in Lebanon and beyond. This will also help reveal some stereotypes (whether negative and positive) held about different sects in Lebanon. It goes without saying that in evoking these sectarian biases, I am in no way trying to reproduce or confirm such essentializing conceptions of specific sects. Instead, these reflections would serve to mirror individuals' complex and multi-faceted identities and reveal how infinite social factors interact and shape their attitudes and behaviors.

In "Practicing Sectarianism: Archival and Ethnographic Interventions on Lebanon" (Deeb, Nalbantian, & Sbaiti, 2022), Deeb's chapter 8 examines the impact of exposure on diversity and sectarian bias in Lebanon, concluding that exposure alone is not enough to weaken sectarian biases. Rather, she argues that it also necessitates a connection based on shared elements – what she refers to as "bi'a", denoting environment/milieu (p.136). In reflecting on the interviews I conducted, Deeb's argument resonated with me. Consider, here, one of my interlocutors. Richard[17] is a sixty-three-year-old retiree who resides with his wife and their golden retriever dog in Mar Chaaya - Mzekkeh, a small and quaint Christian town nestled near Broummana in the Metn district.[18] Richard, who votes in the Beirut I district, has spent most of his working years doing business in Syria and Iraq before he decided to retire early and settle back permanently in his comfortable home in Mar Chaaya. Despite having spent most of his working life in Iraq and Syria and despite being well-traveled, Richard's exposure to people from multi-sectarian backgrounds did not stop him from harboring sectarian stereotypes. Such biases kept popping up in his conversation:

> "We love them. We appreciate them. But their culture is different than ours." (Interview 4).

Deeb's argument of exposure evoked above begins to explain why someone like Richard, with high exposure to multisectarian backgrounds, would harbor sectarian prejudice. Indeed, Richard recounted how he grew up in Mar Chaaya, a monolithic and monoethnic social environment that is often hostile to non-Christians. Mixed neighborhoods are not even common around the town, as most (if not all) of this part of

[17] Pseudonyms have been used in this thesis to de-identify interlocutors who took part in this research.
[18] It is relevant to mention here that voters in Lebanon typically vote in the electoral district where they are registered (at birth), which is not necessarily their current place of residence.

the Metn area is overwhelmingly Christian. Like many Christian 'Frenchies' in the Metn area, Richard went to a Christian Francophone school where mixing with multi-sectarian backgrounds is not too often the case.

Richard's example also helps to complicate the widely-held elitist argument that people from higher socio economic status are more open-minded and more accepting towards those from different sectarian backgrounds, compared to their counterparts in lower socioeconomic classes (Deeb et al., 2022). Likewise, it reaffirms an oft-present Christian attitude of superiority vis-à-vis their Muslim peers among those individuals who grew up in monolithic milieus, as exemplified by Richard's us and them discourse. Additionally, one of Richard's responses brings to mind the stereotypical perception of Sunnis (by themselves as well as by their Christian counterparts) as holding higher social status than their Shiite counterparts (Deeb, 2020). When reflecting on sectarian relations in Lebanon, Richard stated:

> "If you look at the Sunnis living in Beirut, you'll see that they are rather integrated within our Christian communities." (Interview 4).

Nonetheless, he did not seem to espouse the same level of acceptance or integration with the Shia living in Beirut. Throughout the conversation, it became apparent that Richard held a somewhat disparaging view of the Shia community in Beirut, (not so) subtly hinting at a perceived lower status within the social hierarchy. His attitude towards the Shia community became apparent, with a hint of disdain, as we discussed personal status laws:

> "I'm against having different personal status laws. Even the Shia have educated people and they, too, are sick of this!" (Interview 4).

In this context, I view Richard's differentiation between the "Sunnis of Beirut" and the Shia as emphasizing the importance of class and region, rather than sect per se, in his understanding of sectarian similarity and sectarian difference in Lebanon. This is so, not just because the Sunni community is stereotypically held in higher regard than its Shiite counterpart, but also because of the stereotypical view that the Sunni community in Beirut has always been considered to be rather affluent, and thus, by extension and as the stereotype goes, more cosmopolitan and open-minded. Indeed, while Richard tried, at the beginning, to distance himself from being associated with the non-Christian community in general when he evoked cultural connotations and the us and them narrative, he did not seem to dissociate all too much from Beirut's upper-class Sunni community, especially when he referred to the Sunnis of Beirut as more relatable and more integrated "with our Christian communities". This brings to mind Nucho's powerful analysis on the constant interplay of class and sect as "mutually constituted" (Deeb et al., 2022, p. 139) categories, taking the case of the Armenian community in Lebanon. She observes how some middle-class Armenians try to dissociate themselves from their Armenian neighborhood of Burj Hammoud, given the latter's historical connotation with refugee camps (Deeb et al., 2022, p. 150).

Just like factors of sect and class come into play with temporal and spatial aspects of geography (that is, monoethnic neighborhoods and milieus) to uphold sectarian biases despite high exposure to multisectarian backgrounds, such socio-spatial aspects can also come into play in polyethnic milieus and serve to shatter sectarian prejudices. For instance, take one of my interlocutors, Omar. Having grown up in the cosmopolitan and mixed neighborhood of Hamra with a Sunni father and a Shiite mother, Omar's exposure to people from multisectarian backgrounds, combined with

his polyethnic milieu, helped him espouse a more accepting intersectarian view. He argued that in the event that political sectarianism was abolished, he would not care for co-ethnic candidates and would not feel threatened to vote for a non-co-ethnic.

Another one of my interlocutors, Carla, is a sixty-year-old woman who works as a financial officer at a regional marketing communications group and who was born, raised, and has always resided in the Christian-neighborhood of Achrafieh. Carla, who identified as "une femme feministe à fond" (French for "hardcore feminist"), said she was against granting women the right to pass on citizenship to husbands and children, citing "obvious reasons". In her own words:

> "It's clear why they want the citizenship law. Half of them are married to Palestinians and the other half to Syrians." (Interview 21).

Such sectarian – and at many instances, Islamophobic and Xenophobic – tropes are thus again evoked under the guise of cultural differences among individuals whose identity formation took place in monoethnic milieus or bi'as. Spatial and temporal facets are mutually constituting and ever-intertwining with other social categories, thus contributing to the ever-changing identity for citizens that shapes social attitudes and political behaviors.

D. Conclusion

In this chapter, I propose an intersectional framework for a more nuanced understanding of individual voting behavior in Lebanon. I resort to the literature on kinship, clientelism, and social sectarianism in Lebanon, coupled with reflections from my interviews, to argue that social factors like kinship, gender, class, sect, age, geography, and milieu (among many others that could not be examined under the scope

of this study) are altogether ever-intersecting and shaping people's attitudes and behaviors. By exploring kinship ties through the lens of age and gender, I reveal the complex layers that form kinship pressure aimed at preserving families' political allegiances and the ways in which it affects kin members' voting behavior differently. I then analyze clientelism from a class perspective, highlighting how labor conditions and individuals' relations to their means of production can affect their susceptibility to clientelism. This serves to portray voters as actors with agency who seek material benefits, which reflects on their understanding of their selves and their societies. Here, I also move away from the focus on low-income voters to stress that, high-income voters can, too, sustain clientelist services just as much as their low-income peers. Finally, I draw on Deeb's use of the concept of exposure to analyze sectarian bias and everyday sectarianism among my interlocutors, bringing in the notion of milieu or bi'a to highlight the persistence of sectarian bias.

This chapter highlights some noticeable social trends and patterns without adopting any generalizations to avoid essentializing individuals' complex identities. It hopes to serve as an exploration towards the adoption of intersectionality as a critical thinking tool in studies of voting behavior that takes into account the importance of attributing value to the various social markers for a more nuanced analysis that captures the complexity of the voter's lived experiences. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that I try to perceive class, sect, and gender (among other social factors) not as independent categories that form homogeneous entities, but rather as mutually intersecting analytical concepts, each of which is playing a constitutive role in processes of identity formation.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN LEBANON AND BEYOND

Despite a growing tendency by scholars to understand and study Middle East politics beyond sectarian cleavages, the voting behavior scholarship remains largely focused on sectarian and clientelist factors that emphasize, for the most part, descriptive identities. The politicized nature of Lebanon's religious identities has reduced most analyses of individual voting behavior to a sectarian paradigm. Through this thesis, I aimed to shift the focus away from such identitarian motives when looking at voting behavior in the context of Lebanon. One first step in this direction has been my attempt to de-sectarianize the research design by, firstly, not adopting sect as the unit of analysis and not assuming sectarian voting behavior as a given but rather by trying to examine these phenomena, and secondly, by rethinking and bringing into question basic analytical concepts at the definitional level, such as what 'sectarian voting behavior' or 'deeply divided society' entails. This goes in line with the need to sway away from analyses that emanate from the standpoint of the 'exceptional'. Indeed, taking into account the peculiarities of the case at hand should not lead us in the trap of framing them as exceptional (Majed, 2020a). The latter would, conversely, feed into essentializing arguments that reinforce grand sectarian claims and reduce the intricate process of voting behavior to a normative one. Instead, it is by broadening our scope of analysis and looking at the intersection of factors like party politics, kinship, class, labor conditions, network effects, education, milieus, geographies, and many others that we begin to better understand why people are voting to the establishment parties (beyond

the herd mentality and despite being aware of the corruption of the ruling elites) or why people choose to vote for a co-ethnic candidate (beyond arguments that stress their sectarian-ness).

In this thesis, I tried to contribute to a nuanced understanding of voting behavior in Lebanon by rethinking the relationship between the "political" and the "sectarian", both in terms of analyzing high rates of co-ethnic votes as well as properly grasping the politically charged stance of the civil society votes despite their "apolitical" discourse. In addition, I tried to explain how axes of social difference (such as gender, kinship, class, and beyond) intersect to form individuals' complex identities beyond the simplistic understanding of social markers as separate and independent entities. Lastly, it remains to be said that political sectarianism and social sectarianism are mutually reinforcing and mutually intertwined, and so long as the system is based on political sectarianism, there will always be a sectarian dynamic in voting behavior. This reinforces the notion that voters are indeed active agents who are making informed voting choices within the parameters of the existing political structure, rather than passively following the masses.

All in all, I wish to conclude by reflecting on the need to de-sectarianize the scholarship around sectarianism and political behavior in Lebanon and the Arab world, a practice that would entail defying, contesting, and deconstructing the systems of power that perpetuate Orientalist notions within academic spaces. This starts by refuting ahistorical analyses that do not look at the colonial, social, and economic histories of the spaces they seek to study. It also involves moving away from purely quantitative research designs that do not help us grasp individual voting behavior beyond general voting trends nor allow us to thoroughly understand the how and the why of such voting

patterns. This methodical overreliance on numerical data and quantitative modeling to generate graphs and charts about voting behavior traps us in grand and sweeping generalizations that circle back to the sectarian catch-all explanation. It is by combining this number crunching with qualitative work (be it ethnography or focus group etc.) that we can truly begin to understand how people's complex identities and structural hierarchies impact voting behavior.

Beyond academia, de-sectarianization occurs in our classrooms, in our streets, in our homes, and in our workplaces. But just like sectarianization has been a decades-old process meticulously entwined by rulers to sustain their systems of governance, de-sectarianization is also a process that will be marked by undulating ebbs and flows, rather than a sudden event that transpires overnight. In the fleeting but luminous days of October 2019, we witnessed a period of accelerated de-sectarianization unfolding in full swing in the streets of Beirut as people sought to re-imagine political life in Lebanon beyond the divisive shackles of sectarian othering. Ironically, the intensification of the country's free-fall collapse in the post-October uprising has only pushed people further into the embrace of sectarian modes of identification; a cruel irony that the ruling elites seem to grasp more so than anyone else (Halawi & Salloukh, 2020). Yet, hope persists within a middle class unaffected by the spoils reaped by the upper classes and endowed with the luxury that eludes the lower strata, affording them the privilege of real political organization.

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