

In Defense of Intra-Sectarian Divide

In Defense of Intra-Sectarian Divide: Street Mobilization, Coalition Formation, and Rapid Realignments of Sectarian Boundaries in Lebanon

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This article examines the rapid transformations in the salience of sectarian boundaries despite seemingly deeply entrenched polarization. Lebanon provides an interesting case study where sectarian dichotomies moved relatively quickly from a predominantly “Christian–Muslim” divide to a more recent “Sunni–Shia” split within the context of tumultuous street mobilizations. While this sectarian dichotomy is resonant with the regional intra-Muslim divide, its local dynamics and mechanisms remain unknown. Based on recent literature pointing to street mobilization as an important channel for ethnic politics, this article focuses on co-mobilization—or coalition formation in protests—as a mechanism of sectarianization. It builds on an original and exclusive protest event catalogue (2000–2010), network analysis, and in-depth interview to ask: how does the salience of sectarian dichotomies shift in tandem with transformations in street politics? Through an analysis of momentous street mobilizations and coalition formations, the article traces how sectarian and political fault-lines are (re-)drawn and crystalized. The findings suggest that sectarian polarization emerges when political parties (re-)alignments overlap with the boundaries of sectarian cleavages, thus allowing interchangeability between political and sectarian categories. Contrary to common belief, this finding indicates that intra-sectarian political unity—rather than inter-sectarian divisions—shapes the processes of sectarianization and polarization.

The variations in the political salience of ethnic or sectarian boundaries form a persisting puzzle in the social science literature. The question of why some ethnic identities are more relevant than others at certain points in history, or in certain geographic locations, remains a topic of heated discussion. While an older literature has focused on the effect of cross-cutting cleavages to explain the level of ethnic salience in order to predict the likelihood of democratic stability (Dahl 1956; Lipset 1959), more recent studies have looked at the relationship between

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ethnic salience, class cleavage, and civil war (Gubler and Selway 2012; Siroky and Hechter 2016) and the importance of group size (Posner 2004) or institutional setting (Chandra 2012) in determining the variations in ethnic salience. This literature generally argues that the presence of cross-cutting social cleavages within an ethnic group (such as regional, linguistic-, class-, caste-, clan-, race-, or tribe-based diversity) or the existence of structural exogenous factors (such as group size or institutional settings) will determine the political salience of an ethnic boundary. Another set of literature, known as the modernist approach, argues that the political salience of ethnicity and sectarianism is the outcome of historical, cultural, social, and economic transformations that occurred with modernization (Gellner 1983; Anderson 1991; Makdisi 2000). While these literatures have immensely advanced our understanding of variations in the salience of ethnicity across time and space, they are largely based on the study of slow-moving sociopolitical structures or an understanding of cross-cutting cleavages as social “givens” that are generally fixed or “sticky.” How do we make sense of fast changes in the political salience of ethnic or sectarian dichotomies? How can we understand the more sudden transformations in ethnic or sectarian fault-lines?

This research contributes to this literature by examining how cross-cutting cleavages can emerge and shift rapidly even in the context of long-standing institutional and political sectarian divisions. It builds on recent developments in the literature on ethnic studies and contentious politics that call for a focus on the dynamics and mechanisms of change at the meso-level (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2013). Borrowing from the analytical sociology approach (Elster 1989; Hedström and Bearman 2009), this research focuses on a middle-ground analysis that links description with general systems of sociological theory. This study considers “channels” such as street mobilization to be the meso-level medium through which micro- and macro-levels are linked. It similarly considers “mechanisms” to be “a class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations,” whereas “processes” are defined as the outcome of “regular sequences of such mechanisms” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 24). Therefore, based on the works of scholars such as Tilly (2005), this research studies street mobilization (or protests) as a channel that can play an important mediating role in forming and activating ethnic/sectarian boundaries. It deals with street protests as the venue through which political coalitions and divisions are communicated and transformed into ethnic/sectarian fault-lines. In that sense, protest is a *channel* through which the *mechanism* of co-mobilization (or coalition formation) contributes to shaping the *process* of sectarianization/ethnicization.

This research provides a theorization of co-mobilization as forming a crucial mechanism of political and sectarian realignment. It builds on the boundary-making approach developed in ethnic studies research (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2013) and in feminist ethnic studies approaches (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005) to show how boundaries are often drawn and redrawn, and to examine rapid transformations in sectarian salencies during “momentous”

episodes of heightened street mobilization (della Porta 2018). Instead of thinking of protests as instances of dissent and opposition necessarily, this research adopts a Gramscian (1971) approach that examines how protests can become occasions for the reproduction of state sectarian hegemony through specific realignments.

Lebanon provides an interesting case study where sectarian dichotomies moved from a predominantly “Christian–Muslim” divide to a more salient “Sunni–Shia” split within only a few years, following the mass mobilizations in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination in 2005. While Lebanon has an entrenched sectarian political system (Assi 2016) and a long history of sectarian conflict since the end of the nineteenth century (Makdisi 2000; Harris 2012), this study shows that even under such circumstances of long-term institutionalized sectarianism, the salient identity fault-lines can still morph and transform—relatively quickly—depending on how political alliances shift. Therefore, based on the Lebanese case study, this research tries to understand how shifts in sectarian dichotomies occur during periods of momentous mobilization. Instead of focusing on slow-moving variables of “modernization,” or socially “given” variables of the “cross-cutting cleavage” literatures, this study looks at political parties as a dynamic entity (or units of analysis) that forms the main vehicle of sectarianization in street politics (Brubaker 2004). Building on an original protest event catalogue (2000–2010), network analysis and visualization, and in-depth interview, this paper tracks political and sectarian transformations in Lebanon over a period of 11 years. The event history analysis focuses on the relationship between street mobilizations, party coalitions (co-mobilization networks), and sectarianizations to explain the shift in sectarian polarization post-2005.

The research argues that during periods of critical juncture—such as 2005 in Lebanon, when street mobilization was heightened and political alignments were shifting—political transformations can take on a sectarian overturn if the boundaries of the political fault-line overlap with a sectarian cleavage. As the data will show, such overlap between political and social sectarian boundaries is not the result of inter-sectarian (or cross-sectarian) unity but rather the product of intra-sectarian (within-sect) political relations. 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. These overlapping boundaries will then crystalize and form the main sectarian fault-lines during critical junctures when macrostructural changes are channeled to the public through street politics. Therefore, while the literature focuses on *inter-ethnic* relations (Fearon and Laitin 1996) or sectarian “co-existence” (Khalaf 2002) in explaining conflict and conflict resolution, this study suggests that *intra-sectarian* relations (or within-sect political cleavages) play a bigger role in the process of sectarianization. Therefore, the findings of this research can have implications beyond the case study of Lebanon, by suggesting that in times of momentous events, political realignments in multiethnic settings have the potential to shift ethnic fault-lines and generate forms of “inter-ethnic” unity—not because of inter-ethnic relations per se but because intra-sectarian divisions mean that prevailing political cleavages no longer map easily onto

prevailing ethnic divides. As a result, political cleavages do not easily become ethnic cleavages—thus ethnicization is forestalled.

In what follows, the article will proceed with a historical overview of Lebanon's shifting sectarian boundaries. It will then move to survey some of the most recent literature in the field of ethnic studies and social movement studies, before delving into the methodology applied to study the relationship between street mobilization, claim making, and sectarian boundary shifts. The article will then present an in-depth analysis of the shifts in street mobilizations between 2000 and 2010 to show that (1) the year 2005 was a clear critical juncture in Lebanon's protest history, (2) the shifts in claim making (political demands) during the protests reflected the emergence of new political fault-lines post-2005, and (3) the shifts in coalitions (studied through co-mobilization) formed the basis for the shifts in sectarian polarization. Thus, sectarianism is here understood as the outcome of political relations (Amel 1986); and sectarian dichotomies are explained as the outcomes of political alignments and coalitions. Therefore, sectarian cleavages do not set the political agenda but are rather sensitive to political realignment, especially when those overlap or divide (cross-cut) sectarian boundaries.

It is important here to note that the reasons behind the political and sectarian realignments in Lebanon post-2005 are surely linked to internal structural transformations (Majed 2016) and to geopolitical changes in the Middle East (Salloukh 2017), specifically in Iraq. The regional rise in the salience of the "Sunni-Shia" fault-line since 2003 has played a significant role in the sectarianization of many political conflicts in the Middle East (Hashemi and Postel 2017). However, the detailed analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this study since the focus is on the internal mechanisms of sectarian and political reshuffling.

Lebanon's Shifting Political and Sectarian Fault-Lines

On February 14, 2005, a massive explosion shook the center of Beirut, Lebanon's capital. The former billionaire Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, was assassinated. This moment formed a critical juncture in the contemporary history of the country (Harb 2018). Hariri's funeral on February 16, 2005, witnessed unprecedented mobilization in terms of size and composition. Hundreds of thousands gathered in Beirut's Martyrs' Square where Hariri was buried in Al-Amin Mosque. During those early days following the assassination, the country was taken by a wave of daily protests that was often depicted as reflecting Lebanon's long-awaited national unity between Christians and Muslims (Khalaf 2013). While inter-sectarian reconciliation was the highlight of the first month following Hariri's assassination, political tension was building up, and coalitions were being rapidly redrawn in the context of high street mobilization and incendiary media coverage. The main political divide arose on the 1 month anniversary of the assassination between the "March 8" coalition that insisted on its allegiance to the Syrian regime and accused Israel and the United States of killing Hariri

and the “March 14” coalition that accused the Syrian regime of being behind the assassination and called for the immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Highlighting the centrality of street mobilization, the names of these two newly formed political coalitions that will govern Lebanese politics post-2005 denote the dates of the two biggest protests that each claimed to have allegedly gathered a million protesters¹—a real “earthquake” for a population of approximately 4.5 millions. During the first 3 years following the assassination, politics was mainly played out in the streets. Squares and counter-squares (Riad El Solh Square and Martyrs’ Square) became the locus of Lebanese political life. Sit-ins lasted for months, and political demarcation lines were redrawn through intensified street protests. However, the mobilizations along a political divide between pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian regime quickly took on a sectarian overtone. This time it was no longer a “Christian–Muslim” divide that governed political life but rather an emerging “Sunni–Shia” fault-line (Rowayheb 2011). Tension kept on escalating between the two camps until matters came to a head on May 7, 2008, when the country plunged into an episode of internal violence that was considered the most turbulent since the end of the civil war in 1990 (Rizkallah 2017). Reporting on the events in Beirut, *The Guardian* published an article on May 8 entitled “Violence escalates between Sunni and Shia in Beirut” (*The Guardian* 2008). By then, the new framing of the sectarian divide had been consolidated as a “Sunni–Shia” one.

While this new sectarian dichotomy was emerging as the master cleavage in society, calls for inter- and intra-sectarian unity were repeatedly voiced by prominent political and religious leaders (Hirst 2007). Although such calls for sectarian “co-existence” in the wake of major political transformations had become commonplace, the reconfiguration of political alliances did not affect all sectarian boundaries equally. The decline in the salience of the “Christian–Muslim” boundary and the rise of the “Sunni–Shia” boundary as a master cleavage form an important puzzle in terms of understanding fast transformations in the saliency of sectarian divides in the context of heightened street mobilization.

Research Questions

The shift in sectarian polarization in Lebanon is not new. A historical reading shows that, despite institutionalization of political sectarianism, four main waves of transformation in sectarian dichotomies took place in the past century: first, the conflict was labeled as being “Druze–Maronite” at the turn of the twentieth century in Mount Lebanon (Makdisi 2000); then it took on a “Maronite–Sunni” overtone following the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1921 (Harris 2012). This was followed by a conception of politics in broader “Muslim–Christian” frames in the second half of the twentieth century (Hanf 2015), followed by a transformation in sectarian politics into “Sunni–Shia” fault-lines in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination in 2005 (Rowayheb 2011). What is remarkable in those shifting saliencies is that, although the reasons behind them lie in structural transformations related to demographic, class-based, and

internal political changes as explained by [Abisaab and Abisaab \(2014\)](#) in the case of the Shia, for example, as well as geopolitical transformations related to the Iranian and Saudi roles in the region as explained by [Nasr \(2007\)](#), each episode of change in sectarian dichotomies has invariably been accompanied by periods of heightened street mobilizations followed by an episode of violence ([Rowayheb 2011](#); [Majed 2016](#)) that cements the new fault-lines. Therefore, street mobilizations seem to form an important channel for political and sectarian boundary making and unmaking. This article focuses on the latest episode of transformations in the salience of sectarian boundaries. While the reasons behind the shift from a “Christian–Muslim” divide to a more recent “Sunni–Shia” schism are explained through geopolitical changes ([Nasr 2007](#); [Assi 2016](#); [Salloukh 2017](#)) and internal structural transformations ([Traboulsi 2014](#); [Majed 2016](#)) that tilted the sectarian balance of power, this study focuses on the mechanism of fast transformation in the salient sectarian fault-lines. The research asks: how did the sectarian fault-lines in Lebanon quickly shift from the previously established “Christian–Muslim” divide to the more recent “Sunni–Shia” dichotomy following the 2005 mobilizations?

Street Mobilization and Sectarian Boundary Making: A Rich Terrain

The recent turn in the ethnic studies literature to unpack the mechanisms of ethnicization or sectarianization ([Brubaker 2004](#); [Hashemi and Postel 2017](#)) in society has provided insightful accounts on the ways in which ethnic and sectarian politics unfold. Moving beyond the essentialist and primordialist accounts of the mid-twentieth century ([Connor 1993](#); [Freeman 1998](#)), it is now established that identities are constructed and thus they can, and do, change over time and across space ([Chandra 2012](#)).

The constructivist accounts of sectarianism in Lebanon have often studied the phenomenon as being the outcome of the politicization of sectarian identities ([Ofeish 1999](#); [Makdisi 2000](#)), thus distinguishing between the social relevance of a sectarian identity and its political salience. Within this constructivist school, modernist ([Makdisi 2000](#); [Traboulsi 2012](#)) and instrumentalist accounts ([Clark and Salloukh 2013](#); [Cammatt 2014](#)) have dominated the literature on sectarianism in Lebanon. Recent studies of Lebanon’s sectarian system have focused on the failure of the corporate consociational arrangement, especially in the aftermath of the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 ([Assi 2016](#); [Geukjian 2016](#)), or on the reproduction of “everyday sectarianism” through the focus on service provision and infrastructure ([Cammatt 2014](#); [Nucho 2016](#)). Although these studies provide well-substantiated accounts on the development of political sectarianism and the role of clientelism and sectarian-based patronage, the meso-level analysis of street politics as a channel through which the political salience of certain sectarian boundaries becomes more relevant is still unexplained. One argument that is often made in studying sectarian relations and politics in Lebanon is the importance of inter-sectarian (i.e., cross-sectarian) alliances and

relationships in taming sectarian divides, nurturing “civility” (Khalaf 2002), or serving as a tool for moderation and accommodation (Salloukh 2006). However, while the focus in the broader literature is mainly on *inter*-ethnic/sectarian relations and cooperation (Fearon and Laitin 1996; O’Loughlin 2010; Larson 2017), this research pays equal attention to *intra*-ethnic/sectarian (within-sect) political alignments in explaining how political closure can happen along ethnic/sectarian lines. Rather than focusing on the role certain “given” traits (such as region, language, class, etc.) within the same sectarian or ethnic group can have in shaping the political salience of an ethnic identity, as in the wider literature on cross-cutting cleavages, this research adopts a more dynamic approach in focusing on how political realignments—rather than fixed or slow-moving traits—can quickly shift the salience sectarian boundaries. Moving away from the “Herderian” (Wimmer 2013, 22) or “groupist” (Brubaker 2004, 2) assumptions that consider the social world to be divided into clear-cut ethnic groups that are culturally (or politically) homogeneous, I adopt a “Barthian” view of society (Brubaker 2004) that acknowledges that sectarian groups can be heterogeneous or not, depending on the degree of association or overlap between the sectarian boundary and the level of social/political closure. This approach is resonant with Anthias and Yuval-Davis (2005, 4) theorization of racialized boundaries as “continuously being redrawn to serve processes and interests that form part of a diverse number of political projects, including economic ones.”

This research also draws on recent calls within the ethnic studies and social movement literatures to explore the link between ethnic boundary making and street mobilization. It considers that protests can play a crucial role as a channel for (trans-)forming or activating the political salience of specific sectarian or ethnic divides (Beissinger 2002; Tilly 2005; della Porta 2018). For example, in his study of Eastern European nationalist movements, Beissinger (2002) explains that mobilizations are occasions for individuals and groups to expand or activate the boundaries of their identities through collective action. Thus, the analysis of specific events, such as episodes of mobilization or violence that “thicken” history, becomes crucial to understand sudden shifts in identity politics or boundary activation (Beissinger 2002, 39).

Building on these approaches, this research focuses on street mobilization as the channel through which political and sectarian boundaries are (re-)shaped to overlap in new ways, thus shifting pre-existing sectarian fault-lines. In that sense, protests act as a mediating variable: it is in and through street-level mobilization that realigned political divisions are communicated; and it is in the co-mobilization of sectarian parties that we see reflected a redrawing of salient sectarian cleavages.

Tracking Political Parties, Coalition Building, and Claim Making in Street Mobilization

The choice of Lebanon as a case study for sociological research in the field of ethnic mobilization stems from the importance of the Lebanese case to

examine the fluidity of the salience of identity boundaries despite long-term conflicts and institutionalizations that have previously hardened identity fault-lines. While it is difficult to generalize the findings based on one case study, scholars have highlighted the importance of case studies in providing rich and detailed analyses, thus advancing our understanding of social mechanisms, social dynamics, and general social phenomena and highlighting new theoretical implications on the research topic (Brady and Collier 2010). Therefore, as explained by Gerring (2004, 349), case studies serve an exploratory purpose rather than a confirmatory one; and this can have important implications on the study of ethnicity and boundary making in several other contexts.

This research draws on the method of process tracing (Collier 2011) in order to track within-case variation in sectarian polarization in Lebanon. It focuses on the periods between 2000 and 2010 in order to capture political and sectarian saliences 5 years before and after the critical juncture of 2005. As argued by Brady, Collier, and Seawright (2004), within-case analysis allows the researcher to increase leverage without shifting the domain of analysis. This is in line with Wilkinson's (2001, 18) argument that constructivist studies of ethnic conflict and ethnic violence need to analyze longitudinal data that looks at the changes in ethnic salience over time. Therefore, in order to study how the political salience of sectarian relations in Lebanon changed over time, a longitudinal dataset is needed. Based on the intersections between the ethnic studies and the contentious politics literature, I consider protest events to be a major channel for the (trans-)formation of sectarian relations at the meso-level. Therefore, I track street mobilizations in order to study shifts in the saliences of political and sectarian boundaries.

I constructed my own dataset based on newspaper archives. I negotiated access to both *An-Nahar* and *As-Safir* newspapers. The former considered pro-March 14 coalition after 2005, and the latter considered to be closer to the March 8 camp after 2005. Given that access to *An-Nahar* was free of charge, I based the initial dataset on this source and coupled it with a random sample of 500 articles on protests bought from *As-Safir* to cross-check the data. No major bias was recorded between both sources in terms of reporting the occurrence of a protest event. The main bias was in the length of the article and the analysis that came with the coverage. I used the "Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) Triplet" scheme to find information. The Subject is usually the actors who undertake the event, the Verb describes the action, and the Object tells us about the target of the Subject. The analysis in this article focuses on "who" protested (which parties) and the "why" (for which claim/demand) in order to understand "how" coalition formation among political parties shifts based on claim making.

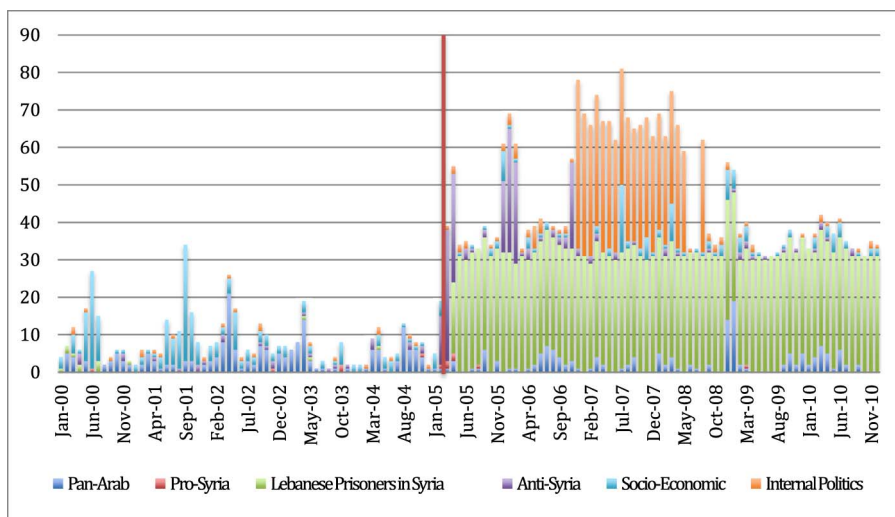
To add robustness to my dataset, I succeeded after long negotiation in securing official protest data from the Municipality of Beirut. The municipalities' records consist of all the filled protest request forms presented by the different parties prior to the protest. I was only granted access to data that has been computerized, and this covered the periods from January 2002 to November 2007. The total number of protests registered at the Municipality of Beirut during this time period is 268 protests, out of which 83 appear in the newspaper data. The

use of such official data in my study gives it many advantages compared to research based on newspaper data only. The first advantage is that I was able to validate newspaper data against official data. Although the overlap between the municipality data and the newspaper data is not very high, most protests that gathered a high number of participants, especially between 2002 and 2005, appear in both datasets. One important observation is that the majority of protests following the assassination of Hariri in February 2005 do not appear in the municipality dataset given that they were either spontaneous or the organizers did not seek to officially inform the authorities of their mobilization. Second, official data is more comprehensive since it includes some smaller protests that are not always covered by newspapers. Building on Charles Tilly's (1995) definition of contentious gathering, I consider any gathering of 10 or more people in a public place to make "claims on at least one person outside their own number" to be a protest event. The keyword search was conducted in Arabic and included the following 10 terms that are usually used in newspapers to potentially refer to a protest: sit-in, demonstration, protest, rally, march, procession, meeting, celebration, memorial, and vigil. The data collection and coding process took 16 months, and the compiled event dataset covers 3,898 protest events.

Thus, the analysis presented below relies on an original protest event catalogue constructed based on *An-Nahar* and *As-Safir* newspaper archives, in addition to exclusive official records obtained from the Municipality of Beirut. Instead of focusing on the frequency of protests (Tilly 1995) or the size of the protests (Biggs 2018), this study looks at the composition of protests. In fact, a widespread methodological problem in the literature on sectarianism lies in the assumption that sects are homogeneous groups and the adoption of sects per se as units of analysis. This study builds on Brubaker's (2004) call to de-ethnicize research methods by looking at sectarian actors rather than sects as units of analysis. Such a shift in the research design could yield results that move us beyond essentialist accounts and prevent the endogeneity problem in studies that endorse "groupist ontologies" (Brubaker 2004, 86). Thus, in studying the shifts in sectarian saliencies in Lebanon, I consider sectarian political parties—rather than sects—to be the main actors in this process. Building on Takeshi Wada's (2004) method, the analysis traces protests focusing on claim-making (political demands) and political party (sectarian actors) coalitions (co-mobilization) through network visualization in order to explain change in sectarian and political salience over time. I particularly focus on the mobilization of the seven main political parties (actors) that claim to represent sectarian communities in Lebanon (El Khazen 2003), thus shaping the political and sectarian boundaries: (1) the Sunni-based Future Movement, (2) the Shia-based Hezbollah, (3) the Shia-based Amal Movement, (4) the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), (5) the Christian-based Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), (6) the Christian-based Phalanges (Kata'ib), and (7) the Christian-based Lebanese Forces. Table 1 gives the details on the main political parties and explains the categorization that will be used in this study. Moreover, the protest data is divided into six main claims: Pan-Arab; anti-Syrian; internal politics; pro-Syrian;

Table 1. The Main Political Parties and Their Confessional/Sectarian Affiliations, 2000–2010

Party	Details	Sect	Confession
Hezbollah	Founded in 1985. Leader: Hassan Nasrallah	Shia	Muslim
Amal Movement	Founded in 1974. Leader: Nabih Berri		
Shia: Other	Including the Free Shiite Movement, the Democratic Socialist Party, the Lebanese Option Gathering, etc.		
Future Movement	Founded in 1992. Officially registered in August 2007, declared April 5, 2009. Leader: Saad Hariri	Sunni	
Sunni: Other	Including the Democratic Nasserite Movement, Federation of Popular Leagues and Committees, Al-Ahbash, Al-Mourabitoun, Arab Liberation Party, Majd Movement, etc.		
Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)	Founded in 1949. Leader: Walid Jumblatt	Druze	
Druze: other	Including the Lebanese Unification Movement, the Lebanese Democratic Party, etc.		
Phalange (or Kata'ib)	Founded in 1936. Leader: Amine Gemayel	Maronite	Christian
Lebanese Forces	Founded in 1976. Leader: Samir Geagea		
Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)	Founded in 2003, officially declared in 2005. Leader: Michel Aoun		
Christian: Other	Including the Al Marada Party, the National Liberal Party, the Independence Movement, the Lebanese National Bloc, etc.		
Non-sectarian parties	Including the Communist Party, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP), the Democratic Left, the Arab Socialist Baath Party, etc.		
Palestinian parties/factions	Including the Fatah (PLO), the Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, etc.		

Figure 1. Monthly frequency of protests in Beirut by reason (2000–2010).

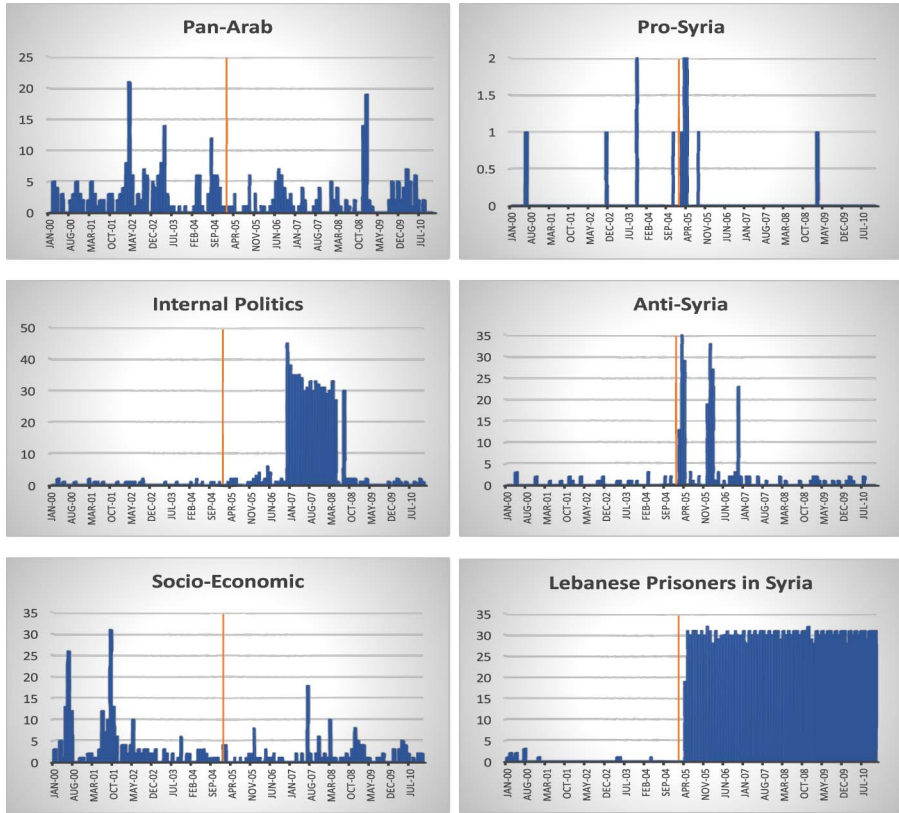
socioeconomic; and Lebanese prisoners in Syria. These categories are then used to trace transformations in political claims and coalition formations of the main sectarian parties in Lebanon.

This quantitative analysis is coupled with 29 in-depth interviews with a sample of protesters from various political parties. The interviews were conducted in Beirut in 2012. Interviewees were reached through a snow-ball sample. The aim of those interviews was to complement the quantitative analysis by delving into the individual-level understanding of the political and sectarian transformations that took place post-2005.

Main Shifts in Street Mobilizations: Critical Junctures and Major Transformations

An analysis of protest trends in Beirut between 2000 and 2010 (Figure 1) shows that the year 2005 formed a “crack” (della Porta 2018) or critical juncture in the Lebanese polity.

Based on Figure 1, the mobilization for the Lebanese Prisoners in Syria appears to form an important bulk of the protests post-2005. This movement consisted of a sit-in that lasted for more than 6 years through a tent that was set up in front of the United Nations house in downtown Beirut. While this movement formed an important part of street politics at the time, the sit-in is coded on a daily basis, but it did not attract a high number of protesters. In order to avoid misleading visualization, Figure 2 breaks down the analysis to provide the protest trends for each claim separately.

Figure 2. Monthly frequency of protests in Beirut by reason (2000–2010).

Taken together, [Figures 1 and 2](#) point to four main shifts in protest trends post-2005: (1) heightened mobilization, (2) heightened interest in political demands at the expense of socioeconomic demands, (3) heightened interest in internal politics at the detriment of regional politics, and (4) a move from Pan-Arab and socioeconomic protests to anti-Syrian and internal political protests as priorities. *T*-tests were conducted for each shift to compare the mean number of protests (by time period, pre-/post-2005, and by claims), and all results show a statistical significance ($p < .05$) in change over time.

The first shift confirms that the Hariri assassination formed a “crack” that was followed by a period of “protest vibration” through “momentous mobilizations,” thus forming a clear critical juncture ([della Porta 2018](#)). The data shows that protests in the period before 2005 were far sparser than the post-2005 period. The centrality of the Hariri assassination in reshuffling political salencies through street protests was repeatedly mentioned in my interviews. Hussam, a 32-year-old security company employee and supporter of the Future Movement (mainly Sunni) from Ras El Nabae, described how he vividly remembers the day of the assassination and the shock he felt at the immensity of the event. He said:

Lebanon after Hariri is not comparable to what it was before the assassination. Everything has changed. We went to the streets determined not to leave before the “Syrians” get out.

Similarly, interlocutors from the March 8 camp also expressed the importance of the Hariri assassination as a turning point. Adnan, a 42-year-old supporter of Hezbollah from Khandak El Ghamik (mainly Shia), explained:

The assassination was a catastrophe for us. We were accused although Rafic Hariri was our ally and he supported the resistance. But since then, the March 8th and March 14th division changed everything. Things are very different now.

The second shift in protest trends points to a decrease in the average number of weekly protests with socioeconomic claims and an increase in the average number of protests with political claims after the Hariri assassination. Focusing on these political mobilizations, the third trend underlines a shift away from Pan-Arab and regional concerns (namely, Palestine and Iraq) and a focus on internal politics (related to the March 8 and March 14 divides). When asked about this, Faysal—a retired 62-year-old supporter of the Future Movement (mainly Sunni) from Ras El Nabae—replied:

It is true that we mobilized less for Palestine, but that is because we had our own crisis to deal with!

Finally, whereas the two main reasons for protest in Beirut prior to 2005 were related to socioeconomic or Pan-Arab concerns, the main reasons for mobilization after 2005 became more directly linked to anti-Syrian activism (especially in 2005–2006) and internal politics (specifically in 2007–2008).

Given that the mobilization for the Lebanese prisoners in Syria and socioeconomic protests² rarely mobilized political parties (our unit of analysis), the following analysis will drop it. Therefore, the subsequent analysis will focus solely on the protests that made overt political claims between 2000 and 2010. These are captured through the following four categories: Pan-Arab, anti-Syrian, pro-Syrian, and internal politics. In order to further understand how these transformations in street politics have affected sectarian fault-lines, an analysis of claim making and party mobilization is in order. Given that the analysis so far confirms that the year 2005 was a turning point in street mobilization, the subsequent analysis will compare party mobilizations by claim before and after 2005.

Shifts in the Frequency of Party Mobilization by Claim

Table 2 shows the relative frequency of party mobilization by claim. The reported frequencies reveal the proportion of party mobilization (relative to the total number of mobilizations by party) for any given claim before and after 2005. The claims for which each party mobilized the most pre-2005 are highlighted in yellow; the ones post-2005 are highlighted in blue.

Table 2. Relative Frequency of Party Mobilization by Claim Pre- and Post-2005

	Pan-Arab		Anti-Syrian		Internal politics		Pro-Syrian		Total	
	Pre-2005	Post-2005	Pre-2005	Post-2005	Pre-2005	Post-2005	Pre-2005	Post-2005	Pre-2005	Post-2005
Future movement	0.57	0.02	0.14	0.90	0.00	0.07	0.29	0.00	7	222
Sunni other	0.81	0.28	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.62	0.03	0.06	67	104
Hezbollah	0.63	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.93	0.08	0.01	40	583
Amal movement	0.58	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.95	0.16	0.01	31	571
Shia, other	0.75	0.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.25	0.00	4	3
PSP (Druze main)	0.56	0.04	0.10	0.92	0.07	0.04	0.02	0.00	41	168
Druze, other	0.54	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.95	0.15	0.01	13	570
FPM	0.07	0.02	0.70	0.12	0.11	0.86	0.00	0.00	27	635
Phalange	0.22	0.01	0.56	0.96	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.00	18	182
Lebanese forces	0.11	0.01	0.89	0.96	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	9	180
Christian: other	0.30	0.01	0.39	0.23	0.09	0.75	0.04	0.01	23	728
Non-sectarian parties	0.67	0.18	0.03	0.53	0.06	0.24	0.05	0.02	97	313
Palestinian factions	0.97	0.82	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.02	0.00	86	91

Results show that the two main political movements in Lebanon before 2005 were a Pan-Arab one and an anti-Syrian movement that was smaller in size given its repression during the Syrian occupation of Lebanon at that time. However, the post-2005 period witnessed the rise of two main movements: the March 8 coalition mainly concerned with internal political claims (in the form of anti-March 14 protests) and the March 14 coalition mainly mobilizing for anti-Syrian claims. Looking at the frequency of party mobilization by claim, it becomes clear that many transformations in political positioning took place after 2005.

Whereas the main reason for the mobilization of the Future Movement (the main Sunni-based party) pre-2005 was Pan-Arab claims mainly related to Palestine (57 percent of their total participation in protests), it switched to anti-Syrian claims after the Hariri assassination, where 90 percent of its mobilizations became focused on accusing Syria of being behind the assassination. Talking about his participation in protests before 2005, Omar—a 41-year-old shop owner and organizer in the Future Movement from Tariq El Jdide—recalled protesting in Riad El Solh square facing the UN Headquarters in support of the Palestinian Intifada in 2000. He explained that Palestine and “Arabism” have always been a central topic for him, but clarified that the developments after 2005 shifted the focus to an anti-Syrian regime activism. He continued:

Thinking about it now, the protest I regret the most participating in was the one following the death of Hafez Al Assad (Syrian president) in 2000. We even organized buses to take people to participate in the funeral in Syria!

Similar shifts in protest behavior can also be depicted for the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP—the main Druze-based party) that was mainly mobilizing in the Pan-Arab camp before shifting to the March 14 anti-Syrian camp more clearly post-2005. Walid, a 52-year-old full-time PSP organizer from Karakon El Druze, explained that the shift in the party’s leadership position toward the Syrian regime started in 2004 and it translated in the declaration of the March 14 coalition following the mass mobilizations in 2005; he said:

Junblat’s relation with the “Syrians” was already in trouble before 2005. We [the PSP] had organized some protests against the extension for President Lahoud’s term [backed by the Syrian regime] in 2004, but it was only after the martyrdom of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri that the struggle against the Syrian occupation took the shape of popular mobilization – with millions in the street – under what became known as the “March 14th” bloc

While the two previous quotes by Omar and Walid speak of the active role played by political parties in mobilizing their constituencies (by providing transportation and organizing protests) and shifting alliances and coalitions, it is also evident that shifts in street politics and mass mobilizations are not only the result of top-down party decisions. Political parties have also used spontaneous mass mobilizations—such as those immediately following the assassination of Hariri in 2005—to reshape the political landscape and rearrange political

coalitions. This does not suggest that street mobilization imposes coalitions on political elites but rather points to the way leaders can co-opt spontaneous mass mobilizations and make political claims and forge new coalitions, as shown by Geha (2019).

On the other hand, the two main Shia-based parties, Hezbollah and Amal, also witnessed a shift in their main reason for protest after 2005. While they previously mobilized mainly for Pan-Arab claims (in support of Palestine and Iraq or to condemn Israel or the United States), the direct reason of their protests after 2005 became focused on internal politics, mainly in the form of the March 8 coalition mobilizations against the March 14-led government (and its anti-Syrian stance). A similar shift can be observed in the political behavior of some minor Sunni-, Druze-, and Christian-based parties as well. When asked about these shifts, Hani—a 38-year-old chauffeur and member of the Amal Movement (mainly Shia) from Zuqaq al-Blat—replied:

We did not change our position, we were always with Syria and we always supported the resistance against Israel. By protesting against the March 14th project for this country, we are protecting our position.

Therefore, while supporters of the Future Movement (mainly Sunni) and the Progressive Socialist Party (mainly Druze) acknowledged a shift in their political mobilization, the main parties that formed the March 8 coalition considered that they remained in their same Pan-Arab, pro-Syrian, and anti-Israel camp. However, the event data shows that the frequency of protests directly linked to Palestine (or Iraq) had drastically dropped after 2005. For example, only 5 percent of Hezbollah's protests post-2005 were concerned with Palestine (or Iraq), while it was at 63 percent pre-2005. Similar trends can be depicted for the Amal Movement where Pan-Arab protests dropped from 58 percent pre-2005 to only 4 percent post-2005.

Looking at the three main Christian parties (FPM, Phalange, and the Lebanese Forces), we can see that they all mobilized primarily for anti-Syrian claims between 2000 and 2005, but their behavior diverged after 2005 causing an intra-Christian political divide. The FPM became mainly concerned with mobilizations for internal politics, specifically after 2006 when the party signed a memorandum of understanding with Hezbollah and aligned itself with the March 8 coalition (Khashan 2012).

The Phalange (led by Amine Gemayel) and the Lebanese Forces (led by Samir Geagea) held to their pre-2005 tradition of mobilizing primarily against the Syrian regime. George, a 34-year-old lawyer and supporter of the FPM from Antelias, explained:

After the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005, we considered that there was no longer a need to focus on Syria in our political mobilization. The country was going through a very delicate time, President Aoun had returned from exile, and it was time to build a new basis for politics in Lebanon.

Therefore, it is clear that most political parties underwent major changes in their main claims and divisions after the Hariri assassination in 2005. This had tremendous implications on the shift in sectarian polarization and the emergence of the “Sunni–Shia” fault-line, as discussed below.

Coalition (Trans-)Formation: Intra-Sectarian Unity as Basis for Sectarianization

Since I am interested in the relationship between political divisions and sectarian polarizations, this section focuses on parties’ coalition formations over political claims. In order to substantiate my argument about major shifts in political and sectarian relations, I use network visualization to show how the pre-2005 coalitions were drastically different compared to the post-2005 period. As previously mentioned, [Table 2](#) shows that while the main political mobilizations in the country before 2005 were around Pan-Arab and anti-Syrian claims, street protests became mainly focused on internal politics and anti-Syrian claims after 2005.

However, political parties could be mobilizing for the same claim without forming a coalition (or co-mobilizing). In other words, the relative frequency of party mobilization by claim does not necessarily capture coalitions. In order to trace co-mobilizations and coalition formations, [Diagrams 1–4](#) show the network structure of the different parties by claim. They show which parties mobilized together for each of the main claims before and after 2005. The size of the nodes is relative to the total number of protests each party has undertaken for each claim (as per [Table 2](#)). Thus, the bigger the node, the more the party has mobilized for the given claim. The thickness of the lines joining the nodes (the political parties) is an indicator of the strength of the tie (in terms of co-mobilizations between the parties). Therefore, we can talk of a coalition when we identify parties joined by a thick line.

Looking at the periods between 2000 and 2005, we established that the political divide was essentially between Pan-Arab activism that formed the biggest coalition ([Figure 3](#)) and anti-Syrian activism that formed a smaller (and often repressed) movement ([Figure 4](#)). In the Pan-Arab protests, mainly Muslim-based political parties (Sunni, Shia, and Druze) mobilized together with secular parties (leftist and nationalist parties such as the Communist Party or the SSNP), minor Christian-based parties (such as the Marada), and the main Palestinian factions. For example, the data gathered for [Figure 3](#) shows that Sunni-based parties (Sunni Other) have mobilized in total 54 times for Pan-Arab claims pre-2005. Of these protests, it co-mobilized 32 times with non-sectarian parties, 25 times with Palestinian factions, 15 times with the Shia-based Amal, 14 times with Hezbollah, and 17 times with Druze-based PSP. In contrast, it only mobilized once with the Lebanese Forces and five times with the Phalange and other minor Christian parties, and it never mobilized with the FPM. Similarly, Hezbollah mobilized 25 times for Pan-Arab claim between 2000 and 2005. These include 14 co-mobilizations with Sunni-based parties, 13 with Amal, 10 with the PSP, 1 with the FPM, and 16 with non-sectarian parties and Palestinian factions.

Figure 3. Network diagram for Pan-Arab protests pre-2005.

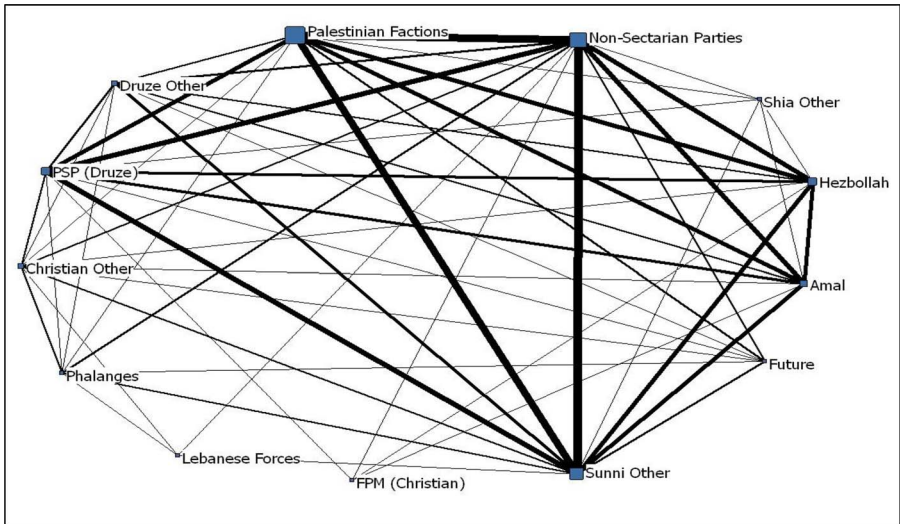
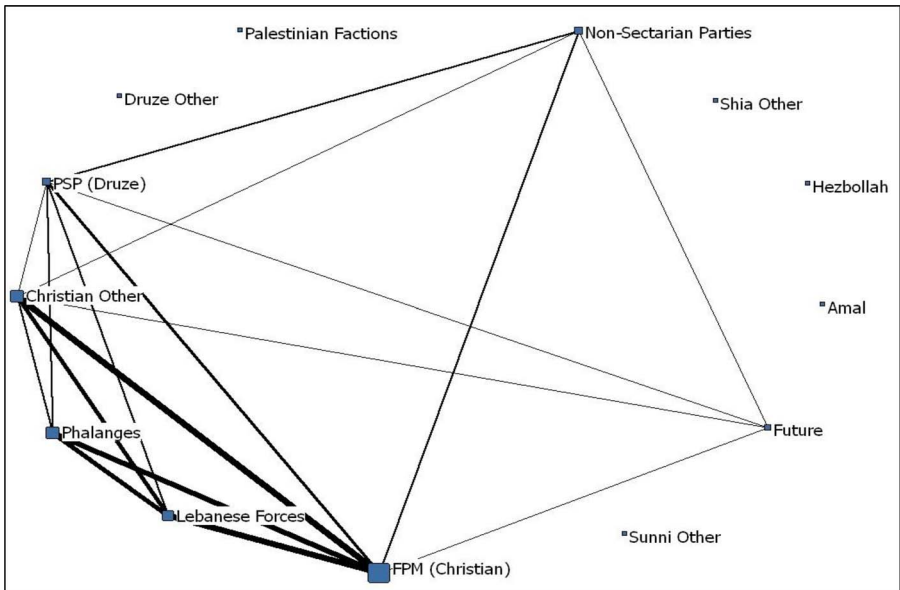


Figure 4. Network diagram for anti-Syrian protests pre-2005.



It is worth noting that while [Figure 3](#) suggests that all parties have mobilized at some point for a Pan-Arab, coalitions were rarely forged when it came to Christian-based parties mobilizing for regional claims. For example, on October 21, 2004, the main Christian-based parties (the FPM, the Phalanges, and the

Lebanese Forces) mobilized in solidarity with the Iraqi people after the targeting of churches in Iraq. Although this protest is coded as Pan-Arab in our dataset, it did not mobilize the usual Pan-Arab coalition (joined by the thicker lines) since the Christian-based parties were mainly mobilizing in support of the Iraqi people with whom they religiously identify. Thus, although these parties appear in this diagram, it is difficult to speak of a coalition given that very few co-mobilizations took place. In that sense, Figure 3 suggests that the pre-2005 Pan-Arab coalition included a strong coalition between Palestinian factions and non-sectarian parties (namely, nationalist and leftist groups), in addition to the main Shia-based parties (Amal and Hezbollah), the main Druze-based parties, and the main Sunni-based parties (represented by the Future Movement³ when reported or the “Sunni Other” groups given that the Future Movement was not yet registered as a party). Read in sectarian terms, this coalition around Pan-Arab claims thus mobilized mainly the Muslim-based parties (Shia, Sunni, and Druze) in addition to some secular leftist or nationalist parties.

On the other hand, the smaller anti-Syrian protests pre-2005 (Figure 4) were almost solely led by the main Christian-based parties, namely, the Lebanese Forces, the Phalange, the FPM, and some smaller Christian-based groups. For example, the data shows that out of 23 anti-Syrian protests by the FPM, it co-mobilized 7 times with the Lebanese Forces, 6 times with the Phalange, and 7 times with other Christian parties. Similarly, out of 10 anti-Syrian protests for the Phalange, it co-mobilized 6 times with the FPM, 5 times with the Lebanese Forces, and 2 times with other Christian parties. Anti-Syrian protests were occasionally joined by the Future Movement (one time), the PSP (four times), and some non-sectarian parties (three times). For example, the “Future Youth” and the PSP participated in an anti-Syrian protest on April 19, 2000. The protest was organized by the FPM together with some Christian-based parties and leftist groups to call for the release of anti-Syrian activists who were arrested by the Lebanese–Syrian security apparatus. Clashes took place between the police and the protesters, leaving 14 injured. Other examples include the 2004 anti-Syrian mobilization of the PSP in support of UN Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarmament of all militias. Similarly, the PSP also joined some protests in November 2004 against the extension of President Emile Lahoud’s term. However, although some co-mobilizations between Christian-based parties and the PSP or the Future Movement took place over anti-Syrian claims pre-2005 (and intensified in 2004), this did not form a clear coalition given that these co-mobilizations remained scattered and occasional. Moreover, these mobilizations did not form “critical junctures” and did not mobilize big numbers to the streets, thus not radically affecting the already cemented political and sectarian polarizations in the country. The anti-Syrian movement in the pre-2005 period was mainly led by a coalition of the main Christian-based parties in the country.

This clustering of the main Muslim-based parties in the Pan-Arab political camp on one side, and the main Christian-based parties in the anti-Syrian political camp on the other, can explain why the political divide activated the salience of the Muslim–Christian boundary prior to 2005. Within the pre-2005

context, “Pan-Arab” or “anti-Syrian” political positions could be easily interchangeable with “Muslim” or “Christian” sectarian boundaries given that these cleavages overlapped with a majority on each side. The main Christian-based parties were—despite their internal divisions—aligned together under the broader anti-Syrian banner; and the majority of the Muslim parties—also despite their differences—were allies in the Pan-Arab camp. This internal political unity of the majority parties within the sectarian communities made the political divide easily translatable into a perceived sectarian divide along “Christian–Muslim” lines. Thus, political divides overlapped with sectarian cleavages and became often interchangeable within the broader fault-lines in Lebanon at that time.

After 2005, the map of parties’ mobilization and coalitions was completely redrawn. The post-Hariri assassination period was politically divided between the March 14 coalition’s anti-Syrian claims (Figure 5) and the March 8 coalition’s internal political claims (Figure 6). A closer look at the coalition diagrams reveals that the March 14 (Figure 5) street protests consisted of co-mobilizations that brought together the Future Movement (mainly Sunni), the PSP (mainly Druze), the Lebanese Forces (mainly Christian), the Phalanges (mainly Christian), in addition to smaller Christian parties (such as the Independence Movement or the Qornet Shehwan Gathering), and secular or non-sectarian parties (such as the Democratic Left). For example, the data shows that the Future Movement has mobilized 200 times for anti-Syrian claims post-2005. Of those mobilizations, 153 were co-mobilizations with the Druze-based PSP, 73 with the Christian-based FPM (until 2006 when it joined the March 8 coalition), and 163 with the Christian-based Phalange and Lebanese Forces.

While the anti-Syrian coalition also mobilized, though to a much lesser extent, other Sunni- or Druze-based parties, the only sectarian parties that never mobilized in an anti-Syrian protests are the two main Shia parties (Hezbollah and Amal), in addition to the smaller Shia groups and the main Palestinian factions—as evident in Figure 5. This overlap between the Shia sectarian cleavage and the political position of the main Shia-based political parties forms fertile ground for the interchangeability of the sectarian and political boundaries.

On the other hand, Figure 6 shows that the coalition around internal politics mainly co-mobilized the main Shia parties (Hezbollah and Amal), one major Christian party (the FPM after 2006), in addition to smaller Christian-based parties (such as the Marada) and Druze-based parties (such as the Lebanese Democratic Party or the Lebanese Unification Movement). For example, the data shows that Hezbollah mobilized 542 times for claims related to internal politics. It co-mobilized 540 times with Amal, 538 times with the smaller Druze-based parties and the smaller Christian-based parties, and 540 times with the Christian-based FPM.

Figure 6 also shows that some protests for internal politics also include a few of the March 14 pillars such as the Future Movement, the PSP, the Lebanese Forces, and the Phalange. Although these parties appear in this diagram because they sometimes mobilized for claims that have been coded as internal politics, it is important to note that Figure 6 shows that none of those parties ever had a co-mobilization with the two main Shia parties (Hezbollah and Amal).

Figure 5. Network diagram for anti-Syrian protest (i.e., March 14 coalition) post-2005.

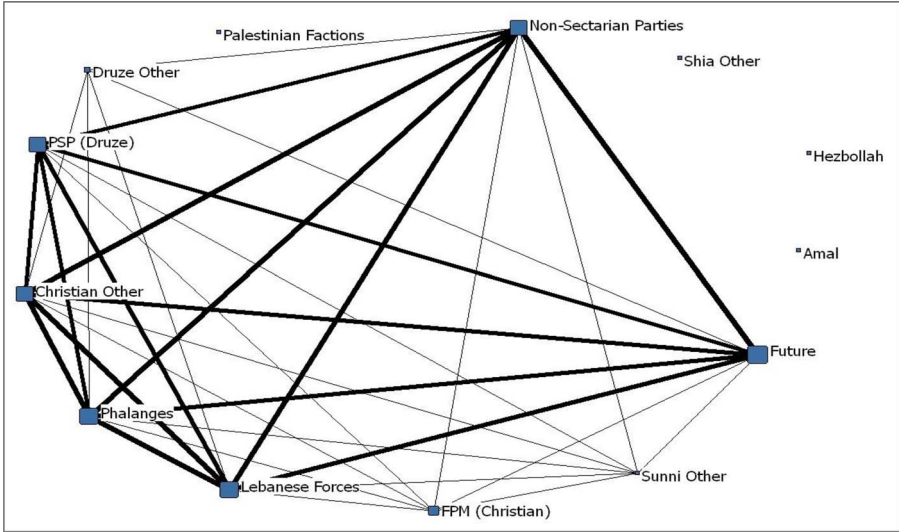
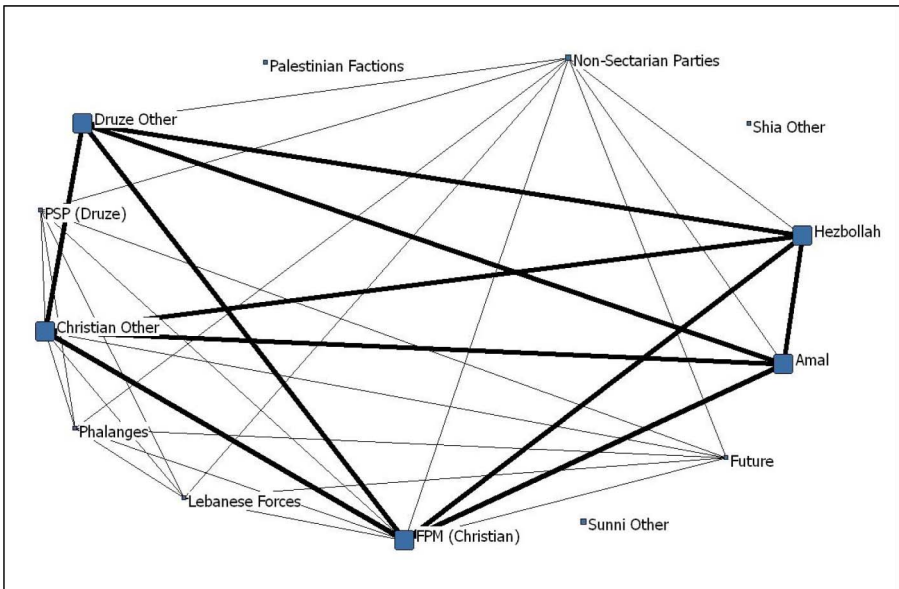


Figure 6. Network diagram for internal politics protests (i.e., March 8 coalition) post-2005.



Therefore, a closer reading of the coalition diagrams suggests that while the Druze-based and Christian-based parties have forged coalitions with other sectarian parties across the main political divide in the country post-2005, it is only the main Sunni-based parties and the Shia-based parties that never forged a political coalition (or co-mobilized) in post-2005. Thus, the post-2005 diagrams point to intra-sectarian political divisions within the Druze and Christian political parties, while the main Sunni and Shia parties mainly exhibited intra-sectarian political homogeneity. In that sense, the transformations in coalitions post-2005 formed the ground on which political alliances gained a “Sunni–Shia” sectarian overtones. Given that the main Christian-based parties were politically divided between the March 8 and March 14 camps, their political mobilization could no longer be conflated with their sectarian boundary. In other words, within the new realignments, saying that one is “Christian” had no clear political connotation as in the pre-2005 period since the main Christian-based parties were split along the principal political divide of March 8 and March 14. Similarly, the division of the Druze-based political parties between the March 8 and March 14 coalition reduced the salience of the “Druze” boundary within the broader sectarian divide. On the other hand, both the main Sunni-based (Future Movement) and the main Shia-based (coalition between Amal Movement and Hezbollah) political parties consolidated their positions within their communities creating an alignment between political and sectarian boundaries. This allowed for their political mobilization to take on a sectarian overtone as a “Sunni–Shia” divide.

Therefore, the analysis shows that in cases where there is intra-sectarian political unity, sectarian and political boundaries overlap allowing for the sectarianization of the political divide. In those cases, political mobilization quickly becomes conflated with sectarian boundaries, which activates the salience of sectarian cleavages, thus sectarianizing the political conflict. Thus, the mechanisms through which the dominant sectarian dichotomy is redrawn can be explained through the focus on party politics and the internal dynamics of political co-mobilization and boundary making. During critical junctures, the realignment of political parties through street mobilization becomes important to remodel fault-lines and cement new divides that can last beyond the initial “crack” period (della Porta 2018). This is what happened in the case of the “Sunni” and “Shia” boundary activation post-2005. However, in cases where there is intra-sectarian political division—as with the Christian parties in Lebanon post-2005—political mobilization does not easily translate into sectarian terms which deactivates the salience of the sectarian boundary and thus de-sectarianizes the understanding of the political conflict. Therefore, while calls for sectarian unity and cross-sectarian “co-existence” are common and widespread in Lebanon and in the ethnic studies literature, the analysis advanced in this study suggests that intra-sectarian political divisions matters more than inter-sectarian cooperation, since such divisions can prevent political divides from taking on a sectarian overtone.

Conclusion

This article provided a theorization of co-mobilization as being an important mechanism of political and sectarian realignment. It dealt systematically with the relationship between street mobilizations, political coalitions, and sectarian boundary transformations within the Lebanese case study. It focused on how coalition formations during periods of heightened mobilization can form the basis for sectarian boundary activation. The analysis presented in this article shows that momentous mobilizations or critical junctures, such as the 2005 moment in Lebanon, are crucial to transform and cement new sectarian and political fault-lines. The data analysis suggests that a political split can only take on a sectarian overturn when sectarian and political boundaries overlap. This usually happens when the majority of the political parties that represent a sectarian group are on the same side of the political divide. Thus, contrary to common belief, it is not inter-sectarian unity that decreases sectarian polarization but rather intra-sectarian division. In other words, internal political fragmentation within a sectarian community—specifically among parties that have a considerable mobilizational power—deactivates the political saliency of the community boundary, while intra-sectarian political homogeneity allows for political and sectarian dichotomies to become interchangeable. In building my argument, I draw on a growing literature that focuses on mobilization to trace the relationship between party politics and ethnic/sectarian cleavages. The analysis advanced in this research has four main implications on the wider literature concerned with sectarianization/ethnicization. First, I show that sectarian dichotomies are a result of political dynamics, rather than religious or age-old social divides. In fact, the existence of a sectarian/ethnic cleavage at the social level does not automatically make it politically salient. Similarly, the existence of a political cleavage does not automatically translate into a sectarian/ethnic divide. Lebanon is a country that officially recognizes 18 sectarian groups; however, only 2 of these groups are politically salient in today's schism. Therefore, it is factors that lie outside the sect itself that can explain when a cleavage becomes politically salient or not. The second important point is that while structural factors are crucial to explain *why* a specific sectarian boundary can potentially become salient, the timing and shape of the transformation (the *how*) can be understood through the tracking of party politics and their overlap with sectarian boundaries. Here, street mobilizations become an important field of study since it acts as a channel for political and sectarian transformations and provides data on political parties' coalitions, political claims, and sectarian boundaries. Third, and building on the previous two points, by drawing on the calls to de-ethnicize research methods (Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2013), this research shows that using political parties—rather than sects—as a unit of analysis led to moving beyond the conflation between the social and the political levels of sectarianism that exists in the literature and revealed important mechanisms of sectarianization or de-sectarianization. This is a crucial conceptual and methodological point that adds to the emerging sociological literature in ethnic studies and Middle Eastern literature on sectarianism. Fourth, this research highlights the

importance of looking at sectarianism/ethnicity as non-static and changing. Therefore, it joins other works that move beyond the study of *sectarianism*, to the analysis of *sectarianization* as a process (Hashemi and Postel 2017). Thus, whereas some studies have focused on cross-country comparisons (Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010), I concentrate on cross-temporal changes. This is important to show how within the same society (therefore controlling for history, depth of cleavages, and role of colonization), the salience of the same ethnic/sectarian cleavage can change over time. This approach is an important addition to the literature on the salience of ethnic cleavages. Finally, this study offers an insight into the complex relationship between ethnic/sectarian boundary making and street politics at the meso-level. The proposed analysis can explain the rapid realignments in the salience of certain ethnic/sectarian cleavages in times of historical “cracks” and eventful mobilizations. While this research focuses on the meso-level to show how co-mobilizations reflect the landscape of political alignments that determine the viability of a sectarian framing, further research is needed in two main directions. At the macro-level, more research is needed to better theorize the relationship between street mobilization, party alliance, and sectarianization. This could be done through the study of elite strategies with regard to street politics and co-mobilizations as a process that links elite coalitions with sociopolitical transformations. At the micro-level, studies should focus more on understanding how macro-level changes in political and sectarian polarization are filtered down to the individual level in order to depict the processes of identity formation and transformation.

About the Author

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Notes

1. Although each movement claimed to have gathered one million protesters, a study published by *The Monthly* (2006) shows that taking into consideration the surface area where the protests occurred, it is impossible for more than 700,000 people to have gathered in each of the demonstrations of March 8 and 14.
2. The data shows that political parties mobilized in less than 8 percent of socioeconomic protests, which makes it marginal for the analysis of this article since the focus is on political parties specifically.

3. The Future Movement was not formally registered as a political party until August 2007. This explains why the participation of the pro-Hariri protesters, then known as the “Future Youth,” possibly went underreported in newspaper articles.

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