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Women's Participation and Representation in Lebanese Politics: Electoral Performance, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

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Executive Summary

The representation of women in Lebanese politics has always been disproportionately low. Not only is the historical framework of power in Lebanon patriarchal in nature, but the country's political families are all led by men as well. Under the majoritarian systems that have dominated parliamentary and municipal elections since the end of the civil war, electoral results have always sidelined women. The proportional representation system, adopted in 2017 and used in the 2018 parliamentary elections, brought some hopes of changing these tendencies. In reality, only six women entered parliament that year—an increase of only two from the previous elections. This report examines the reasons behind the low representation of women in Lebanese politics and potential

remedies in order to create a fairer and more egalitarian electoral system. It also sheds light on the impact of geographic characteristics and sectarian representation on the performance of women candidates in the elections.

Introduction

The 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections saw significant improvements in women's representation in candidacies: Eighty-six women ran for parliament, compared to 12 in the last elections of 2009. Their performance, however, was underwhelming with only six making it to parliament.

The vast majority of women candidates, or 73, were independents running on party-affiliated or anti-establishment lists, with no prior exposure in the political sphere. With the new proportional representation system, which included the preferential vote—thus giving voters the option to vote for the candidate of their choice—non-affiliated women running on party lists had little chance of beating their male counterparts. In addition, with the districting done along confessional and party lines, anti-establishment lists, which included a high share of women candidates, had little chance of beating sectarian political parties.

The poor performance and representation of women in Lebanese politics is a direct result of the country's elections culture which naturally discriminates against women, as its only function is to reproduce political elites—political families and sectarian parties. Indeed, the very few women who received voter support were the highly politically connected ones. One inherent characteristic of the Lebanese political system is its familial nature whereby political power is distributed between the *zuama*—paternal figures who represent different Lebanese confessional communities. This means that political leadership tends to be transmitted through familial lines, most often from male political leaders to their male relatives, with women accessing political power only in the absence of the male heirs.[1] This positions women as a natural extension of their male relatives, with the political system naturally privileging men and discriminating against women. In fact, since 1953, when women obtained the right to run for office, only 17 women have been elected into parliament with most of them being either the wives, daughters, or sisters of male politicians. Some examples include Bahia Hariri, sister of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and aunt of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who has been in office since 1992, Nayla Moawad, widow of former President René Moawad, who served as an MP from 1992 to 2009 when she endorsed her son Michel Moawad who was elected in 2018. Similarly, Solange Gemayel, widow of former President-elect Bashir Gemayel, was elected in 2005

1
Joseph, S. 2011. 'Political Familism in Lebanon.' *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 636(1): 150-163.

and decided not to run in the 2009 elections, handing over her seat to her son Nadim Gemayel instead, and Sethrida Geagea, wife of the Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, was elected in 2005 and has been in office ever since.

Combined with the hereditary transmission of power, women's underrepresentation in politics is inextricably linked to the Lebanese society's widespread patriarchal social norms, which restrict women to more 'traditional' roles.[2] Rather than being fixed, these norms are continuously reproduced by the institutional makeup of the Lebanese state. The patriarchal nature embedded in the Lebanese political sectarian system means that women's participation often depends on the support and approval of men.[3] Women face the challenge of moving from the private to the public sphere due to the sectarian character of the legal system, which dictates that all legal decisions are to be taken by men, who naturally become the head of the household—confining women to the private sphere.[4] Lebanese women, whose personal rights depend on the sect they belong to, therefore have little chance of reaching political power when the legal system is based on their inequality with regards to their male counterparts.[5]

An additional feature of the Lebanese political system is its clientelistic nature, whereby political leaders are able to maintain loyalty through the services they provide to their constituents. This results in an uncompetitive system, favoring men with financial resources and the few women they decide to back, over any new political actor. Building a just political system which would give equal opportunities to men and women will require a dramatic change to the make-up of the Lebanese political culture—founded on sectarianism, clientelism, and a religiously-based judicial system, which not only discriminates against women, but creates inequalities between women belonging to different sectarian communities. Overthrowing this culture is a goal to strive for—but it would be unrealistic to think that it can happen in the short term. Rather, this should be done in parallel with reforms to the electoral system. Electoral systems can benefit certain actors at the expense of others, and because these can be changed regularly, building a system that can enhance women's representation would be a realistic, short-term measure.

This report is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of women's participation in the 2018 elections by electoral district, confessional group, and political affiliation. In the second section, the performance of women candidates is analyzed quantitatively based on the official elections results published by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, disaggregated by polling station. While only a few women captured the majority of the votes obtained by all 86 women overall, we show how their performance partly depended on

2 Stamadianou, V. 2011. 'Perspectives of Young Women in Political Parties on Women and Politics in Lebanon.' *Emerging Voices: Young Women in Lebanese Politics.* International Alert.

3 Geha, C. 2019. 'The Myth of Women's Political Empowerment within Lebanon's Sectarian Power-Sharing System.' *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy,* 40(4): 498-521.

4 Kingston, P. 2011. 'Women and Political Parties in Lebanon: Reflections on the Historical Experience.' *Emerging Voices: Young Women in Lebanese Politics.* International Alert.

5 Saadeh, S. 2011. 'Women in Lebanese Politics: Underlying Causes of Women's Lack of Representation in Lebanese Politics.' *Emerging Voices: Young Women in Lebanese Politics.* International Alert.

the sectarian seat they were competing for. Merging the official elections results with a series of variables relating to the characteristics of voters and the areas they were registered in, we identify the relevant impact of different factors on the performance of women candidates. The third section unpacks elements of the 2017 electoral law and system which created additional challenges to women's participation and representation. It then discusses electoral reforms that would have the potential to benefit women, most notably the implementation of a gender quota.

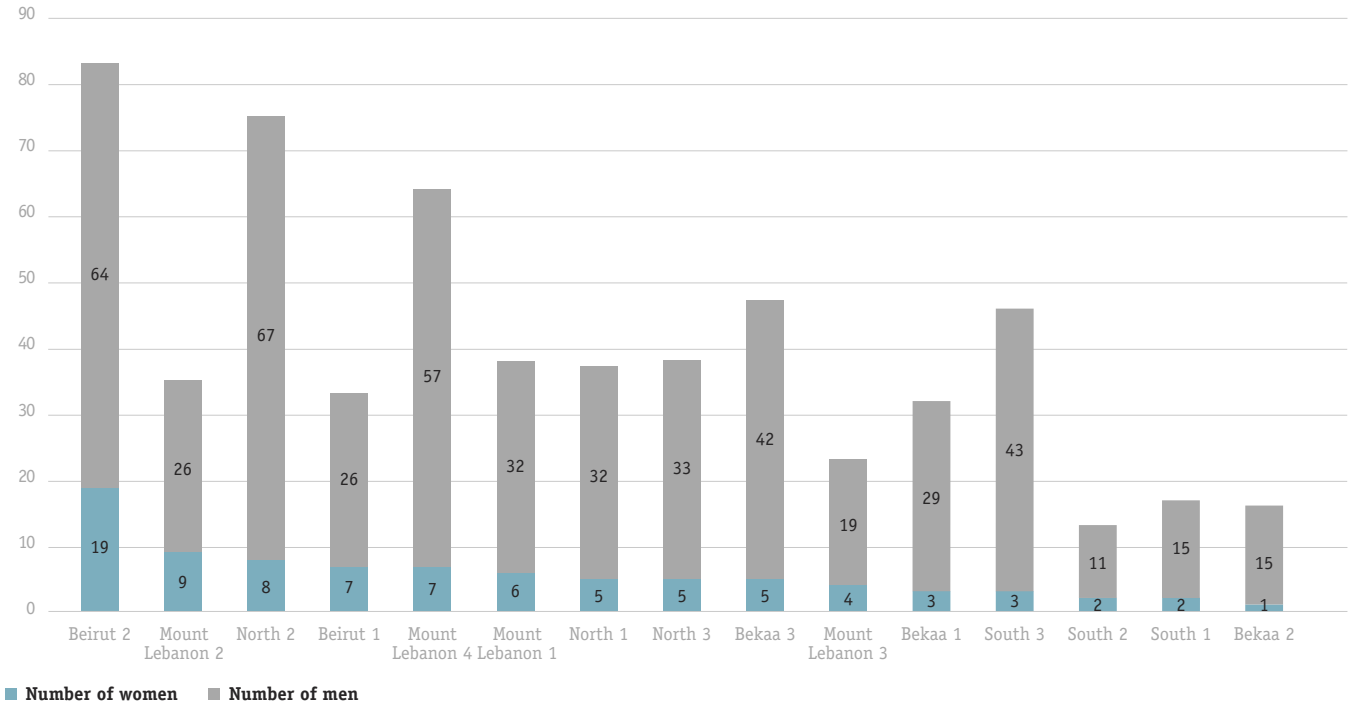
I Who ran, where, and with whom?

The May 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections saw a record number of women candidates, who competed in all electoral districts. The elections were hailed as a step toward strengthening the role of women in Lebanese politics: Eighty-six women ran, representing 14% of the 597 candidates. This was a significant increase from the previous elections of 2009, when only 12 women ran. In fact, since the 1992 elections—the first to take place after the Lebanese civil war—less than 20 women competed in each of the electoral races, ranging from only six in 1992 to 18 in 2000. Moreover, in contrast to the previous elections, women candidates in 2018 competed in all electoral districts, although there were large geographical variations in their candidacy.

The vast majority of women ran in the more urban regions of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Across the 15 electoral districts, Beirut 2 had the highest number of women candidates, with 19 running on eight of the nine competing lists. This was followed by Mount Lebanon 2 (Metn), with nine women running, and North 2 (Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh), where eight women candidates ran. By contrast, two women ran in each of the electoral districts of South 1 (Saida and Jezzine) and South 2 (Sour and Zahrani), and only one ran in Bekaa 2 (West Bekaa-Rachaya). Women's participation also varied within electoral districts. The 2017 parliamentary law used for the 2018 elections divided the country into 15 electoral districts, with some of them being further divided into sub-districts, for a total of 26 sub-districts. Each of the sub-districts had different candidates running.[6] Women ran in all sub-districts with the exception of Minnieh (in North 2), Zahrani (in South 2), and Nabatiyeh (in South 3, combined with Bint Jbeil and Marjayoun-Hasbaya).

6
For example, the electoral district of North 2 combined Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh. While the same lists ran in all sub-districts, the candidates put forward by each varied across sub-districts. According to Article 98 of the Law No. 44 of 2017, or the Lebanese electoral law used for the 2018 elections: 'Each voter is entitled to vote for one of the competing lists, and may as well give one preferential vote for a candidate from the minor constituency and the same list they have voted for.' In other words, voters were only allowed to cast a preferential vote for candidates running in the sub-district of their registration.

Figure 1 **Number of candidates by gender and electoral district in the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections**



The number of women candidates by confessional group also varied. Most women candidates were Maronite (26 candidates) and Sunni (22 candidates). Maronite women competed in nine of the 12 electoral districts with Maronite seats, and Sunni women ran in six of the nine electoral districts that have Sunni seats. On the other hand, only nine Shia women ran, across five of the eight electoral districts that have Shia seats. Among the other groups, women's participation was highest among the Greek Orthodox, with 12 candidates running in nine of the 10 electoral districts that have Greek Orthodox seats (Annex 2). Overall, considering the number of seats in each of the electoral districts allocated to each sectarian group—i.e. taking into account all the variables that determine the distribution of parliamentary seats in the country, namely the regional and sectarian distribution of seats—enough women ran to fill over half of the 128 parliamentary seats (72 seats). Geographically, had they obtained a high enough number of votes, women candidates could have filled at least half of the seats in all of the Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and North districts. For example, in Beirut 2, 10 women ran for the six Sunni seats, three women ran for the two Shia seats, three ran for the Druze seat, two for the Protestant seat, and one for the Greek Orthodox seat—meaning that all 11 seats could have been won by women. Across sects, over half of the parliamentary seats allocated to the Maronite, Sunni, Greek Orthodox, and Armenian Orthodox communities could have been occupied by women, while less than 40% of

the Druze, Greek Catholic, and Shia seats could have been occupied by women. This widespread participation of women, which did not translate into representation, shows that the stumbling block to women's representation is not about the latter's need for encouragement or empowerment to enable them to participate in public life; rather, it is about the very limited support they are able to obtain.

Apart from the total number of women candidates, many districts saw a low share of lists that included women candidates, highlighting political parties' lack of commitment to equal representation. For example, in Akkar (North 1), although there were five women candidates, all of them ran on 'Women of Akkar', a list formed exclusively by women competing against the five other male-dominated lists. Similarly, in Saida and Jezzine (South 1), only one of the four lists included women. The district where politicians showed the highest level of commitment to equal representation was Metn (Mount Lebanon 2) where each of the five lists included women candidates. Moreover, the vast majority of women candidates were independent, running on either party-affiliated (37 women) or anti-establishment lists (36 women), and only 13 were members of a traditional political party. Seven of them were members of one of the six main established parties with, in fact, five of them making it to parliament. Bahia Hariri, Rola Tabsh, and Dima Jamali were candidates from the Future Movement; Sethrida Geagea and Jessica Azar were from the Lebanese Forces; Ghada Assaf from the Free Patriotic Movement; and Inaya Ezzeddine from the Amal Movement. Neither Hezbollah nor the Progressive Socialist Party put women forward in the elections. The six main political parties preferred adding independent women candidates to their lists instead. Only two women, both independent, ran on the same lists as a Hezbollah or Progressive Socialist Party candidate—one in Keserwan for the former party and one in Baabda for the latter, which also included the Lebanese Forces in the list. Six women from smaller political parties—such as the Kataeb, Ramgavar, and Communist party—ran, while in total, 37 independent women on party-affiliated lists, or lists backed by politicians who have been part of the political establishment,[7] did so. On the other hand, 36 women ran on anti-establishment and independent lists, with 19 belonging to the Kulluna Watani coalition, out of the total 124 candidates on those lists and the 66 Kulluna Watani candidates.

Parties' reluctance to include women in their lists may be due to strategic reasons. According to the 2017 electoral law, an electoral list has to pass a certain threshold in its number of votes in order to receive at least one seat.[8] A party aiming to achieve electoral success will therefore prioritize nominating figures who are more likely to garner votes. Women either lack the public exposure required to

7
Such politicians include former minister and member of parliament Michel Murr in Mount Lebanon 2 and former minister Ashraf Rifi in North 2.

8
According to Article 99 of the 2017 electoral law: 'The number of seats obtained by each list is determined based on the electoral quotient. The electoral quotient is obtained by dividing the number of the voters in each of the major constituencies by the number of seats to fill in each. Lists that do not achieve the electoral quotient are excluded from the seat allocation, and the electoral quotient is re-calculated after deduction of the votes obtained by such lists.' The quotient therefore ranges from 7.7% of votes in Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf, 13 seats) to 20% of votes in South 1 (Saida and Jezzine, five seats).

succeed, or still face discrimination due to Lebanon's political framework which remains patriarchal in nature. Adding men candidates to electoral lists, in particular the better-known ones, may therefore be more attractive for political parties. This strategic decision is illustrated by the highly limited electoral success of women in 2018. The majority of women received less than 500 votes, while the best performing ones were those with higher political and financial capital.

II How did women candidates perform?

Results for women candidates were disappointing. They only managed to capture 5.6% of preferential votes in the minor districts they ran in (89,447 votes),[9] obtaining six seats—up from four in 2009.[10] Most of these votes were received by the more politically connected women who ran for elections, such as Bahia Hariri, sister of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who has been in office since the first parliamentary elections after the Lebanese civil war (1992) and Sethrida Geagea, wife of Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces party, who has been a member of parliament since 2005. Overall, Hariri won a seat in Saida with 13,739 votes (42% of preferential votes in Saida), and Geagea won in Bcharre with 6,677 votes (36% of preferential votes). The four other women who made it to parliament were newly elected. Inaya Ezzeddine (Amal Movement) who won her seat in Sour received 18,815 votes (22% of preferential votes in the district). With Sour being one of the main strongholds of Amal, Ezzeddine's success was already guaranteed. However, Ezzeddine performed particularly well, receiving a higher share of votes than incumbent MP Ali Khreiss on the same list. Her success can be explained by the fact that she was the Minister of State for Administrative Reform at the time of the elections—and the only woman in that cabinet—and was therefore an already known politician. Two other elected women, Rola Tabsh and Dima Jamali, were from the Future Movement. Tabsh ran in Beirut 2 alongside Saad Hariri, the party's political leader, and received 6,637 votes (5% in Beirut 2). Jamali won in Tripoli with 2,066 votes (2%), and while she was less successful than some of the losing candidates in the district, she won her seat due to the high percentage of votes obtained by her list. However, amid allegations of electoral fraud and following an appeal from Taha Naji, a losing candidate who ran on a competing list in 2018, the Constitutional Council unseated Jamali in February 2019.[11] With the backing of the main Sunni political figures in Tripoli, Jamali won her seat back in the by-elections of April 2019 and received over 19,000 votes.[12] Finally, the sixth winning woman, Paula Yacoubian from Kulluna Watani, won 2,500 votes in Beirut 1 (6%). She is the only independent candidate who entered parliament. While Beirut 1 is a highly competitive district, increasing new political

9
As noted in the previous section of this report, women candidates ran in 23 of the 26 sub-districts. No woman ran in the sub-districts of Minnieh (in North 2), Zahrani (in South 2), and Nabatiyeh (in South 3). When including the number of preferential votes cast in all 26 sub-districts, women candidates obtained 5.1% of preferential votes across the country.

10
Note that six women won in the 2005 elections.

11
Naharnet. 'Constitutional Council Annuls Election of Dima Jamali.' February 21, 2019.

12
Redd, B. and H. Dakroub. 'Dima Jamali Claims Victory in Tripoli By-Elections.' *The Daily Star,* April 15, 2019.

actors' chances of winning, Yacoubian's success can be partly attributed to her experience and previous media exposure: She is a well-known media personality, and has interviewed prominent politicians throughout her career.

One woman candidate who performed particularly well but did not make it to parliament was Myriam Skaff in Zahle. She is the widow of former MP Elias Skaff, who served as member of parliament between 1992 and 2009, and is the leader of her late husband's party the Popular Bloc, showing again that political connections highly determine the performance of women candidates. While Skaff was among the most successful candidates in her district (6,348 votes, 7% of preferential votes), she did not win a seat due to her electoral list's failure to pass the electoral threshold for winning a seat in Zahle.[13]

Apart from the results for these specific candidates, support for women candidates varied across voters' characteristics and geographical areas within electoral districts. Using the official 2018 elections results published by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities disaggregated by polling station,[14] we identified the relevant impact of different factors on the performance of women candidates. The results at the polling station level were merged with a range of variables relating to the characteristics of voters and of different geographical localities. First, based on the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities' list of registered voters by confession and gender in each of the polling stations, we identified the demographic characteristics of voters.[15] In addition, for each electoral district, we calculated the relative size of each confessional group[16] and constructed a variable on whether they were a minority group—which we define as those representing less than 30% of registered voters in a district. We also constructed variables on whether a group was allocated a parliamentary seat in this district and whether they had a co-sectarian woman candidate to vote for. Moreover, based on the location of each of the polling stations specified in the official results, we calculated the results by municipal and cadastral areas. These results were then combined with geographical characteristics such as: The level of economic development in an area, approximated by the night-time light intensity and obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration;[17] the poverty rate in a cadaster, based on the ratio of beneficiaries of the National Poverty Targeting Program over the population in the cadaster;[18] the level of sectarian homogeneity in a cadaster, which we constructed based on the distribution of voters by confession in each cadaster;[19] and the share of refugees over the number of registered voters in a cadaster, collected from the UNHCR.[20] Through a multivariate regression analysis, all of these variables allow us to see which gender group was more likely to vote for a woman

13
According to Article 99 of the 2017 electoral law, in any district, a list has to receive a higher number of votes than a certain electoral quotient in order to receive at least one seat. This quotient is equal to the number of valid votes over the number of seats in a district. In the case of Zahle (seven seats), this is equal to 14% of votes. Myriam Skaff's list received nearly 12%.

14
Available at: http://elections.gov.lb.

15
Note that some polling stations had both men and women registered to vote, and some had voters from multiple confessional groups registered. These are marked as 'Mixed stations.'

16
The number of registered voters by confession in each district was calculated through the combination of the number of registered voters in each polling station and the confession of these voters. For polling stations that had more than one confessional group registered to vote, the number of voters by sect was approximated by looking at the number of registered families from each by sect in each of these polling stations.

17
Obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (2017).

18
Data on National Poverty Targeting Program beneficiaries was obtained from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

19
Based on electoral data on the sect of voters per polling station, we constructed an index of homogeneity (IH) = $\Sigma_{i=1}^{n} Sij^2$, where S_{ij}^2 is the sum of the square root of the share of each sectarian group in the total number of registered voters in a cadaster. The index ranges between 0 (when the cadaster is fully heterogeneous) and 1 (when the cadaster is fully homogeneous, or only one sectarian group is present).

20
Data on the refugee population was collected from UNHCR (2017).

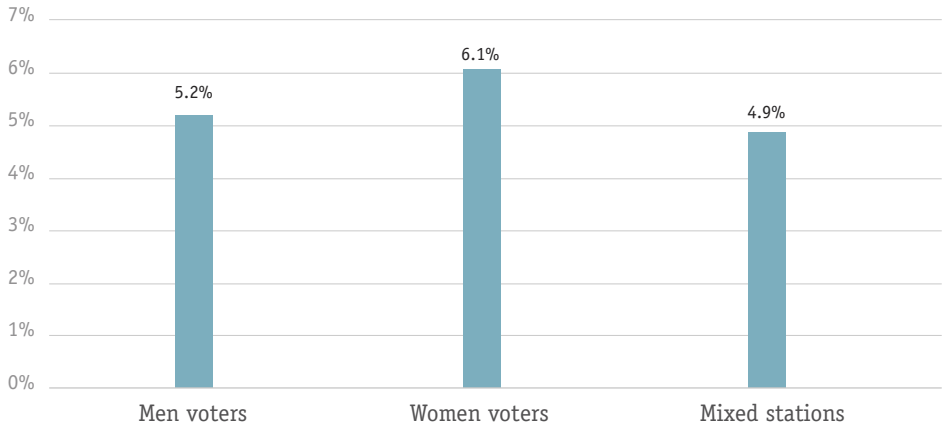
candidate, regardless of their confession and the characteristics of the electoral districts and areas they were registered in. We are also able to measure the impact of political representation on the results for women candidates, such as whether voters from a specific sectarian group were more likely to vote for a woman candidate when they were allocated a seat in a district and had a co-sectarian woman to vote for, and whether the relative size of their sectarian group affected their decision to vote for a woman. At the geographic level, the analysis can highlight the impact of urbanization, economic development, and poverty on voters' support for women candidates, while controlling for their gender and confession.

Women were more likely to vote for women candidates

Across demographic characteristics, after controlling for geographical characteristics, women voters were more likely to vote for women candidates, with 6% of them casting their vote for a woman candidate, compared to 5% of men voters.[21] However, these variations in support for women candidates across genders were not stark, showing that even women voters did not fully support women. Support for women candidates was also stronger among women in the vast majority of districts, although, again, variations across genders were minor. The largest difference was in Saida (where the share was 4% higher among women voters), followed by Beirut 1, Beirut 2, Tripoli, and Sour (between 2% and 3% higher among women voters), and Aley (1% higher). Men voters showed slightly higher support for women candidates in Bcharre (where the share of votes they gave to Geagea was 2% higher than that among women voters), and Marjayoun-Hasbaya (1% higher). The variations across genders in all other districts were lower than 1%. This slightly higher support among women voters highlights the dominating role of men in the public and political sphere.

21 Here we exclude the minor districts of Minnieh, Nabatiyeh, and Zahrani, where there were no women candidates. Variations across genders are statistically significant even after controlling for voters' confession and certain characteristics of the districts and municipalities and cadasters they were registered to vote in, such as level of economic development, poverty rates, and level of confessional homogeneity.

Figure 2 **Percentage of votes for women candidates by gender**



Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**
Mixed stations are those that had both men and women registered to vote.

Women voters, however, tended to support women candidates more often than men voters who voted for the same list. In other words, among those who voted for a specific list, women voters were more likely to give their preferential vote to a woman candidate: 18% of women who voted for a list that included at least one woman candidate gave their preferential vote to a woman, while 15% of men who voted for the same list did so. For example, in Zgharta, where only one woman, Antonia Ghamra (Kulluna Watani), ran, 24% of women compared to 16% of men who voted for a Kulluna Watani candidate chose her. This shows that party support may trump gender: Once a voter chooses a list, gender becomes a consideration in selecting which candidate to give their preferential vote to, and women voters may then become more likely to vote for a woman candidate.

Women's performance was shaped by a confessional group's level of political representation

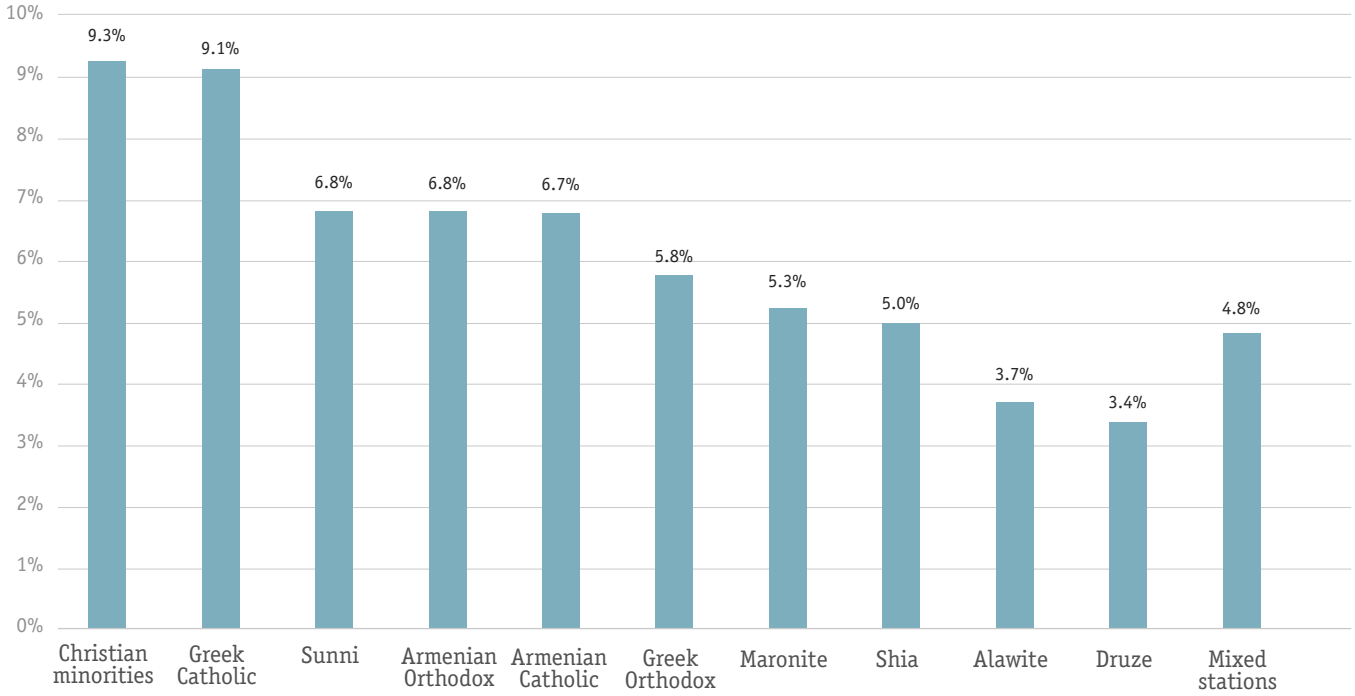
Support for women candidates varied across confessional groups. Christian communities generally gave a higher share of their votes to women candidates, while Druze and Alawite voters gave the lowest. The percentage was particularly high among Christian minorities and Greek Catholics (over 9%), followed by Sunnis, Armenian Orthodox, and Armenian Catholics (nearly 7% each). On the other hand, less than 4% of Druze and Alawite voters voted for a woman candidate.[22]

Most of the votes each confessional group gave to women candidates went to one specific woman. For example, over 80% of Shia voters who voted for a woman chose Inaya Ezzeddine, in the Sour district where they represented the majority. The low share of votes given to women among Shia voters reflects their loyalty toward the main Shia political parties—as Amal had only one woman candidate and Hezbollah had

22 Note that these percentages exclude the results in Minnieh, Nabatiyeh, and Zahrani, where no women candidates ran.

none. Over 40% of Sunni voters who voted for a woman chose Bahia Hariri, who ran in Saida where Sunnis represented the majority. Similarly, over 40% of Maronite voters who cast a ballot for a woman chose Sethrida Geagea, running in Bcharre, where nearly all voters were Maronite. The high share of votes among Christian minorities and Greek Catholics was driven by their support for Paula Yacoubian in Beirut 1 and Myriam Skaff in Zahle, respectively.

Figure 3 **Percentage of votes for women candidates by confessional group**



Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**
Mixed stations are those that had voters from multiple confessional groups registered.

Beyond these levels of support for women at the national level, there were district-specific characteristics that influenced voters' decision to vote for women candidates: There is a significant relationship between a confessional group's level of political representation, voters' sectarian biases, and the votes they gave to women candidates.

First, voters whose sects were not represented by a seat in a district were more likely to vote for a woman, compared to those represented by a seat in that same district. For example, in Batroun, Shia and Sunni voters were more likely to vote for the single woman candidate compared to Maronite voters, who are represented by all seats in the district. In Beirut 2, Maronite, Greek Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox voters were much more likely to vote for a woman candidate compared to all represented confessional groups in the district. Even in Sour,

which was the district where Shia voters gave their highest share to a woman candidate, most non-represented voters were significantly more likely to vote for a woman candidate compared to Shias.[23] Voters not represented by a seat in a district may be less targeted by political parties, and as the main political party candidates tend to be men, these voters may choose to vote independently—either for a candidate running on a party-affiliated list who is not the main political figure, or for a candidate running on an anti-establishment list.

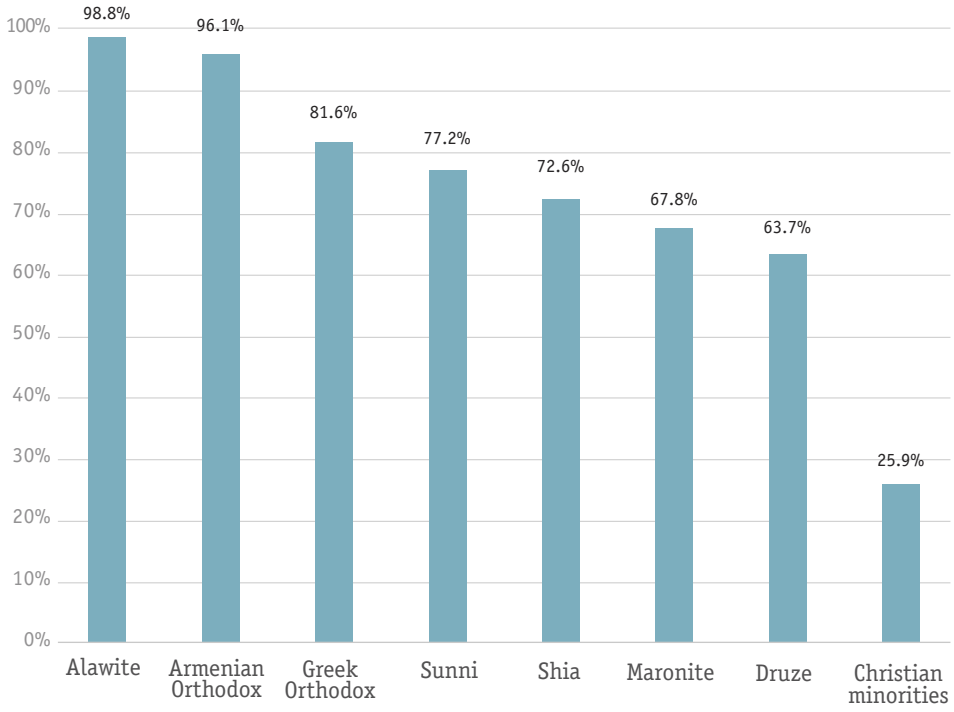
Second, among the confessional groups represented by a seat in a district, voters who had the option to vote for a woman candidate from their own confession were more likely to vote for a woman compared to those who did not have that option, suggesting that sectarian lines may trump gender preferences. In other words, voters who had a co-sectarian woman running were more likely to vote for a woman candidate than those who only had co-sectarian male candidates running in their district. For example, in Marjayoun-Hasbaya, where only one Shia and one Greek Orthodox woman ran, Shia and Greek Orthodox voters were significantly more likely to vote for a woman candidate, compared to Sunni and Druze voters who are also allocated a seat in the district. In West Bekaa-Rachaya, Maronite voters were more likely to vote for the single woman candidate, who was also Maronite, compared to the other groups allocated seats in the district.

In line with this, the majority of voters who voted for a woman candidate chose their co-sectarian one, highlighting the role of sectarian considerations when casting a preferential vote. Counting the districts where voters had the option to vote for a woman candidate from their sect or a different one within their selected list,[24] 74% of voters who voted for a woman candidate chose their co-sectarian one. The majority of all sectarian groups chose a co-sectarian woman candidate, with the exception of Christian minorities (26%), driven by their support for Paula Yacoubian in Beirut 1 (Armenian Orthodox). Among the other groups, the co-sectarian bias ranged from over 95% among Alawite and Armenian Orthodox voters, to slightly less than 65% among Druze voters. While no Armenian Catholic woman ran for the single Armenian Catholic seat in the country, this confessional group voted overwhelmingly for Armenian Orthodox women. In addition, even though no list in the country included both a Greek Catholic and a woman from another confessional group, Greek Catholic voters overwhelmingly voted for a Maronite or Greek Orthodox woman candidate.

23
Besides Shias, four other confessional groups had their own polling stations in Sour. Three of these groups were more likely to vote for women candidates, while there we no significant variations between the fourth group, Sunnis, and the single represented group, Shias.

24
Here we exclude the votes given to women candidates when a voter did not have the option to vote for a candidate from the same or different sect within their selected list. For example, in Beirut 1 where seven women ran across four lists, only one list, Kulluna Watani, included women candidates from multiple sectarian groups. The list had two Armenian Orthodox and one woman candidate representing Christian minorities. Therefore, the co-sectarian bias in this case is measured among Armenian Orthodox and Christian minority voters who voted for a woman Kulluna Watani candidate.

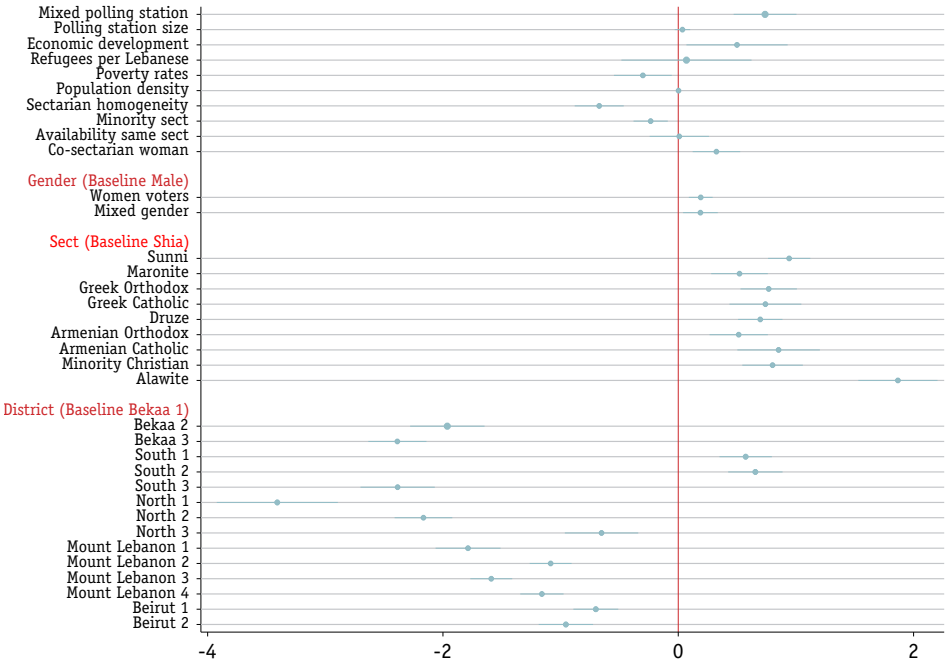
Figure 4 **Percentage of votes given to a co-sectarian woman candidate among voters who chose a woman candidate within their selected list**



Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**
These calculations exclude the votes cast for women candidates when a voter did not have the option to vote for a woman from their own or a different sect within their selected list. Armenian Catholic and Greek Catholic voters are also excluded, as no Armenian Catholic woman ran, and no list in the country included both a Greek Catholic woman and a woman from another confession.

The relative size of a sectarian group in a district was also a significant factor. While those who had the option to vote for a co-sectarian woman candidate were more likely to vote for a woman, the effect was not similar across sectarian groups. Minority groups—those that represented less than 30% of registered voters in a district—generally voted more for women candidates than the majority group in a district. For example, Greek Orthodox voters in Beirut 2 were significantly more likely to vote for a woman compared to the majority groups in the district, Sunnis and Shias. In Tripoli, where Sunni, Greek Orthodox, and Alawite women ran, Greek Orthodox and Alawite voters were more likely to vote for a woman candidate compared to Sunnis, who represent the majority group. This result could suggest that minority groups may not be as targeted by the main political parties as the majority groups in a district, given that, generally, districts with a significant share of one group also tend to be specific parties' strongholds.

Figure 5 **Drivers of votes for women candidates**



Geographically, within—rather than across—electoral districts, women candidates tended to perform better in areas with lower poverty rates and higher levels of economic development. These areas tend to be associated with higher levels of income, which may weaken clientelistic ties between citizens and traditional political parties. One additional result was that voters in more confessionally mixed areas were more likely to cast their ballot for a woman candidate, which could potentially be explained by parties' higher capacity in mobilizing their supporters in more confessionally homogeneous areas. Vote buying or citizens being pressured vote may also be more rampant in rural and poorer areas, which again could push voters to cast their ballot for established political parties, all led by men. The exceptions were in the votes for politically connected female candidates, who obtained a high share of votes in their districts. This shows that the overall poor performance of women in the elections is not purely due to their gender, but rather related to their political affiliation.

Separating the votes for each type of woman candidate—political party members, independents on party-affiliated lists, and women on anti-establishment lists—can negate the effect of political affiliation on their performance.

How did women on anti-establishment lists perform compared to men on the same lists?

Thirty-six of the 86 women candidates ran on independent and anti-establishment lists, and they tended to perform much better within their lists compared to women candidates on party-affiliated lists. Overall, 42% of voters who voted for an independent list across the country cast their preferential vote for a woman. Conversely, women who are members of political parties received 22% of the votes that went to their respective lists. Independent women running on party-affiliated lists barely received any of the votes that went to their lists (less than 4%).[25] This shows that voters who voted for anti-establishment lists were more inclined to elect women. This also shows that women have little chance of capturing votes when they are running on the same lists as male political leaders.

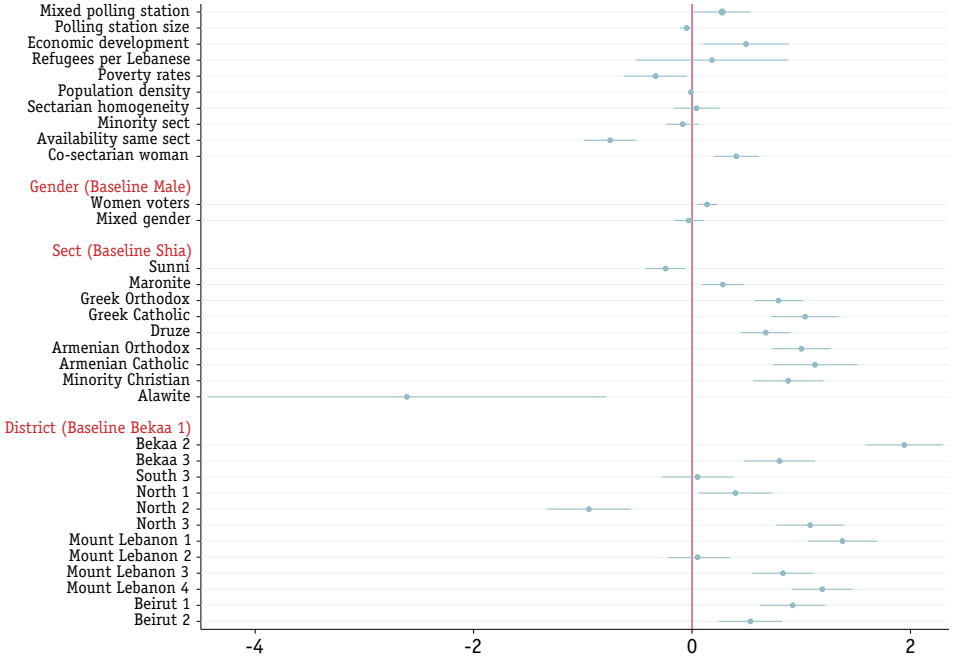
With these variations in mind, looking at the factors that affected the performance of women on anti-establishment lists specifically—i.e. their performance compared to that of their male counterparts—can highlight the robustness of the results. Interestingly, most of the same results were observed. Within electoral districts, women running on anti-establishment lists tended to perform better in areas with higher levels of economic development and lower poverty rates. However, the level of confessional homogeneity in a cadaster was no longer significant. The two former results may suggest that the better performance of women in more economically developed areas is not solely due to the generally weaker clientelistic ties there. Rather, these areas may also be associated with higher levels of education, and may be more socially progressive. Thus, among voters who supported an anti-establishment list, those in more economically developed areas also tended to be more supportive of women candidates.

Regarding the characteristics of individual voters, while the relative size of a sectarian group no longer had a significant effect, those who had a co-sectarian woman candidate to vote for were more likely to choose a woman candidate compared to voters who either only had a co-sectarian male candidate, or a woman candidate from a different confession. Women voters were still more likely to vote for a woman candidate, however, some differences across confessional groups were observed. Overall, when combining the results for all women candidates, Alawite voters were the most likely to vote for a woman candidate. However, when focusing on those who voted for an anti-establishment list, Alawites become the least likely to vote for a woman. This lower rate among Alawite voters may be due to the fact that no Alawite woman ran on an independent list; therefore, Alawites who voted for an anti-establishment list did not have the option to choose a co-sectarian woman candidate. In addition, Sunni

25 We calculate these results by counting only the votes for lists that included at least one woman candidate in a district, depending on their affiliation. We therefore only count the votes for independent lists that included women candidates. Regarding party-affiliated lists, we calculate the share won by women belonging to political parties by counting only the votes for the list they ran in. The same method was followed for independents running on these lists. For example, as previously noted, 13 women candidates were members of political parties, and 22% of those who voted for a political party list chose a woman. The results here are therefore based on the votes for these 13 lists only.

voters, who were among the most likely to vote for a woman candidate overall, become the second least likely when focusing on the results for independent candidates only. This is partially explained by the higher share of votes Sunnis gave to the winning Sunni women candidates, most notably Bahia Hariri.

Figure 6 **Drivers of votes for women versus men candidates running on anti-establishment lists**



Note **No independent list ran in the electoral districts of South 1 and South 2.**

The performance of women candidates was also shaped by Lebanon's electoral system. Given the sectarian foundation of the Lebanese political system, creating equal opportunities for men and women competing in the elections will be challenging. As long as political parties are led by male paternal figures and political power is transmitted hereditarily, only women who represent their sectarian leader are given the opportunity to represent voters. A change to this political system is needed to give more chances for new political actors and women, but it cannot happen dramatically. An immediate measure to increase the representation of women in political life would be to implement electoral reform, as electoral systems can be changed more quickly and easily, and have a highly determining role in who makes it to parliament.

III Increasing women's representation through electoral reforms

Who makes it to parliament is determined not only by voters' preferences for certain candidates, but by a country's electoral law and system. Electoral systems, and the laws governing them, can benefit certain actors at the expense of others: None are without flaws, and all influence voter behavior.

The analysis above showed that the performance of women candidates was shaped by various factors, including geography, demographics, and political representation. However, under the sectarian, clientelistic, and familial nature of the Lebanese political culture, only women backed by male political leaders have been able to garner support. While this culture can be changed progressively, it may be hard to overthrow in the short term. By contrast, electoral laws and systems can be quickly and regularly adjusted. Electoral reforms can benefit aspiring women, mitigate the obstacles they face when running for elections, and improve their performance, thus giving them a better chance of accessing parliament. This would, in turn, have the potential to change voters' perception of women in politics.

This section first provides an overview of the 2017 Lebanese electoral law and the proportional representation electoral system adopted in 2018, and shows how the different elements it combined contributed to the poor performance of women. An understanding of the electoral law and system can highlight which of their elements need urgent reform. Second, this section discusses the implementation of a gender quota. While various reforms can help women, the most direct measure that would produce immediate changes is the implementation of a gender quota. In the case of Lebanon, this will require identifying the electoral system that can best combine a gender quota with a confessional one.

The 2018 elections were Lebanon's first use of a proportional representation electoral system. This was a positive step away from the previously majoritarian system, and is a factor likely to have encouraged anti-establishment actors, and more women, to run as this time they had a chance to enter parliament without needing to capture a plurality of the votes in a district. International experiences have shown that women tend to have more chances of being elected under a proportional representation system than they are under a majority, or single-member district system—where candidates compete against each other, with the most successful one making it to parliament.[26] Results across all countries that held elections in 2018 showed that women constituted a much higher share of parliament in countries that use proportional representation or mixed electoral systems (26%) than in those that use a majoritarian or single-member

26 Matland, R. 2002. 'Enhancing Women's Political Participation: Legislative Recruitments and Electoral Systems.' *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers.* IDEA.

district system (20%).[27] Lebanon, however, was an exception. The very minor increase in the number of women in parliament—from four in 2009 to six in 2018—could be explained by the combination of proportionality with a preferential vote, the districting that was drawn, and the electoral thresholds that were set.

First, the preferential vote gave voters the option to choose their candidate of preference, thereby influencing which of the candidates would make it to parliament. This naturally put women candidates at a disadvantage, as their possibility of beating a male politician in their lists would already be limited. In addition, the electoral law divided the country into 15 electoral districts, rather than 26 as was previously the case. While the smaller number of electoral districts was expected to create more confessionally diverse constituencies and increase competition between parties, some electoral districts were further divided into sub-districts, for a total of 26 sub-districts, most of which were the same as the previous ones.[28] Constituencies therefore remained highly homogeneous and divided along party lines. The law also set high electoral thresholds, or the minimum number of votes a list has to obtain to win at least one seat in a district, which varied from nearly 8% in Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf) to 20% in South 1 (Saida and Jezzine). Homogeneous and smaller constituencies strengthened the positions of sectarian political parties, first by limiting the number of available seats in a district and increasing the chances of incumbents, which harmed women simply because incumbents tended to be men. As stated by candidate Antonia Ghamra, who ran on the Kulluna Watani list in Zgharta, a homogeneous district with three Maronite seats up for grabs: 'It is not about how people perceive women's candidacy because Zgharta is an open-minded region. The problem is that there are no empty seats. They are all reserved for the leaders.'[29] In addition, the districting combined with high electoral thresholds benefited sectarian parties because new political actors had little chance of passing the thresholds. As very few of women were backed by political parties, this harmed women candidates even more. Female candidates on anti-establishment lists had little chance of being elected with such high thresholds, and with the option to cast a preferential vote, women running as independents on party-affiliated lists had little chance of beating the male candidates in their lists.

The electoral law also set high nomination fees and campaign financing ceilings, thus significantly hindering the chances of candidates with limited access to financial capital. The nomination fees were set at LBP 8 million (around $5,300)[30] and were non-reimbursable in case of withdrawal, and the campaign financing ceiling was fixed at LBP 150 million ($100,000), with a provision allowing candidates to spend an additional LBP 5,000 for each registered voter in the larger constituencies.[31] This amount is only accessible to established parties,

27
Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2018. 'Women in Parliament in 2018: The Year in Review.'

28
In 2018, while the same lists competed in each of the 15 electoral districts, candidates could only run in a sub-district. Voters could therefore only give their preferential vote to a candidate running in the sub-district, meaning that constituencies were essentially kept unchanged.

29
Statement made on Télé Liban on April 30, 2018. Quoted in Nader, J. and T. Mikhael. 2018. 'Women in Lebanon's 2018 Legislative Elections.' Maharat Foundation, p.92.

30
According to Article 45 of the 2017 electoral law: 'All candidates standing for parliamentary elections shall submit […] a financial receipt issued by the financial department of the Ministry [of Interior and Municipalities] confirming the deposit of eight million Lebanese pounds as nomination fee by the candidate.' The US dollar amount is based on the LBP 1,507 exchange rate in place at the time of the elections.

31
According to Article 61 of the 2017 electoral law: 'The maximum amount that each candidate may spend during the campaign period shall be determined according to the following: The limit amount is composed of a fixed lump sum of one hundred and fifty million Lebanese pounds and a variable sum determined by the number of voters in the major constituency in which the candidate may be elected, on the basis of five thousand Lebanese pounds per voter registered in the voter lists in the major constituency. The campaign spending limit of a candidate list is a fixed lump sum of one hundred fifty million Lebanese pounds per candidate.'

the candidates they back, or independently wealthy candidates, and is significantly higher than that in many countries. For example, spending per candidate in the British general elections is capped at £30,000 (around $39,000),[32] while that in France is set at €38,000 (approximately $53,000).[33] In Tunisia, the ceiling per candidate varies across regions, but does not surpass $35,000 in any of them.[34]

While the lack of financial capital presents an obstacle for all new, independent political actors, women face additional financial constraints given gender inequalities in economic participation and income. For example, Lebanon ranks at 136 out of 149 in terms of women's economic participation and opportunity, and more specifically, at 137 in terms of estimated earned income.[35] In addition, they represent only 32% of the Lebanese labor force and the wage gap between employed Lebanese men and women is 31%.[36] Therefore, a first measure that would weaken the barriers women face when running for elections would be lowering—if not waiving—the candidate registration fees and making them reimbursable in case of withdrawal. This would encourage more women to run, as they would not be penalized financially if unable to join a list. Second, lowering the campaign financing ceiling would enable women, as well as candidates who lack financial capital more generally, to compete in a fairer environment. Lower campaign financing ceilings would reduce the gap between wealthy candidates' and emerging actors' campaign spending, thus creating more equal opportunities to run a successful campaign. The financial capital required when running for elections should be reduced regardless of whether other changes to the electoral system are implemented or not.

This does not mean that the electoral system must be left unchanged. While adopting a proportional representation system was a positive step away from the previously majoritarian system, its different elements enabled the same sectarian and traditional political parties to stay place. As all of them are led by men, this harmed women in the process. The districting that was created along confessional and party lines, combined with high electoral thresholds, gave non-sectarian and emerging political groups little chance of accessing parliament, and the preferential vote almost guaranteed that male political leaders would come out on top of their lists. Potential reforms to the electoral system may therefore include increasing the number of seats available in a district. Larger districts would create more diverse constituencies, thus weakening the power of sectarian leaders. They may also weaken clientelistic ties by limiting the close relationships between voters and sectarian leaders. In addition, with each leader having their own stronghold where their success is guaranteed, larger districts would increase the number of seats available for new actors, and potentially women regardless of their affiliation. Opting for closed party lists,

32
BBC. 'General Election 2019: How Much Can Parties Spend?' November 4, 2019. The US dollar conversion is approximated using the 1.29 average GBP to USD exchange rate in November 2019.

33
Atwill, N. 2009. 'Campaign Finance: France.' Library of Congress. The US dollar conversion is approximated using the 1.39 average EUR to USD exchange rate in 2009.

34
International Foundation for Electoral Systems. 2019. 'Elections in Tunisia: 2019 Early Presidential Election.'

35
World Economic Forum. 2018. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018.*

36
UN ESCWA. 2009. 'Women's Control Over Economic Resources and Access to Financial Resources.' *Arab Women and Development Series*, Number 36.

where voters would vote for a party rather than a specific candidate, may also create equality between women and men running on the same lists. Increasing women's representation would therefore depend on political parties' willingness to nominate a high enough number of women and to place them in advantageous positions in their lists, instead of relegating them at the bottom of them.

Apart from these reforms, there is no doubt that the single most effective and direct measure to increase women's political representation will be the implementation of a gender quota. While the sectarian allocation of seats in the Lebanese parliament rightly guarantees the representation of each confessional community, the lack of a gender quota has prevented the representation of half of the Lebanese population.

A number of Arab countries have increased women's representation by implementing gender quotas.[37] A first type of quota would be the reservation of seats on lists, thus requiring lists to include a minimum number of women in order to be qualified to run. As political parties have shown reluctance toward nominating women, this would be a positive measure to increase women's representation in candidacies and their chances to succeed, whether they are partisan or independent. In fact, previous draft electoral laws have proposed the implementation of a gender quota on lists, such as, for example, a 2005 law developed by the Fouad Boutros Commission. However, the measure was dropped as it was argued that the combination of a sectarian and gender quota for seats reserved in parliament would complicate the process of seat allocation.[38] Indeed, with the allocation of seats in parliament being already constrained by the sectarian quota, adding a gender quota may lead to inequalities in the representation of women from each sectarian group. A gender quota should therefore ensure that all women have equal opportunities, regardless of their sect.

This does not mean that the combination of a sectarian with a gender quota is impossible. Another type of quota may be the reservation of seats for women in parliament, rather than only on lists, with a certain number of seats already set aside for women from each confessional group. In other words, a certain number of seats would be guaranteed for women and would be contested under a plurality basis, with the women receiving the most votes making it to parliament. Such a measure can be implemented alongside proportional representation, thus creating a mixed electoral system. These seats reserved for women from each confession could be assigned to a specific region depending on the sectarian configuration of a district. Alternatively, Lebanon could be taken as a single constituency, where women would not be running in a specific district but rather nationally.[39] This is only one of many options for the implementation of a gender quota, and shows

37
Such countries include Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia's Shura Council. Data for all countries is available on: Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline. 'Global Data for National Parliament.' https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Acurrent_women_percent&structure=any__lower_chamber#map.

38
Hussein, W. 2017. 'The 'Female Quota' in Lebanon: A Temporary Solution to a Chronic Political Problem.' Heinrich Böll Stiftung.

39
Among others, Feghali (2009) developed a proposal for the implementation of a gender quota in Lebanon, in which a certain number of seats would be reserved for women and allocated according to the regional and sectarian distribution of seats already in place. See: Feghali, K. 2009. 'Electoral Law Proposals for a Women's Quota in the Lebanese Parliament.' *Al-Raida,* 126: 66-70. Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World.

that it can be compatible with a sectarian quota. There is an urgent need to open the debate over women's lack of representation in parliament and the obstacles they face under the current electoral system. While other barriers to women's political representation, such as the patriarchal structure of the Lebanese state and the religiously-based judicial system, will need more long term planning, electoral reform can be done as an immediate and first measure. Electoral systems can regularly change and can also be highly malleable. When a system does not work, other options are available. As Lebanese voters showed little support for women candidates in the 2018 elections, building an electoral system beneficial to aspiring women will have the potential to change voters' perception of women in the political sphere.

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Annex 1: Number of and votes for women candidates by electoral district in the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections

Electoral district	District	Number of lists	Number of lists that included women	Number of candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of votes for women	Share of votes for women
Beirut 1	Beirut 1	5	4	33	7	3,755	8.8%
Beirut 2	Beirut 2	9	8	83	19	10,528	7.6%
Bekaa 1	Zahle	5	3	32	3	10,467	11.8%
Bekaa 2	West Bekaa-Rachaya	3	1	16	1	847	1.3%
Bekaa 3	Baalbek-Hermel	5	3	47	5	1,556	0.9%
Mount Lebanon 1	Keserwan	5	4	23	5	1,818	3.0%
	Jbeil			15	1	323	0.6%
Mount Lebanon 2	Metn	5	5	35	9	3,968	4.5%
Mount Lebanon 3	Baabda	4	3	23	4	2,129	2.8%
Mount Lebanon 4	Aley	6	3	21	2	2,907	4.7%
	Chouf			43	5	3,526	3.4%
North 1	Akkar	6	1	37	5	434	0.3%
Noth 2	Tripoli	8	5	53	7	3,598	4.3%
	Dannieh			14	1	5	0.0%
	Minnieh			8	0	0	0.0%
North 3	Batroun	4	3	7	1	952	3.0%
	Bcharre			8	1	6,677	35.7%
	Koura			11	2	560	2.1%
	Zgharta			12	1	149	0.4%
South 1	Saida	4	1	7	1	13,739	42.2%
	Jezzine			10	1	36	0.1%
South 2	Sour	2	2	8	2	19,316	22.3%
	Zahrani			5	0	0	0.0%
South 3	Bint Jbeil	6	3	13	1	471	0.8%
	Marjayoun-Hasbaya			22	2	1,686	2.2%
	Nabatiyeh			11	0	0	0.0%
Total		77	49	597	86	89,447	5.6%

Annex 2: Number of women candidates by electoral district and confession

Confession	Electoral district	Beirut 1	Beirut 2	Bekaa 1	Bekaa 2	Bekaa 3
	District	Beirut 1	Beirut 2	Zahle	West Bekaa-Rachaya	Baalbek-Hermel
Maronite	Seats	1		1	1	1
	Women candidates	0		0	1	2
Sunni	Seats		6	1	2	2
	Women candidates		10	0	0	1
Shia	Seats		2	1	1	6
	Women candidates		3	0	0	1
Greek Orthodox	Seats	1	1	1	1	
	Women candidates	1	1	1	0	
Greek Catholic	Seats	1		2		1
	Women candidates	0		1		1
Armenian	Seats	3		1		
Orthodox	Women candidates	4		1		
Armenian	Seats	1				
Catholic	Women candidates	0				
Druze	Seats		1		1	
	Women candidates		3		0	
Christian	Seats	1				
minorities	Women candidates	2				
Protestant	Seats		1			
	Women candidates		2			
Total	Seats	8	11	7	6	10
	Women candidates	7	19	3	1	5

Confession	Electoral district	Mount Lebanon 1		Mount Lebanon 2	Mount Lebanon 3	Mount Lebanon 4	
	District	Keserwan	Jbeil	Metn	Baabda	Aley	Chouf
Maronite	Seats	5	2	4	3	2	3
	Women candidates	5	1	6	2	1	3
Sunni	Seats						2
	Women candidates						1
Shia	Seats		1		2		
	Women candidates		0		1		
Greek Orthodox	Seats			2		1	
	Women candidates			3		1	
Greek Catholic	Seats			1			1
	Women candidates			0			0
Armenian	Seats			1			
Orthodox	Women candidates			0			
Druze	Seats				1	2	2
	Women candidates				1	0	1
Total	Seats	5	3	8	6	5	8
	Women candidates	5	1	9	4	2	5

Confession	Electoral district	North 1	North 2			North 3			
	District	Akkar	Tripoli	Dannieh	Minnieh	Batroun	Bcharre	Koura	Zgharta
Maronite	Seats	1	1			2	2		3
	Women candidates	1	0			1	1		1
Sunni	Seats	3	5	2	1				
	Women candidates	3	5	1	0				
Greek Orthodox	Seats	2	1					3	
	Women candidates	1	1					2	
Alawite	Seats	1	1						
	Women candidates	0	1						
Total	Seats	7	8	2	1	2	2	3	3
	Women candidates	5	7	1	0	1	1	2	1

Confession	Electoral district	South 1		South 2		South 3		
	District	Saida	Jezzine	Sour	Zahrani	Bint Jbeil	Marjayoun-Hasbaya	Nabatiyeh
Maronite	Seats		2					
	Women candidates		1					
Sunni	Seats	2					1	
	Women candidates	1					0	
Shia	Seats			4	2	3	2	3
	Women candidates			2	0	1	1	0
Greek Orthodox	Seats						1	
	Women candidates						1	
Greek Catholic	Seats		1		1			
	Women candidates		0		0			
Druze	Seats						1	
	Women candidates						0	
Total	Seats	2	3	4	3	3	5	3
	Women candidates	1	1	2	0	1	2	0