

# NEWSLETTER

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY **SAWTI** AND **THE PHOENIX DAILY**

FEBRUARY 2021 / ISSUE 1



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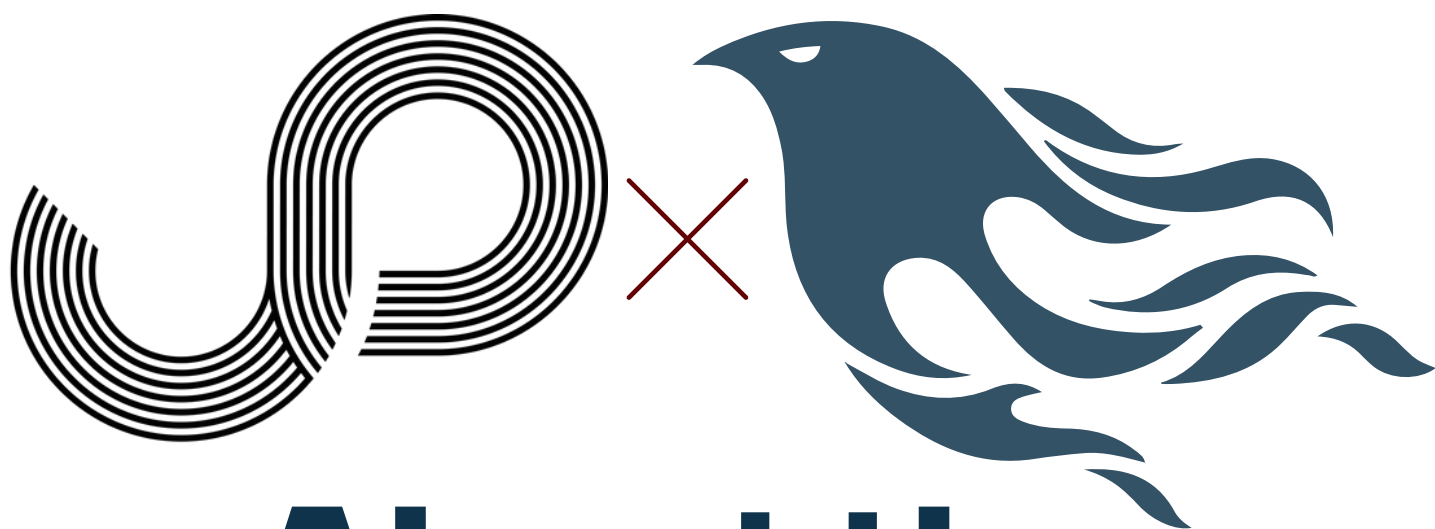
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# About the Partnership

The Sawti x The Phoenix Daily partnership is a Lebanese co-authoring partnership aiming to publish content on Lebanese elections and pertinent national affairs, in order to cultivate an environment of intellect-driven, evidence-based, civic engagement through informed analysis.

The partnership aims to publish monthly articles in collaboration between The Phoenix Daily Staff Writers, and Sawti members, in the lead up to Lebanon's 2022 parliamentary elections. All articles will be published on the Sawti month-end newsletter & on The Phoenix Daily's online website.



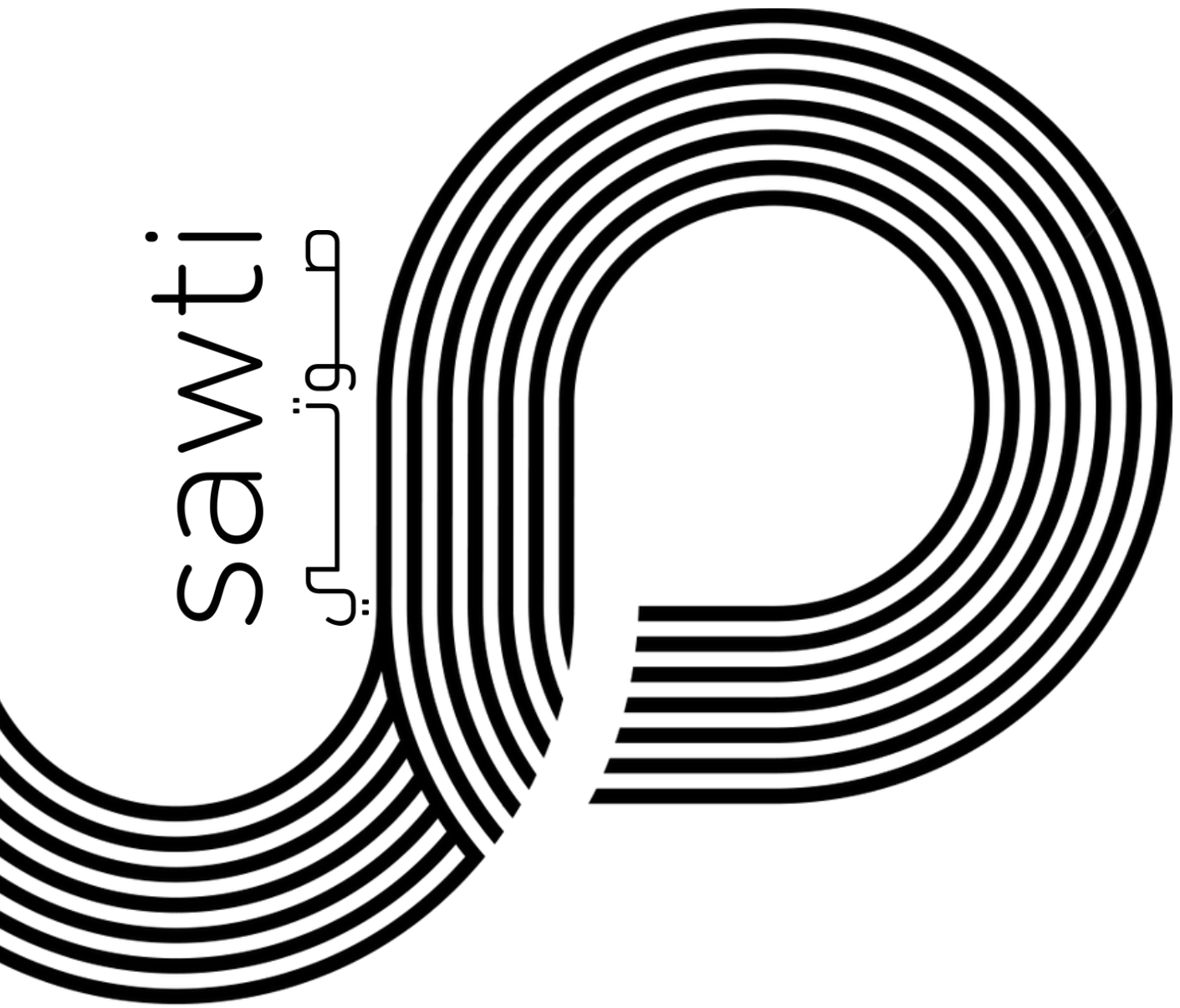
# About us

We are a national Lebanese independent newspaper covering national & international affairs in Arabic, English, and French for a better and more intellectual Lebanon.

The Phoenix Daily is your place for the latest analyses, reports, news, and intellectual pieces on national and international affairs. Ranging from political and economic conversations, to historic and philosophical, The Phoenix Daily remains committed to fostering a more intellectual, aware, and every-learning Lebanese society.

Being independent, we are able to bring perspectives, opinions, and analysis from various viewpoints together for the purpose of creating complementary discussions for knowledge creation.





## About us

Sawti is a global movement for Lebanese people all around the world to make their voices heard, rally for change and participate in the political process as active citizens.

Sawti's website, social media and global network will be a resource for accessing information on elections, parliament and alternative parties.

Sawti will also provide a platform to engage with alternative political parties, discuss the issues and connect with Lebanese communities around the world.

# الأحزاب اللبنانية إختلاف بين الواقع والنظرية، والشباب اللبناني منقسم

مقالة رأي، بشري مرعي

يختلف مفهوم الأحزاب السياسية بين التطبيق والممارسة، مع أنّ تعريفها واضح ودورها محدّد ومفهوم في علم السياسة، وتختلف الأحزاب السياسية بطبيعة عملها وتقسيمها وعددها بين دولة وأخرى، وذلك بحسب طبيعة النظام الذي تتواجد فيه، فهناك أنظمة ذات الحزب الواحد الذي يحتكر فيها النشاط السياسي في الدولة من الناحية القانونية والفعليّة. وهناك أيضاً الدول ذات نظام الحزبين أي هو نظام فيه حزبان يسيطران على الساحة السياسية كالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، فهناك الحزب الجمهوري والحزب الديمقراطي اللذان يتنافسان دائماً على الحكم في أمريكا. وأخيراً هناك الأنظمة ذات التعددية الحزبية، فمثلاً لبنان يعتبر من هذه الدول التي يقوم نظامها على سياسة التعددية الحزبية، بغض النظر عن الفهم والممارسة الخاطئة لدورها السياسي فيه.

وبحسب الدراسات الأكاديمية في العلوم السياسية، الحزب السياسي هو تنظيم قانوني يسعى للوصول إلى السلطة الحاكمة - في الأنظمة الديمقراطية - من خلال المشاركة في الانتخابات بمستوياتها المختلفة، سواء المحلية أو البرلمانية أو الرئاسية. يجب على الحزب أن يمارس العملية الديمقراطية داخله أيضاً عبر انتخاب أعضائه لتولّي المناصب القيادية ووضع الأهداف والخطط المستقبلية.

تكرّس الأحزاب مبدأ الديمقراطية، وتخلق مساحة للرأي العام للتعبير عن آرائه وتكوين هويّاته السياسية، وتمكّنه أيضاً من المشاركة الفاعلة في السياسة ممّا ينعكس بدوره على تقدّم المجتمع وتطوّره الثقافي. بمعنى آخر تشكّل الأحزاب طرقاً متعدّدة للمشاركة السياسية التي تُعدّ معياراً مهماً لبناء مناح تفاعلي بين النظام والمجتمع.

في حال لبنان، أي في نظام أسير للتوازنات الطائفية تختلف فيه الممارسات الحزبية عن تعريفها النظري، فليكني نفهم دور الأحزاب اللبنانية وعملها يجب أن نفهم أولاً النظام السياسي اللبناني.



تنوّع الأحزاب في لبنان بين أحزاب دينية طائفية، أيديولوجية أممية، قومية وطنية، وحتى عائلية. نشأ العديد من هذه الأحزاب منذ السبعينات على أنها ميليشيات وليست أحزاب سياسية. و الميليشيا في علم السياسة هي الحزب الذي يحمل بندقيّة، منظّمة غير حكومية بشكل ميليشياوي، أي أن هدفه الوصول إلى السلطة عبر العنف واستخدام السلاح.

إذن، الأحزاب السياسيّة المشاركة اليوم في السلطة هي الميليشيات نفسها التي شاركت في الحرب الأهليّة ولبست عباءة الأحزاب الطائفيّة، وساهمت في خسارة لبنان نحو 25 مليار دولار أميركيّ على امتداد فترة الحرب وذلك بحسب ما ورد في تقرير للجزيرة نت. وهي نفسها السلطة التي أوصلتنا إلى أزمة إقتصاديّة صعبة وأدت إلى تهجير العديد من الشعب اللبناني وخاصةً الشباب منه.

فضلاً عن ذلك، ترسّخت في فكر الكثير ممّن عاشوا الحرب الأهليّة هذه "التروما الجماعيّة" والفكر الطائفيّ والاقصائيّ، فقاموا بنقله إلى أولادهم ( فئة الشباب اليوم) فبعضهم تقبّل هذه الأفكار وتصرّف على أساسها والبعض الآخر رفضها، ومّن رفضها رأيناه في شوارع لبنان ينور على السياسات الحاكمة في ثورة أو انتفاضة 17 تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩.

وبالحديث عن الأحزاب التي شاركت في الحرب الأهليّة والتي هي نفسها التي تُدير شؤون البلد اليوم، يجب أن نتحدّث عن الهويّة السياسيّة التي تحملها هذه الجماعات وهل أفرادها - وخصوصاً الشباب - واعون لها ويحملون هذه الهويّة بكل قناعة ومعرفة عنها؟

الهويّة السياسيّة بحسب التعريف العام لها، هي عندما يحمل الشخص أو الجماعة أو نظام ما أيديولوجيا سياسيّة محدّدة، أي فكر سياسيّ، فيستطيع هذا الفكر أن يحدّد أفكارهم وتصرفاتهم في المجتمع وفي الشؤون السياسيّة.

لفهم وضع مفهوم الهويّة السياسيّة عند الشباب اللبناني، علينا أولاً أن نفصلهم إلى عدّة أقسام:

أولاً، الشباب الذين يتبعون لحزب سياسيّ معيّن ويقبّسون زعيمه، مستفيدين من الوساطة لتدبير شؤون حياتهم.

ثانياً، الشباب العاطل عن العمل والذي لا يزال يقبّس زعيمه، أو الزعيم الذي وُلد على حبّه وتقديسه.

ثالثاً، الشباب الرافض للسياسات المتبّعة وللأشخاص الغير الجديرين بالحكم فيها، هؤلاء هم الشباب المنتفض الذي كان الأمل منذ 17 تشرين الأول ٢٠١٩ حتى اليوم. وقد تجلّى ذلك في الانتخابات الطلابيّة في الجامعات الخاصّة، وفي تحرّكات الطلاب التي جرت في الجامعة اللبنانية في 17 تشرين.

ولكن ضمن هذه الفئة من الشباب هناك من قدّ الأمل وتراجع عن المشاركة السياسيّة، وفصّل السكوت أو الهجرة لبحث عن مستقبلٍ جيد.

رابعاً، فئة الشباب التي كانت أصلاً فاقدة الأمل من أيّ تغيير وهي فئة لا يُستهان بها ، فئة تشربّت خوفاً من المشاركة في التعبير عن رأيها والمشاركة السياسيّة فحملت جملة " أنا ما بتعاطى سياسة" كشعارٍ لها.

تقول سيرينا وهي شابة في منتصف عشرينياتها، " أنا لا أحبّ التدخّل أبداً في المواضيع التي تخصّ الشأن السياسيّ اللبناني فلن يتغيّر شيء" و تُضيف " إن السياسة في لبنان معقّدة و تُلحق بنا الضرر عند ممارستها. هناك الكثير من أصدقائي الذين تعرّضوا للتهديد والتنمّر بسبب تعبيرهم الصريح عن رأيهم في الشؤون السياسيّة، فاحترام رأي الآخر مبدأ تعلّمناه في كتاب التربية الوطنيّة في المدرسة لا أكثر ولا أقلّ".

هذه الفئة من الشباب لم يعد لديها لا ثقة ولا أمل بأيّ شخصٍ ينضمّ إلى موقعٍ يحمل فيه القرار والمسؤوليّة، فئة جعلت لنفسها هويّة سياسيّة جديدة ، أيديولوجيا جديدة وهي أيديولوجية الخوف من التفكير في القضايا السياسيّة.

كلّ هذه الفئات تريد إما أن تصنع لنفسها هويّة سياسيّة جديدة أو أن تتخلّص من ما أسقطَ عليها من أيّ تأطير سياسيّ، إضافةً إلى الفئة التي بُرّجت على عقيدة وهويّة محدّدة ولا تريد غيرها، وأخيراً هناك من فقد الأمل من أيّ تغيير وتبنّى مبدأ العدميّة.

من جهة أخرى، لنفكر قليلاً بالتأثير الذي سوف يطرأ على الانتخابات النيابية القادمة بسبب الجيل الجديد الذي أصبح قادراً قانونياً على القيام بحقه الانتخابي في لبنان، هذه الفئات المتنوعة من الشباب أصبحت تملك الحق في الاختيار الفعلي لممثليها في المواقع السياسية، أعتقد أن فئة الشباب التي اعتبرت نفسها خارج كل هذه التحوّلات واتخذت القرار بعدم التدخّل في الحياة السياسية اللبنانية سيكون لقرارها هذا وقعاً كبيراً على الانتخابات النيابية، ففي الانتخابات السابقة التي جرت عام 2018 كانت نسبة الذين لم يشاركوا حوالي 51% ، و في السنة القادمة هؤلاء الشباب الذين يخافون من مصطلح "سياسة" أصلاً بسبب ما تلقّوه من صدمات و خيبات أمل عاشوها من أهل السلطة و مناصريهم، كيف لهم أن يتّقوا بأيّ شخصي جديد؟ وكيف سيستطيعون أن يقتنعوا فعلياً أن التغيير آتٍ لا محالة؟

في النهاية، الشباب المنتفض اليوم لديه مهمة إضافية وهي إستقطاب الشباب الفاقد للأمل و حثّهم على التغيير و ممارسة حقوقهم السياسية، لأننا إذا بقينا هكذا و ضلّلنا طريقنا سوف نقف مكاننا و من الممكن أن يظلّ أهل السلطة اليوم في السلطة غداً يمثّلون فقط الفئة الصغيرة التي ستنتخبهم.





# THE DILEMMAS OF VOTER APATHY & SOCIAL MOBILIZATION IN LEBANON

OPINION POLICY ANALYSIS BY CONTRIBUTORS

**GAIA BCHARA AND OMAR BADR**

In 2018, Lebanon held its first Parliamentary Elections in nine years. For the first time since 2009, Lebanese citizens had the chance to select new representatives. With such a long wait between the two elections, the country had many first-time voters ready to cast their vote. With the momentum of the upcoming “Democratic Wedding”, as labelled by mainstream media, there seemed to be a lot of excitement leading up to elections. A high turnout could safely be expected. However, results were much more different than expected, instead of a rise in voter turnout, a 5% drop was seen, with around 49% of the Lebanese population choosing to vote on May 6, 2018.

Additionally, election results yielded a very

similar parliament to the one prior, with a slight shift in seats between the de facto ruling parties. For the first time, a national coalition ran in the face of the traditional sectarian parties. A coalition of civil society groups and opposition parties ran together in most of the country’s electoral regions; however their results were poor. The coalition gained 4% of the overall vote and were only able to win 1 seat out of the 128 contested seats. With half of the country’s eligible population choosing not to vote and an overwhelming majority of voters, 96%, voting for the same parties, the situation leads us to a few glaring questions.

Why was there so much voter apathy? Why did voters elect the same groups? And is there a way to combat voter apathy and mobilize the population effectively?

similar



Let’s start with the people who decided to vote and try to understand the general trends in voter behavior. According to a detailed study conducted by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS), titled “Understanding Turnout in the 2018 Elections”, we can find overall themes that explain why people voted how they voted in 2018. A glaring, and almost obvious, theme was that people overwhelmingly tended to vote for sectarian counterparts. Meaning, people chose to vote for candidates who shared the same sect as themselves. With 77% of voters registered in

voting booths housing voters of a single sect, the data shows that the vast majority of voters voted for candidates of the same sect. Furthermore, citizens that did not have a seat representing their sect in their respective electoral region tended not to vote at all. This result is seen in the dramatically lower voter turnout rate found amongst minority religious groups, with groups such as Alawites, Christian minorities and Armenian Orthodox and Catholic groups, yielding a turnout rate of less than 33%; with Christian Minorities yielding a record low turnout rate of 24%.

This phenomenon helps us paint a clear picture of the Lebanese psyche on election day, and reinforces a very eloquent conclusion made by Dr Bashar Haydar, AUB Professor of Philosophy in his piece in the Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, that there is a “mutual unwillingness” for different Lebanese communities (religious groups) to “make sacrifices”, and not vote for their sectarian leaders, “in order to effect change.” Therefore, the decision on election day is not made based on selecting the best candidate, rather it is made to maintain the fragile status quo.

A second theme that helps us explain why voters voted, and connects to our above point, is the maintaining of strong clientelist ties through vote buying. According to LCPS, 20% of voters that were surveyed, self-reported vote buying; meaning that they admitted to their vote being bought by a sectarian party. Using the collected

data, a more accurate estimate is that at the bare minimum 40% of voters were subject to vote buying. And so almost half the population was subject to voter buying, a truly appalling, though not very surprising, statistic. Seeing that less developed areas had much higher levels of voter turnout, these areas were targeted by vote buying, given that they tend to be cheaper to buy and are more vulnerable to intimidation by politicians. Regions with higher levels of unemployment, housing more vulnerable groups prone to vote buying, also voted more than other regions. This represents one of the many tools of the political elite to enforce a cycle of dependency - financial and otherwise - among their constituents and subsequently maintain the status quo.

With non-programmatic political parties dominating the scene, high levels of vote buying that sway votes in a predetermined manner towards sectarian counterparts and high levels of



mobilization that left countless voting stations under the intense monitoring of sectarian parties. We can understand, on a macro level, just why people chose to vote in 2018.

What about the remaining 51% who haven't voted? Abstention can be explained, among other things, by the “Voting Paradox”. Also known as Down's paradox, the Voting Paradox claims that a rational, self-interested individual will refrain from voting because the costs of doing so trump its benefits. In other words, the

effort one would have to exert to inform themselves about the mechanisms of voting, each candidates' policy program, competence, and past record, followed by the willingness to show up on election day, wait in line to vote and potentially get exposed to some sort of voter intimidation, knowing that the probability of their single vote affecting the election's results are very slim, isn't worth it. In the absence of a viable alternative to traditional political parties, many felt their vote inconsequential. In return, this choice strips away their right to participate in national decision-making processes.

However, since 2018, Lebanon has witnessed a number of changes. First, the 17th of October uprising demonstrated the large desire of a substantial portion of the population for a political alternative, many of which have mobilized and established new political parties to spread political literacy and coordinate direct action. Although such demands have been echoed in the past few years, none were of this scale and impact. Consequently, it provides decent ground for a group-based model of voting. This type of decision-making disseminates the responsibilities (costs) that typically fall on the one individual to the group level. More importantly, making decisions as a group fundamentally changes the probability of impacting electoral results, therefore incentivizing formerly de-mobilized people to vote.

Second, the benefits most definitely exceed the costs of voting this election. Lebanon is facing an unprecedented economic, financial, social, and political crisis that requires skilled governance to manage it. Lebanon suffers from a 40% unemployment rate, 23% of the population plunged in extreme poverty, an almost 9,000 LBP/USD exchange rate, 145.8% inflation rate, Lebanese Lira losing 80% of its value against the dollar in less than a year, and endless stalling in the formation of the very government that is needed to tackle these issues. The numbers are discouraging and have most definitely impacted almost all – if not all – Lebanese households. It is precisely in times of crisis that the rewards of having competent legislators capable of navigating hardships surpass typical electoral considerations. This elections' consequences will be reflected in the monetary, economic, and financial reform strategies, basic infrastructure and restructuring in sectors like electricity, job opportunities, social and environmental justice, and an independent judiciary – or lack thereof.

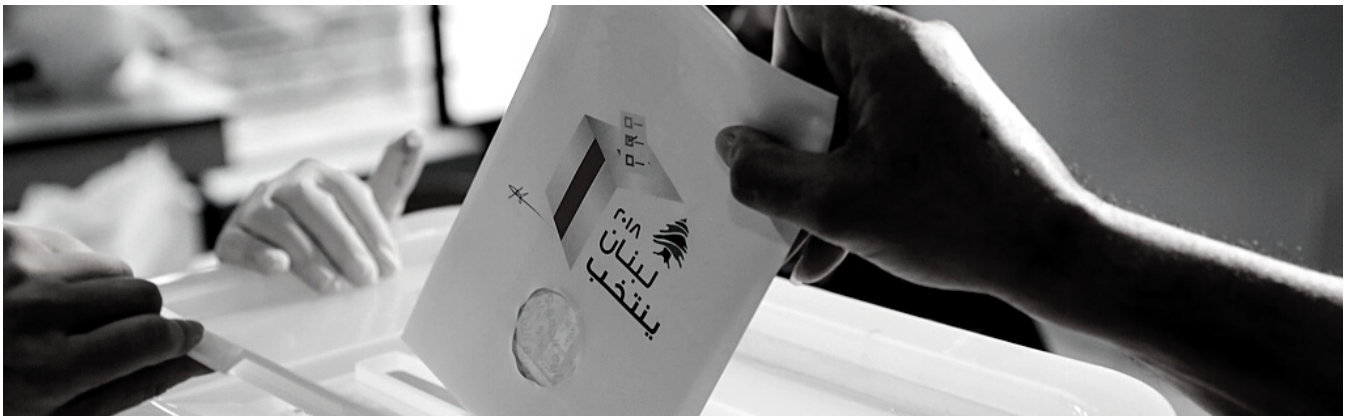
This makes for reasonable ground to believe that the next election has the potential to produce a higher voter turnout and additional alternative voices in parliament.

The question is how? On the individual level, what are efficient ways to reach out to our family, friends, and small/large community and incite them to vote? Years of research conducted on effective voter mobilization strategies have almost unanimously reached one conclusion: people respond to people. Canvassing to mobilize citizens to vote has been proven to be 150% more likely to increase turnout than a phone call, phone calls are three times more effective when they are conversational than scripted, and even scripted commercial callers are 7 times more effective than mail. Do you see the pattern? The more personal and genuine, the more effective. Mobilizing a discouraged voter will take an honest, back-and-forth conversation about the impact and significance of voting. Most importantly, the best suited person to have these conversations with a de-mobilized citizen is an acquaintance. In other words, the best person to convince your dad, friend, or partner to vote is YOU. In fact, studies conducted prove that being encouraged to vote by someone you know is much more effective than being encouraged by a stranger or campaigner. What is more, another study revealed that having one member vote increases turnout among all people within the same household. And the best news is, sometimes, all you have to do is ask! Promises are often more than just cheap talk. Pledging to vote has been actually proven to make it more likely that people follow through.

This brings us to the issue of norms of participation in a group setting. Within groups, enhancing social observability is crucial to increase voter turnout. What does this mean? People learn about the best option they have by observing others.

This can lead to a heap of individuals making the same decision, which is to say: being vocal about your intention to vote can lead others to do the same within your circles, because behavior spreads in networks. Finally, when someone is really insistent on not voting, refer to the foot-in-the-door strategy: don't ask them to vote, ask them to do another, smaller, less costly task related to elections. For instance, checking if their name is on the electoral lists (and if you haven't yet, go do that now). From there, build on small "assignments" before asking them to vote. The rationale behind this strategy is that when people invest time and effort in any act, they infer new traits, attributes, and values about themselves based on their initial act. Hence, they become motivated to act on this newfound identity and follow through with their actions.

So why all this hassle? Simply because voters dictate policy. Current political parties' mobilization efforts target – sometimes exclusively – their voter base, partly because the silent majority exhibits no signs of willingness to participate in the electoral process. Interestingly, we have seen a shift in rhetoric throughout attempts to form a cabinet, consistent with the demands of a large segment of the voting population, to appoint technocrats and independents. Similarly, also consistent with October 17th Revolution's demands, many political parties have – and others probably will – started campaigning on a platform calling for a "civil state", an agenda that inherently contradicts their very mechanism of operation in government. That is partly because they anticipate these segments to vote.



Similarly, when large groups vote based on sectarian affiliation, politicians have incentive to capitalize on sectarian identities. If you have certain demands you would like to see met, one of the best ways to force policy makers' hands to cater to you is to vote.

Breaking the vicious cycle will neither be easy nor prompt. But it is not impossible. Currently, two major routes can be taken. First, the large Lebanese diaspora can potentially be a game changer. In 2018, over 80,000 expats registered to vote, of which approximately 46,000 did.

Diaspora voting presents logistical advantages, whereby voters living in a certain area/state can ALL head to the same voting station, unlike in Lebanon where each is required to vote in his registered district. Moreover, violence of the sort Lebanese voting stations witness is much less likely to occur in foreign embassies. However, diaspora voting must be complemented with internal reforms. Some might argue structural change requires international interventions. In reality, international support is needed to complement internal efforts in what cannot be achieved alone – for example, pressuring current



political elites, particularly by withholding their illegitimate wealth held abroad – but not replace them. No foreign country will account for Lebanese interests the way the Lebanese will. Others might reason that because a year and a half of protests has not seen its original demands met, change must be hopeless. That is an unrealistic expectation. First, there is more than one way to demand and enact change. Direct action is important as a pressure tool and must be complemented with political action such as voting. Second, establishing and consolidating democracy is a long, demanding, and bumpy road. Progress is almost never linear. For instance, France witnessed the establishment and subsequent collapse of 4 different Republics over the course of 229 years to get to where it is now. Setting sustainable, informed, and realistic goals – like voting for new, capable policymakers to make gradual breakthroughs – can be just as effective in enacting major change on the long run.

While this election might not produce dramatic-enough outcomes, as to enact major structural modifications to the current system, all change needs to start somewhere. It takes one election to produce a snowball effect for the coming years. Once the barrier of fear is broken and competent alternatives are voted into power across all Lebanese districts, it will only become a matter of time before change ensues.



## READ MORE PUBLICATIONS



August 18th, 2020

### FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES ARE NEEDED IN LEBANON, LET'S START WITH HOW WE VOTE

Opinion Analysis by **Albert Geokgeuzian**, Staff Writer

The foundation of any democracy is its voting. You vote, they count, a candidate wins. At first glance voting might seem so simple; you get your ballot, you select your preferred candidate and you leave. However, it isn't as simple as it may first appear and the best system requires greater thought. The voting system that Lebanon, and many other countries, have is called First Past the Post voting, a.k.a FPTP. You select one candidate and at the end whoever has the most votes wins. The problems with FPTP are many ranging from Strategic Voting, to a duopoly of politics, and as such Lebanon must switch to a system that allows for a more proportional representation and is more resistant to corruption.



January 19th, 2021

### LEBANON'S POLITICAL HISTORY - A TRUE REFLECTION OF TODAY'S REALITY

Analysis by **Joelle El Sheikh**, Staff Writer and **Tala Karkanawi**, Staff Writer

Lebanon's political history is one filled with national, international, and regional agreements, both written and unwritten, that aim to organize the affairs of a country as geopolitically important as Lebanon. Through reviewing historic documents, from the Lebanese constitution to the Taif Agreement and the unwritten National Pact, patterns, as well as contradictions, emerge.



February 18, 2021

### LE DROIT DE LA NATIONALITÉ : À CHAQUE ÉTAT, SON DÉBAT ÉTUDE DE CAS : LE LIBAN

Analyse de **Nour Lana Sophia Karam**, rédactrice et **Josette Ramarojaona**, rédactrice

Entre appartenance et identité, la place de la nationalité reste importante dans nos sociétés actuelles. Qu'en est-il du Liban ? Souvent qualifié de "berceau du vivre ensemble", il semblerait que la transmission de la nationalité y soit complexe.

# How can I join the TPD team?

We are frequently looking for new authors, as well as other interested individuals, in our attempt to foster knowledge creation through interdisciplinary means in media and journalism. You may apply by sending through an application by email to [thephoenixdaily@gmail.com](mailto:thephoenixdaily@gmail.com) with your CV along with any past publications, writings, or other document that will aid us in evaluating your application.

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Are you passionate about creating change in Lebanon and want to encourage political engagement within your community?

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