Sectarianism from Below: Youth Politics in Post-war Lebanon

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I examine why sectarianism persists among Lebanese youth. While much of the literature on communal conflict focuses on macro-level factors and elite-based explanations, I look to different, finer, levels of analysis for a fuller picture of how communal dynamics are reproduced, and why they persist—even where the literature would expect to find them lacking, such as among educated, economically secure young Lebanese, in western-oriented universities, or civil society movements. I argue that youth themselves, and particularly the young partisans of Lebanon’s political parties, play an active role in the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarian political dynamics ‘from below.’ The networking, strategies, and activities of youth within their political spheres constitute a ‘feedback mechanism’ operating at the grassroots to reproduce Lebanon’s particular sectarian institutional configuration. I contend that youth not only contribute to the reproduction of sectarianism, they also help to renew and rejuvenate its appeal among their peers. I examine three spheres of youth politics: the university campus; youth-led civil society movements; and youth wings of political parties. I find that far from being the ‘blind followers’ of manipulative elites depicted in the literature, Lebanese youth act with more autonomy than is often assumed; generating new culture, styles, and social networks—all of which are imbued with sectarian affiliation.
For Flora
I also show that the politics of Lebanese youth are complex, ambivalent, and even contradictory. Youth pursue multiple agendas—not only sectarian ones. In some cases, partisan youth even challenge their sect-based parties to develop more transparent, democratic institutions. Their efforts, however, often get shut-down by political elites. Thus, while youth enjoy relative autonomy within their own political realms, the closer they come to the power of Lebanon’s elites, the more limited it becomes. This study contributes to debates on path dependency, the persistence of communal categories, and challenges dichotomous conceptions of youth politics. To understand the political role of youth as more than simply the “hope” or “threat” for democracy, I argue we must look closely at the politics of everyday life and grassroots realms, and take youth seriously as political actors in their own right.
Acknowledgements

Twenty years ago this summer I traveled to Lebanon for the first time. I had been hired as a research assistant by my undergraduate thesis supervisor, Paul Kingston. I spent the summer riding around the country in share taxis and interviewing the people of Lebanon’s early postwar advocacy NGOs. Little did I know that this trip would shape the next two decades of my life.

During that summer in 1996, I met the people behind the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union, the Lebanese Association for the Blind, Green Line, The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, La Rassemblement Democratie des Femmes Libanaises, the Lebanese Human Rights Association, and The Lebanese Women’s Council, among others. I had the opportunity to speak to some of the most committed activists I have ever met, including Sylvanna Lakkis, Paul Salem, Omar Trabousli and Lina Abou-Habib—friends I still hold dear, and all of whom have helped deepen my understanding of Lebanon’s political complexities. I thank them for their friendship and for the many conversations—often over argileh—we have had over the years. It is Paul Kingston, however, whom I have most to thank. Paul first introduced me to Lebanon and sparked my passion for and commitment to the country. I am grateful to him for his continued friendship and support during my (long and meandering) academic journey which began, in many ways, that summer.

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When I was working as an NGO director in Beirut, one of the events we organized involved members of Northern Ireland’s political parties coming to speak to the youth of Lebanon’s political parties. One of the speakers was a woman who had lived through Northern Ireland’s troubles and went on to become a leader of an inter-sectarian women’s political party which sought to forge a new type of politics. I like to remember her words when I find myself feeling cynical or pessimistic. So to all of us, but especially the hundreds of Lebanese youth from the NGOs, the parties, the campuses, and the communities, who are fighting for a more just, equitable, and peaceful world: “Stay impatient. Don’t take no for an answer. Never give up on change”.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Sectarianism from Below

The Scene

It’s November 2009, on the campus of Lebanon’s most prestigious university, the American University of Beirut (AUB). The results of the recent student elections are being announced. The Lebanese army has been brought in to secure the streets surrounding the campus. There is a strict ‘no outsiders’ policy in place on the university premises—no one can enter without proof of student registration or a letter of permission signed by the Dean of Students. Hundreds, if not thousands, of students have gathered in front of AUB’s West Hall. Camera crews and journalists from practically every news channel in the country are present. The atmosphere is tense and emotionally heightened and it’s impossible to hear anything over the deafening chants of the crowd. The Dean of Students, his staff, a group of journalists, and security guards stand in front of the throngs of students at the entrance to the building where the ballots are being counted inside. The students have been separated into two groups by metal barricades. Each side is clad in the distinctive colours of the Lebanese political parties. On the right are students affiliated with the March 14th bloc—a group of mainly Christian and Sunni political parties. On the left are students of March 8th—the bloc represented primarily by Shi’a parties such as Hezbollah and Amal, as well as their one Christian ally, the Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun. If you want to be there to hear the election results, you have to physically be on one of these two sides—there is literally no room to be independent. “Abu Hadi!” shouts the group on the left as they pump their fists in the air and swear their loyalty to Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah. “Hakim!” chants the other side, using one of the
nicknames for the Christian leader (and former warlord) Samir Geagea—the leader of the Lebanese Forces. The students are shoving, throwing bottles, and shouting sectarian insults at each other. It is a blatant display of sectarian division among the students, as the nation’s political divisions are played out on the AUB campus—just as it is, in one form or another, on virtually every other university campus in Lebanon. With every result that is announced, one of the two sides erupts in victorious cheers. In some cases, the shouts of victory occur a few seconds before the official announcements are even made, because the students counting ballots inside are secretly texting their group the results in advance. An older, seasoned journalist, there along with the hordes of other media types covering the event, sighs and remarks: “These are supposed to be the leaders of the future, the ones who are supposed to want democracy and bring us change. But look at them! They are shouting the same insults we used to say during the war! And for what? For a bunch of leaders who bring them nothing. Most of these guys are not even old enough to vote.”

The Question

Why do so-called ‘modern’ Lebanese youth, who are educated, globally connected, and technologically savvy, lend their support to wartime militia-leaders-turned-politicians of their

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1 O. Harkous, personal communication, November 2007. This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted in Lebanon, the bulk of which took place between September 2007 and September 2009. I also made two shorter trips to Beirut in June 2005 and August 2005, immediately after the Independence Intifada. It is also based on my observations, conversations, interviews, as well as the blogs, social media pages and other sources of information that I followed during my two-year tenure as the country director for the UK-based peace-building NGO, International Alert, from May 2009 to May 2011 and in the two years after I left Beirut, 2011-2013. During my time with International Alert, I worked directly with the youth leaders and youth members of Lebanon’s 18 most prominent political parties. During this time, I also had the opportunity to observe student elections over several years, as well as civil society movements such as Laique Pride, and the 2011 protests in Lebanon triggered by the Arab spring.
parents’ generation? In other Arab countries it was exactly this cohort of educated youth who were at the front lines of the revolutions against their regimes. Yet in Lebanon, despite the fact many youth will tell you they are fed up with the sectarian system, these young Lebanese are still waving the flags, brandishing the logos, and wearing the colours of their respective sectarian political parties. How do we explain this? Why do sectarian political divisions persist among this generation of educated young Lebanese?

The Argument

When seeking to explain how ethnic divisions and conflict are reproduced, much of the literature focuses on macro-level factors or ‘top-down’ explanations, such as the damaging power of external interference (Lake and Rothchild 1996), the configurations of formal and informal institutions (Bertrand 2004; Horowitz 1985; Lijphart 1977; Lustick 1979; Posner, 2005), or the power of manipulative political elites (Brass 1997; Tambiah 1996; Kapferer 1988; Fearon and Laitin 2000). While I accept these explanations, I also argue that they are incomplete. The approach I take in this study is that we need to deepen the structural explanations of communal politics and look to different, finer, levels of analysis for a fuller picture of how communal dynamics are reproduced, and why they persist—even, as I show, among the people and in the places that the literature would expect to find it lacking, such as among educated, economically secure young Lebanese, in western-oriented liberal arts universities, or civil society movements. In short, my argument is that youth themselves, and especially the young partisans of Lebanon’s political parties, contribute to the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarian political dynamics ‘from below.’ I argue that the networking, strategies, and activities of
Lebanese youth within their own spheres of politics constitute a ‘feedback’ mechanism that operates at the grassroots, deep within the “nooks and crannies of everyday life,” to both reproduce and rejuvenate sectarianism among youth. This, I argue, is part of why sectarianism persists, and why sectarian-based parties continue to attract young Lebanese – including those who are educated and economically secure. Though in most scholarly work, educated youth are often associated with more ‘civic’ and ‘progressive’ politics, in this study I show the ambiguities and ambivalence of youth politics and how the strategies and activism of educated, middle- and upper-class youth can also act as a mechanism of reproduction for communal affiliations and categories. I further contend that understanding youth as political actors in their own right—not just as the followers of elites—as well as taking seriously the politics of youth-occupied spaces, can reveal a more complete picture of why ethnic parties and movements persist among young people—especially over and above the more secular, progressive movements youth are often associated with. Indeed, youth are too often neglected parties in our political analyses. A closer look into their political realms can bring greater insight into why communal movements persist and how they are renewed and revitalised to suit the sensibilities, styles, and priorities of a younger generation.

To explore how sectarianism is reproduced among youth, I adopt the conceptual framework of historical institutionalism, and, as a starting point, I argue that the sectarian

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2 Max Weiss argues that historians and social scientists need to “more carefully understand how sectarianism is produced, how it evolves and how it spreads into the nooks and crannies of everyday life” (Weiss 2010, 15).
3 The Lebanese conflict is most commonly analysed through theories of ethnicity and ethnic conflict (prominent examples include Lake and Rothchild 1996; Horowitz 1985). Scholars refer to Lebanon’s segments as “ethnic” “ethno-religious,” and “communal” categories (see Clark and Salloukh 2013 for one recent example). Most commonly, the conflict and the categories are referred to as “sectarian” or “confessional.” I use the terms confessional and sectarian synonymously.
political system in Lebanon is deeply path-dependent. Even critical junctures such as the 16-year civil war, the 2005 Independence Intifada and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal did not result in any fundamental changes to the underlying basis of political power in Lebanon, namely, sectarianism (Clark and Salloukh 2015; Geha 2016). Rather, Lebanon’s sectarian configuration has repeatedly proved resilient, deeply self-reinforcing and incredibly resistant to change. Of course, the fact that this system (i.e., Lebanon’s formal and informal political institutions) shapes the political participation of Lebanese citizens is something that most would consider a truism. But what does this actually mean at the level of ‘ordinary’ life? How does this actually work at grassroots levels? Institutions, of course, do not ‘automatically’ reproduce politics, any more than the inflammatory sectarian rhetoric of elites ‘automatically’ translates into action by ‘followers.’ I argue that there is much that happens in between that needs to be better understood. Take, for instance, the case of the Lebanese Forces (LF). How has this political party, which emerged from the civil war with a profoundly tarnished reputation (even within the Christian communities whose interests it supposedly represented), and which was then banned from Lebanese politics for more than a decade, now managed to become one of the “chicest” political parties among Christian youth who adopt its trademark style of dark aviator sunglasses with the LF’s pointed cross? Or the case of the young Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) activists, who ‘accessorize’ with the Hezbollah Flag and accent their look with their trademark orange and low-rise jeans? Or the fact that the American University of Beirut’s

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4 As Kathleen Thelen states, institutional stability is “far from being automatic” and requires feedback mechanisms in order to be “sustained politically” (1999, 396).

5 Interview with Assistant Dean of Students, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.

6 The dark aviator sunglasses is one of the classic looks of the FL founder, Bashir Gemeyal.
‘hottest’ social gatherings of the year are coordinated by students affiliated to Lebanon’s partisan political parties? If these modes of political affiliation among youth are products of Lebanon’s sectarian institutional configuration, which they no doubt are, then they are distant ones. What exactly are the mechanisms that work to reproduce these dynamics among youth at the grassroots? Though much of the literature on ethnic conflict, as well as the literature on Lebanese politics, tends to focus on elite-oriented explanations for the “stickiness” of ethnic identities and perpetuation of communal conflict, I argue that we must take the notion of youth as political actors in their own right more seriously. We cannot dismiss these manifestations of sectarianism among young Lebanese as merely the product of the top-down manipulation or strategic machinations of Lebanon’s geriatric political elites. Although I would by no means argue that elite manipulation plays no role, I contend that it is too crude and simplistic an explanation to capture fully the complexity of youth politics and to explain why communal boundaries and dynamics persist among them. Then what is the explanation?

In short, my argument is not that institutional explanations or explanations of elite instrumentalism are wrong, only that they are incomplete. Rather, I argue that the reproduction of sectarian political dynamics among youth is also a product of youth themselves. More specifically, it is partisan youth who, through their presence, networking, activities, and activism create political dynamics that contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of Lebanon’s particular sectarian institutional configuration. It is youth who bring their partisan identities, perspectives, affiliations, and resources into various grassroots, youth-occupied realms. They do so for the purpose of pursuing multiple agendas and accomplishing multiple goals—goals that in some cases have little to do with politics at all. In doing so, partisan youth reproduce partisan,
and thus sectarian, dynamics and boundaries ‘from below’ among young people. This happens in a few key ways. First, the presence, networking, and activism of partisan youth works to inject the sect-based parties (and the image of their leaders) with new life and purpose at the grassroots, thereby keeping them current, attractive, and relevant to young people. The activities of partisan youth also facilitate and build social networks of young people along partisan lines, which in turn helps to channel their political energy toward the existing parties. The work of partisan youth also disrupts and divides attempts by non-affiliated, ‘independent’ youth activists to challenge the sectarian status quo—whether in their universities or in civil society—thus narrowing the space for an alternative politics to emerge. Finally, partisan youth have also contributed, as activists and professionals, to the renewal of their parties’ image and style, specifically in how they seek to advertise and communicate their political message to a broader—and younger—Lebanese public. In these ways I argue that partisan youth are producing dynamics at the grassroots that both reinforce Lebanon’s factional, sectarian politics as well as renew and rejuvenate sectarianism for a younger audience. In other words, their efforts constitute a feedback mechanism for the reproduction and renewal of sectarianism ‘from below.’

The majority of the literature on youth in ethnic conflict depicts youth involvement in communal parties and movements as simply the product of instrumentalist “elite strategies” or “elite manipulation.” I argue, however, that this understanding of young ‘followers’ is too

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7 For a recent example of scholarly work that focuses on elite strategies in Lebanon and discusses the activities of partisan students as an extension of elite strategies, see Clark and Salloukh 2013. Also see Salloukh, Barakat, al-Habbal, Khattab and Mikaelian (2015) for an in-depth look into sectarian politics and how elites make use of Lebanon’s institutionally weak, yet centralized state and how this reproduces sectarian identities.
simplistic to capture the multilayered and complex dynamics that exist among youth themselves, and within the political arenas that youth occupy (such as student elections at universities, for example)—arenas that are often overlooked or under-analysed in studies of politics. To label youth involvement as solely the result of elite instrumentalism misses an important part of the picture. It underestimates the active and (at times) autonomous role of youth, neglects the complexity of their own desires, and simplifies them as ‘blind followers,’ ‘tools,’ or ‘victims’ of manipulative ethnic elites.

Though the line between what is youth-driven and what is a result of elite manipulation might at times be fuzzy, I propose that the nature of the relationship between elites and their ‘followers’ is more complex and elastic than is often assumed. We need to take seriously the notion that youth—if not followers more generally—also can contribute to the reproduction of ethnic categories ‘from below.’ The case of Lebanon gives us good cause to challenge the standard passive conception of youth (if not followers more generally) that pervades the literature, and examine the ways and contexts in which young ‘followers’ assume varying degrees of autonomy and agency in communal movements, and how their actions and influence also work to reproduce communal boundaries and dynamics at grassroots levels.

In sum, I contend that the networking and activities of young partisans constitute a ‘feedback’ mechanism that operates at the grassroots, deep within Lebanese society, to reproduce and rejuvenate sectarian dynamics among youth. Though feedback mechanisms are most often discussed in relation to the structure of formal institutions and policy, as Paul Pierson argues, there is good reason to think that they are “widespread in politics,” so much so that at first glance they may even seem “commonplace” (Pierson 2004, 44, 46). This statement
certainly applies to the role of youth in Lebanon. In this thesis I aim to correct this oversight by showing how youth are powerful and active actors in their own right, and how their forms of political participation can also reproduce and reinvigorate divisive politics ‘from below.’

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows: first, I review the literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflict and examine how youth and their role in the reproduction of ethnic identities and conflict are commonly conceived. Second, I review the literature on youth in the Middle East to show that here, too, the role of youth is also described in limited, two-dimensional terms. Third, I review the prominent theories of ethnicity and discuss the general acceptance of constructivist theories which emphasize the fluid and changeable nature of ethnic identities. I then show how we are still left with a puzzle—namely, explaining the persistence, or ‘stickiness’ of ethnic identities and ethnic conflicts. Here I ‘borrow a page’ from historical institutionalism and assume that if ethnicity persists it does so because of identifiable mechanisms of reproduction (Schatz 2004, xx). I adopt the framework of historical institutionalism to show how Lebanon’s ‘sectarian democracy’ became self-reinforcing historically. This review lays the groundwork for my main argument, which is that the activism and networking of partisan youth activists constitute system-reproducing mechanisms of feedback in Lebanese politics. I conclude with a brief discussion of two of the central concepts I use in my thesis: ‘youth’ and ‘sectarianism.’

**Youth in the Literature on Ethnic Conflict**

If we look to the literature on ethnicity for insight into young people in communal movements, we find that youth are frequently mentioned but sorely under-examined. When
and if youth are discussed at all, they are discussed in very narrow terms: as the ‘blind
followers’ or ‘tools’ of ethnic and communal elites (Bayoumi 2005, 34), the ‘foot soldiers’ of
ethnic leaders, or the ‘radical recruits’ of ethnic elites (Collins and Reid 2009a, 2009b; Horowitz
2001, 259-261; Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Last 2005; Olaiya 2014, 5, 9; Smyth and Robinson
2001; Urdal 2006; Villalon 1999; Von Hellermann 2010). Furthermore, the categories of ‘youth’
that are most often examined in the literature are the “angry, desperate, young men” or
“young, ill-educated, underemployed men from small towns” who make up the “gangs of thugs”
that help to perpetuate ethnic conflicts (Collins and Reid 2009a; Fearon and Laitin 2000, 869;
see also Deuchar 2010). Kapferer (1998, 12), for example, notes of the internal conflict in Sri
Lanka that “Sinhalese gangs made up largely of impoverished and unemployed youth attacked
Tamils in their houses and shops, settling old scores and looting.” Rajasinha-Senanayake
(2004) remarks that “[Sri Lankan] rural youth from low caste communities have overwhelmingly
comprised the fighting forces on both sides [the GoSL and LTTE].” Indeed, many studies of youth
in the contexts of civil conflict and post-conflict settings focus on socially excluded youth who
have received almost no secondary or university education (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006;
Finnström 2008; Peters 2011; Utas 2005; Vigh 2006a; and Vigh 2006b). The underlying logic is
that because young people are frequently unemployed or under-employed and frustrated with
the lack of opportunities, and because they are often unmarried and do not have family
obligations of their own (i.e., have the life circumstances which are assumed to be deterrents
against risky political behaviour), and quite simply, just because they are young, they are
understood by scholars of ethnic conflict as naturally more prone to “clannish and cruel in their
exclusion of all those who are different” (Eric Erickson quoted in Horowitz 2001, 261). In short,
the extent of the discussion about youth and ethnic politics in the scholarship is generally limited to this: youth are disadvantaged, frustrated, ‘naturally’ more radical, and have nothing else to do and nothing much to lose, and thus are easily mobilized by ethnic elites for risky (often violent) behaviour.

Although these descriptions are not always inaccurate (indeed, underemployed youth are widely found in ethnic movements), as explanations they are incomplete and unsatisfying for understanding why young people get involved in sectarian movements. For one, it is odd that such clearly essentialist explanations for the mobilization of young people along ethnic lines are so prevalent in a body of scholarship that has otherwise eschewed the same category of explanations (i.e., primordialism) for the persistence of ethnic identities and ethnic group conflict. Scholars who argue against ethnic identities as being ‘natural’ and thus ‘naturally’ conflictual, seem to have no trouble viewing youth in exactly this way. Second, the scholarship is also limited in that it tends to focus on youth who are rural, unemployed, and/or uneducated. The Lebanese case, however, demonstrates that a much broader range of young people is involved in communal politics. Even a cursory glance at the members of Lebanon’s political parties’ youth wings indicates that the average member is more likely to be a trilingual, educated, urban student or young professional, rather than the ‘angry, desperate, young men’ that are so frequently referenced in the literature. Moreover, even if we were to take at face value that youth are ‘naturally’ more radical (which I do not)—the fact that communal identities, over others, repeatedly become the basis for political affiliation and mobilization still requires explanation.
Last, the most common focus in the literature on ethnicity when seeking to explain ethnic identity and mobilization is on elites and their manipulative use of ethnic resources, while youth are commonly seen as their ‘foot soldiers,’ ‘tools,’ or ‘followers.’ Indeed, “the most common narrative” in literature on ethnicity (whether it be instrumentalism or constructivism) when explaining ethnic violence is that it is “provoked by elites seeking to gain, maintain, or increase their hold on political power” (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 846; See also: Bob-Milliar 2014). Far less examined are the questions of why ‘followers’ follow elites down these self-serving paths at all, and even less so, how the actions of these so-called ‘followers’ may help to reproduce ethnic and communal categories. In contrast, I am interested in the active role youth play in contributing to the reproduction of ethnic identities and conflicts at the grassroots level. I suggest there is more to know when it comes to understanding why young people ‘follow.’ In fact, examining the role of youth in communal conflict raises questions about the label of ‘followers’ in general, and the nature of the relationships between elites and their ‘followers.’ By exploring these questions in this study I strive to enhance our understanding of why mobilization along communal/sectarian lines persists over time and over other, more crosscutting, forms of affiliation—questions that are crucial to those who hope to transform politics in deeply divided countries such as Lebanon.

**Literature on Youth in the Middle East**

Studies on youth in the Middle East have also often tended to depict young people in rather two-dimensional terms. Youth have often been seen as either ‘vanguards’ or ‘vandals;’ as “a sign of social decay” or “our best hope for the future” (Abbink 2005; Austin and Willard 1998,
They are portrayed as either “vulnerable innocents” or “disruptive recruits” who are liable to be “seduced” by radical forces—most often Islamists (Meijer 2000).

Scholarly interest in Arab youth emerged in the 1990s when it was also becoming glaringly clear that the region was suffering from an ‘imbalance’ in its population pyramid, and that it was demographically very young. In fact, most studies of Middle Eastern youth initially focused mainly on issues of demographics and tended to be “tinged with anxiety” (Bayat 2011, 47). At the root of this anxiety was the simple fact that there are a large number of young people in the Middle East (see, for example, Urdal 2006). Reference is still frequently made to the fact that nearly every country in the Middle East is currently home to some of the largest young generations in history (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2009). It is estimated that two-thirds of the population in the Arab world is under the age of 30 (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey). In Lebanon, 44% of the population is under the age of 24 (Government of Lebanon, 2008). These ‘youth bulges’ in the population pyramids of the Middle East are the products of improvements in health care—specifically the decline in infant mortality rates—with simultaneous continuation of high fertility rates (births per woman). With the introduction of medical advances and welfarist regimes in the 1960s, female and infant health progressively improved. However, rather than leading to the reduced incentive to have large families, which was expected to accompany the simultaneous processes of urbanization, modernization, and post-subsistence household economies, female fertility continued to carry cultural and even political (nationalist) significance and thus family size just got larger (Murphy 2012, 7). The result is historically large youth populations across the region.
It is not just the size of these youth ‘bulges’ that caused anxiety, however, it was also the fact that the growth of these large young populations was coinciding with specific (and devastating) sociopolitical and economic realities that have only grown steadily worse. These included increasing rates of poverty, unemployment, and deepening income disparity—all of which are a result of neoliberal economic policies introduced in the 1980s and technological change. Coupled with this has been the brutal repression by Arab regimes of any political opposition. While other regions of the world were undergoing the ‘democratic wave,’ Arab countries had managed to avoid any real process of political liberalization for decades, until the massive uprisings in 2011 referred to as the ‘Arab Spring.’ On the contrary, since independence Arab states have increasingly relied on often brutal security forces for the surveillance and control of their young populations and maintained tight control of political expression and organization. These difficult and oppressive structural conditions, combined with an overwhelmingly young regional population, have led many scholars to draw pessimistic and at times foreboding conclusions about youth in the Middle East. Concerns about the ‘tens of millions of educated, unemployed youth’ have abounded in the scholarship, with the specific implications that the mounting grievances of these young Arabs render them politically vulnerable to a host of political forces (Assaad and Roudi-Fahimi 2007; Kabbani and Kathari 2005; Assaad 2007). As Ted Swedenburg (2007) writes, Middle Eastern youth, depending on the context and perspectives of the commentator, have tended to be seen as ‘vulnerable innocents’ in danger of being swayed by any variety of sinister forces. For some observers these parasitic forces preying on youth take the form of the global media and western consumer culture that supposedly pacify and depoliticize young Arabs and turn their attention toward frivolous
entertainment and fashion. For many others, it is Islamists who threaten to radicalize and consume the political energy of youth (see e.g. Zakaria 2001; Huntington 1996 and 2001; Fuller 2003; Kivimaki 2003; Goldstone 2001). Indeed, many studies, prior to the 2011 uprisings, focused specifically on the link between ‘youth bulges’ and potential for religious violence, specifically armed combat, terrorism, and riots (Urdal 2006). This literature, like the scholarship on ethnic and religious conflict in this respect, simplistically depicts youth as the gullible victims, or ‘blind followers’ of religious and communal elites.

Middle Eastern states have also tended to see themselves as the supervisor, instructor, protector, or ‘father’ of youth—who are in need of direction and instruction lest they be led astray. Even the former presidents of Egypt and Tunisia framed the recent uprisings in their country in these terms. Mubarak, for example, in his 10 February 2011 speech where he announced he would not step down but rather hold onto power until that September, framed his appeal to the youth as “a speech from the father to his sons and daughters” (Mubarak 2011). Similarly in Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali’s last speech in Tunisia he spoke about the demonstrations as youthful naiveté and deviation from the path of rightful and patriotic behaviour—to which the young protesters responded with boos and insults (Murphy 2012, 16; Filiu 2011, 40).

In fact, ‘youth’ has been imbued with different meaning and significance to Arab states at different historical junctures. During anti-colonial struggles and the optimistic years that followed independence (such as Egypt before 1952, or Iran after 1979), for example, youth symbolized the future of the modern nation (Swedenburg 2007, 2). Whereas the older, under-educated generation represented backwardness, the youth were imagined to be “recipients of
modern progressive education and the imbibers of state-propagated ideology” (ibid., loc.cit).

After independence, educated youth were constructed as the “hope” and the “builders” of Arab nations—an idea that emerged out of enlightenment ideas about progress (Neyzi 2001, 412). In the post-independence era, Arab states made concerted attempts to incorporate youth and co-opt them into nation-building projects through formal education and promised jobs in the state. This was part of the “implicit nationalist-populist-socialist ‘bargains’” between Arab states and their citizens which entailed citizen duties such as obedience and the pursuit of education (for some) in exchange for policies favouring the redistribution of wealth and opportunities for employment in the civil service. These implicit, informal, but collective agreements specified the norms and institutions that underpinned relations between these regimes and their societies. As Heydemann writes, these pacts included the preference for state-led economic policies that involved redistribution of wealth, the protection of local trade, and an emphasis on the “organic unity of the polity” (2007, 27). For example, in some regimes, such as Egypt, there was the promise of civil service jobs for every university graduate in the country. These ‘pacts’ were informal and reciprocal in nature and, in the first decades post-independence, there were some relative successes. The Arab states, for example, were able to achieve impressive rates of economic growth and took some significant steps, such as land reform, to redress the huge imbalance in wealth and power that had taken hold during the colonial period. As such, the integration and discipline of youth were also seen as successful and state authority went unquestioned.

Chinks in the state’s armour started to appear during the 1970s and into the decade of the 1980s when young people began to question state legitimacy for not only failing to provide
the promised opportunities for upward mobility, but also curtailing their freedoms and rights to criticize politics (Bennani-Chraïbi 2000). With the introduction of neoliberal economic policies in the Middle East, living standards fell drastically, especially among rural populations. Many rural dwellers migrated to urban areas in search of opportunity, causing an increasing rate of urbanization across the region. In 1960, only a quarter of Arabs lived in cities. By 2010 that figure had risen to 56% and is expected to rise to 66% in 2020 (Roudi, 2011). Furthermore, poverty was spreading and deeply affecting the region’s population. On the eve of Egypt’s uprising in 2011, for example, it is estimated that over a quarter of the of the population—mainly concentrated in rural and urban slum areas and the south of the country—was living below the poverty line (World Bank 2013).8

For Middle Eastern youth born since the 1980s their ‘bargains’ with the state have broken down. The institutions and promises that once ensured a measure of intergenerational equality and social justice are no longer working. This cohort of youth has grown up in a context of increasingly limited economic opportunities, widespread political corruption, and repressive political space. Looking at these striking realities of Arab youth we see a portrait of young people who, as Bennani-Chraïbi saw over a decade ago, “have imbibed the collective dream of post-independence, the idea of universal education as the engine of social upward mobility... (youth who have) internalised meritocracy as a legitimate value and yet their hopes have been dashed” (2000, 147). Indeed, Arab youth have fulfilled their end of the ‘bargain’ with their

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8 Others have estimated the poverty rate to be much higher. Hazem Kandil (2012), for one, puts the poverty rate at an estimated 50% (2012, 208). He writes that the effects were plain to see in the suburbs of Cairo where 10 million rural migrants “lived in slums with no schools, hospitals, clubs, sewage systems, public transportation, or even police stations [and] which had become a Hobbesian world of violence and vice” (2012, 208).
states by staying in school, investing in private education, and succeeding academically. But the state has not met its promise to provide either employment in the civil service, or a dynamic labour market after neoliberal reforms (Singerman 2007, 35). The ‘youth bulge’ in the Middle East should have been an opportunity, “a demographic ‘gift’” of dynamic, working-age lower-dependency ratio individuals who can contribute to the productive and savings sectors of the economy (Murphy 2012, 9). Instead, the region is experiencing a bulge of dependent, under-utilized, and increasingly impoverished individuals who represent a poor return on the investments already made in education. As Murphy writes, “the promises of the post-independence regimes not only remain unfulfilled but for those who were born too late to play a part in bringing them to power, the gap between rhetoric and reality leaves a deep sense of alienation and exclusion” (2012, 2).

In 2011, however, Arab youth by the tens of thousands took to the streets in largely peaceful protests to demand greater democracy, an end to corruption and authoritarianism, and genuine economic opportunity. These protests caught many scholars by surprise—especially political scientists, who until then had been focusing on the enduring nature of Arab authoritarianism and the potential for youth radicalism (i.e., Islamic radicalism). The Arab uprisings have triggered a re-evaluation and revisiting of scholarship on the politics of the Middle East, as well as on the perceptions of Arab youth as passive, gullible, and vulnerable (Murphy 2012). It has been argued that this scholarship has “overlooked, or misdiagnosed” the fact that Arab youth have political agency, even in spite of remarkably powerful systemic and structural conditions. The neglect of youth’s political agency is why Murphy, for one, has argued
that the world (and specifically political science) was taken by surprise when these young people rose up in non-violent opposition to their regimes (Murphy 2012, 17).

In the case of Lebanon, the nature, power, and resilience of the country’s sectarian power-sharing system means that an argument which promotes the idea of youth’s political agency is a difficult one to make. Nonetheless, the overview of previous scholarship on youth in the Middle East serves as a reminder that we cannot underestimate youth as political actors in their own right. Youth are far more than credulous victims. Rather, youth have a great deal of autonomy within their own spheres of politics, play an active role in society, and influence the political movements of which they are a part—whether they be pro-democratic civic movements, more particularistic communal movements, or something in between. In this study of partisan youth in Lebanon, I challenge conceptions of youth as naive and passive and the notion of youth as the simple ‘followers’ of ethnic elites. Even in the context of heavy-handed and hierarchical leadership, young members and supporters of the sect-based political parties in Lebanon still have some degree of autonomy (albeit to varying extents) over specific realms of politics, such as student elections in universities, for example, and they are savvy political actors in their own right. I discuss the varying degrees of autonomy young people have within their own spheres of politics, and explore the variety of ways they reinvigorate the conventional Lebanese political parties, act as the conduits for their transmission into grassroots arenas, translate them into organizations that appeal to youth, and infuse them with new ideas and modes of communication. In doing so, partisan youth contribute to the renewal of these sect-based partisan political parties, and ensure that they are kept present, relevant, and appealing
to young Lebanese, thus contributing to the reproduction of sectarian boundaries and dynamics ‘from below,’ within arenas of political life deep within Lebanese society.

“Illiberal” Youth Activism: When Youth Activism Reinforces, Rather than Challenges, the Status Quo

When we think of the political activism of youth, we most often think of examples of youth challenging and resisting dominant power structures. To be sure, most literature on youth activism and politics focuses on exactly on this, especially on their role in pushing for greater democracy, human rights, and freedoms. Youth activism is often portrayed in both the popular media and in the social science literature as one of the drivers of liberal political reform. Indeed, there has been a reversal in the scholarship on Arab youth in this regard, which now highlights youth and youth movements pushing for progressive changes and the democratic role of youth in the region. Any reflection on the images and narratives of the uprisings in Egypt or Tunisia, or the revolutions of Eastern Europe in Georgia, Serbia, or Ukraine, immediately conjures up youthful protesters challenging power (and winning) while they face off with equally young armed soldiers. Lebanese youth are also frequently viewed in this optimistic light in both the popular and scholarly presses. Recent studies tend to focus on ‘progressive’ and ‘alternative’ Lebanese youth groups, and often portray young people as more progressive than their parents, and as being the ‘drivers of democratic change’ and the ‘hope for Lebanon’s future.’

However, as Eric McGlinchey (2009, 1147) states in reference to Uzbek youth politics, “we should not be

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9 For scholarly work which focuses on progressive youth activism in Lebanon see: Bortolazzi 2013; Clark and Zahar 2015; Clark and Sallouk 2013; Faour 1998; Khalaf 2010; Moawad 2012; Staeheli and Nagel 2013; Maaroufi 2014, for a few recent examples.
deluded that youth are any more committed to reform than their elders.” This echoes a claim made decades ago by sociologist Karl Mannheim who studied the nature of generations. In his widely read 1972 essay, *The Problem of Generations*, he writes:

> Nothing is more false than the usual assumption, uncritically shared by students of generations, that the young generation is progressive and the older generation *eo ipso* conservative. ...Whether youth will be conservative, reactionary, or progressive depends (if not entirely at least primarily) on whether and what kind of opportunities the existing social structure, and the position they occupy in within it, provides for the promotion of their own social and intellectual ends” (1972, 18).

Asef Bayat (2011) makes a similar argument in relation to youth in the Middle East, stating that “youthful claims” and “their transformative and democratizing potential, depends on the capacity of the adversaries, the moral and political authorities, to accommodate and contain youthful claims” (48). In other words, the claims and movements of youth will take on various shapes and will have different political potentials depending on the opportunities available to them and the structures which surround them. Thus, depending on the context, youth “may be as conservative as any other social group” (Bayat 2011, 48). It makes sense, then, that scholarship should pay attention to the range of contexts of youth politics including cases when youth activism works to reinforce the status quo. These cases, however, get comparatively little scholarly attention (McGlinchey 2009, 1149). This study aims to fill this gap.

There are a handful of studies that do examine cases where youth activism reproduces, rather than challenges, existing forms and dynamics of power. Verkaaik’s (2004) ethnography of urban youth in Pakistan is one such example. In his examination of the Muhajir Qaumi movement in Pakistan, Verkaaik shows how urban youth imagine and utilize large scale ethnic-religious violence as opportunities for self-assertion and ‘fun,’ and end up perpetuating ethnic-religious conflict in their pursuit of these things. Another example is Bell’s study on youth
culture and sectarianism in Northern Ireland. Bell argues that youth (specifically working class males), are far from being the passive initiates of Loyalist and Republican political elites. In fact, Bell argues that youth “play an active part in the reproduction of sectarian ideology” (Bell 1987, 158). Through creating youth cultural practices such as new music, bands, marches, wall-markings, and bonfires, Bell argues that young men generated “new sectarian culture” which became an important link between the formal institutions of Orangeism and the informal realm of the politics of the ‘street’ (ibid.). I make a similar argument in chapter six about the ways in which Lebanese youth have contributed to the adoption of new styles of political advertising and communication by the Lebanese political parties, thus allowing the parties to reinvent their image, and strengthen their appeal and connections to youth.

Along similar lines, Craig Jeffrey, a human geographer and observer of youth politics, discusses cases of young people who are engaged in political strategies that end up perpetuating established systems of power (2012, 250). Importantly, Jeffrey argues that “[t]hey do so not through simply imitating past practices” but by developing “reinvigorated practices” of their own Jeffrey (ibid., loc. cit). He adds that young people’s involvement in reproducing and deepening established structures of power is “never a consequence of their simply being brainwashed into doing what the dominant systems tell them they should be doing,” rather, it is evidence of how youth can “resuscitate” old structures for different or new reasons of their own (ibid., loc. cit.).

This line of argument is similar to that of Fearon and Laitin (2000) when they

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10 Jeffrey goes on to argue, however, that youth, even those whose activism reinforces hegemonic structures, still have agency. Indeed, he states that the fact youth have agency has become “virtually a truism” in the disciplines of geography and anthropology. In cases where youth activism strengthens existing power structures, he still asserts youth have agency, calling this phenomenon “negative agency.” Problems arise with this term however, because of the difficulty of distinguishing between what constitutes “negative agency” and what is a result of the influence and shaping forces of surrounding structures and institutions. The argument I am making here, by contrast, is
discuss ‘followers’ in situations of ethnic conflict. They state that while most of the ethnicity literature focuses on elites, elites are not the only ones who mobilize identity. Rather, ordinary people also instrumentalize ethnicity, and do so for multiple purposes—some of which may have little to do with ethnicity at all, such as the pursuing of personal or local agendas (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 855).

I agree with Jeffrey, and argue that Lebanese youth activists are not simply imitating the old strategies of their leaders. Instead, they are reinvigorating them and adapting them to their own political realms and for multiple reasons. I further argue that youth support the sect-based political movements for all sorts of reasons—not all of which have to do with sectarianism, but which do end up reproducing and rejuvenating sectarian dynamics. Lebanon is an interesting case for such a study because despite the presence of powerful sectarian movements there is still a great deal of political competition and freedom to organize and form political networks. Thus, despite the fact that youth are members of very hierarchical parties, they still have varying degrees of freedom and autonomy over their own realms of politics. As I discuss in

primarily a structural one—namely, that Lebanese sectarianism is a deeply path-dependent political system and is the product of historically embedded formal and informal institutions. I further argue, however, that within this path-dependent system there is still room for a limited range of autonomy. More precisely, I argue that youth have varying degrees of ‘relative autonomy’ when they are operating in specific spaces and realms of politics (i.e.: youth-oriented spaces) such as universities, youth wings of political parties, and on-line forums. As I elaborate below, however, I also argue that while youth have some degree of autonomy in these more ‘peripheral’ political realms, the closer that youth come to the centres of power—namely the leaders of the sect-based political parties—the less autonomy and influence they have. Thus, when operating in the more ‘distant’ realms of politics (i.e., campus politics), youth achieve some degree of autonomy, but when they operate in the realms that are closer to elite power (i.e., the youth wings of the political parties themselves), they have less autonomy over their own affairs. I also argue that it is precisely because youth have limited autonomy in the former (i.e., more peripheral) realms that they are able to innovate and to reinvigorate strategies, create ‘new sectarian culture,’ which then keeps Lebanon’s factional partisan political parties attractive and relevant to youth. My argument is that we need to deepen the gaze of institutional arguments to examine not only how and why they persist at grassroots levels, but also how they are renewed in order to appeal to young people. To do so we cannot underestimate the semi-autonomous political role of youth and the power of politics in youth-occupied spaces.
chapter two, this freedom is a by-product of the fact that no one sectarian community has ever been able to achieve political hegemony. Rather, Lebanon’s power-sharing political system guarantees each community’s right to be free from interference from others. This has resulted in a fragmented political landscape, with no one centre of power. The presence of this ‘negative’ freedom (i.e., freedom from interference) means there is ample political space for all sorts of agendas to be pursued simultaneously.

For youth, the absence of an overarching state or political power has meant, as Deeb and Harb have argued, that “Lebanese youth police themselves” (2013, 32). In keeping with this line of reasoning, I examine the ways in which partisan youth rejuvenate the conventional Lebanese political parties through their own strategies and innovation, and how this works to recreate partisan divisions among youth, thereby contributing to the reproduction of sectarianism ‘from below.’ The active role of young people has been too often neglected in studies of ethnicity and in political science. This study aims to correct this oversight.

The Puzzle of Persistence: Using a Historical Institutionalist Lens to Explain the Reproduction of Ethnic Affiliation

The questions surrounding youth and the reproduction of sectarianism in Lebanon speak to another puzzle in the scholarship on ethnic politics and conflict. This scholarship has traditionally been divided between those scholars who believe ethnic identities are given, ascriptive, firmly bounded entities that change little over time (i.e., primordialism), those who argue that identity is a product of the machinations of ethnic elites (instrumentalism), and
those who see ethnic identity as constructed and open to change as a result of economic, political, or social factors (constructivism).\textsuperscript{11}

Broadly speaking, primordialists understand ethnicity as a fixed characteristic of individuals and communities (Horowitz 2002a; Isaacs 1975; Smith 1986; Kaplan 1993; and Connor 1994). Whether rooted in inherent biological traits or centuries of past practice which are now beyond the ability of groups or individuals to alter, “one will invariably and always be perceived as a Serb, a Zulu, or a Chechen” (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 5). Moreover, primordialists also view ethnic conflicts as ‘natural’ outcomes of ethnic identities—especially the emotional and irrational aspects of those identities. Thus, although primordialists may recognize that ethnic warfare is not a constant state of affairs, they tend to see it as flowing ‘organically’ from ethnic differences and therefore not necessarily in need of further explanation. While some scholars of the primordialist school may probe the catalysts that trigger a violent outbreak, ultimately they see ethnic conflict as naturally rooted in ethnicity itself (ibid., loc. cit). The fact that primordialists do not operationalize the link between ethnic identity and ethnic conflict and the implication that because it is natural it is unchangeable if not inevitable, is the main reason this position has been heavily critiqued, if not abandoned altogether (Tiemessen 2005, 5).

One place, however, where this approach has enjoyed some unfortunate staying power is in studies of the Middle East. In fact, explanations of Middle East politics, including communal conflict, political mobilization, authoritarianism, etc., have been “saturated” with explanations

\textsuperscript{11} Of course, there are further delineations within each group and in reality most scholars of ethnic politics straddle the boundaries between them.
based in culture, religion, identity, and their effects on politics (Hudson 1995, 61). The so-called ‘political culture’ approach, rooted in notions of primordialism, has been privileged over others in explaining political outcomes in Arab countries. Questions have thus been (appropriately) raised as to why, when studying the Arab region, political phenomena are explained as being the outcomes of religion, identity, or culture, when in others (Latin America, to name one example) the political economy approach, and attention to the histories of colonization, marginalization, and state building, are more often highlighted in explaining current political circumstances. As Hudson argues, the use and abuse of the concepts of political culture, be it Islam, tribalism, or ‘Arabness,’ has been “widespread and highly problematic” in western scholarship on the Middle East in particular (ibid., loc. cit). The result is that more recent scholarship on Middle East politics tends to view cultural explanations with healthy skepticism.

In this study I adopt the ‘healthy skepticism’ view of the political culture approach. To be clear, I agree with critiques of primordialism in their rejection of the notion of ethnic or religious identities being essential, timeless, or fixed, and rather understand them to be products of social and political circumstances and constructions.

The instrumentalist approach is one that stands in contrast to primordialism in that it understands ethnicity as a tool that is used by individual or group elites to obtain some larger, typically material, end (Glazer and Moynihan 1975; Steinberg 1981; Brass 1979, 1997; Lake and Rothchild 1998, 8). Ethnic mobilization and ethnic conflict, therefore, are a product of the use and manipulation of ethnic identity. In this view, ethnic identity is just one among several alternative bases of identity, and gains social and political significance only when it is invoked, utilized, or manipulated by ethnic elites (Ray and Rajat 2006, 12; Lake and Rothchild 1998, 6).
Elites utilize ethnicity for either their own or collective interests, for offensive or defensive purposes, and/or in response to perceived opportunities or threats to themselves or the group. Ethnicity, therefore, is understood primarily as a label or a set of symbolic ties that is used for political advantage (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 6). Brass, one of the foremost theorists in this category, describes the process of ethnic mobilization as “ethnic and nationalist elites increasingly stressing the ways in which the members of the group are similar to each other and collectively different from others” (Brass 1997, 21). They do so, he argues, for the purpose of “creat(ing) greater internal cohesion, and to press more effectively ethnic demands against rival groups” (ibid., 26). Instrumentalists, therefore, do not see ethnic conflict as inherent but rather understand it to be an outcome of the process of elite manipulation.

The final theoretical category, constructivism, dominates debates on identity formation today. Scholars who subscribe to this school of thought, most famously associated with Benedict Anderson, tend to acknowledge the strength and embeddedness of ethnicity, as primordialists do, but do not see it as natural or given. Rather, constructivists argue that ethnic identities are a product of material and political struggles in specific historical contexts. To the constructivist, identities are historically embedded, constructed through dense webs of social interactions, and inherently attached to other social identifications such as region, family, clan, and other non-material based identities (Tiemessen 2005, 6; Anderson 1983; Dominguez 1989; Young 1993, 21; Brubaker 1995). In this sense, constructivists generally see a person’s ethnic identity as beyond the choice or control of that individual (Lake and Rothchild 1998, 6). Max Weber, one of the earlier writers who stressed the social construction of ethnic identity, viewed ethnic groups as “human groups” whose belief in a common ancestry (in spite of it being mostly
fictitious) is so strong that it leads to the creation of a group that is reinforced over time (Weber 1968, 389). This led Weber and other constructivists to conclude that ethnic membership itself does not necessarily result in ethnic group formation or conflict, but only provides the resources—the ‘master narratives’—that may, in the right circumstances, be mobilized into a group by appropriate political action (Ray and Rajat 2006, 13).

Constructivists thus disagree with primordialists in that they do not see ethnicity as essential or biologically given, but do recognize (as primordialists also do) its embedded and enduring quality. Constructivists also disagree with primordialists in that they do not see the internalization of ethnic identity as naturally resulting in conflict and politicization. On this point, constructivists are closer to the instrumentalist position in their view that the politicization and potential conflict of ethnic groups occurs as a result of a process of political mobilization. Like instrumentalists, constructivists also recognize the importance of elites and leadership in the mobilization process. The disagreement with the instrumentalist approach, however, is over the extent to which these identities can be manipulated at the whim of politics and political elites (Tiemessen 2005, 7). Constructivists re-examine “the old argument that ethnic conflict is wholly a dependent variable to be explained only in terms of elite manipulation and competition for scarce resources” (Osaghae 2001, 27). Instead, constructivists tend to see ethnic conflict as flowing from a sort of “pathological social system” that breeds conflict from multiple social cleavages that are not under the control of the individual (Tiemessen 2005, 7; Lake and Rothchild 1998, 6). Instrumentalist explanations, constructivists argue, overemphasize the malleability of what elites can ‘do’ with ethnic resources. Elites cannot create ethnicity out of thin air and are themselves products of their socially constructed
environments. Thus, their interests, as well as their tools of mobilization, are shaped and constrained by their social environment as well. As Horowitz says, “the constraints of the field in which group interactions occur limit what elites can do and what interests they can pursue” (Horowitz 1998, 19).

Today, however, the debate between the theoretical poles has become more or less passé, as it is widely accepted in the literature on ethnicity that group identities are socially constructed. Yet, if we understand ethnic identities as capable of being ‘unmade’ and as fluid, dynamic, and changeable, as constructivist theories attest, why is it then that group identities, once created, seem to enjoy such significant staying power? As Schatz (2004, xx) writes, in the “world of fluidity and change that constructivist theories emphasize, persistence (of ethnic identities) becomes the puzzle.” But how well do theories of constructivism explain continuity as well as change? Schatz argues that the theoretical leverage offered by constructivist approaches needs to be improved to account equally for stasis and persistence as for fluidity and change (ibid., loc. cit). Similarly, Varshney writes that constructivism has a “key weakness” in that it “accounts for identity construction well,” but it “does not do a good job when it comes to explaining ethnic conflict” beyond pointing to the causal role of historically rooted ‘master narratives’ and political entrepreneurs (Varshney 2007, 287; see also Chandra 2006). Thus, as Schatz proposes, we need to “borrow a page” from historical institutionalism and assume that if ethnicity persists, we should be able to locate identifiable mechanisms of reproduction that sustain it over time (2004, xx). After all, an ethnic category does not ‘automatically’ survive. If we are to take theories of the constructed nature of ethnicity seriously, we would claim that if ethnic identities and affiliations endure and continue to be the basis for political mobilization,
they do so because of identifiable ‘feedback’ mechanisms that work to reproduce those identity affiliations. It is the core argument of this study that the networking and activism of partisan youth constitutes one of these mechanisms of reproduction, and thus helps to explain why we see the continued participation of youth in the sectarian political parties in Lebanon.

**Historical Institutionalism: Path Dependency and Feedback Mechanisms**

Here, I turn to historical institutionalism for further insight into feedback mechanisms. The overwhelming consensus among scholars of historical institutionalism is that political life has a tendency to be path-dependent, meaning it is difficult to reverse a particular institutional trajectory once it has been launched (Pierson 2004, 21; 2000b, 490; 2000a). The historical evolution of state formation, for example, is often understood to be made up of relatively rare critical junctures—defined as periods of particular contingency from which states emerge, such as significant conflicts in which one group emerges predominant and advances institutional changes that suit its interests—followed by long periods of institutional continuity (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). This also applies to the context of divided and developing countries such as Lebanon. In these cases, as for example Atul Kohli has similarly argued, “the process of state formation in the developing world has proceeded in a series of ‘big bangs’ with formative moments few and far between” (2004, 409). These “elephantine moments of change” (Katznelson 2003, 277), or critical junctures, are understood as then producing what Collier and Collier describe as significant or “basic changes” in the nature of political institutions and rules.

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12 Indeed, theories of historical institutionalism are compelling when it comes to explaining institutional persistence. So much so that some argue it has too much difficulty explaining institutional change (Bell 2011).
they promote (1991, 29). This in turn leads to the crystallization of an institutional legacy that becomes ‘sticky,’ ‘self-reinforcing,’ and thus persistent and difficult to change. As Pierson has argued, this ‘stickiness’ is particularly intense in the political realm (2004, 31). We also know that institutions, once created, can give ethnic identities significant “staying power” (Steinmo 2008; Varshney 2008, 27).

But what makes institutions so ‘sticky’? Path dependency arguments rest on a conception of historical causes—some initial event or process that generates a particular outcome, which is then reproduced through time even though the original generating event or process does not recur (Pierson 2004, 45). If the original event does not recur, what causes the outcome to persist? Thelen posits that arguments about the “freezing” or “crystallisation” of particular institutional configurations can “obscure more than they reveal unless they are explicitly linked to complementary arguments that identify the mechanisms of reproduction at work” (Thelen 1999, 391). Without these, Thelen writes, arguments about path dependency are “at best incomplete, for they cannot explain why these patterns persisted and how they continue to dominate the political space” (ibid., loc. cit.). We must not only examine the historical processes which laid down the path, but also the current processes by which the pattern is reproduced. As Pierson asserts, the “key” to uncovering the dynamics of path dependency and one of the “crucial objects of study” is the mechanisms of reproduction, otherwise referred to as “feedback mechanisms,” which propel the persistence of a certain tradition in political life (Pierson 2004, 53).

“Feedback mechanisms” are understood as relationships, dynamics, or processes which work to consolidate and transform the changes associated with critical junctures into legacies
that persist over time. Though they are produced by the original set of events, they are separate and distinct from the factors that gave rise to the critical juncture in the first place. When it comes to identifying feedback mechanisms, the literature on historical institutionalism tends to look at the level of policy. Thelen summarizes this work as pointing to two broad types of feedback mechanisms (Thelen 1999, 392). The first is “incentive or coordination effects,” which, once a set of institutions is in place, encourage actors to “adapt their strategies in ways that reflect and reinforce the ‘logic’ of the system.” The second, distributional effects, refers to the idea that “institutions are not neutral coordinating mechanisms but ‘reflect, and also reproduce and magnify, particular patterns of power distribution in politics… (and) emphasizes that political arrangements and policy feedbacks actively facilitate the organization and empowerment of certain groups while actively disarticulating and marginalizing others” (Thelen 1999, 394). Most of the historical institutionalist literature focuses on identifying feedback mechanisms at the level of state structures, institutions, and policy. But as Pierson argues, feedback mechanisms are not restricted to these realms. In fact, he states that there is good reason to think that these feedback effects are pervasive, “widespread,” and “commonplace” in politics, to the extent that at first glance they may even seem “invisible” (Pierson 2004, 44, 46). If we know, therefore, that feedback mechanisms are ubiquitous in political life, it makes sense that they would also be happening at multiple levels and in multiple arenas of politics, including the spheres of politics occupied by youth, such as the university, to give one example. Furthermore, if they are as commonplace as Pierson suggests, it also makes sense that we need to pay close and careful attention to the range and variety of feedback dynamics that can
occur—not just to those that happen at the level of institutions, government policy, or at elite levels—but also to those that occur deeper within society, among “ordinary” people like youth.

Recently, scholars studying the Middle East have used the framework of historical institutionalism to analyse the resilience of sectarianism in Lebanon. For example, Carmen Geha’s (2016) book, Civil Society and Political Reform in Lebanon and Libya, examine how the shape of institutions constrains the scope of political reform during periods of transition, resulting in what she calls “partially critical” junctures (16). Similarly, Clark and Zahar (2015) investigate the absence of political change in Lebanon despite critical junctures such as the 2005 Independence Intifada. In the case of Syria, Raymond Hinnebusch (2013) turns to questions of history and path-dependency to analyse causes for the uprising in 2011. Paul Kingston’s (2013) notable book, Reproducing Sectarianism: Advocacy Networks and the Politics of Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon uses historical institutionalism to analyse the roots and evolution of Lebanon’s path-dependent sectarian political field and to frame his main argument which is that the networking between civil society actors and political elites acts as a powerful, system-reproducing mechanism of feedback within the realm of Lebanese civil society—even among those civic actors seeking to challenge the sectarian system. My work builds on this emerging trend in the scholarship on the Middle East. Kingston’s work in particular provides a starting point for my own argument, which is that the strategies and activism used by partisan youth within their own spheres of politics produces dynamics that reproduce and reinforce Lebanon’s (formal and informal) institutional configuration, namely, sectarianism. As I show, youth networking and activities within spheres such as the university, youth-led civil society movements, as well as their own communities and wings of the political parties, work to
reproduce partisan and sectarian dynamics at grassroots levels, and among youth. In this study, however, I depart from Kingston to discuss not only the ways that partisan youth contribute to the reproduction of sectarianism, but how their activities and strategies also contribute to its revitalization and rejuvenation in the process. As I demonstrate, youth achieve varying degrees of political autonomy when operating within their own political spheres. The relative autonomy they have over these spheres is key to their ability to develop new and ‘reinvigorated strategies’ to pursue their aims—aims which, it is important to emphasize, are not only partisan or particularistic in nature, but also encompass social, personal, and even political goals that depart from their parties’ agendas. Indeed, my analysis indicates youth are far from being the passive agents of their political parties so commonly depicted in the literature. Partisan youth bring their parties into these youth-occupied realms and in doing so they act as conduits for Lebanon’s factional parties into youths’ lives by translating and transforming them into organizations that are relevant and appealing to young people. In short, partisan youth activism helps to ensure both the persistence of sectarianism as well as its renewal—its ability, as Mermier and Mervin state, to constantly “clothe itself in new garments” (2012, 8).

The Resilience of Informal Institutions

Another insight from the historical institutionalist literature that is particularly relevant to Lebanon concerns the nature of informal institutions, namely, the fact that informal institutions are particularly ‘sticky’ or path-dependent. As I discuss in chapter two, Lebanon, like many developing countries, is a society where informal political institutions are hegemonic and formal political institutions are weak. In Lebanon, real political power is derived from informal
political and economic networks rooted in community and clan, and the ability of elites to control them and garner support through these means. Formal institutions and positions within the state, on the other hand, are primarily utilized by elites to buttress their informal networks of power. Here, ‘informal institutions’ refers to the many ‘rules of the game’ that structure political life, which are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, see 725). Clientelism and patrimonialism, which embody informal systems of distribution, rule, and exchange, are two prominent examples. Many argue that informal institutions shape political behaviour as, if not more, strongly than formal ones, and to exclude them from political analyses means we risk missing some of the most important incentives and constraints that underlie political behaviour (ibid.).

Scholars who study institutions have further argued that the degree to which institutional legacies are path-dependent has much to do with how powerful and hegemonic the informal dynamics are versus the more formal processes and institutions. In fact, many argue that informal institutions possess “tenacious survival ability” and can persist even in the face of extensive formal institutional change and development (North 1990, 45; Dia 1996; Helmke and Levitsky 2004; O’Donnell 1994; Pejovich 1999; Collins 2002). Furthermore, informal institutions can continue to have a powerful influence on formal political decision-making once they are established (North 1990, 45; see also Knight 1992, 173).

Why are informal structures so resilient? The literature points to a few key reasons. First, because they are often deeply rooted, based on unwritten codes, and enforced outside of sanctioned channels, informal institutions are much more difficult to change as compared to formal rules and processes (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 734). Lauth, for example, argues that
because informal rules “do not possess a center which directs and co-ordinates their actions,” informal institutional change is likely to be a difficult and “extremely lengthy” process (2000, 24-25). Second, informal institutions, like the political realm more generally, are often underpinned by unequal distributions of political power—thus providing the basic resources for their reproduction (Knight 1992, 188). Third, informal institutions can become ‘ingrained’ among those who must comply with these unwritten rules. Take the case of the unequal, yet consensual, dynamics of clientelism as one example. As Knight writes, these “distributive mechanisms of inequality are reinforced by cognitive ones” (Knight 1992, 173). James Mahoney (2001) similarly argues that informal institutions become grounded in an actor’s subconscious views and beliefs. He states that “institutional persistence may occur because actors view informal institutions as legitimate and voluntarily opt for their reproduction out of a belief that it is the right thing to do. Here institutions are assumed to persist until actors develop a new subjective code concerning appropriateness” (9). A fourth reason informal institutions may be particularly path-dependent is that they can become entwined with and underpinned by formal institutions, especially the state. For example, Lebanese political elites, who hold formal positions within the state, essentially use their official posts to buttress and extend their informal clientelistic networks. Put differently, elites instrumentalize the formal institutions of the state for their own factional and particularistic purposes—often weakening the state in the process and transforming into a “de facto third party enforcer” of the informal rules and institutions (Kingston 2013, 5). The state, however, is a “double edged sword” for these elites, as it can be used by opponents to strengthen the formal realm against the informal realm—thus becoming an ally to those who seek to challenge the (informal) institutional status quo (Knight
In order to protect their informal power, the proponents of the prevailing informal institutional order must carefully balance their interests in capturing the state in order to use it for their purposes, with their interest in hindering its development so that it does not become too powerful and thus present a potential threat to their informal power. Indeed, as Kingston argues, weak states do not necessarily produce weak regimes (2013, 5). On the contrary, because regime structures within weak states are usually of a highly informal nature, they are often strong, powerful, and resistant to change. The weakness of the state is precisely what allows for powerful social actors to co-opt and utilise it in the first place, thus structuring politics in a way that works to entrench and strengthen their own particularistic power. The political ‘game’ among elites of weak states, therefore, is not just about capturing the state in order to pillage it; it is also about utilising the state in ways that work to expand their own power and advantage, while limiting that of others.

When it comes to the relationship between civil society and the state, it follows then that it is the nature of regimes, rather than states, which would most determine how citizens can link up with, and influence the political system (Kingston 2013, 12). In other words, the nature of regimes strongly shapes the political opportunity structure for civil society actors and their ability to affect political change. For example, in regimes underpinned by strongly institutional states, the access of citizens and civil society organizations to the state and its resources is likely to be universalistic in nature, and thus civil society is able to flourish, especially if the regimes are democratic. By contrast, in cases where the state is weakly institutionalized and the formal rules are not ‘the only game in town,’ regimes tend to be hybrid in nature, characterized by a complex intertwining of the formal with the informal—or the
universal with the particularistic—systems. In these cases, access to the state is more likely to be uneven, providing some civil actors (i.e., citizens or civic associations) enduring advantages while disadvantaging others. In the case of Lebanon, we have this type of ‘hybrid’ regime where informal dynamics and institutions are hegemonic, and formal process and institutions are comparably weak. This context is crucial to understanding why Lebanese civil society, despite being a vibrant, lively, and adversarial sphere, has been ultimately limited in its ability to effect change (Kingston 2013, 13). Indeed, much of the scholarship on Lebanese civil society politics and the difficulty these actors face in achieving reforms, highlights the constraining context of state-society relations.

There is, however, much more to know about how these hybrid institutional dynamics manifest at the grassroots. If the stability of these institutional configurations is not ‘automatic’ then how is it reproduced and recreated at the grassroots and in everyday realms of life and politics? One of the realms of youth politics that I examine in this thesis is Lebanon’s youth-led civil society movements. While most literature focuses on Lebanon’s ‘hybrid’ institutional configuration or elite manipulation as causes for the failure of youth-led movements, few have considered what this means for youth activists ‘on the ground,’ let alone considered the active role youth themselves may play in the recreation of sectarian dynamics that underpin and reinforce Lebanon’s divided institutional configuration. In this study, I aim to go beyond the level of institutional configurations and elite strategies in order to “muck around” 13 in the sometimes messy and multiple realities of youth politics. When we take seriously the power of

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13In his article on Uzbek youth politics McGlinchey invites us to “roll up our analytical sleeves” and “muck around” in the “messiness” of day-to-day politics (2009, 1137).
youth politics to generate sectarian dynamics, and the idea that youth are actors in their own right, we not only gain a deeper understanding of the nature of feedback mechanisms behind particularly ‘sticky’ formal and informal institutional configurations, but also why these institutional configurations, such as the formal system of Lebanese sectarianism or the informal system of patronage, are able to persist and still have appeal—even among a younger generation who will often decry both. Indeed, without the ability to adapt and accommodate youth, it is difficult to imagine how any institutional configuration—whether formal or informal—would manage to be sustained. In his study of Uzbek youth politics, Eric McGlinchey (2009), for example, argues that the Karimov regime’s focus on youth politics (i.e., creating a youth organization and forms of entertainment for youth) should actually be seen as a sign of “growing autocratic strain” and as an attempt of the regime to renew its waning hold on power (1149). Though McGlinchey’s case study analyses the top-down attempts of a regime to adapt to and incorporate young people, whereas I am emphasizing a ‘bottom-up’ process of institutional renewal, it nonetheless underscores my contention that in order to persist, institutions must not just be reproduced, they must also be renewed in order to appeal to youth. Their persistence also depends on their ability to accommodate, adapt to “youthful claims” (as Bayat says) and to build legitimacy among youth. The argument here is that Lebanese partisan youth play a powerful role in this process ‘from below’. Partisan youth contribute to the reproduction of Lebanon’s formal and informal sectarian configuration as well as its ability to accommodate and appeal to the styles, sensibilities, needs, and desires of youth. Recognizing this builds our understanding of what propels the path-dependence of the
Lebanese political field, and opens up our understanding of the opportunities for change (Thelen 1999, 401).

**Organization of the Thesis**

My thesis is framed as a critique of the more structural explanations of ethnic politics. I argue we need to ‘open up’ structural explanations and include different, finer, levels of analysis in order to explore what is happening at the grassroots and ‘from below.’ Doing so allows us to understand more clearly the variety of ways that institutional configurations are reproduced and renewed at multiple levels of society, including among young people, and in day-to-day politics. This allows us to account more fully for the persistence of communal categories in divided societies such as Lebanon. The central argument of this thesis is that Lebanon’s sectarian institutional configurations are also reproduced ‘from below’ by youth, in the spheres of life and politics that youth occupy. The dynamics generated by youth in these spheres work to both reinforce and revitalize sectarianism. These dynamics, I argue, are driven by the active role, networking, strategies, and activities of youth, and specifically, partisan youth. Their networking and activism constitute a feedback mechanism, which recreates partisan affiliations and dynamics among Lebanese youth in various spheres of life, and thus propels the reproduction and renewal of sectarian categories and dynamics ‘from below.’ I further argue that these youth are neither the ‘blind followers’ nor the ‘passive victims’ of instrumental elites. While so much of the literature on youth in ethnic movements suggests that young people are manipulated by elites, I contend that these young ‘followers’ have more freedom and autonomy over their own realms of life and politics than is commonly acknowledged. It is youth who facilitate the penetration of these sect-based, partisan political parties and their leaders into
youth-occupied spaces—spaces that might otherwise be beyond their reach. Moreover, it is precisely because partisan youth have some degree of autonomy in these spaces that they are able to innovate, reinvent, and adapt their partisan perspectives and agendas to suit the sensibilities, styles, and priorities of youth. Partisan youth are the ones who create new forms of sectarian culture which helps keep Lebanon’s factional partisan political parties relevant and appealing to young Lebanese. In other words, they do not contribute to the reproduction of sectarian categories and dynamics, they also revitalize them.

In this dissertation I explore four case studies of Lebanese youth politics in order to illustrate how the networking and activism of partisan youth acts as a feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism ‘from below.’ The strength of the case study method for analysing questions surrounding youth politics is that it allows us to look in-depth at specific spheres of youth life and politics and to explore their subtleties and complexity. The contributions of this method for political science are primarily empirical and, in this study, confined to generating insights into the nature of the Lebanese political arena, particularly its grassroots politics and the politics of Lebanese youth. Having said this, a deeper analysis of how identity categories are reproduced among youth in Lebanon has broader implications for our understanding how sectarianism and other forms of identity-based politics are not static, but subject to continual renewal and reconstruction, and thus advances the potential for generating hypotheses in a broader range of comparative case study research.

In this study I examine three distinct ‘spheres’ in youth politics: the university; youth-led movements in civil society; and the youth wings of the partisan political parties themselves. I selected these case studies because they represent the realms of Lebanese society where youth
are most politically active, and where much of their political participation takes place—particularly partisan youth, who are the main focus of this study. These cases also illustrate the broad scope of partisan youths’ activities, as well as the deep reach they have into the lives of so many young Lebanese.

The organization of this thesis, and in particular the order in which the four case studies are presented, reflects an aspect of my argument about the limited nature of youth autonomy. As I stated above, in a strong, resilient, and path-dependent political field such as Lebanon’s, an agency-based argument is a difficult one to make. To be clear, the argument I am making here is primarily a structural one—namely, that Lebanese sectarianism is a deeply path-dependent political system and is the product of historically embedded formal and informal institutions that constrain agency. I also argue, however, that even within this path-dependent political field, there is still room, or rather “pockets,” of political space where youth can achieve autonomy, even though their agency is ultimately constrained by the institutional configuration which surrounds them. In other words, I contend that youth have varying degrees of ‘relative autonomy’ when operating in specific spaces and realms of politics—namely, youth-oriented spaces, such as their universities or the youth-led movements of civil society.

In chapter four, the first of my empirical chapters, I examine the case study of student politics at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This case study provides the clearest example of a sphere where partisan youth have achieved some degree of autonomy from their parties and leaders. The AUB is a realm of politics with its own formal and informal institutions, which youth ‘inherit’ from previous generations of students as well as from the administration. The AUB ‘political field’ is an interesting case because it is formally structured in a way that
creates and protects space for independent, non-partisan students to participate in politics, while informally allowing for the operation of partisan students on campus—even helping them to gain some independence from their party leaders. Chapter four thus illustrates a youth-occupied realm of society where youth have a great deal of autonomy form their leaders – albeit still limited. In chapter five, I examine a case study of a youth-led movement in civil society, namely the “Anti-Sectarian Movement” (ASM). In this case youth are also acting with some degree of autonomy from their leaders. It is, however, not as ‘protected’ a realm as AUB. Indeed, chapter four illustrates how partisan youth involvement in civil society movements for change can act as a “conduit” for sectarian dynamics into them, leaving them vulnerable to the interference and co-optation of Lebanon’s factional elites. I argue, however, that this is not simply because partisan youth are “blind followers”, doing the bidding of their leaders. In chapters six and seven, the last empirical chapters, I examine the activities of partisan youth within the youth wings of their own political parties. As I illustrate, the ‘sphere’ of the youth wings are an example of youth-occupied political space where youth have a much lesser degree of autonomy, and a more limited range of control over their own decisions and activities. Although the freedom youth wings are granted varies from party to party, in each of the cases there are clear limits on the range and type of influence youth have in their parties. Thus, what chapters six and seven illustrate is that when youth activism revolves around promoting issues and strategies that perpetuate and renew elite power, they have a great degree of freedom to innovate. Indeed, it is precisely this freedom that allows them to be so effective in renewing and revitalizing sectarian dynamics and categories among young people. However, when youth activism threatens to confront elite power, their efforts are shut-down, ignored, or frustrated.
In terms of the organization of the chapters, therefore, the first and last cases (i.e., AUB versus the youth wings) represent opposite ends of a ‘spectrum’ of youth autonomy. The overall argument is that when youth are operating in realms of politics that are more peripheral to their leaders’ interests and power, such as on university campuses, or within youth-led movements of civil society, they are able to achieve greater degrees of autonomy. Furthermore, when youth activism and strategizing are focused on interests that do not contradict, erode, or threaten to encroach upon the power of their leaders, youth have a great deal of room to innovate, strategize, network, and organize. The freedom and autonomy that they have is exactly why they are so effective in creating ‘new sectarian culture,’ which then helps keep Lebanon’s factional partisan political parties present, relevant, and appealing to Lebanese youth more widely. However, the closer youth come to the centres of power—meaning the power of the leaders of the sect-based political parties—the less autonomy and influence they have. As the case studies illustrate, there is a threshold between the autonomy youth are able to achieve versus the power of the surrounding structure, where the balance ‘tips’ in favour of those forces that maintain existing power dynamics—most prominently, the factional power of the Lebanese elites. Thus, I argue that partisan youth, in the final assessment, contribute to the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarianism in Lebanon, but not to its reform. We need to deepen the gaze of institutional and elite-based arguments to examine not only how and why sectarian dynamics persist among youth at the grassroots, but also how they are reproduced and renewed by young people themselves.

Outline of the chapters:
In the following (second) chapter, I use the lens of historical institutionalism to highlight the strength and path dependency of the Lebanese political field. I diverge from the popular literature which understands Lebanese sectarianism as emanating from ‘primordial religious identities’ or an ‘enduring political culture.’ Rather, drawing on the work of Paul Kingston (2013), I see sectarianism in Lebanon is a product of the “continual and recursive interaction” between its formal institutional order (i.e., the sectarian based power-sharing political system, initially imposed and then consolidated by external powers) and its hegemonic informal institutions (such as multi-levelled elite networking, systems of patronage, and corruption [Kinston 2013, 52]). I discuss the historical evolution of the Lebanese political field and examine what it has meant for young people growing up in the postwar era. I then go on to argue that despite the hegemony of sectarianism in the Lebanese political field, Lebanese politics are still extremely contested, diverse, and dynamic, and not all about sectarianism. This frames my second argument in this chapter, which is that Lebanon’s ‘hybrid’ regime has produced ‘hybrid’ politics among many youth.

In the third chapter, I discuss the historical context of student and youth politics in Lebanon, reviewing the recent history of youth politics up to the outbreak of civil war in 1976 and ending with the case of the 2005 ‘Independence Intifada.’ Prior to the war, and reflective of the times, the 1960s and 70s saw the advent of a vibrant, adversarial, and ideologically-rooted student movement in Lebanon. The forces unleashed by the civil war, however, put an end to this newly emerged student movement. After the war and up until the early 2000s, student and youth mobilization was limited. Instead, civil opposition happened ‘from the margins’—by journalists, academics, and lawyers representing a “superior middle class situated at the edges
of the system” rather than activism and organizing ‘from below’ (Karam 2009, 55). Students and youth activism did not reappear on the national scene until the late 1990s when young people began to organize against the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Their protests grew increasingly bolder from 2001 on, and culminated in the historic demonstrations of 2005, in which youth played a central role. I discuss the Independence Intifada as an example of the struggle of independent youth activists to change the system, their failure to do so, the role their involvement played in propelling the 2005 movement, and the involvement of youth afterward, back toward a sectarian logic. It is an example of how partisan youth activism constitutes a system-reproducing mechanism of feedback.

The historical context sets the stage for the following four chapters, which contain the bulk of my empirical material. In chapters four and five, I examine two distinct arenas of youth politics: the university campus and youth-led civil society movements. In the chapter on student politics, I analyse the case study of the American University of Beirut (AUB), which provides an excellent ‘laboratory’ of youth politics. I show how, in spite of strict formal rules and regulations prohibiting sectarianism and sectarian parties from campus, student politics at AUB are nevertheless still dominated by sectarian political parties. I investigate why this is the case, and how partisan youth use informal strategies to bypass the formal rules prohibiting their operation and activities and still manage to dominate student government and elections. This sphere provides a fascinating window into how sectarianism is reproduced among youth in Lebanon today and highlights the active, relatively autonomous, and powerful role of partisan youth in the process.
In chapter five, I examine a second sphere of youth politics, namely the youth-led movements of civil society. Specifically, I examine the case of Lebanon’s answer to the Arab Spring, the 2011 anti-sectarian movement to ‘bring down the sectarian regime.’ On the heels of the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, young secular and ‘independent’ activists in Lebanese civil society came together to attempt a similar revolution in their own country. I discuss how partisan youth also became involved in this movement, albeit for mixed reasons. I examine why this youth-led movement, like the Independence Intifada before it, ultimately failed to sustain momentum and create change, but rather ended up fizzling out. Specifically, I show the active and relatively autonomous role of partisan youth, whose presence divided the movement internally, tarnished the image of the movement in the eyes of the public, and ultimately co-opted an anti-sectarian movement for their own factional purposes. This is another example of how the activities and networking of partisan youth act as a mechanism of feedback for the reproduction of sectarianism—this time within the sphere of civil society.

In chapter six, I look inside the sectarian ‘system’ to the realm of the political parties. Here I examine the contributions and activities of youth within their own political parties. I show how partisan youth have worked to rejuvenate their political parties and translate them into organizations that appeal to young people and are relevant to their lives. Not only has their involvement led to the adoption of new technology, modes of communication, and ‘sexier,’ more youthful, styles of political advertising and communication, but partisan youth have also spearheaded the establishment of community and social activities that provide youth with opportunities to socialize with peers and contribute meaningfully to their communities—but do so along partisan lines. In short, youth have helped to renew and rejuvenate the image of their
political parties, especially among young Lebanese, in a way in which the efforts of partisan youth reproduce dynamics that reinforce Lebanon’s particular formal and informal institutional configurations.

In chapter seven, I show that the renewal of the political parties to which youth have contributed is only skin-deep, much to the frustration of partisan youth who are actually interested in bringing more than just a new image to their parties. I discuss several cases in which youth are lobbying for internal reforms within their parties—namely, the creation of stronger, formal institutions which would promote greater democracy, transparency, and accountability. I examine four case studies of this phenomenon within the youth wings of some of the main parties in Lebanon: the Maronite Christian Lebanese Forces, the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party, the Sunni-based Future Movement, and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement. As I argue, these cases highlight the limits to the autonomy and influence that youth have in their parties. Whereas the previous case studies of university politics and the youth-led movements of civil society illustrated the varying degrees of freedom and autonomy partisan youth have in relation to their leaders—realms which are less crucial and more distant from the elites—in chapter seven I show that the closer youth are to the centres of power, namely, the party leaders and Lebanon’s highest echelon of political elites, the less autonomy and influence they have. These cases illustrate the limits to youth autonomy, the power and resilience of the Lebanese system, and particularly the role of elites in maintaining it. In each instance where partisan youth activists have attempted to lobby for change within their parties, their leaders have shut them down. Thus, the contributions that youth are ‘allowed’ to make are limited to the scope of ‘rejuvenation’ but not reform.
Defining Crucial yet Slippery Terms: ‘Youth’ and ‘Sectarianism’

Before moving on, it is important to discuss and define two of the key concepts I use in this thesis: ‘youth’ and ‘sectarianism.’ Both of these notions are contested, ‘slippery,’ and contingent on the context in which they are discussed, and thus require further clarification. What follows is a brief look at how I approach these concepts in this study.

Using ‘Youth’ as a Category of Analysis

In Lebanon, both teen-aged students and middle-aged professionals are described as ‘youth,’ depending on the context. The fact that they are illustrates the notion that ‘youth’ is a socially constructed and contingent category—a “social shifter” as anthropologist Deborah Durham (2004) has argued. In interviews the label ‘youth’ was invoked by people of different age groups and positions which underscored not just the subjective nature of the category, but also its relational quality, and the fact that the term is defined within a broader field of power. Durham states that youth as a concept “indexes shifting relationships of power and authority, responsibility and capability, agency and autonomy and the moral configurations of society” (2004, 589). As discussed above, the concept of ‘youth’ in the Arab world has been charged with different meanings and symbolism at different historical junctures—from ‘builders’ and ‘hope’ to ‘victims’ and ‘radicals.’ Indeed, not unlike categories of gender such as ‘mother’ and
'motherhood,' for example, the category of ‘youth’ also takes on specific meaning in specific historical and political economic contexts (Orock 2013).

For example, in today’s Lebanon, as in much of the Middle East, one of the ways ‘youth’ is often socially defined is as ‘unmarried.’ Persons are seen as ‘youth’ until they are married and start a family of their own. Age at marriage, however, has been extended because of the devastating impact of unemployment and increasing poverty among youth in Lebanon and the wider Middle East. This has meant that many young people are caught in a place of what Singerman (2007) and Dhillion and Yousef (2009) call ‘waithood’—an in-between place where they are no longer adolescents but neither are they fully adults, mainly because they still live with and depend on their parents and are unable to marry.14 It is a “Peter Pan scenario gone terribly wrong” (Burgess and Burton 2010, 4). Try as they might, these ‘youth’ cannot seem to become adults. Their lives are stalled and their transition toward adulthood cannot take place. One of the key reasons for this is the extraordinarily high costs of marriage and housing in the Middle East, and, as such, the Middle East has one of the highest rates of delayed marriage in the world (Shehata 2012, 108).15 This is why a person can be in their thirties and still be considered ‘youth’ in Lebanese society.

14 The concept of waithood begins with the understanding that the transition from youth to adulthood is multifaceted. It encompasses securing a job, marrying, securing a home, having a family, as well as engagement in social and civic participation. In many Arab countries, however, young people are caught in “perpetual youth” (Singerman 2007).
15 In Egypt, for example, one estimate states that on average the groom and his family (who traditionally must bear the cost of the marriage) must save the equivalent of 43 months of income in order to afford marriage (Singerman 2007). The savings burden is significantly higher for those in lower income brackets, and among the lowest in the country; the estimated savings is equivalent to an average of 88 months of income. The same prohibitive costs apply to housing across the region. Securing a home in the Middle East is expensive. Whereas on average individuals in developed countries spend the equivalent of 30 months’ income to afford a home, the costs in the Middle East range from 60 months in Egypt to as high as 200 months in Yemen. Lebanon is somewhere in the
In my own research, I spoke to individuals who considered themselves as part of the category of ‘youth,’ especially in relation to political contexts, even though they were in their early forties. In the Lebanese political parties, for example, many activists considered themselves ‘youth’ because they saw themselves as distinct from the generation of their leaders and older party members. One of the main lines of delineation was the civil war. The ‘old guard’ were members of the parties during the war, whereas those who identified as the ‘younger generation’ or as ‘youth’ were part of the post-civil war generation. Their status as ‘youth’ was also reinforced by the fact that many were outside of the small coterie of power within the party. Many of the executive positions in the parties were dominated by an older generation of Lebanese and, thus, even though these individuals were in their late thirties and early forties, they felt like ‘youth’ in relation to their leaders. As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, the political parties organize (some would say sequester) youth participation into a separate branch of the party—the youth wing—thus keeping them arguably distant from the centres of power and influence.16

In this study, I therefore understand the concept of youth as one that is heterogeneous, contested, socially and historically charged, and varying from one socio-cultural and political context to another (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). I also understand it can encompass and be imbued with multiple meanings and symbolism in different socioeconomic and political

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16 As I will explain, this has to do with legal restrictions surrounding party membership, which cannot be held by any person under the age of 21.
contexts. As such, as an object of research, I approach the category of ‘youth’ fluidly and foreground not just biological age, but also ‘youth’ as a subjectively experienced identity (Bucholtz 2002, 532). My research participants may have spanned the ages of 18 to 40, but all considered themselves as ‘youth’ in politics, if not also in life.

**Disaggregating ‘Lebanese Youth’**

Though it seems obvious, it bears stating that the category of ‘Lebanese youth’ represents a diverse and multifaceted group of people whose politics are equally diverse and multifaceted. For the purposes of my study on the political participation of youth, I look at three broad groups of youth in Lebanon. The first group, and the most central to the thesis, are the youth I refer to as ‘partisan.’ By this, I mean the youth who are politically active in Lebanon’s major, conventional, sect-based political parties, all of which are associated with the country’s most powerful communal politicians. Many of the partisan youth have some sort of ‘official’ affiliation to their party, namely, membership in its youth wing, or membership in a university club affiliated to a party. As I note in the next chapter, however, ‘official’ affiliation does not mean formal membership in the party—which is restricted to individuals over 21. It does mean that these are youth who are actively involved, meaning they attend regular meetings (usually at least one weekly meeting, but often more) and participate actively in major events. Although none of the parties agreed to divulge official statistics on their numbers of members,¹⁷ all of the parties included in this study claimed to have “thousands” of youth members. Given the

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¹⁷ Statistics are an extremely touchy subject and very difficult to obtain in Lebanon. The reason is that they are almost always perceived to be indicators of a community’s demographic size and thus linked to existential conflicts about a community’s legitimate share of political power. This is why there has not been an official census conducted in the country since 1943.
turnouts of youth I witnessed over the years I lived in Lebanon, there is no reason to doubt them. Having said that, to gain some indication of actual numbers, we can look at survey data collected in 2008, by Robert Chatterji, which focused on the politics of university students, and to which I was granted access.18 This survey included 1,454 students in 7 Universities and 19 campuses in all regions of Lebanon (Chatterji 2008). The survey showed that approximately 27% of students fell into this “very active” group, meaning that they held membership in a student group affiliated to a political party and attended regular meetings. This group is the main focus of this study.

The second category of youth comprises those I refer to as ‘fans.’ This term is an English translation of the Arabic terms munasireen or ansar, which are widely used to describe those who support a particular political party or leader but who do so from outside the formal institutions of that party or group. The ‘fans’ are young people who support a specific political party or coalition, but do not hold an official position or membership in a party. Their level of participation would likely include attending rallies and events, but probably not regular meetings. There are no official numbers for these groups, but, given the survey data, it is not unreasonable to assume that a majority of Lebanese youth would fall into this category (Chatterji 2008 and Hanf 2007). Again, to get a sense of actual numbers, we can look at Chatterji’s 2008 survey. It showed that 56% of students fell into this category, claiming they supported one of the major parties, but did not hold membership in a politically-affiliated youth organization. Indeed, it is most common in Lebanon for youth to have an ‘informal’ membership.

18 Robert Chatterji generously granted me access to his data sets. I have used them to supplement and cross-reference my own interview data from more than 200 hundred interviews with students and youth involved in politics in Lebanon.
in a party, which is defined more by their political views and attendance at major events.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, many youth will tell you that official membership is problematic for them in their families, as their parents, who likely lived through the civil war, still carry a deep mistrust of the political parties and do not want their children associated with them in some cases.

The last category of youth I discuss, but who are not the main object of this study, are young people who are politically active in groups or parties that seek to challenge directly the political status quo in Lebanon. Some are members of explicitly non-sectarian, secular, political parties such as the Democratic Left Movement, the Green Party, or the Democratic Renewal Movement, all of which have come into existence in the postwar era. Others are members of student activist groups, for example, \textit{Bila Hadood} (“No Frontiers”) at the American University of Beirut or “Pablo Neruda” at the Lebanese American University—groups that have sought to take on the power of the ‘sectarian giants’ in their university elections and create a more democratic campus. These youth, whom I call the ‘independents,’ express very critical opinions of the prominent political leaders as well as the system overall. They constitute the smallest group of the three.

\textbf{What is Sectarianism?}

Last but definitely not least, it is crucial to discuss the concept of ‘sectarianism’ in relation to Lebanon. Not surprisingly, it is the main subject in both the scholarly and popular literature on Lebanon and the Lebanese. In the words of one scholar, it has

\textsuperscript{19}In his 2013 study of youth associated with the Free Patriotic Movement, Bruno LeFort reported a similar finding: that in most cases youth have ‘informal’ membership in the party (LeFort 2013a).
become a “highly charged and overburdened term” in the Lebanese context (Weiss 2010, 11). In fact, there are precious few studies that do not view the political and social dynamics of this country through this lens.\(^{20}\) Lebanese politics, however, are not all about sectarianism, nor is sectarianism the only meaningful category through which to understand Lebanese politics. As one young NGO activist told me when describing the politics of the 2009 election: “(sectarianism) is certainly there, but it’s one of a dozen other dynamics.”\(^{21}\) The historian Usamma Makdisi warned that if we restrict our understanding of politics only to the communal/religious, we miss the “web of conflicting and contradictory relationships” that can make up a sectarian political field (Makdisi 2000).\(^{22}\) Other identities and relationships can overlap or compete with sectarian ones, further complicating and/or intensifying sectarian dynamics. Take, for instance, the dynamics of clan and family politics in Lebanon—something which can both overlap with and intensify sectarian affiliation, but also something which helps to explain why some of the most intense conflict and competition happen within sectarian communities rather than between them. The dynamics of patron-client relations are yet another example of why it is important not to look only along the lines of sectarianism. As the sociologist Samir Khalaf has stated:

\(^{20}\) I admit with some misgivings that I join this long list of observers and academics who have chosen to study this Middle Eastern country and its politics through the lens of sectarianism. Having said that, I hope to bring some fresh perspective to it.

\(^{21}\) Randa (activist with Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, LADE), interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.

\(^{22}\) Missing the myriad of other relationships and power dynamics is a mistake that was made by colonial powers when they determined that religious ‘sect’ was the overriding important political variable to consider when designing political systems in Lebanon. This mistake has more recently been repeated in Iraq, and has had the consequence of leading to increasing sectarian sentiment and violence.
Confessionalism in Lebanon is often made the scapegoat for abuses whose roots lie elsewhere. For example, the abuses of marja’yah or taba’iyah (i.e.: clientelism) are far more egregious in their character and pervasive implications. Indeed, the seemingly sanctimonious and self-righteous communal predispositions underlying sectarian loyalties become expedient disguises for the aggrandizing and self-seeking interests which sustain patron-client ties (2003, 110).

That having been said, this is a study which aims to shed light on this hegemonic and stubbornly persistent dynamic, and as such it is important to spend some time unpacking the many meanings and implications of this term and clarifying how I understand it here.23

At times seen as the ‘root of all social ills’ and at others as the ‘political remedy,’ sectarianism in the Lebanese context is a ‘slippery’ concept. The first point of clarification is that ‘sectarianism’ (or ‘confessionalism’ as it is also referred to in Lebanon) is understood here as primarily a modern and political phenomenon, as opposed to an ancient, cultural one. As already mentioned above, much of the popular literature on Lebanese sectarianism (and on the Middle East more generally) has tended to follow “an implicitly orientalist paradigm” of seeing sectarianism in these cultural, even biological terms—a primordialist view of sectarianism (Kingston 2013, 22; see e.g. Davis 2008, 555). Moreover, much of the popular literature tends to view the terms ‘modernity’ and ‘sectarianism’ as inherently antagonistic, as if sectarianism stems from ‘ancient’ regressive forces, contrary to ‘modern’ progressive ones. Makdisi (2000) argues, however, that rather than being an ancient phenomenon, confessionalism has its roots

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23 Though it should be obvious, I would like to state that my aim in this study is not to judge sectarianism nor those who are adherents of the parties which contribute to its political and social persistence in Lebanon—but rather to understand how sectarianism works in the lives of young people, and why it is so doggedly resilient, especially among a generation often looked to as the main hope for overcoming its divisions.
in the political and economic transformations of the mid-nineteenth century and, as a result, is very much a product of the processes of modernization. This bears remembering for our discussions about the informal nature and power of the sectarian elites as well. Rather than being ‘traditional’ obstructions to ‘modern’ politics, they are in fact products of it. Similarly, when I refer to tensions between partisan youth activists and their independent, secular counterparts, this should not be seen as a battle between more ‘traditional’ youth versus more ‘modern’ youth (even if the youth themselves sometimes refer to each other in these ways). On the contrary, I understand both as the products of a complex combination of modern forces and dynamics emanating from the local, national, and international spheres.

Another point of clarification is that, in the case of Lebanon, the term ‘sectarianism’ refers to several different categories of things—some political, some institutional, some more emotive and intangible. For one, the term ‘sectarianism’ often refers to the type of political system in place in Lebanon, that is, a consociational democratic state, which, like other consociational systems, is designed to promote intergroup stability by guaranteeing shares of political power and granting each community autonomy over its own affairs. In Lebanon, this means that political power and representation in government, Parliament, and every single bureaucratic post is allotted on the basis of religious confession, with quotas assigned to each confession’s community according to the size of its population. This form of sectarianism is often referred to as ‘political sectarianism’ (Weiss 2010, 10).

Sectarianism in Lebanon, however, is more deeply institutionalized than just at the level of political power. In Lebanon, sectarianism can also refer to the broader set of institutional arrangements that govern a citizen’s relationship with the state. Indeed, virtually the entire
relationship between Lebanese citizens and their state is negotiated by the confessional community. The most notable example of this is the set of laws regarding family and personal status—all matters relating to family law and personal status are relegate to the authority of religious courts and institutions. This means that sectarian courts and institutions handle all issues concerning family, marriage, divorce, child custody, adoption, kinship, lineage, inheritance, and even some aspects of nationality. The Lebanese Constitution and subsequent parliamentary decisions have dictated that all religious communities must establish their own personal-status court systems autonomous from the state. There is no civil code relating to these matters in Lebanon, nor has any attempt to create one ever been successful. In fact, because the topic is so politically charged, Lebanon is one of the few Arab countries that have enacted absolutely no reforms to religious personal-status laws. Thus, despite the fact that the Lebanese Constitution enshrines equality between its citizens, in practice there are 18 legally recognized sets of personal-status laws and thus 18 different sets of legal rights and conditions for Lebanese citizens.

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24 Currently, there are 15 religious court systems in Lebanon among the 18 legally recognized religious communities. None of these court systems, however, is subject to the authority of the more universal dictates of Lebanese law—including its provisions for the protection of the rights of individuals. Neither are these courts subject to the authority of international conventions, such as the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), of which Lebanon is a signatory. In fact, the religious courts have been safeguarded by the decision of the Lebanese government to express its reservations with respect to those aspects of CEDAW that infringe upon the personal-status authority of the religious-court system. Furthermore, religious officials have access to the highest constitutional court in Lebanon and have the right of appeal if parliamentary laws violate their autonomy. Citizens, in contrast, do not have this right. Thus Lebanese religious officials, in effect, have veto power over reform of the personal-status legal system as it currently stands.

25 Even countries with traditionally more repressive regimes have enacted some change to these laws to promote greater gender equality and women’s rights.

26 Among other problems, this means there are serious issues of gender discrimination in Lebanon. Both Muslim and Christian religious laws and courts operate based on a system of male authority that reinforces male privilege and control in both domestic and social spheres and discriminates against women in matters related to marriage, nationality, child custody, and so on (Joseph 1997, 171). By granting the sects this authority and by failing to create any civil alternatives to these laws, the Lebanese state has legally mandated gender discrimination.
Family law and personal status are not the only areas left to the domain of the confessional community, however. The Lebanese state also provides few, if any, goods and services to its citizens—leaving the lion’s share of education, health care, and social welfare services to private agencies, most of which are linked to confessional communities and/or to the networks of confessional elites. As I discuss in the next chapter, as a result of economic decline in the postwar era, Lebanese families have become more reliant on services distributed by their confessional communities to meet their needs. The intensification of social welfare distribution along communal lines helps generate strong bonds and a deep sense of belonging and loyalty, between citizens and their patrons (Kochuyt 2004). These informal relationships create an experience of citizenship based less on rights and more on privileges—privileges that in turn reinforce lines of affiliation rooted in community and sect.

This brings us to another aspect of sectarian significance, what Max Weiss calls the “affective state.” This includes ‘identity’ but also goes beyond it to describe a “way of being in the world that depends upon a set of cultural markers and social practices, a framework capable of holding familial, local, regional and even international loyalties together in a variably defined and shifting communal bloc” (Weiss 2010, 13). Weiss makes an important distinction here that is also relevant to my study on youth. He states that sectarianism in Lebanon is not a “static thing in itself” but rather it has become a “comfortable, acceptable and understandable” “way of doing things” (ibid.). He distinguishes this form of sectarianism from “overt sectarianism,” which is generally frowned upon in Lebanon. Consequently, there is a tension here: between sectarianism as a general practice, a “way of doing things,” a “taken for granted mode of existence” that is seen as acceptable and even necessary, on the one hand, and a negative
“objectionable act” on the other (ibid., 14). As I discuss in chapter four, this distinction nicely sums up the way Lebanese youth tend to relate to sectarianism as well. For example, in the first weeks of term at university, it is seen as ‘normal’ for the Druze youth from the main Druze political party to approach only Druze freshman and Maronite student activists to approach only Maronite freshman in order to help ‘orient them to campus life.’ It is also normal, however, for those same partisan students to reprimand other students if, during student elections, for example, they should make comments about their political foes that ‘sound too sectarian’ and thus risk alienating potential voters.

One last point of clarification concerns the idea that sectarianism is a result of something that was imposed ‘from without’ on Lebanese citizens—whether it be by colonial agents or manipulative political elites, domestic or regional. These ‘instrumentalist’ explanations have merit but, as I argue in the case of youth politics, are incomplete. Rather, I understand sectarianism as emanating from a variety of social, economic, and political factors, some of which are structural and some of which are agential. I concur with Weiss in understanding that sectarian politics takes multiple forms and operates at multiple levels, and thus has multiple histories (Weiss, 2010, 217).27 Again, Weiss offers a useful distinction of the different types and levels of sectarianism here. The imposition of the consociational power-sharing arrangement based in sect by colonial powers—a starting place for this study—for example, is understood by Weiss as a process of “sectarianism from above.” This political arrangement, however, triggered a host of other processes—some informal, some

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27 The history and path of Shi’a ‘sectarianization,’ for example, is different from and not necessarily related to that of the Maronites. For more on this see Weiss (2010).
institutional—that operated at various levels within Lebanese society. For example, the ‘use’ of these processes by local elites, and sometimes even by ‘ordinary people,’ to assert their position and to advocate for their rights vis-à-vis colonial power or other sects is described by Weiss as sectarianism “from below” (ibid.). These processes of ‘sectarianization’ have also been conceptualized as emanating from external sources versus internal sources (i.e., external actors such as the Ottomans, the French, and later the Syrians, versus the instrumental use of institutions by social and political actors within Lebanese society). I adopt the understanding of the process of ‘sectarianization’ as emanating from the complex and contingent interaction of a variety of actors and institutions and at multiple levels of society. It is the processes of ‘sectarianism from below,’ however, that are my focus in this study. Though Weiss suggests that “even ordinary people” have helped to propel sectarianism, his primary focus is on local politicians and religious leaders as the actors who operate ‘from below’ to ignite processes of sectarianization. His study provides the starting point for my conceptualization of sectarianism ‘from below’. I suggest, however, that we bring our focus to even deeper levels of society when investigating sectarianism ‘from below’ to include actors and realms that are often neglected in studies of politics—namely, youth and the political arenas they occupy. Moreover, I examine these actors and their realms of activity in their own right, not just in relation to elites, and show how they make unique and influential contributions to the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarianism ‘from below.’ Though the nature of the political dynamics among youth is no doubt also a result of factors ‘from above,’ such as institutional contexts and elite politics, the networking and activism of partisan youth within their own realms of politics can operate relatively autonomously of those factors, and outside the context of elite politics, thus
becoming a ‘new’ self-reinforcing and rejuvenating source of sectarian dynamics at grassroots levels. Thus, when I refer to partisan youth networking as a feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism ‘from below,’ I am referring to the ways in which sectarianism is being reproduced and renewed in these under-analysed corners of Lebanese society and the role of ‘ordinary people’ themselves, i.e., youth, in the process.

In sum, I adopt an understanding of sectarianism as fluid, malleable, constructed, and produced by a variety of socioeconomic and political factors. It is, as Makdisi writes, a result of a series of processes “through which a kind of religious identity is politicised, even secularised, as part of an obvious struggle for power” (Makdisi 2008, 559). Among these ‘processes,’ I highlight colonial intervention, capitalist penetration in Lebanon and the Middle East, and the launching of processes of state formation—all of which have had uneven and destabilizing effects on pre-existing power relations and continue to ignite competitions for wealth and power today. In the context of such uneven distribution, the competition for wealth, opportunity, and even basic survival can overlie, be ‘disguised’ by, or generate sectarian dynamics (Kingston 2013, 22). Hence, rather than treating sectarianism as an “impermeable condition,” I opt to place the focus on the processes and practices of sectarianism; the ways in which sectarianism is continually manifested and recreated; and the significance it takes with various places and people at different times.28 Although I see it as powerful and resilient, I do not see it as inevitable or irreversible. To quote Weiss again, sectarianism can be “made and unmade” (Weiss 2010, 235). My aim in this study of Lebanese youth politics is to travel to the overlooked corners

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28 Weiss challenges us to understand sectarianism in a more nuanced way as a “malleable product, an historical effect, and not an impermeable condition” (2010, 15). Indeed, the focus on its malleability makes it all the more important to understand how it is continually reproduced and ‘molded’ to attract youth suit their sensibilities.
of everyday life, the realms of youth life and politics, in order to understand what processes and practices drive the perpetuation of sectarianism among youth and, moreover, how deeply in the fabric of Lebanese society it is continually reproduced and revitalized, “as if always in perpetual motion” (Mermier and Mervin 2012, 8).
Chapter Two

The Resilience of Sectarianism in the Lebanese Political Field, and the Context of Youth Politics

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the historical evolution of the Lebanese political field and how its ‘sectarian democracy’ emerged. Beginning with the Ottoman era and ending with the legacies of the 16-year civil war, I discuss the factors that have led Lebanese sectarianism to become so path-dependent and resistant to change. I conclude with a look into what this means for the context of youth politics today. I argue, contrary to theories of primordialism, as well as much of the popular perception of sectarianism in the Middle East, that the enduring nature of sectarianism in Lebanon, and the factional and asymmetrical informal dynamics that underpin it, are not a result of ‘ancient hatreds’ between the religious communities who inhabit the country. Nor are they a product of an enduring ‘political culture’ either of Arabs, or of Muslims. Rather, situating myself within the work of scholars who reject “ahistorical and cultural explanations” for the durability of sectarian identities, I show how Lebanese sectarianism, and its formal and informal institutions, is the product of relatively recent, modern processes—a “nationalist construct”—which dates back no further than the beginning of the modern era when European powers and local elites forged a politics of religion amid the emerging nation state system (Makdisi 1996, 26). Lebanon’s sectarian system, however,

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1 I use the term ‘political field’ as opposed to simply looking at the state. ‘Political field’ is defined in broader terms than the state to include the patterns of organization, mobilization, agitation, and struggle that develop alongside it (Zubaida 1993, 146). Indeed, in the Lebanese political field, the Lebanese state is but one actor—and a weak one at that. See Zubaida (1993).

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became strongly path-dependent—and persisted despite various historical critical junctures. Its resilience, and thus also the ‘stickiness’ of sectarianism as a marker of political identity, can be understood using the framework of historical institutionalism. I discuss various phases in the evolution of state and society in Lebanon, beginning with the long drawn out critical juncture in the late 19th century instigated by the intervention of Ottoman colonial powers and the continued intervention of the French. These colonial interventions set Lebanon on a political trajectory that had the effect of privileging informal and factional political dynamics relating to sectarianism and clientelism over its parallel traditions of republicanism and democracy, which would have meant strengthening of formal institutions of the Lebanese state. The intrusions by colonial powers are what Weiss (2010) refers to as “sectarianism from above.” The entrenchment of sectarianism and clientelism, however, was also a result of the networking of local elites at multiple levels, who used the formal and informal structures and dynamics of sectarian governance to assert their positions and extend their own political and economic bases of power. This process is what Weiss refers to as “sectarianism from below,” and what Kingston (2013) argues constitutes a powerful system-reproducing feedback mechanism. It is the intertwining of formal and informal processes, coupled with the powerful feedback mechanism of elite networking at various levels, which have created the historical and institutional precedent for a particularly “stubborn,” post-independent consociational power-sharing system based in sect (Salloukh et al. 2015). This system, however, has not gone unchallenged. As I discuss in this chapter, the post-independence era was marked by substantial socioeconomic and political inequalities, which were a product of the sectarian system. Despite several demands for systemic change, however, the Lebanese sectarian system
was unable to evolve peacefully and accommodate demands for reform. This was in part due to the existence of opportunities for powerful actors to block challenges to the status quo—or “veto points” in the language of historical institutionalism (Kingston 2013, 35). Instead, Lebanon broke down into a civil war in 1975 which lasted 16 years. The civil war was a significant rupture in Lebanese politics. It did not, however, result in any change to the underlying sectarian logic of Lebanon’s political field. On the contrary, rather than setting Lebanon on a new historical path, the war generated outcomes which served to not only reproduce the sectarian basis of power, it had the effect of deepening and strengthening the informal networks of power associated with the elite, and further eroding whatever purposeful ability the Lebanese state had in the prewar period. I look at various processes and events which led to this outcome and consider the damaging legacies of the civil war on Lebanon’s postwar political economy. Last, I conclude this chapter with a discussion of how this political context has shaped the lives of youth, and youth politics, in Lebanon.

The Historical Evolution of Sectarian Democracy in Lebanon

No one would argue that Lebanon is an easy country to govern. As one of the most religiously diverse countries of the Middle East (18 religious sects are officially recognized in Lebanon’s political system), and with political divisions running deeply along those same lines, Lebanon is a country that is “extremely plural” (Hudson 1988, 233). It is also a country with a very weak state. Formally, the Lebanese state has been weakened by its consociational power-
sharing arrangement which stipulates the sharing of political power among Lebanon’s 18 sectarian communities based on their demographic size. This power-sharing agreement has provided the Lebanese with long stretches of peace—albeit of a precarious sort. It also has prevented the concentration of political power at the centre, so no one confessional community has ever been able to achieve hegemony and dominate the state. Moreover, encompassed in Lebanon’s power-sharing agreement, and written in Lebanon’s constitution, is the guarantee of each religious community’s freedom from interference by others, including the state. In practice this means that each sectarian community has autonomy over its own affairs, such as educational and social welfare institutions, and, importantly, all matters relating to personal status which in Lebanon are all governed by the religious courts and institutions of the communities.

Informally, the Lebanese state has been weakened by the accumulation of informal power of Lebanon’s formidable communal elites. Lebanon presents us with a case where the state is weak, and has a shallow reach into society, whereas ‘society’—meaning the political and religious leaders of Lebanon’s sectarian communities—is strong and powerful (see Migdal 1988). As I shall explain, the political elites, who represent communities based in confession and clan, compete to capture the formal institutions of the state, and utilize them to bolster their powerful, informal networks of clientelism. Indeed, real power in Lebanon is not derived from control over formal institutions, but rather the ability to build, control, and mobilize informal networks. Thus, Lebanon’s political field is characterized by both formal institutions which are designed to protect and share power between sectarian communities, and informal
sect-based networks of power which are controlled by the leaders of Lebanon’s multiple communities.

Though often viewed as ‘exceptional,’ Lebanon is not unlike other many other countries of the ‘developing’ world where states are rarely autonomous or highly institutionalized. Rather than being autonomous from society, states in the developing world are often weakened by the penetration of a variety of competing social forces, all vying for power, and appropriating parts of the state, all of which lead to a political order characterized by “alternative sets of rules” and, ultimately, the absence of integrating frameworks of authority (Migdal 2001, 19). Migdal refers to this as “dispersed domination”—where “neither state nor any other social force has an established overarching hegemony... and domination by any social force takes place within an arena or even across several arenas but does not encompass society as a whole” (ibid., 129). Rather, states of this sort are more like a series of “fragments,” working at cross purposes to themselves (Migdal 2001, 22). Mamdani refers to this as “decentralized despotism” where multiple leaders in society derive power not from the state but from their command over their communities—something that has been facilitated by colonial policies of indirect rule (Mamdami 1996, 37).

While religious identities have always played an important role in the social life of Lebanon, they have not, contrary to the popular understanding of their salience in Lebanese politics, always been the primary mode of one’s political identity—nor are they even necessarily so today (Makdisi 2000; Weiss 2010; Khalaf 2003; Salloukh et al. 2015). As numerous scholars of the Middle East have argued, for much of the 20th century sectarian identity was not particularly relevant in political terms. Rather, the politicization of sectarian
identity is a product of more recent, modern phenomena that began with the colonial interventions of the Ottoman and European (French) bureaucrats in the late 19th century. As the historian Usama Makdisi argues, it was not until the late 19th century that what is now modern Lebanon underwent a process of ‘sectarianization’ in which “religion was detached from its social environment and treated as a cohesive, exclusive and organic force” (Makdisi 2000, 65). It is to a brief examination of this history I now turn.

The 19th Century—Lebanon under Ottoman Rule

To gain an understanding of the roots of Lebanon's modern political field, a good place to start is the *tanzimat* era of the Ottoman Empire. The *tanzimat* (literally meaning ‘reorganization’) was an era of state-building and reformation that began in 1839. It was characterized by various attempts to modernize the Ottoman Empire and to secure its territorial integrity against nationalist movements from within and aggressive powers from outside. It was during this era that the two pillars of the Lebanese political system, democracy and sectarianism, were laid down. Before this era neither religion nor democracy really entered the politics of the principality; feudal ties formed the basis of social order (Hamzeh 2001, 168; Harik 1968, 40). On the democratic side, the reforms of the *tanzimat* were influenced by republican intellectual currents that emphasized equality, liberty, and fraternity (Akarli 1993). These republican principles (revolving around electoral representation) were also embedded in the institutional design of governance of Mount Lebanon with the inauguration of the indirect two-stage elections of the 12-member administrative council called the *Mutasarriffate*, which was established in the *Reglement Organique* (Organic Law) announced by the Ottoman Empire
and backed by a consortium of European powers in 1861. Indeed, while Lebanon is best known for its sectarianism, it also has a long democratic participatory tradition—one that is more "deeply rooted in history than is often presumed to be the case" (Akarli 1993, 190).³

Besides establishing Lebanon’s democratic and participatory tradition, however, this period was also a time when the fundamentals for a parallel system of political sectarianism were laid down. This process began with the initial and short-lived creation of Maronite/Druze governance arrangements in 1841. These arrangements were transformed shortly thereafter with the establishment of communally-mixed councils in these separate districts (councils that were described as Lebanon’s first power-sharing arrangements), and culminated in the emergence of the *Mutasarriffate* whose seats were allotted according to communal demographic weight. This era thus marks the beginning of both the democratic and sectarian traditions of government in Lebanon.

The sect-based power-sharing system was designed against the backdrop of violence in Mount Lebanon between Maronite peasants and their Druze landlords.⁴ It was, therefore, designed with one purpose in mind: the reduction of tension and conflict between confessional

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³ Akarli (1993) describes the administrative council as becoming an embryonic national assembly, and argues that its institutionalization helps to explain why Lebanese politicians adapted so easily to a parliamentary system in the French Mandate period. See also Kingston (2013, 25-26).

⁴ This bloody conflict took place in 1860 between Maronite peasants and their Druze lords. These revolts came to a head in 1858 when they spilled over into the southern area of Mount Lebanon, where Druze elites (feudal lords) also ‘played the communal card’ and utilized Druze communal identity to rally their peasants against the Christian peasants. By July of 1860, Druze were victorious and the death toll among Christians numbered eleven thousand. This conflict—which was increasingly and inaccurately understood as purely sectarian in character—was the background in which the first power-sharing arrangements were devised, and still has resonance in Lebanese politics today (see Zahar 2005). In fact, it is this same intention—to reduce conflict between the sects—that has driven its re-establishment at various points throughout Lebanese history including independence and after the civil war. This has provoked ample debate in scholarship on consociationalism as to whether the sectarian power-sharing agreement in Lebanon is the “cause or cure” of the country’s ills. See Halpren (1986); Horowitz (1991, 2002); Hudson (1976, 1988, 1999); Jabbra and Jabbra (2001).
communities. The problem was that these tensions were actually the result of complex and multiple, socioeconomic, political, and institutional processes, but were interpreted and “treated” by Ottoman and European powers as “purely sectarian” problems (Makdisi 2000). Both European consuls and Ottoman bureaucrats thus imposed the religious power-sharing formula on Lebanon as a way of solving what they thought were religious problems. In doing so, they created “purely communal actors” where they had never existed before and set Lebanon on its sectarian path (ibid., 16). As Makdisi writes: “whereas religion had once been an integral part of an elaborate non-sectarian order... it now constituted the basis and raison d’être for communal segregation” (ibid., 94).5

Thus, the Ottoman era marks a crucial period in the history of the emergence of the modern Lebanese political field, when three principles (which remain in force today) were institutionalized—two of them formally and one informally. Formally, this period saw the institutionalization of both the principles of democratic participation and political power-

5 A number of processes helped further to politicize sectarian identity in new ways during this era including socioeconomic issues such as the uneven processes of development throughout the area and capitalist penetration in the 19th century, both of which had an ambiguous effect on class formation within the Lebanese political field. Kingston argues that, on one hand, these processes promoted social differentiation within and outside of the traditionally feudal communities which sparked the potential for cross-cutting class ties at an ‘embryonic’ national level. On the other hand, however, their uneven and dislocated nature generated forms of grievance and identity that began to resemble “sect-classes” which weakened cross-cutting ties and instead created suspicion and heightened awareness of communal identities in the mid- to late-19th century (see Kingston 2013, 26). Furthermore, this new system of sectarian and democratic governance, combined with a growing commercial urban class, threatened the power and position of the feudal families who, desperate to maintain their social and political prestige, competed fiercely for administrative offices. Thus, local feudal elites joined the ranks of the ‘sectarian entrepreneurs’ (including others such as the Ottoman officials and Egyptian occupiers) who exploited communal identities to advance their position and shore up their decaying power. The mutasarrifie (the administrative authority of the Mustasarrifate), however, ensured their protection of the feudal lords in the newly emerging political order and saw that these families were “gradually absorbed” into this new system of governance (see Hamzeh 2000, 170). Local elites were not the only ones instrumentalizing communal identities to promote their demands. For example, the 19th century saw a series of revolts by Maronite peasants who used their sectarian identity to challenge their Druze feudal lords. This use of communal identities by a variety of political and social actors—from the level of the political elite down to the level of peasants—contributed to the entrenchment of sectarianism in the 19th century.
sharing based on sectarian identity (i.e., confessionalism). It also, however, represents the period in which clientelism was informally institutionalized into the system of governance—because of both the incorporation of the prominent feudal families into the emerging system of confessional governance and the fact the subdistricts were now more confessionally homogenous and governed by a representative of one’s sect. As a result, patron-client relationships increasingly came to be organized along confessional rather than feudal lines, and informally institutionalized into the system of governance. It is this interweaving of the principles of democratic participation, confessionalism, and clientelism in this period that are crucial to understanding the emergence of the hybrid path along which the development of Lebanon’s political field has travelled. It was, nevertheless, just the beginning. However profound these shifts were, they still remained unconsolidated. What “tipped the balance” toward the sectarian side of Lebanon’s political equation was the destruction of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the imposition of French mandatory rule (Kingston 2013, 27).

**Lebanon under French Mandate: Consolidating Confessionalism**

The French mandate era was crucial to the consolidation of sectarianism in Lebanon, both formally and informally. The processes of sectarianization occurred both ‘from above’ in the form of French ‘divide and rule’ colonial policies, which privileged certain minority communities at the expense of others, and ‘from below’ in the form of the wide-ranging demands for sectarian representation and recognition made by local actors, among them local politicians, traditional feudal leaders, religious scholars (‘ulama), and even ordinary people (Weiss 2010, 11).
After World War I and the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire, and in accordance with the Sykes-Picot Agreement that was signed between Britain and France during the war, the French were granted control over what was Ottoman Syria (i.e., modern day Syria and Lebanon) as well as certain areas of southeastern Turkey. The British were granted control over most of Ottoman Mesopotamia (i.e., modern Iraq) as well as the southern part of the Ottoman Syria (Palestine and Transjordan). These territories became formalized by the League of Nations’ mandate system in 1923. One of the first things France did was to proclaim the creation of *Grand Liban* (Greater Lebanon) in 1920, which expanded the previous boundaries, thereby increasing the region’s religious diversity and significantly re-weighting demographic balances. Although the Maronites were still the largest single community, they no longer formed an overwhelming majority, having gone from 80% to 51% in the new territory (Zamir 1985, 98). Nonetheless, the Christian sects—traditionally pro-French—still heartily welcomed French rule. The Druze community also lost their position to the Sunnis as the majority Muslim sect (ibid.).

Of crucial significance was the fact that the French chose to establish their colonial presence and hegemony on the foundations of the Ottoman era, meaning that they reinstated the confessional power-sharing institutions set down by the Ottomans. This time, however, these arrangements were written ‘in stone’ in the form of Lebanon’s first constitution which was promulgated (after lengthy delays) by the French in 1926. Again, their choice was based on the belief that the root of civil strife in the region was sectarian, and thus only sectarian-based representation could solve the problem. Like the Ottoman tradition which preceded it, the constitution reflected a combination of both sectarian and democratic principles. On the one
hand, it deepened democratic practice in Lebanon by broadening the (male) electorate through abolishing the stipulation that voters must be property owners, setting stronger guarantees for personal liberties, reducing the minimum voting age to 21, and expanding the power of the presidency as a way to (theoretically) counter sectarian squabbling and political jockeying between elites and to allow the president to act in a more unifying, autonomous, non-sectarian manner (Kingston, 2013, 28). On the other hand, the new constitution continued the Ottoman tradition and enshrined confessional politics throughout every level of government—setting in place the proportional representation of religious communities in the assembly, cabinet, and civil service. The constitution further stipulated significant protections for the rights of the religious communities, including the right to autonomy over their own affairs. The main examples of these protections were the autonomy granted to religious communities to run their own social welfare and educational institutions, as well as to have control over all matters relating to personal status. Thus, the French launched the process of formally institutionalizing communal religious power. As historian Elizabeth Thompson described, when it came to addressing social demands and grievances of the Lebanese the French “turned to the paternalistic constituencies they had cultivated as the pillars of their rule” (Thompson 2000, 168). The communal elites now “became not only vehicles of political control, they also became vehicles for the delivery of social services” (ibid., loc. cit.). The bulk of publicly funded health care and education was placed in the hands of private and mostly religious agencies, creating a

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6 Women did not get the right to vote in Lebanon until 1953.
7 All of these areas of autonomy of the confessional communities are still in existence today.
“parallel regime of power” that would, over time, have crippling effects on the formation of the Lebanese state, weakening the basis of its power and legitimacy (ibid., 169).

Yet, as politically defining as the official institutional policies of the French were, they were not the most influential. It was rather the long-term impact of French policy, the unleashing of France’s colonial statecraft, that had the most powerful influence in shaping the modern-day Lebanese political field (Firro 2003). For example, the French did not seem to be interested in defending the republican democratic principles that were embedded in the new constitution, unless doing so worked in the favour of French interests. Rather, they generally left Lebanese politicians “up to their own devices” (Zamir 1997, 44). This stands in contrast to the “decidedly authoritarian” practices of the French when it came to advancing their own agendas such as rigging elections, promoting land tenure and agricultural policies in support of their collaborative elites, repressing protests within civil society, suspending the constitution when debate became too destabilizing, and restricting the flow of information in the press and public sphere, to name a few (Kingston 2013, 30). The French also utilized ‘divide and rule’ tactics in Lebanon, exemplified by their cultivation of a group of cooperative elites from across the sectarian spectrum whom they used to extend their influence and also curb the dominance of the Maronite community (Zamir 1997, 241). Unsurprisingly, these practices further stimulated factional dynamics and the ‘sectarianization’ of Lebanon’s political field as old and new elites vied for position by portraying themselves as the sole representatives of their communities’ rights and strengthening their hold on the state.

The French also designed electoral laws to privilege candidates from leading families as a way to ensure their compliance and solidify their stake in the state. This included forming
constituencies that were locally-based and had multiple seats which were allocated on a communal basis. It also included implementing the requirement that all Lebanese had to vote in the village of their birth and/or village of origin. Lebanese electoral law still retains many of these features today. In theory, they were designed to promote inter-sectarian cooperation. But, as Elizabeth Picard among others have noted, the reality was (and arguably still is) that the candidates who achieved success did so not because of their talent at inter-confessional cooperation, but because they were the most capable at generating the largest and most loyal clientelist base (Picard 1996, 48). Having a seat in parliament and access to the resources of the mandate state, of course, only strengthened the patronage networks of these local elites even further. It also served to entrench more deeply into the Lebanese state a coterie of elites whose basis of power was “informal as much as formal, factional rather than national” (Kingston 2013, 30).

The overall impact of French colonial statecraft worked to build, consolidate, and entrench different segments of Lebanon’s elite. As we have seen, the basis of power of these elites was primarily informal. It was their informal power, derived from their wealth and ability to generate a large clientelist base, that enabled them to maintain their formal positions of power within the Lebanese state. Their formal positions of power then provided them with the access to the state resources necessary to buttress their informal networks. This elite made up a small, highly interconnected circle and, despite the apparent sectarian tension in the country, members of this dominant class were actually highly cooperative with one another (Picard 2000). This was no doubt a result of their common interest: exploitation of the institutions of

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8 For an explanation of how this still holds true in Lebanon today see Cammett (2014).
the new state to strengthen their position and increase their wealth (Meir 1997, 31).

Sectarianism was used instrumentally by these elites as a tool to exact privileges for themselves, their relatives, and their clients. Indeed, only politicians predisposed to these methods were able to succeed in the Lebanese political area. Those who strove to transform Lebanon into a more democratic, pluralistic, and equitable society either had no influence or were forced out of the system altogether (ibid.).

The above analysis highlights the role of the French in ‘sectarianizing’ Lebanon’s political field—a process of ‘sectarianism from above.’ It is only part of the story, however. Local elites also played a powerful role in “routinizing” sectarianism in Lebanese politics during the Mandate era. The ways in which Lebanese elites utilized sectarianism to gain power and position is what Weiss refers to as “sectarianism from below” and what Kingston, using a historical institutionalist framework, characterizes as a “feedback mechanism” which over time worked to entrench the divisive legacies of colonial rule even further, and helped transform Lebanon’s political field into a self-reinforcing system (Kingston 2013, 31-34). It is worth examining the ways elites contributed to the entrenchment of sectarianism during the Mandate era here, because the same types of elite strategies continue to be a prominent feature in contemporary Lebanese politics.

The Lebanese constitution which enshrined the confessionally-based power-sharing system gave Lebanese elites an institutional basis upon which they could base their political claims. In fact, Firro argues that the communal power-sharing system was “the only truly basis of legitimacy” for these factional local elites (2003, 115). As such, it set into motion intensive inter-elite competition, networking, and political maneuvering. The primary objective of this
competition was to build as extensive a clientelist base as possible in order to secure access to the state and thus one’s position in the political order vis-à-vis rival elites. Inter-elite competition in the Mandate era was fueled by many factors, not least the fact that the communal power-sharing ratios were unfixed. Given the potential for fluidity in power-sharing, whether it be at the executive level, for appointments in the bureaucracy, and/or in budget allocations, Lebanese elites engaged in an intense competition to get as much of a stake as possible in the distribution of power in the Lebanese system (Firro 2003, 125). It is important to realize, however, that the driving logic behind inter-elite competition was often factional and clientelist more than it was sectarian (Hamzeh 2001; Kingston 2013, 31). Nonetheless, the intensity of networking and competition between confessionally-based elites worked to entrench confessionalism as a driver of Lebanese politics and thus also as a marker of political identity; transforming it into the “only game in town” (Firro 2003, 152). As many have argued, competition over the state and its resources continues to be a “major ingredient” in the calculations and strategies of self-enrichment of the Lebanese elites today (Leenders 2012, 231; Najem 2012).

Another way in which elites have worked to routinize and reinforce sectarianism in the Mandate era was through cultivating ties to external and international patrons as a way to shore up their power vis-à-vis their rivals. This too is a practice which continues today—and one that gives this tiny country its status as a battleground for regional and global interests. The more acute the communal tension in Lebanon, the more Lebanese elites have tended to turn toward their regional and international patrons to intervene and bolster their leverage in the Lebanese political field—something that only serves to strengthen the intensity of sectarian
logic in Lebanese politics. Maronite Christian elites, for example, relied on their ties with France to bolster their domestic position, whereas the Sunni politicians cultivated ties with Syria and wider pan-Arab networks. Of course, calling in external actors to improve one’s position at home does not come without a cost, for these relationships are a two-way street. Regional and international patrons alike would also work these alliances and play on Lebanese divisions for their own political advantage. This interference would often spark domestic tension as it fed back into Lebanon’s communal dynamics, at times having dangerous and destabilizing implications for Lebanon’s “communal street” (Kingston 2013, 33). The willingness of Lebanese elites to network with external actors to shore up their position, as well as the subsequent interventions of those actors in the Lebanese political arena, thus served to reinforce factionalism based in sect.

A third and final way elites contributed to entrenching the sectarian logic of Lebanese politics was through their efforts vis-à-vis their bases of support within civil and political society. The Mandate era saw the rise of subaltern movements, including increasingly formalized issue-based associations, professional associations, and, as historian Elisabeth Thompson says, a “dizzying array” of civic groups—all of whom sought to challenge the status quo (Thompson 2000, 91-92). Still, the groups linked to Lebanon’s powerful families and communal elites were both more numerous and more powerful than these civic society actors. These ‘communal society’ actors included an array of family associations, an increasing variety of confessionally-based social welfare organizations, and political parties. Some of these political parties were populist in nature but still oriented toward a particular sect—such as the Kata’eb, Najjada, and al-Talai, representing the Maronite, Sunni, and Shi’a communities respectively (Traboulsi 2007,
These parties were ideological, often influenced by European movements of the extreme right or left, and drew their support from the emerging middle classes who were frustrated with the scheming, corrupt Lebanese political class. Other parties that formed during this era were essentially an extension of the patronage networks of the elites, and a way for them “to lend a modern aspect to older power structures based on personality, family, clan, and religion” (Suleiman 1967, xvi). The growth of this communally-oriented ‘civil’ society demonstrates that the dynamics of sectarian democracy in Lebanon were increasingly being absorbed and reflected at grassroots levels and by new social actors (Traboulsi 2007, 107). These communally-oriented movements were often instrumentalized by political elites as a way to bolster and protect their power and advance their claims on the state (Picard 1996). They fact that they could do so is evidence that Lebanon’s factionalized political field was well entrenched and had begun to be constantly reproduced over time (Kingston 2013, 34).

In sum, the tanzimat era of the Ottoman Empire set Lebanon on a political trajectory characterized by two parallel paths: democracy, on the one hand, and sectarianism as the basis for political representation and power on the other. During the French Mandate era, these parallel paths were consolidated, formally through the institutionalization of the confessionally-based power-sharing system, and informally through French statecraft in Lebanon, and their privileging of local elites who soon realized their fortunes lay in cultivating clientelist networks based in sect, and securing their access to the Lebanese state. Lebanese elites further

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9 Kingston (2013, 34) cites several historical examples of this: Sunni leaders who, in advance of the 1936 Franco-Lebanese treaty negotiations, instigated a well-orchestrated campaign of protests which subsequently spiraled into street riots, killing hundreds of people; and elites who mobilized their community members to shut down market places and hold massive street protests in the face of a French proposal to institute a secular personal status code (which would have eroded sectarian bases of autonomy and power).
routinized the sectarian logic of the Lebanese political field through their intensive competition, cultivation of external and international ties, and through the mobilization—indeed instrumentalization—of domestic civil society actors and movements, all of which was done for their own gain. Thus, rather than being the product of ‘ancient hatreds’ or an ‘enduring political culture,’ as many accounts of Middle East sectarianism have tended to suggest, we see how Lebanon’s sectarian dynamics are the result of intervention by actors from above—such as the colonial actors who instituted and consolidated the confessionally-based system of governance in the first place, as well as the use of this system by actors ‘from below,’ most prominently local elites, whose networking at multiple levels to strengthen their own bases of political and economic power acted as a powerful feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarian dynamics (Kingston 2013). It is the intertwining of this ‘sectarianism from above’ and ‘sectarianism from below,’ as Weiss (2010) argues, as well as the intertwining of the formal institutions with the increasingly powerful informal processes, that have made Lebanese sectarianism particularly ‘sticky’ and path-dependent.

Politics in the Post-Independence Era: Counter-hegemonic Movements and the Breakdown to War

I now turn to a brief discussion of Lebanon in the post-independence era. The main point to highlight here is how, despite the dominance of factional sectarian dynamics, Lebanon also saw the emergence of numerous counter-hegemonic actors in the form of vibrant social and political movements, as well as ‘reform-minded’ elites who sought to challenge the status
quo and create a more equitable democratic country. Ultimately, however, these reformist movements were unable to create the changes in the system they sought. The sectarian system in Lebanon had become by this point deeply entrenched and path-dependent, as the networking and informal power of elites combined with the constraints of the formal institutions worked to reproduce factionalist, communal political dynamics. Thus, the Lebanese system was unable to respond to the mounting pressure and demands for change. By the mid-1970s tensions rose to the degree that Lebanon broke down into war. In what follows, I examine various attempts of actors, from 'below' and 'above', to demand and implement change to the Lebanese system. I then turn to a discussion of various reasons that change did not take place.

The post-independence period was an era of highly contested politics in Lebanon. As such it demonstrates an important aspect of the nature of Lebanese politics, which connects to my own study. That is, despite the strength of sectarian political structures and dynamics in Lebanon, politics are still extremely dynamic, and there is still social and political space for the articulation of a wide variety of political and social interests by diverse actors, and even, to some degree, agency—albeit of a limited sort. As I illustrate in the case studies of youth politics,

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10 Unified, adversarial student movements in particular were one of the new social actors of this period which I examine in more detail in chapter three.
11 Domestic tensions, caused by mounting socioeconomic problems and the declining legitimacy of the sectarian power-sharing formula particularly among Muslim sects, were exacerbated by the regional context and particularly the rise of Arab nationalism, as well as the presence of the Palestinians and the PLO (which consisted mainly of Fatah) in Lebanon at this time. Their presence triggered resentment and fear particularly among Christians as the demographic balance shifted further toward Muslim sects, and also because the PLO was not under the control of the Lebanese government, and invited violent reprisals from the Israelis.
12 On veto points, see Immergut 1992; Tsebelis 1995.
this is still true today. The space that exists in the Lebanese political field is a ‘by-product’ of the Lebanese system itself. Unlike other Arab countries where authoritarian systems took hold post-independence, the Lebanese state was weak, fragmented, and its borders porous—having been ‘colonized’ by powerful social actors. No one community has ever been able to achieve hegemony in Lebanon. Rather, as I have discussed, political power is dispersed among multiple centres of power. Each of these centres of power is represented by political elites and their political parties, and each of these is embedded within a confessional community and controls extensive, and mainly informal, political and economic networks. One of the results of this severe fragmentation of the political field is, by default, the existence of relative freedom and space for political organizing. Moreover, because each of the communities is guaranteed freedom from interference by others, ‘negative freedom’ exists not only for the confessional, but also for other social and political actors.\(^\text{13}\) Michael Young, for example, conveys this aspect of Lebanese politics in his book, *The Ghosts of Martyr’s Square*, when he states that Lebanon is a country of “liberal spaces” which are generated by its weak state and “sectarian balancing act” (2010, 120, 248). These “liberal spaces,” he states, can be exploited by actors seeking change (2010, 107). The paradox, however, is that though space exists, the fragmented and informal nature of political power in the country also means that the system is very difficult to change. Put differently, Lebanon’s political opportunity structure is such that it provides a

\(^{13}\) While I am focusing on the realities of freedoms in the Lebanese system—which combine both formal and informal processes—it is also necessary to note the formal individual rights and freedoms stipulated by the Lebanese constitution. These include the right to religious freedom, education, as well as the freedom of speech, association, and freedom of the press. As for the principle of equality, article 7 of the Lebanese constitution also stipulates that “[a]ll Lebanese are equal before the law. They enjoy equal civil and political rights and are subject to public duties and obligation without distinction among them.” Article 12 further stipulates that “[e]very Lebanese has the right to hold public office without preference of one over another except for merit and competence in accordance with the terms stated by law[.]”
fertile ground for a diverse array of adversarial, lively, counter-hegemonic groups and actors seeking to challenge the status quo, but who have, paradoxically, scant hope of effecting any substantive change in the system. The politics of the post-independence era illustrates the paradoxical nature of the Lebanese political field. It is also, however, true for Lebanese politics today. As one astute observer of Lebanese politics and long-time civil society activist commented, Lebanon gives us the “illusion of opportunity” for political change.14

**Challenges to the Status Quo in the Post-Independence Era**

To achieve its independence from the French, Lebanese leaders arrived at an informal ‘gentleman’s agreement’ upon which the Lebanese state was founded. This agreement, known as the ‘The National Pact’ (*al Mithaq al Watani*), struck between Bishara Khuri, Lebanon’s first President and a Maronite Christian, and Lebanon’s first Prime Minister, Riad al-Solh, a Sunni Muslim, was a compromise based on the various nationalist positions dominant at the time and, in effect, represented the “lowest common denominator among the independence leaders”’ aspirations (El-Khazen 1991, 5).15 Though often celebrated as a show of national unity, the National Pact is also an example of the willingness of the Lebanese elite to cooperate with their main rivals for the purpose of securing their position and power over others. Farid El-Khazen (1991) argues, for example, that the National Pact represented a “capitalist confessional

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14 O. Traboulsi, communication with author, Beirut, September 2009.
15 Specifically, the pact was a compromise on the identity and foreign orientation of Lebanon. For the Christians, the act asserted Lebanese independence and sovereignty, but as a country with an ‘Arab face.’ For the Christians this meant assurance that Lebanese Muslims would not seek reunification with Syria. For the Muslims, on the other hand, it meant that the Christians would not seek protection and tutelage from the French and that Lebanon, though independent, was still in the Arab fold (Salloukh et al. 2015, 16).
deal,” and the merger of confessional and economic interests which was designed to promote some segments of Lebanese society at the expense of others.\footnote{El-Khazen (1991, 4) cites Daher 1984 for this argument. He also states that such an interpretation was also reflective of the predominantly leftist reading of the National Pact on the eve of the 1975-76 war. Similarly, Kingston (2013, 32) argues the National Pact was driven by “intensifying and shifting factionalism.”} Importantly, the National Pact reinforced the confessional system by formalizing the distribution of high-level government posts according to religious identity and the demographic size of each religious community. Based on figures from the 1932 census—the last official census conducted in Lebanon to this day—the National Pact enshrined the 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims in the parliament and civil service. In the now longstanding and delicate practice of confessional distribution of political offices, the National Pact stipulated that the president of the republic (an office with extensive privileges and powers) must be a Maronite Christian. To ‘balance’ the power of the Maronites, the office of the Prime Minister was given to the Sunnis. Later on, the post of speaker of parliament was given to the Shi’a and the post of deputy speaker to the Greek Orthodox. Cabinet posts were also assigned to specific religious communities according to their demographic weight and importance.\footnote{The Ministry of Finance, for example, was shared by Sunnis and Maronites; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Maronites and Greek Orthodox; the Ministry of Agriculture by the Shi’ite and Druze; and the Ministry of Defence given to the Druze, etc. (Zahar 2005, 228).} In addition, the National Pact enshrined the principle of segmental autonomy, which guaranteed the communities the right to conduct religious, educational, and cultural affairs free from state intervention.

It was hoped the agreement would build a sense of common national identity between Lebanese Muslims and Christians, and thus strengthen citizens’ commonality under a united Lebanese nation. The electoral system was also designed with this in mind, requiring members to be elected on the basis of a ‘common roll’ representing constituencies rather than specific
communities (Crow 1962, 494). But from the beginning the agreement and the electoral system failed in their unifying roles. In regard to the electoral system, for example, rather than fostering efforts on the part of candidates to build cross-sectarian support, traditional leaders simply used patronage and coercion to get their lists of candidates elected. The legislature was essentially turned into a “private club as leaders promoted themselves and their protégés” (Zahar 2005, 233). Thus, though political power was shared across communities, the elites divvied it up amongst themselves. Elites succeeded in securing a monopoly of representation, thereby promoting their own factional political and economic interests at the expense of the majority of citizens in the newly established independent Lebanese state.

This system did not go unchallenged, however. Indeed, the post-independence period was a vibrant period in Lebanese history, marked as it was by a number of significant movements for change. These movements were responding to the increasing inequality in the country, brought on by rapid and unequal growth in Lebanon’s political economy, coupled with rapid and destabilizing shifts in the country’s socio-demographics.

The post-independence era was, for example, a time of great economic expansion, but also a drastic increase in economic inequality. Lebanon’s laissez-faire, neo-mercantilist, capitalist system worked to the advantage of the country’s political and economic elite but ended up excluding vast regions and groups of people from its benefits. The Lebanese economic ‘miracle’ was primarily based on the expansion of its service economy, and particularly its banking sector. Wealth was highly concentrated in the hands of a powerful clique of foreign capital interests that dominated the Lebanese banking sector in this era—all of whom were attracted to Lebanon by the guaranteed secrecy of its banking sector, or in the
hands of one of approximately 30 families who represented Lebanon’s merchants and bankers whose wealth and power were used to secure monopolistic control over numerous sectors of the country’s import-export economy (Fawaz and Peillin 2003, 2). The industrial and agricultural sectors, on the other hand, sectors that could have generated significant employment, were excluded from the economic transformation. The result was that the Lebanese economy was highly asymmetrical and “more equipped to serve the interests of foreign capital and its small allied Lebanese elite than those of the majority of the population” who instead suffered the results of rapid and intense dislocation, and impoverishment (Kingston 2013, 37).

Concurrently with this economic expansion, Lebanon experienced significant population growth, nearly doubling its population in the first 20 years after independence. Rapid population growth contributed to the impoverishment of landless agricultural workers and massive rural-urban migration, to the suburbs of Beirut. Once in Beirut, these citizens stood witness to this economic ‘golden age’ which benefited some, but not them, as they were forced to eke out a living in the informal sector in perilous, poverty-stricken conditions. As the rift between the ‘centre’ (i.e., Beirut) and the periphery widened, the disparity between elites and the masses grew, and the class divisions increasingly began to overlap with sectarian affiliation. While the Sunni and Maronite communities were getting richer, the Shi’a were getting poorer. As Zahar states, “the Maronites were at the top of the heap, and the Shi’a were at the bottom” (Zahar 2005, 234). A growing sense of injustice was starting to build among segments of the Lebanese population.

In the context of these rapid and uneven transformations, there were several movements that arose in an attempt to challenge and reform the system, some of which
emanated from civil society, while others came from reform-minded elites. One of the novel forces in Lebanese civil society during this era were movements associated with youth and students, which I examine in depth in the next chapter. Just as the students did, so also did Lebanon’s working classes begin to organize into unions and associations during this period. By the end of the 1960s and especially leading up to and after the 1967 war, labour activism was escalating at an intense pace as Lebanon experienced demonstration after demonstration in a “nearly uninterrupted series of strikes and protest movements” (Traboulsi 2007, 145). Though labour became more sophisticated and organized in the prewar era, there were certain obstacles that prevented the labour movement from becoming a real force for change. First, Lebanon’s labour laws were more conducive to defending the interests of economic elites than they were to defending worker’s rights, and provided the basis for the state’s willingness to use force in order to crush worker protests (ibid.). Second, most commerce and industry in Lebanon continued to be dominated by the family firm—which meant that unions were too small, numerous, and often firm-oriented which made more concerted widespread organization difficult. Last, most of Lebanon’s workforce still remain outside of union structures, and rather beholden to the clientelist networks of Lebanon’s elite. The power and influence of the national body—the General Confederation of Lebanese Trade Unions (the ‘CGL,’ according to its French acronym)—was clearly hindered by these circumstances.\(^\text{18}\) Thus, the ability of labour to mobilize as a force of change in labour relations—let alone as a force to affect political and economic reforms at the national level—remained limited for Lebanon’s burgeoning labour movement, as the working classes remained largely unconsolidated (Salloukh et al. 2015, 73).

\(^{18}\) At its height the CGL represented only 14% of the entire Lebanese workforce. See Clark and Salloukh (2013, 733).
Besides broad-based movements expressed in areas like student and labour activism, Lebanon also saw the rise of new, ideologically-based political parties, which included many Leftist parties (such as the Organization of Communist Action, The Independent Nasserite Movement), as well as the first major Shi’ite party, Amal, and the Maronite-based National Liberation Party, to name a few. These parties, along with other political forces, became increasingly polarized in the years leading up to the civil war. These parties were represented by the conservative, populist coalition of the Lebanese Front headed by the Kata’eb party on the right end of the spectrum, and on the left by the Lebanese National Movement, headed by Kamal Jumblatt, as I discuss below. They would become the protagonists of the 1975 civil war (Traboulsi 2007, 156).

In addition to political parties and civil society actors, there were also attempts to implement reforms to the Lebanese system ‘from above,’ by reform-minded elites. Two prominent examples in the post-independence period were the presidency of Fuad Chehab and the leftist organizer and Druze zaim, Kamal Jumblatt.

President Fuad Chehab was an army general who came to power in the wake of the 1958 Lebanese crisis. Chehab had travelled extensively around the country and seen firsthand the suffering and underdevelopment of the peripheral—and mainly Muslim-areas. As a witness to the destabilizing effects of sectarian violence, President Chehab genuinely recognized the need for political accommodation of the Muslims and modernization of the state. His administration’s single most important objective was to generate national unity among Lebanon’s different sectarian communities, based in a shared loyalty and allegiance to Lebanon as a final and indisputable country (Salloukh et al 2015). To do so, Chehab was determined to
use the extensive powers of the presidency to reform the Lebanese state and create a modern administration and more efficient public services. During his regime (1958-1964), he adjusted the power balance within the cabinet to 6:6, and expanded the number of deputies in parliament in order to reintegrate elites who had been excluded under the previous administration. He also scored important achievements in the areas of social security, civil service reform, agricultural development, rural development, and planning (Hudson 1976; Salem, 1998; Salloukh et al. 2015). Implicitly, the purpose of these changes was a more equal distribution of wealth to Muslim areas. At the same time, however, Chehab sought to weaken the power of Lebanon’s factional elites and bypass their power through the creation of parallel institutions which, he hoped, would gain increasing prominence and slowly erode the status quo.\footnote{Chehab went about recruiting new, young, and loyal bureaucrats who were loyal only to him. He actually called them \textit{awladi}, which translates to “my children”. He increased the number of state employees approximately five-fold—to 26,000 in 1966—and the state budget increased from 60 to 585 million Lebanese pounds. This gave Chehab a significant degree of control over the administrative apparatus, allowing for deeper penetration into the socioeconomic affairs of the country. For example, Chehab expanded the army, started the nation’s first social security institution in the form of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), and founded the first publicly funded university—The Lebanese University.}

As impressive and extensive as Chehab’s programs were, however, their success was fleeting, and they ultimately failed. For one, Chehab lacked popular support—indeed, he never attempted to build it because of his wariness of the potential sectarian dangers that may have been unleashed had ‘Chehabism’ been promoted among the masses. This, however, left the Lebanese masses free to be mobilized along other, namely factional and sectarian, lines. This was evidenced by the loss of the Chehabist candidate in the 1970 elections to Suleiman
Frangieh—a leader who was the “embodiment of the traditional confessional elite” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 20). The loss marked the end of Chehab’s brief reformist ‘experiment.’

The main flaw behind Chehab’s attempted reforms was that they left the underlying sectarian and factional networks of the country’s regime intact, because they were based on a classic strategy of ‘institutional layering’ as a way to bypass the powerful networks of the elite as opposed to actually weakening them (Kingston 2013, 38). In fact, Beshara argues that with the dramatic expansion of the state under Chehab, the incentives for the elites to appropriate state resources actually grew (2005, 57). Still, Chehab’s regime began increasingly to compete with and encroach upon the power of the clientelist networks of the zu’ama, and ultimately “incurred the wrath” of the country’s traditional political elites, who soon joined forces and fought back to “defend the Lebanese system” (Salloukh et al. 2015, 19; Hudson 1968, 135).

Chehab, however, was not the only reformist elite of the post-independence era. The socialist leader and Druze elite member, Kamal Jumblatt, also attempted to challenge the status quo. Jumblatt was both the Druze zaim in Lebanon as well as the leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). In the 1960s Jumblatt attempted to engage the state on issues of reform. He realized, however, that the nature of his power within the state was limited. Not only would his power and status as a zaim not garner the political influence he needed to succeed, but, given that he was a Druze, he was shut out of the executive political offices. Thus, in order to increase his political leverage inside the state, Jumblatt pursued a strategy of linking up with and providing leadership to the growing socio-political movements outside of it, including tying

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20 Furthermore, because of the alliances Chehab struck with competing factions (i.e., the Kata’eb and the PSP), he has been accused of reinforcing some of the features of the old structure that he initially sought to undermine (Beshara 2005, 57).
his fate to the increasingly Lebanese-based PLO (Traboulsi 2007, 176). Initially, Jumblatt supported the autonomous activism of labour and students but then shifted his focus to forming a broader political movement encompassing the various elements of the Lebanese left. These efforts culminated in the formation of the Lebanese National Movement (LNF) in 1975, which he headed.

With persistent Muslim demands to re-evaluate the unfair political power-sharing formula, and the presence of the Palestinians continuing to complicate Lebanese affairs, sectarian tensions in Lebanon steadily increased. Maronite Christian elites and communities vehemently resisted any alteration to the confessional power-sharing formula—because of either self-interest or insecurity, or both. Other elites, Muslim and Christian alike, co-opted the struggle over the ratio of power only because they could use it as “a ramming rod to cut out a better deal for themselves” and thus incited their communities to ethnocentric, prejudiced views and actions toward other religious communities (Salem 1998, 10; Hudson 1976, 115). Despite Jumblatt’s initial reluctance to engage in paramilitarism, the LNF eventually built a powerful private army, which proved to be one of the strongest in the Lebanese Civil War. This mobilization was paralleled by the mobilization of its main rival, the Maronite Christian Kata’eb party. The Kata’eb had emerged as the hegemonic party among the Christians and was

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21 Of course, all of this was taking place in the context of the regionalization of the Lebanese political conflict—the main issue of which was the increasingly visible presence of the PLO in Lebanese affairs (Zahar 2005, 238). The Palestinian issue accelerated mobilization on both sides of the Lebanese conflict. For the left, it provided both a unifying discourse and cause as well as access to the resources of the PLO. Jumblatt took advantage of this and sought to extend his connections to every organization that was linked or sympathetic to the PLO. His intention was to increase his political leverage in bargains with the ruling elites, the bargain being: Jumblatt would offer to act as a moderating influence on the PLO in exchange for socioeconomic reforms and the granting of greater power to the Muslim communities (Traboulsi 2007, 176). This bid, however, ultimately failed.
militantly opposed to any reformulation of the Lebanese political equation.\textsuperscript{22} With the increasing power and mobilization of the PSP/LNF on the left and the Kata’eb on right—each strengthened by networking at the local, national, and regional levels—the Lebanese political field became polarized along communal lines and “froze the Lebanese system in its tracks” (Kingston 2013, 46). Lebanon’s political field then descended into a civil war between these two poles—a war that would last another 16 years.

Why did these forces ultimately fail to reform the Lebanese system and create lasting change? As Michael Hudson has argued, Lebanon’s consociational system was unable to evolve and suffered structural ‘rigidity,’ making it ultimately incapable of accommodating societal pressures and demands (Hudson 1988). Salloukh et al. (2015), discuss various institutional bases for the tenacity of the sectarian system, highlighting how it allowed for the strategic use and manipulation of the system by elites in multiple ways. Using the framework of historical institutionalism, Kingston (2013, 44) similarly argues that the ‘rigidity’ of the Lebanese system prior to the war emanated from the ability of various components of the post-independence elite to coalesce in defence of their factional power, creating specific ‘veto points’ or ‘veto power’ which have proved effective in thwarting reform of the system. In what follows, I briefly examine three of these points: (1) the Lebanese electoral system and specifically how it inhibits the creation of cross-confessional political parties, (2) the intertwining of the political and economic elites and thus their ability to shut down socioeconomic reforms, and (3) the ability of the elite to resist changes to the confessional power-sharing arrangements (ibid.). I will

\textsuperscript{22} One of the reasons for the power of the Kata’eb was its focus on recruiting youth through its summer camp programs which it held throughout the country, as well as its practice of holding parades and rallies in the towns of the Christian Mount Lebanon (Goria 1985, 66).
b briefy examine these in turn, for though the specificities of the issues are different, these ‘veto points’ still exist in Lebanese politics today.

**Elections and Electoral Law**

The defining features of Lebanon’s electoral system were established during the Mandate era and were traditionally designed to privilege local elites based in sect. These features contributed to the political system’s “rigidity” and thus its breakdown in 1975, and continue to play a central role in the reproduction of sectarian modes of subjectification and mobilization in Lebanon today (Salloukh et al. 2015, 88).  

Because this ‘veto point’ profoundly structures the nature of political parties in Lebanon, and because I examine youth participation in the major conventional political parties, it is important to discuss the electoral system here, especially as it pertains to political parties.  

In essence, the design of Lebanon’s electoral system maintains the sectarian structure by directing votes to the sectarian leaders and those they select as their representatives. Once in power, political elites are then able to block reforms and engage in electoral strategies such as malapportionment and gerrymandering to predetermine electoral results in their favour (Salloukh et al. 2015, 90). Moreover, in the law that was laid down by the French, citizens must vote in the town or village of their family’s origins as opposed to the district where they actually

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23 Carmen Geha (2016) states that the Lebanese electoral system is “at the heart” of the political institutions which strengthen fragmented identities (2016, 52).
live—something which also works to cement the leadership of the political elites over the long term.  

Lebanon follows a multi-member constituency system for voting, whereby every person in a given district votes as many times as there are allotted seats. To prepare for this system, candidates establish lists of alliances they have made, and pressure voters to select from their prepared list of candidates. The seats allotted to each sect in the district have already been determined, so, regardless of the number of raw votes, a certain number of Christians, Sunnis, and others will hold the seats; if the negotiations worked well beforehand, allies across the sects enter parliament together. Once in office, the elected representatives are expected to reward their supporters with the benefits and favours that access to political office brings. Supporters are well aware of the benefits that come with connection to an elected official and for this reason many make pragmatic decisions when it comes to voting. As such, though the system was meant to foster inter-sectarian cooperation, it actually privileges the factionalized elites over political parties—especially those ideologically-oriented parties that have tried to construct cross-cutting ties. In these ways the electoral system has contributed to the development of political parties in Lebanon which are basically extensions of the patronage networks of Lebanon’s sectarian elites and notable families. Even ideologically-oriented parties

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24 Even though the vast majority of the population now lives in the cities, especially Beirut, they are forbidden to vote in the locale where they actually live. See Anderson (2016).
25 See ibid. In fact, in Lebanon there is no pre-printed ballot used in elections. This allows the political parties to print their own ballots with the list of candidates’ names already on it, and hand them out to voters in advance of elections. Moreover, these party-printed ballots are all slightly different—and different versions are given to different families in the district. This allows the parties to monitor which family has and has not voted and facilitates the process of vote-buying.
26 Independent candidates rarely win seats in this system because they do not have the patronage power to attract sufficient numbers of voters without the benefit of a list of alliances. Once elected to office, a member of parliament is expected to reward his supporters with services and privileges (see Anderson 2016, 320).
have been distinctly molded by the system, and, unable to garner significant and lasting cross-sectarian support, remain strongly associated within a particular sectarian community. 

Regardless of its ideological orientation, if a party hopes to achieve any sort of electoral success in Lebanon, it has to be organized along the same lines as the broader factionalized struggle for political power and resources in the country (Kingston, 2013, 44). All told, Lebanese political parties are far from being the organizations through which citizen interests are organized and represented. In fact, while they might seem diverse on the surface, most Lebanese parties share a number of key traits: they are “highly personalised and having a low degree of institutionalisation” (Catusse and Karam 2010, 22), “often devoid of platforms or ideas” (Luizard 1996, “limited by confessional representation” (El-Khazan 2003), and “reduced to patronage networks and organizations in the service of a man or a family” (Catusse and Karam 2010, 22). But they are not just ‘empty shells.’ On the contrary, Lebanese parties have a deep reach into many realms of Lebanese society including, as we shall see, those occupied by youth. Some consider the parties today to be ‘sub-societies’ as they constitute and overlap with a myriad of social and economic structures that are (re)constructed along partisan lines (Mermier and Mervin, 2012, 24). To this point, most of the major Lebanese parties have advanced to the level in which they have come to own and operate large business enterprises to support their activities financially and to provide salaries to thousands of members. Lebanese parties own

27 A good example of this phenomenon is Jumblatt’s PSP. After the crisis in 1958, the PSP, initially a cross-sectarian party, lost much of its Christian support. Subsequently its members comprised students, labour, but increasingly the urban poor—by 1975 the urban poor did in fact make up the majority of members in the party. This steered the PSP into becoming more of a provider of patronage as these members viewed Jumblatt as a “passport for jobs,” and returned his assistance in providing work with their membership in and loyalty to the party. Thus, the originally ideological PSP evolved into another clientelist network, with minimal cross-sectarian support—much like any other political party of any other local zaim. See Richani (1997, 52).
everything from gas stations, convenience stores, import-export companies, to cement companies, security companies, real-estate operations, media conglomerates, schools, hospitals, community centres, and sports teams. They are also widely known to engage in illegal activities such as money laundering, drug dealing, and cross border smuggling (Salamey 2014; Ezrow and Frantz 2013, 123). The outcome of all this is the establishment of “relatively autonomous communal infrastructure networks” whose maintenance and sustainability have been closely associated with “the prevalence of nepotistic relationship of patronage existing between members of the sectarian community and their populist leaders” (Salamey 2014, 124).

In short, the electoral system in Lebanon works to reproduce the sectarian structure by directing votes toward sectarian leaders. Accordingly, Lebanese parties have organized themselves along vertical lines of confession and clientelism: the same lines as the broader factionalized struggle for political power and resources in the country (El-Khazen 2003).

A second aspect, or ‘veto point,’ of the Lebanese system which contributed to its ‘rigidity’ was the ability of the elite to cooperate and close ranks and shut down socioeconomic reforms that would encroach on their economic power. Indeed, the overlap between members of the sectarian political elite and the country’s commercial-financial oligarchy, in concert with the willingness of rival elites to come together to veto even minor economic reforms, continues to be one of the crucial mechanisms of reproduction of the sectarian system. Elites use sectarianism to obfuscate debates about the country’s political economy, camouflage wide income disparities across regions and within sects, and impede the emergence of a trans-sectarian working class consciousness that might facilitate cross-cutting rather than identity-based affiliations (Salloukh et al. 2015, 3).
In the years prior to the civil war there were several economic proposals that sought to address socioeconomic inequalities, including, for example, efforts to formulate policies to promote the national development of industry, as well as efforts to construct a more equitable pharmaceutical regime with the hope of reducing the price of essential medicines. All such proposals, however, were “systematically blocked by the intertwining networks of parasitic capitalism and political feudalism” (Petran 1987, 110). This outcome seems especially ironic given the intensity of the rifts between Christian and Muslims during this period—rifts, however, that were no match for the desire of Lebanon’s ‘power bloc’ to reach consensus to capture the immobilized state in order to defend their class position (Kingston 2013, 45).

In the postwar era, as I discuss below, the late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri’s reconstruction plan and neoliberal economic policies worked to deepen the integration of the sectarian and economic elite. This has provided unprecedented economic advantages to Lebanese elites, at the expense of the vast majority of the Lebanese population who would have benefited from more “sound” economic development policies, as well as at the expense of transparency in state institutions (Leenders 2012).

The last veto point was (and is) the remarkable ability of confessional elites to “replace their collusion with confrontation” and mobilize in resistance to any alterations to the balance of political power sharing (Geha 2016, 59). The extreme resistance to altering the power-sharing formula is arguably a product of the consociational power-sharing system itself. One of the critiques of consociationalism, particularly when applied to a developing society with a new state, is that rather than relieving each community’s insecurities about being protected, the system actually entrenched these insecurities, as virtually all political issues and debates—no
matter how mundane—are coloured by every community’s fixation on their share and their fears of domination, if not annihilation, fears which are skillfully utilized by elites (Hudson 1976, Deutsch 1961). In such a system compromise, let alone reform, becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, as everything is seen in zero-sum terms. Thus, Lebanese elites had substantial social ‘resources’ upon which to mobilize large and increasingly powerful coalitions in defence of their communal power.

This was best symbolized in the prewar era by the substantial and intensive mobilization of the Maronites to resist any adjustment to the confessional formula. This took shape in the increasing power of the Kata’eb—a party whose existence was described as “undermining any possibility […] for an institutional restructuring of the Lebanese system” (Goria 1985, 127).\(^{28}\) Maronite mobilization on the right was paralleled by Jumblatt’s progressive socialist party and the Lebanese National Front (PSP/LNF) on the left, which opposed the Maronite-dominated sectarian order in Lebanon. The strength of both sides was also bolstered by their external and regional networks which increasingly exposed the country to external interference and significantly raised the stakes in the crisis.

Indeed, the confrontation between these two poles eliminated what little room there was left to maneuver in Lebanon’s factional political field. As we shall see, the sectarian system still lends itself to this type of profound polarization today.

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\(^{28}\) In 1976, for example, the LNF came very close to achieving a military victory over the Kata’eb, which Kingston argues could have represented a new critical juncture in the history of Lebanese politics in favour of progressive forces and might have ushered in important socioeconomic reforms. Syrian intervention put an end to this possibility, however, as Damascus intervened on the side of Kata’eb, thus “returning Lebanon to its factional roots”—ones that the Ba’thist regime in Syria could more easily manipulate and control for its own purposes (Kingston 2013, 46).
Thus, in response to the mounting challenges to the Lebanese system in the post-independence era, and the inability of that system to accommodate even the mildest reforms due to the existence of the above ‘veto points,’ Lebanon descended into war, ironically just at the moment when its state was most robust and hope for reform of its inequitable political and economic system seemed the greatest. But not even 16 years of bloody battles managed to dislodged the sectarian logic of Lebanon’s political field. The Ta’if accord, which was signed in 1989 to bring the Lebanese civil war to an end, represented little more than a slight readjustment of the power-sharing formula between the three major confessions (Maronite, Sunni, and Shi’a) that was originally agreed in the National Pact. The sectarian power-sharing agreement that many blamed for causing breakdown in the first place, was once again re-entrenched as the only viable way to govern the country—a devastatingly minor reform in response to a mountain of conflict.

Indeed, rather than producing new political directions, the civil war had the effect of deepening Lebanon’s factional politics. Not only was the confessional system reinstitutionalized as the basis of political power-sharing—albeit with a slight adjustment to Maronite power—but the incremental gains that had been made by progressive actors in the post-independence era

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29 The Ta’if agreement was made in 1989, but hostilities continued. By 1991, the fighting had totally ceased and most parties had accepted the terms of the agreement.

30 Specifically, the Ta’if accord stipulated that the powers of the president be curtailed, while more power be granted to the (Sunni) Prime Minister, to the legislature, and especially to the (Shi’a) Speaker of the House. The Ta’if accord also replaced the former 6:5 ratio of distribution of seats in Parliament to an equal distribution of 5:5 between Christians and Muslims and increased the number of seats in parliament from 99 to 108 and eventually to 128. It is interesting to note that both the Ta’if and the National Pact were supposed to be temporary agreements—and both stipulated that the government should work to eliminate the confessional system which was seen, even by those who established it, as an obstacle to national progress and as “poisoning the good relations between diverse elements of the Lebanese population” (Riyad al-Solh, quoted in Melham 1996, 71). No timeframe was ever given for this task, and there has never been any serious attempt to undertake it.
were all but reversed. Instead, the war and the postwar settlement which followed, have had the effect of strengthening the informal and increasingly factional processes of Lebanese politics, while further eroding any purposeful capacity the Lebanese state had developed in the prewar period. This outcome can be seen in many ways, two of the most significant being: the incorporation of the militia leaders and their informal war economies into the state, and the implementation of Syrian tutelage in Lebanon—both of which were stipulated in the Ta’if agreement. I now turn to an examination of these legacies.

_The Incorporation of Militia Leaders and Economies into the Postwar Political Economy: The Rise of the ‘Militia Lumpen-Elite’_

During the war, Lebanon saw the rise of new political and economic networks associated with the Lebanese militias (Picard 2005). These new and powerful networks were more sectarian, more fragmented, more hostile, and more predatory than any that had come before and soon came to supersede those of the traditional _zu’ama_—a shift Elizabeth Picard describes as moving from “clientalism to predation” (Picard 2000, 302). More crucially, the fact that the Ta’if agreement granted amnesty to the militia leaders meant that their activities and networks were incorporated into the postwar Lebanese state. Thus, these new wartime networks and actors have profoundly shaped the postwar political economy in Lebanon.

During the war the militias perpetrated a series of devastating and transformative activities including “unspeakable violence” against civilian populations, population cleansing of certain neighbourhoods and geographic areas, the creation of homogenous ‘statelets,’ the pillaging of state property, seizing control over the country’s seaports and airports, the trafficking of illegal goods, taxation of imports and exports, overseeing extensive smuggling
operations, the extortion of funds from various types of trade, businesses, and citizens for ‘protection,’ and all sorts of other illicit black market trade involving arms, drugs, oil and gas, vehicles, and even toxic waste, as well as the overall structuring of a war economy largely based on neoliberal market logic (Picard 2000).

The militias also developed, to varying degrees, an institutionalized presence during the war, as they sought to set up increasingly autonomous delivery of services to the populations under their control and jurisdiction. Militias provided extensive parastatal services such as banking, schooling, hospitals, and social services to the communities under their control—in effect, compensating for the state’s lack of services due to its collapse which militias had helped to bring about in the first place. Picard argues, in fact, that the Lebanese civil war did not constitute the eruption of disorganized anarchic violence as a by-product of the state’s collapse—it was quite the opposite. In wartime Lebanon, the militias and their pervasive, wide-ranging networks struggled to construct and defend institutional arrangements that permitted them not merely to survive, but to “manage the demands of war-making” and, more precisely, to profit from them (ibid., 305). Indeed, management of wartime economic activities became an intrinsic and integral part of the conflict between the various militias.31

Of course, many of the militias discussed here are the political parties of today.32 Of the political parties I examine in this study, two started as militias during the war: The Lebanese

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31 It is also worth noting that at the same time that this intense conflict was going on, there were also “forms of interaction, even interdependence and collaboration” between the warring militias that seemed “out of place” given the intensity of the violence (Picard 2000, 298).

32 The fact that many of the political parties have such bloody and corrupt histories as militias during the war has much to do with why the older generation (i.e., those who lived through and remember the civil war) have such distrust and animosity toward many of the political parties today. This topic is discussed later in this thesis in chapter three and four, in the context of the perceptions of the parents of today’s youth with respect to their involvement in political parties.
Forces and Hezbollah. The others had different roots. The PSP represented the network of a traditional Druze zaim (Kamal Jumblatt) as well as an established (and overlapping) ideological party. Despite Jumblatt’s intention to avoid it, the PSP did “slide into violence” once war broke out, becoming a powerful militia during the war. The Future Movement and the FPM did not begin as militias, though both have their roots in the civil war. The Future movement emerged out of the economic Sunni-oriented networks surrounding the businessman Rafiq Hariri, whereas the FPM evolved from the circles of political support (which consisted mostly of youth) surrounding the army general Michele Aoun.33

All of the militias worked to combine coercive power—often subsidized by foreign patrons—with political and economic control over distinct geographical areas of the city and the country. As the war went on these evolved to varying degrees into institutionalized ‘sectarian quasi-states’ and cantons, resulting in increasingly homogenous populations in various areas and neighbourhoods—a legacy that remains today.

Thus, whether it be the business and ‘corporatism’ of the Lebanese Forces, the ‘autonomous principality’ of the PSP, or the ‘Islamic welfare state’ of Hezbollah, the Lebanese militias provided an institutional framework, organized around the tasks of coercion and predation, that went on to profoundly shape Lebanon’s postwar political economy. More precisely, their incorporation has deepened the levels of territorial, social, and economic fragmentation (Picard 2000, 298). These predatory, antagonistic, and deeply sectarian-based

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33 These parties are discussed further in chapter seven. It also bears mentioning that there were other militias established by the traditional elites which have turned into political parties since the end of the war. Most notably these included Marada of the Franjieh family and the National Liberal Party of the Chamoun family (with their militia called the ‘tigers’). These are small parties and are not taken up in this study.
networks and their elites became the new social class that carried on their wartime activities, both political and economic, in the postwar era.\textsuperscript{34} Lebanese citizens watched as the militia leaders were granted amnesty under Ta’if’s demobilization and amnesty laws, and they became the ministers, parliamentarians, and political party leaders of postwar Lebanon. This transition from conflict into formal politics was accompanied by the translation of their wartime informal economies into the formal postwar economy. After the end of the civil war, these warlords became public officials and continued to pursue their narrow economic, and sometimes illegal, interests, only now from within Lebanon’s state institutions. As Reinoud Leenders (2012) argues, the widereaching, and inclusive nature of the Ta’if agreement further dispersed the already fragmented political power in Lebanon and allowed for the expansion of extra-institutional forms of power and authority by the elites. In short, the Ta’if agreement “failed to put Lebanon on track to build a state” (Nawaf Salam quoted in Leenders 2012, 123).

Holding political office has allowed these ‘militia-leaders-turned-politicians’ to exert influence over economic matters in general and over the vast project of national reconstruction in particular. It has spawned “unruly and predatory” forms of capital accumulation that have increased income disparities and deepened rates of poverty in the postwar era, reversing the more favourable socioeconomic conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Kingston 2013, 49). While the war’s ‘nouveaux riche’ (i.e., the militia leaders and their networks) became

\textsuperscript{34} This is not to say that the traditional elites were completely superseded, however. In fact, as Elizabeth Picard (2000) argues, many of Lebanon’s traditional \textit{zu’ama} began to participate discretely in the networks of the war’s new economic elites. While militias looked to launder their fortunes and integrate them back into the formal economy, they began to engage with the more established, prewar economic networks associated with the traditional elites. As Picard states: “one should not underestimate the discrete but continuous participation of the largest fortunes from the pre-war era in these new profitable ventures, the complex financial ties that formed between non-military elites and the new entrepreneurs who prospered in the shadow of the militia system” (Picard 2000, 298).
richer, a significant portion of the Lebanese population fell into poverty. By the end of the first
decade after the civil war extreme rates of poverty touched almost one-third of the Lebanese
population while the lower socioeconomic classes grew from 20% to 60% of the population in
the first decade after the war (Hamdan 2000, 517). The middle classes, which in 1974 were
estimated to account for approximately 60% of the population, dropped to 30% of the
population by 1999 (ibid.). This was in part due to economic decline and partially a result of yet
another legacy of the war, the outmigration of the Lebanese middle classes—the economic
backbone of the country (Nasr 1989, 157). These reversals in socioeconomic equality have
created drastic income disparities in Lebanese society which have continued into the postwar
time. However, despite heightened levels of poverty among Lebanese in the postwar period, the
government has not enacted policies that would provide for and protect its citizens (Salloukh et
al 2015). Rather, as Picard states, the post-civil war government in Lebanon is little more than
“The representative of the financial interests and former militias who now have an opportunity
to pursue their military objectives by other economic means” (2000, 318). This is a clear
indication that Lebanon’s civil war was “not a parenthesis” but has continued to shape the
country’s postwar political economy and political field (ibid.).

Pax Syriana: Reinforcing Political Sectarianism

Another significant element of the Ta’if accord which has profoundly shaped the
postwar era was the establishment of ‘special relations’ between Lebanon and Syria, providing
for Syrian ‘guardianship’ in Lebanon. The accord marked the beginning of the period of Syria’s
‘peace-building’ statecraft in Lebanon which was to last for 15 years (1990-2005). Syrian
intervention in Lebanon has had destructive consequences for the country, its politics, and people. It worked to further weaken the already frail democratic institutions of the Lebanese state, while strengthening the factional, particularistic, informal dynamics based in sect, clan, and class. Syria achieved this through several means.

The first was through its coercive power, exemplified by Syria’s swift and brutal military intervention in 1991 which brought the Lebanese civil war to an abrupt end. Following the end of the war, Syria oversaw the disbandment of the Lebanese militias (Hezbollah being the notable exception) while simultaneously deploying its troops quickly throughout the country. Syria then oversaw the expansion of the Lebanese armed forces (through Emile Lahoud, the Syrian-backed commander-in-chief of the Lebanese army) and the ‘re-indoctrination’ of Lebanese troops along Syrian lines—something which some have described as the ‘Syrianization’ of the Lebanese army.35 Moreover, the Lebanese and Syrian security apparatuses were being increasingly integrated, effectively giving Syria control over the Lebanese security apparatus and cementing Syrian hegemony in Lebanon (Salloukh 2005; Geha 2016). Combined, these manoeuvres meant that Syria, not the Lebanese state, had the monopoly of force in the country, and from 1991 until 26 April 2005 (the date of the official Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon) Syria exercised near total control over Lebanon’s domestic and foreign politics (Hinnebusch 1986; Salloukh 2005).

35 Lahoud was supposedly eliminating sectarianism from the Lebanese army, but many understood this as a mask for his real agenda, which was to ‘Syrianize’ the army. He began sending new officers, for example, to Syrian military academies. This move on the part of Lahoud is part of what was understood as the rapprochement between Lahoud and Syria that paved the way for his presidency. During this time the Lebanese army expanded from 15,000 personnel to more than 60,000 by 2000—transforming it into one of the biggest employers in the country as it provided a livelihood for more than half a million people. See Salloukh et al. (2015, 91).
Syria achieved this ‘near total control’ through its military and coercive power, but also through its intervention into the Lebanese political economy. This process had begun during the war when Syrian troops had ‘inserted themselves’ into the economic networks of the militias and the elites, taking part in looting, taxing, and re-exporting commodities such as gas, wood, iron, tires, and medicine. In the postwar era the process continued as Syria used its coercive power to dominate Lebanon’s political economy, engaging in the deep manipulation of Lebanese politics. Syria used a “two-fold strategy” of weakening the democratic institutions of the state (namely the parliament, cabinet, and executive offices) on the one hand, while simultaneously constructing a variety of dispersed and collaborative networks beneath the state, on the other (Kingston 2013, 50). For instance, because of the dispersal of power at the executive level, Syria was able to penetrate, manipulate, and instrumentalize Lebanon’s ‘three presidents’ (often referred to as the ‘troika’) and generate immobilizing dynamics at the highest levels (Geha 2016, 62). Syria also contributed to the weakening of the mechanisms of Lebanon’s electoral system, effectively promoting the ‘depoliticization’ of the Lebanese parliament (El-Khazen 2003, 67). Furthermore, Syria engaged in gerrymandering and interference in the creation of alliances and electoral lists in order to ensure the election of pro-Syrian candidates (Salloukh 2005). The high levels and extent of political interference meant that the Lebanese parliament suffered a serious loss of legitimacy, especially among Christians, and more specifically among many youth, as I show in the next chapter.

36 Toward the end of the war the estimated value of merchandise that passed through Syrian hands in whatever ways was estimated to be US$5 million a day (Picard 2000, 297-298).
In sum, Syrian intervention in Lebanon eroded Lebanon’s already feeble democratic institutions while simultaneously deepening and strengthening processes of de-institutionalization and informality, namely, the factional, particularistic, and increasingly autonomous political networks of elites that revolved around confession, clan, and class. Syria achieved this though the establishment of its coercive force, the manipulation of ‘troika’ politics, its weakening of Lebanon’s electoral system through its interference, and its use of the security apparatus to repress any opposition. Thus, despite the end of the war holding the possibility of being a critical juncture in Lebanese politics, the imposition of Syrian tutelage in Lebanon worked to reinforce sectarian dynamics and processes (Geha 2016, 63). It did so by using its coercive power to interfere in Lebanon’s political life, weaken its democratic institutions, and strengthen its parallel, informal “sectarianized regimes of power,” thus acting as a powerful feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism in Lebanon (Kingston 2013, 52).

In sum, like the Reglement Organique implemented by the Ottoman Empire in 1861, the constitution enshrined by the French in 1926, and the National Pact of 1943, the 1989 Ta’if accord once again reinstitutionalized sectarian identity as the basis for political representation. It did so, in theory, to bring an end to hostilities and encourage peace and reconciliation among Lebanon’s communities. But, as many have argued, Lebanon’s postwar settlement not only perpetuated the problem, it deepened it by incorporating former militia leaders and their informal economic networks into the state, as well as implementing “special relations” between Lebanon and Syria. The postwar settlement thus allowed for persistence of the legacies of the civil war, which has led to the expansion of the informal, extra-state power of
the elite, and the weakening of the Lebanese state. As one Lebanese scholar has remarked, “We believe the reasons behind violence in Lebanon do not lie within the previous wars but within the peace settlements that were adopted to stop them” (Beydoun 2007, 15).

I now turn to a broader discussion of the postwar era—the period of time in which the majority of youth who are the object of this study grew up. I discuss specific legacies of the civil war and the postwar settlement that have profoundly shaped this era, in particular the deepening of corruption and clientelism, and their implications for the lives of Lebanese youth.

**Corruption and Clientelism in Post-war Lebanon: The Strengthening of Informal, Particularistic Political Dynamics**

The legacies of the civil war and the postwar settlement have deepened and reinforced the dominance of informal dynamics in Lebanese politics. There have been significant “reversals,” to use Kingston’s term, in Lebanon’s state formation on the one hand, and the strengthening of the informal and increasingly autonomous sect-based networks of the Lebanese elites on the other. Elite networks have been fortified in the postwar era by two main processes: unfettered capital accumulation, symbolized by high rates of postwar corruption, and the increasingly invigorated politics of clientelism, facilitated by high rates of postwar poverty.

As discussed above, one of the legacies of the war was the continuation of unruly capitalist practices, something that deepened levels of poverty and increased income disparity in the postwar era, but also contributed to the deepening of corruption. Of course, corruption was present before the war, but in a way that has been described as operating at “manageable” and “sustainable” levels (Leenders 2012, 109; Gaspard 2004, 219). In the postwar era, however,
corruption has been transformed into “the rule rather than the exception” (Gebara 2007, 9). It
has been called “so widespread that it permeates all levels of society” and “working against the
state rather than with the state” (Wickberg 2012 quoted in Kingston 2013, 57). As the former
minister of economy, Georges Corm, remarked, corruption was “robbing the country twice,
once during the war and again after it” (quoted in Kingston 2013, 57).

To understand how this came to be, we can look to the election of Rafiq Hariri, the
country’s first prime minister after the war. Hariri, a businessman who made his fortune in
construction in Saudi Arabia, instituted an ambitious reconstruction plan (called Horizon 2000)
which embodied a series of neoliberal economic reforms and spawned a new era of political
corruption (Leenders 2012). Hariri sought to “turn back the clock back to the pre-civil-war
period” and restore the country to its previous role as the financial and commercial centre for
the region (a status it has lost to Amman, Dubai, and Doha) and turn Beirut into “the Singapore
of the Middle East” (Hariri quoted in Denoeux and Springborg 1998). Initially, Hariri’s plan was
successful in promoting the recapitalization of the country and achieving high rates of growth in
the early postwar period. But Hariri’s plan also provided Lebanese postwar elites with new and
vast opportunities to continue their self-enriching practices, evident from the sheer size of state
investment after the war—something which was risky for a country of its size (Leenders 2012,
214). Writing in 1998, Denoeux and Springborg described Hariri as having made a “Faustian
Bargain” with Lebanon’s postwar elites—one that would leave the reconstruction effort to
Hariri, his backers, Gulf partners, and the banks he controlled—while the state stayed out of
the reconstruction process. More implicitly, the bargain Hariri made with the postwar elites was
that the state would neither be modernized nor overhauled, but rather left as an arena for
negotiation and bargaining among the leaders of the various sects, who used their control over segments of the state apparatus to “distribute patronage to their respective constituencies and thus preserve their power and position” (Denoeux and Springborg 1998, 172).

Unsurprisingly, in this context of a co-opted state, unchecked capitalism, lack of basic social services, and rampant corruption, the majority of Lebanese have felt the effects of intensifying socioeconomic disparities in the postwar period. In 2008, one study conducted by the International Poverty Centre of the UNDP found that nearly 28% of the Lebanese population could be considered ‘poor’ and an additional 8% were considered ‘extremely poor.’ Regional income disparities were also striking and mirrored prewar conditions, only in a much more extreme form; for example, nearly half (46.9%) of the population in the Northern regions of Akkar fell into the category of ‘extremely poor’ compared to .9% of Beirutis (UNDP 2008). In 2013, the World Bank estimated that those earning less than USD$9,000 annually (defined as lower-class) has grown to encompass approximately 69% of the population, and the middle class (defined as USD$15-27,000) had shrunk to less than 28% of the population.37 This stands in stark contrast to the prewar years (1960-1970) when the middle class comprised between 50-60% of the population. Though remittances serve as a cushion for many families, there can be little doubt that life has become more difficult for the great majority of Lebanese.38

37 As of 2011, the World Bank defines ‘middle class’ as someone with earnings of approximately USD$15,000–27,000 annually, and ‘lower class’ as earning USD$10,000 annually. The World Bank estimates that only 5-10% fall into the middle-class category, while 70% of the population generates an annual income of less than $10,000 and 15% live in abject poverty. See World Bank (2014).

38 According to the World Bank, in 2014 the percentage of households earning less than USD$800 a month declines when taking into consideration those families who benefit from remittances. Moreover, the proportion of young people dropping out of schools and universities to enter the labour market is higher among families who do not benefit from remittances. The study also showed that 61.4% of recipient Lebanese households use their remittances for food expenses, while 58.9% use them for accommodations, and 53.9% to improve their living
Youth are disproportionately affected by poverty and economic decline as they have a harder time finding employment. Youth unemployment rates are staggering in Lebanon, reaching over 35% in 2014.\(^{39}\) Even educated youth suffer from poverty because of their inability to find work. For instance, 20% of university graduates considered ‘middle class or above’ are unemployed, and one-third of extremely poor university graduates are unemployed (Kawar and Tzannatos 2013). This means that even when people are able to break out of the cycle of lack of education, and obtain a university degree, they still face major obstacles when it comes to finding a job, especially one that is commensurate with their educational level (ibid.).

While the legacies of the civil war and the postwar settlement have contributed to worsening levels of poverty and the dramatic rise in income disparity, at the same time they have also allowed for the expansion and scope of clientelist networks. There are three main forms of clientelism which have expanded in the postwar period: bureaucratic clientelism, electoral clientelism, and more “institutionalized” forms of clientelism.

Bureaucratic clientelism in the postwar era, when the number of public sector jobs ballooned dramatically, is related to the carving out of personal zones of influence and control within the state by the elites (and especially between the ‘troika’) who then dole out public sector jobs to their clientele. The political elite interface with every nook and cranny of public standards. Lebanon is the 18th-largest recipient of remittances globally. Remittances are clearly a crucial pillar of the Lebanese economy (World Bank 2014).

\(^{39}\) This statistic is from the World Bank (2013). It is important to note, however, that statistics regarding youth unemployment in Lebanon significantly vary from source to source, and depending on the definition of the youth age bracket (Harb 2016). The national youth policy document endorsed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports places unemployment at the alarming figure of 66%, for youth aged between 15 and 29. Other studies place this number at radically different rates: 15% (YEF 2012, for the same youth bracket of 15-29); 19.7% (Chaaban 2008, also for the youth bracket of 15-29); 34.3% (Chaaban 2013, for a youth bracket of 15-24, and vis-à-vis a general unemployment rate of 15%); and 24% (Kawar and Tzannatos 2013, for a youth bracket of 15-25).
sector appointments and use them to “lubricate” their clientelist networks (Salloukh et al. 2015, 45). Hiring anyone, from a Director General down to a clerk, requires the approval of the sectarian political elite. The various units of the state have thus become personally identified with a specific elite and seen as being under his autonomous control. Though all the communities have varying degrees of access to the state, these dynamics have become the most “routinized” between the “three presidents” (Leenders 2012, 142). Moreover, public expenditures are also allocated based on sectarian and demographic considerations rather than the developmental needs of the country’s widely economically unbalanced regions (Salloukh et al. 2015, 45).

A second type of patronage that has thrived in the postwar era is electoral clientelism. Indeed, per capita electoral spending in Lebanon is among the highest in the world (Salloukh 2009). There is, for example, widespread vote-buying, as well as ‘strategic investments’ in the form of grants from foundations associated to the elite, increased services or new infrastructure for communities, especially those in highly contested areas, all of which take place in advance of elections. In the postwar era this practice has been dubbed ‘asphalt politics.’

Finally, there has also been the tremendous proliferation of the more ‘institutionalized’ forms of sect-based clientelism. These range from the increase in hospitals, schools, and social welfare agencies (Cammett 2014), to sports teams (Reiche 2011), community centres, orphanages, NGOs, ‘extracurricular’ youth programs, and even care for the elderly—which are run by or affiliated with political elites and/or their political parties. One example particularly

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40 This is also a play on words as the Arabic word for ‘asphalt’ can also be used to describe excrement.
relevant to this study is the educational and recreational programmes for young people.

Education, of course, is a key institution through which national identities and notions of citizenship are shaped. In the postwar era, the vast majority of Lebanese youth attend schools run by their sectarian communities, each of which implicitly promotes its own visions of Lebanon. By not meeting its responsibility to provide universal and compulsory education to its young citizens, the Lebanese state has allowed for the ‘colonization’ of the educational system by the sectarian elites and thus facilitated communal modes of identification among youth over more national or ‘civic’ ones.

Another example is the ‘extra-curricular’ programmes for youth promoted by the political parties, and in particular, their scouting programs—the most stunning version being Hezbollah’s Mahadi Scouts. The Mahadi Scouts is the first and most extensive of the scouting programmes and the one with the largest membership—close to 45,000 youth. Hezbollah may have been the first to organize a scouting movement, but the other political parties quickly caught on. The Lebanese Forces, Future Movement, the PSP—now all have their own scouting movements, all of which are designed to renew the social base of the parties (Christian Science Monitor 2 February 2011).

The various forms of clientelism are what connect conditions of poverty and socioeconomic insecurity to deepening sectarian sentiment in the postwar era. The depth and breadth of the patronage networks of the political elites contribute to a “distorted incentive structure” for Lebanese citizens (Salloukh et al. 2015). Indeed, where almost 50% of the Lebanese population have depended upon some kind of private social welfare, the “intensified provision of social services along lines of sect and clan has generated strong senses of
communal belonging and loyalty, especially among the poor and their helpers” (Kochuyt 2004, 518). This creates a sense and experience of one’s citizenship and belonging that is based not on rights but on (confessionally-based) relationships and privileges, bestowed from above. For youth on the inside of a political network this often comes in the form of opportunities for employment.

Employment/unemployment is one of the main preoccupations among youth. In a country where the unemployment rate among youth is a staggering 24%, securing jobs is a constant source of stress even among middle- and upper-class youth. Many young people remain under- or unemployed, unable to afford to marry, and thus often find themselves living in the family home, and caught in a “state of perpetual adolescence” (Singerman 2007, 42). Even when they marry some remain in the family house because of the financial constraints of purchasing or renting their own home. The paucity of opportunities for employment also forces many youth to leave their country, family, and friends in search of jobs elsewhere in the region. Though there is no in-depth research on this issue specifically, several studies indicate that youths’ access to employment is often substantively impacted by their wasta—their ability to access opportunities and benefits through their relationships (Cammett 2014; Favier 2004; Makhoul and Harrison 2004). Youth themselves commonly invoke this issue as one of the main hindrances in securing their livelihood in Lebanon. In this context one’s connection with

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41 In its Global Wealth Databook 2014 report, Credit Suisse states that 0.3 percent of the Lebanese population own 50% of its wealth. (Credit Suisse 2014, 24, 108).
42 Studies on youth and unemployment in Lebanon cite several reasons for high rates of youth unemployment including the insufficient development of the legal framework governing the labour policy sector and the ineffective role of the National Employment office in the ministry of labour, as well as unequal access to education, poor linkages between education levels and types of education, and the absence of an effective employment policy associated with private firms (see Kawar and Tzannatos 2013).
43 The term ‘Wasta’ refers to using connections to obtain benefits.
and participation in partisan networks certainly facilitates finding employment, with the most committed partisans having easier times securing a job. According to my own interviews, as well as survey data collected by Chatterji (2009) and the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (2013), accessing opportunities for employment plays a role in youth’s decision to join and remain within partisan networks. Parties recruit members and secure loyalty through a range of strategies and activities including offers of public service jobs, the provision of health, education, and social welfare services, economic incentives, vote-buying, fighter recruitment, political education programmes, and so on. As one mother of a recent high school graduate, and a Beiruti Sunni, explained:

When my son graduated from high school he needed to find work. We heard that there were openings at the Securité Générale—up to 300 places for new recruits. We heard that a third of these would go to Sunnis. But to get in you had to go to Rafiq al-Hariri. It was really that clear. To get a Sunni job you had to go to the strongest Sunni leader. So we went to a person we knew who was very close to Hariri and thankfully everything worked out and my son got a job. After that, we all became his followers. Because if he doesn’t care for us, then nobody else will.44

Given these circumstances, it is unsurprising to learn that sectarian sentiment has become more open and pervasive since the end of the civil war. In contrast to the prewar period when expressions of confessional sentiment were described as being “nuanced, subtle, and furtive,” in the postwar period they are characteristically “much more invasive,” intruding into “virtually every national discourse and public issue,” and sparking “confessional hostility and anxiety” (Khalaf 2003, 132). Theodore Hanf’s most recent survey of Lebanese attitudes and values showed that solidarity with one’s religious community has continued to strengthen in

44 Abbas, interview with author, Beirut, December 2008.
postwar Lebanon: in 2002, two-thirds of Lebanese expressed it; in 2006, four-fifths.45 As Khalaf summarizes, today more Lebanese are “brandishing their confessionalism as both emblem and armor. Emblem because confessional identity has become the most viable medium for asserting presence and securing vital needs and benefits... Armor because it has become a shield against real or imagined threats” (Khalaf 2003, 113).

To conclude, due to the multiple legacies of the civil war and the postwar settlement, including the deepening of processes such as corruption and clientelism after the war ended, the formal bureaucratic power of the Lebanese state has been at its weakest yet in the postwar era—eroded as it is by the informal power of Lebanon’s powerful elites. Since the end of the civil war Lebanese political elites have rarely even attempted to agree on even the most basic of reforms that could help the development of at least a minimal public sector.46 Instead, they have simply competed for the right to control and instrumentalize different pieces of the state apparatus, and allocated public sector jobs according to sectarian formulas rather than the needs of the country. Though it appears that there is persistent competition and conflict between them—and there is—it is also true that Lebanese elites are highly cooperative in achieving their aims. They are in concert when it comes to ensuring the weakness of the state through strengthening its neo-patrimonial role as the distributor of patronage, while also using it as one of the principle agents to enforce and protect unruly capitalistic practices. Indeed,

45 There was little difference between confessions on this matter: 79% of Muslims expressed solidarity with their sect and an even higher 84% of Christians did (Hanf 2007).
46 In fact, Lebanon’s postwar elites have continually rallied to veto reformist efforts—even resorting to coercion against actors within civil and political society (Kingston 2013, 61). Calls for the formulation of policies that would see the development of the country’s agriculture and industrial sectors have been repeatedly ignored or shut down as have similar efforts to address rampant rates of poverty through the development of more extensive social assistance (Kochuyt 2004, 521). Even the feeble NSSF, developed in the Chehabist period, has been sorely inadequate at addressing the widening socio-economic gaps that have emerged.
whereas many accounts of the postwar Lebanese state depict it as “absent,” Leenders emphasizes the “omnipresent” and important role of the state as an arena in which Lebanese elites engage in fierce struggles over the building (or non-building) of state institutions while “utterly disregarding” the universal application of bureaucratic rules (2012, 232). The state, he argues, is a “major ingredient” in the strategies of the elite aimed at self-enrichment (2012, 231). Thus, Lebanon’s postwar elites make use of the power of the state in two paradoxical ways. First, by taking advantage of its weakness they have transformed corruption into a routinized practice in the postwar period. Second, by taking advantage of its authoritarian potential they are able to use their negotiated access to specific parts of the state to protect and promote their more particularistic accumulations—creating a classic example of what Migdal calls “dispersed domination” (Kingston 2013, 58; Migdal 2001, 129).

What it All Means for Youth: How Civil War Legacies Shape the Lives of the ‘Postwar’ Generation

Today’s young Lebanese live in a country dominated by informal, factional politics characterized by clientelism, endemic corruption, personalization of power, the weak rule of law, and a state that is co-opted, carved into pieces, and utilized to buttress the informal networks of power of the elites. Ironically, this has meant that the ‘postwar’ generation of Lebanese youth, who are so often heralded as the country’s great hope for democracy, are actually growing up in a society where sectarian dynamics (i.e., the powerful informal, factional networks of the elite and the modes of communal identification they help to produce) are now more deeply embedded than they were when war broke out. Besides the significant impact of high rates of youth unemployment discussed above, there are other ways in which this
factional and communal context shapes the lives of young Lebanese, one of which is the fact that young Lebanese today grow up in far more homogenous communities than their parents did. This sectarianization of Lebanon’s geography is a direct result of the civil war. Because of the fierce fighting that took place in Beirut’s centre and its surrounding areas, there were massive population shifts as people moved into neighbourhoods more defined by sect. It took ‘no time at all’ for virtually all major public and private institutions and businesses—including universities, schools, banks, embassies, travel agencies, and the like—to take measures to establish headquarters or branch offices in more than one district (Khalaf 2003, 127). The result was the creation of increasingly self-sufficient and communally homogenous enclaves. Prior to the outbreak of the war, residential neighbourhoods were often mixed, and people travelled to a variety of places in order to access services. After the war, this became less necessary, let alone desirable. The result is that today’s youth are living, going to school, working, shopping, and socializing within more homogenous circles. As Khalaf states, it is a compelling notion that “generations of children and adolescents have grown up thinking that their social world could not extend beyond the confines of the ever smaller communities within which they have been trapped” (ibid.). Calling this situation a “geography of fear,” Khalaf pessimistically adds, “What is unsettling in all this is that (people) don’t seem to particularly resent such restrictions” (ibid. loc. cit.). I return to this issue in chapter six in the context of discussing the lack of public space available for youth, and the role political party offices play in offering young people a place to socialize with their friends away from the ever-watchful gaze of their families.

The Lebanese media must also be considered. In fact, Lebanon has a long history of freedom of the press and censorship is nowhere near as stringent as it can be in other countries
of the region (although journalists and bloggers will often self-censor for their personal safety) (Melki 2010; Alabaster 2011). The problem is that nearly all media are (fully or partially) owned by the networks of the political elite. Future TV is associated with Hariri’s Future Movement, LBC is associated with the Lebanese Forces, Al Manar is associated with the Hezbollah, NBN with the Shiite parliamentary speaker and head of the Amal movement, Nabih Berri, and Orange TV (OTV) is affiliated with the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, Michel Aoun. Though they all profess to be ‘pan-Lebanese’ it is apparent that they contain (sometimes overt, sometimes subtle) biases in their coverage that correspond to their political affiliation. Those biases become apparent when one observes the attention (or lack thereof) various networks pay to specific events, the political leanings of their talk shows, and even the nature of their children’s programming (see Cochrane 2007; Melki and Mallat 2014; Lamloum 2009). These sectarian and elite-based media networks are extremely well financed in comparison to more independent news sources. Their dominance not only limits the space for advancing independent perspectives, or the possibility of contesting opposing discourses without appearing partisan, it also means that Lebanese youth grow up consuming biased political opinions and depictions of other sects. When 60% of youth list TV as the “most credible” source of news, it becomes evident that Lebanon’s partisan media ‘ecosystem’ imposes a sectarian lens on the interpretation of any national or local issue (Melki and Mallat 2014). In the absence of strong secular forces in the country, this sectarian media environment fractures

47 For a particularly stark examination of the impact of sectarian media on children and youth, as well as their “hybrid” political views, see Al Jurdo, Jouni, and Habbal (2015).
48 This statistic compares with 27.5% who see the most credible news source as the Internet and 2.1% who see the most credible news source as newspapers (UNESCO 2015).
the public sphere even further, effectively dividing it into smaller sectarian public spheres that rarely interact despite overlapping interests (Melki and Mallat 2014; see also Dawahare 2000).

Given that youth are growing up in these more segregated circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising to see an erosion of trust among them (Yassin 2012). At first glance, social interaction and relations among young Lebanese appear convivial, but interviews and recent research on this subject reveal a more complex picture. Youth from different communities and backgrounds do socialize and interact with one another in certain spheres of life, such as the university campus; but, when it comes to trusting others, this appears to be limited to a small inner circle and does not often encompass members from different sects or even clan backgrounds (UNESCWA 2009). One study conducted in 2006, for example, found that among Lebanese youth in three neighbourhoods in Beirut, only 6.3% trusted “most or many people,” whereas 94% of respondents declared that they trust only close relatives and their closest friends (Khawajaa, Abdulrahimc, Soweidc, and Karama 2006). These data are supported by other studies which show that, two decades after the war, Lebanese communities still tend to have negative images of ‘other’ communities and positive images of themselves. Theodore Hanf’s 2007 survey, for example, showed that across all of the communities levels of distrust had actually increased after 2005—the tumultuous period of the youth-led protests associated with the Independence Intifada and the deepening of the political rift which came afterward.49

In my interviews with Lebanese youth, it was also common to hear ethnocentric interpretations of history, and specifically of the civil war. It is an oft-cited fact that Lebanese

49 In the following two chapters I look at how youth political participation has increasingly been channelled into the partisan political parties after 2005, and the role partisan youth play in contributing to this.
schools offer no curriculum of the civil war. “Apparently Lebanese history ended in 1943,” quipped one sarcastic history graduate of the American University in Beirut (AUB). Numerous studies of Lebanon remark on the deliberate state policy of ‘amnesia’ when it comes to remembering and commemorating the war (Barak 2007; Launchbury, Célestin, DalMolin, Tamraz, 2014; Haugbolle 2010b; Hout 2012; Launchbury, Célestin, DalMolin, and Tamraz 2014).

There has never been an agreed-upon educational curriculum on the civil war history, nor any successful attempts to create a national day of remembrance or war memorials to acknowledge (if not begin to deal with the legacies of) the civil war. One youth stated: “We sort of have a taboo when it comes to discussing the war, at least in my generation we do, because the truth is it never really ended... My generation doesn’t know what really happened.”

Though many of the research participants in this study were still young (if yet even born) when the war ended, stories of the war nonetheless featured prominently in discussions with youth about today’s politics. During the campaigns for the parliamentary elections in May 2009, for example, there were many instances of the war’s central role in the political discourses of young party activists. Young activists recalled war ‘memories’ that they were never party to, but which featured prominently in their explanations of their political goals. Most of the events they cited were of examples of political violence perpetrated against their communal group during the war and long before they were born. Slogans such as “we will

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50 Rabah, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
51 Note, in May 2016 the first museum dedicated to the war, called ‘Beit Beirut,’ opened in Beirut. It represents the fruits of a long struggle for a museum about the war by a small group of Lebanese activists and their French backers.
52 Craig Larkin (2010) refers to this as ‘post-memory,’ meaning the memory of a generation who have grown up dominated not by traumatic events that preceded their birth but by the narrative accounts of them. He states: “This residual form of memory carries and connects with the pain of others, suffusing temporal frames and liminal positions” (Larkin 2010, 616).
never forget as long as the sky is blue,” which highlighted significant wartime events as well as images of assassinated politicians and leaders, were ubiquitous among young party supporters. A study conducted in 2009 by UN-ESCWA on communal tensions among youth reported similar findings. That study quoted youth from the Marada party in North Lebanon, for instance, referring to the Ehden Massacre and the assassination of former Minister and Member of Parliament Tony Frangieh and his family on 13 June 1978, calling it a “central feature in the collective memory of young supporters of the Marada movement” (UNESCWA 2009, 15). For some Druze youth the example was the “War of the Mountain,” which referred to the violent clashes that occurred in 1983 in the Chouf and Aley districts between Christian and Druze militias. This wartime event shaped the perceptions of Druze youth of their Christian counterparts, in spite of the political alliances they now have and in spite of the fact it happened before they were born. As one young Druze participant candidly put it “They have murdered us; they committed massacres and war crimes. We can never forget that” (quoted in UNESCWA 2009, 16).

**Longing for Lebanon: Political Ambivalence and Hybridity among Youth in Lebanon**

When one realizes the strength and ubiquitous nature of sectarian networks and dynamics in Lebanon, and the extent to which youth are surrounded by and embedded within them, the question of why youth still support political leaders and their parties becomes much less of a puzzle. Yet despite the strength of this context, my research as well as other recent studies indicate that many educated youth are also very critical of the sectarian political system and the political class, and express high levels of dissatisfaction with the rampant state
corruption. Thus, one of the arguments I advance in this thesis is that the politics of most Lebanese youth are ambivalent—comprising an amalgam of political perspectives, desires, and attitudes. Lebanese youth are political ‘hybrids’—caught between their sect-based identities and affiliations on the one hand and their desires for a more peaceful, democratic, and equitable country on the other. Their notions of Lebanese citizenship are still often tied up with their sectarian affiliations. But as other survey data have shown, youth express seemingly contradictory—some would say ‘schizophrenic’—views toward politics in their country.53 The survey conducted in 2008 by Chatterji, for example, found that 79% of university students strongly agreed with the statement “our political system is not democratic” and only a mere 3% of were “satisfied with the way democracy is exercised” in Lebanon. Moreover, 92% agreed with the statement: “there is a great deal of corruption and favoritism in the political administration of my country,” and 80% felt that “it is possible to improve our political system by a series of non-radical and nonviolent reforms.” What is more, a whopping 91% agreed with the statement that a “change in mentality” was needed. Puzzlingly, however, despite this clearly expressed disapproval of the political status quo and desire for change, this survey also showed that these same youth articulated support for a specific sect-based political party leader and tended to vote for that party (or political coalition) in their student elections.54 In my own interviews, most youth articulated similarly contradictory views. On the one hand they expressed the desire for a more Weberian ideal-type state; as one young person stated, “we

53 In a recent report on social classes and political power in Lebanon, Fawaz Traboulsi refers to the “political schizophrenia” of the Lebanese middle class, citing both the middle-class support for civic movements as well as populist sectarian movements, such as Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, in the postwar era (Traboulsi 2014, 54).

54 As I will discuss further in chapter four, Lebanese youth are unable to vote until the age of 21, so university elections are often the only venue for the expression of their political views.
want the rule of law not the rule of zaims.” But with their next breath they would then go on to profess their support and admiration for precisely one of these zaims.

Why is this? A likely explanation is many youth are well aware that their support of partisan networks will bring benefits, and though they decry the system of wasṭa, neither do they want to forgo the opportunities it brings. While the contempt youth have for the practice is “nearly universal,” as Heiko Wimmen states, so is “the urge not to be left behind in the scramble for the spoils” (Wimmen 2007).

Lebanese youth, after all, want the same types of things that youth all over the world want: jobs, scholarships, to get married, a secure future, fun, and time to socialize with their peers—desires that have little to do with sectarianism, and which neither contribute to nor detract from sectarianism. The problem arises in the ways they find to meet these goals.

For example, youth often expressed a complete disrespect for the Lebanese state as an institution in its current form. The view of the state that was often communicated was one of a state which fails in its responsibility to meet the needs of its citizens. In interviews youth described the state as a place of “corruption, criminal cover-ups, sectarian tension, foreign intervention, nepotism.” As one young woman explained: “the state gives us no security, and there are not equal rights between us. Equal opportunities are non-existent.” As another young research participant stated, “It is unequal opportunities that are an indicator of the dysfunction of the political system.” Youth clearly see the state has having been ‘sub-

55 Kayrouz, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008. Note that similar views were expressed in interviews by youth of every confessional background.
57 Research participant quoted in study on communal tension among Lebanese youth conducted by Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA 2009, 19).
contracted’ to the politicians and political parties and communal leaders. “Because the state is weak, absent, and because it can’t serve its citizens, it is normal that a political leader offers services provided that the citizens vote for him,” explained one research participant.58 Youth “long for real public services that we can all depend on no matter what our background” and “an end to wasta”. However, in order to meet their needs and goals and to satisfy their desires, most youth have little option but to turn toward the networks of political elites for access to opportunities. Across community, youth expressed this as “the way to get things done.” As one youth stated: “When we want a job we go directly to our representative. It is easy and guaranteed.” Another articulated the contradiction in this way: “We re-elect the same political leaders to positions in the state because we are in need of services and job opportunities from them that the state should provide us with.”59

Yet to think of these clientelistic relationships as simply instrumental, transactional, or ‘one-shot’ exchanges would be to misunderstand much of their significance as well as the perspective of youth themselves.60 Though these shorter-term exchanges exist, I suggest that the clientelist relationships between elites and their young supporters also include deeper and more enduring bonds, which complicate their other political desires for greater democracy and meritocracy. Described by youth as “intimate,” “strong,” “warm,” and “natural,” patron-client relationships clearly carry emotional weight and meaning for many youth. This is contrary to much of the literature on clientelism which tends to view patron-client relationships as political

60 Such as the simple transaction of vote-buying, for example. For an excellent piece on vote-buying in Lebanon see Corstange 2012.
choices rooted in coercion and manipulation, or as a strategically played ‘game.’ This literature, however, tends to overlook what Javier Auyero describes as “a much more complex reality of enduring and long-lasting relationships, narratives and identities,” not to mention, Auyero adds, “common sense” (Auyero 2001, 231). Along these lines Lebanese anthropologist Sami Hermez, for example, looks at how clientelism in Lebanon not only provides material security, it also provides the necessary basis for the preservation of people’s dignity—a deeper, more symbolic, and emotional element (Hermez 2011).

Similarly, the ties between youth and the political parties provide these types of non-material benefits. Suad Joseph, for example, argues that the political networks of the elite are often grounded in real or symbolic kin-like relationships. Political leaders, she states, “use the norms, idioms, and moralities of kinship and the mobilisation of these codes into their political practice” (Joseph 2011, 156). Most zu’ama maintain the loyalties of their followers—even as they shift their own political alignments at the national level—by providing highly personalized, local service to their followers on a patron-client basis. Because of the relatively short distance from the bottom to the top in this small scale society, partisan networks easily connect the average citizen to the top political leaders of the country, and these political relationships are often grounded in or animated by family or idiomatic family relations (ibid.). As Salloukh et al. (2015, 4) state, “sectarian elites deploy kinship as a tool of political control” which means that leaders are not held to account according to a generalized set of publicly agreed upon standards and principles but rather to the subjective morality of a highly personal, intimate and kin-like relationship.
Characteristically, in interviews youth would often refer to their leader as “a father to me” and the party as a “family.” As one Future movement supporter stated: “I joined Future because for me there was no one but Hariri. I loved him like a father.”61 In fact, many asserted that their loyalty was based in genuine love and often brushed aside criticisms of their leaders with expressions of personal forgiveness. Indeed, while youth want a more Weberian-type state on the one hand, on the other most also see their own leaders as “facilitators” and “saviours” who make up for the weakness of the state rather than as the ones who are contributing to its weakness. They dislike the system of patronage (wasta) that predominates, yet they will not forgo the opportunity to use it. Indeed, both Chatterji’s survey and another conducted by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies in 2013 showed that close to three-quarters of Lebanese youth consider political connections as an important factor in finding a job. Clearly, youth see wasta as a legitimate ‘back-up’ given the inability of the state to provide and create equal opportunities. Their leaders, therefore, are seen as the defenders of their—and their community’s—rights: “Our rights (in Lebanon) are preserved only by the leader of our confession; a Shiite wouldn’t defend a Christian and vice versa,” explained one student.62 The blame for corruption and state weakness is then placed outside of themselves and their communities and onto the state itself or onto other leaders and groups.

What is more, this phenomenon is especially alive within middle- and upper-class educated Lebanese youth—the main category of youth I examine in this study. A survey of 300 university students conducted in 2013 by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and

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International Alert (an international peace-building NGO) revealed that to find jobs 55% of students use social connections above all other means such as job advertisements, employment offices, and job fairs (LCPS 2013). Moreover, the study showed that 21% of youth from middle- and upper-middle-income families feel that an MP, once elected, should provide personal services—as opposed to 8% of those coming from lower-income brackets. The report goes on to state those youth “whose families have a higher income are more likely to resort to social connections.” After all, the report claims, “their family members seem to be well placed economically and it would be a missed opportunity not to tap into this network and find a job in a country where wasta is the rule and not the exception.”63 This sheds light on why sectarianism persists among educated middle- and upper-class youth.

In sum, many youth turn to their sectarian communities to meet their goals and desires, not necessarily out of deeply held sectarian beliefs, but because the networks facilitate their ability to pursue (and obtain) their (very ordinary) goals. The result is a paradoxical outcome for youth’s political attitudes and views in that their perception of the state as weak, corrupt, and illegitimate is deepened, along with their frustrations with the political system, on the one hand, while their view of their own leaders—the very group who instrumentalize the state in ways that perpetuate its weakness in the first place—is positively enhanced.

Despite their frustrations with the political class, youths’ rejection of the ‘old guard’ is ambivalent and incomplete. Given their hybrid and ambivalent political views, we can see how many youth-led initiatives for change, such as the protests associated with the Independence

63 The study also shows, unsurprisingly, that those who feel that their “sect defines their identity” and those “whose family have connections to religious leaders” are much more likely to resort to political connections and those who do not hold this view are more likely to emigrate (LCPS 2013).
Intifada, for example, are open to being co-opted by the sect-based political parties and elites—just as the civil actors of the 1960s and 70s discussed earlier were. My added contribution to this picture, however, is that partisan youth (i.e., youth who have affiliations and sympathies to the major parties) actively contribute to the co-optation and/or demobilization of otherwise independent youth movements—it is not just the result of elite manipulation and instrumentalization. Though scholars tend to highlight the work of leftist and independent youth who challenge the sectarian system, my point is that the political role of youth is often more ambiguous. Because of the hybrid and ambivalent politics of most Lebanese youth, they may not be the vanguards of Lebanon’s future democracy as so many hope.64

In this chapter I have shown how Lebanon’s sectarian path-dependent political field is not the result of an enduring political culture or of primordial religious identities. Rather, it is the result of relatively recent historical processes including the interventions of colonial and other external actors and the networking of the local elites they privileged. These interventions set Lebanon on its sectarian path—a path which became increasingly self-reinforcing as networking elites and the various ‘veto points’ of the Lebanese system worked to ensure its persistence, even in the face of substantial challenges from various levels of society and even in the face of war.

As I have discussed, the persistence of informal and factional networks over the formal processes and institutions have persisted into the post-civil war era, structuring Lebanon’s

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64 Interestingly, Fawaz Traboulsi makes a similar point about the Lebanese middle class in general, citing both the support for civic movements as well as populist sectarian movements, such as Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement, that has come from the middle class in the postwar era (Traboulsi 2014).
political economy in a way that serves to reinforce the divided and asymmetrical nature of political power and ensuring that informal processes are hegemonic over the formal apparatus of the state. On the one hand this fragmented political arena has meant no one community has ever achieved overarching political authority and thus Lebanon avoided the authoritarian fate of many other countries in the Arab region. Indeed, Lebanon’s political arena leaves room for many forms of lively and adversarial political movements and groups to take hold. On the other hand, however, Lebanon’s political field is one in which power is fragmented and informal dynamics are hegemonic, with the result that it is extremely difficult to change. This hybrid nature of Lebanon’s political field has given birth to other forms of hybridity as well—namely, the ambivalent and mixed political views and attitudes of many educated Lebanese youth. Young Lebanese today love their parties’ politicians while hating the system of politics. They disparage the system of clientelism, but do not forgo participation within it. This is the context in which youth politics play out, and where, as I argue in the chapters that follow, the networking and activism of partisan youth constitute a feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism among a sizeable cohort in the Lebanon’s youth population.
Chapter Three
From Student Movement to Partisan Mobilization

Although partisan and sectarian dynamics have been present in Lebanese youth politics for some time, they have not always defined them as profoundly as they do today. In fact, in the decades prior to the civil war (the 1960s and 1970s), Lebanon saw the emergence of a more unified, ideological movement among youth and students demanding greater equality in education. Though these grievances overlapped with those rooted in confession, at their core they were about students’ rights and student equality, and demanding the reform of Lebanon’s inequitable educational system was a way to address the inequalities of Lebanese society. But as the tension between the various poles of Lebanese politics mounted in the years leading up to the civil war, which began in 1975, this student movement became divided and then collapsed. Student and youth politics, as a force of its own, all but disappeared from the Lebanese political scene for the next two decades.

In the postwar era (i.e., 1990 onward), Lebanese youth and students were largely disengaged from and apathetic toward politics in their country because, in their view, politics were inextricably linked to the evils of war, and thus something to be avoided (Younes 2003). There was one notable exception, however, namely, the young Lebanese who endeavoured to resist Syrian hegemony. While a small number of these youth were independent, leftist activists seeking a new political platform of their own outside of the traditional leftist parties, the majority had more partisan leanings, specifically to the two rival Christian parties that had been banned in the postwar era: Samir Geagea’s Lebanese Forces (LF), and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of General Michel Aoun. As I discuss, during the postwar period when these...
leaders were absent from the political scene, the clandestine and determined activism of these partisan youth kept the message and the spirit of these parties—and their leaders—alive in the minds of Lebanese society.¹ From the mid-1990s and into the early 2000s, it was these youth, in conjunction with independent leftist youth and the Druze youth of Walid Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) who joined later, who laid the foundations for the protests of the Independence Intifada of 2005.

The protests associated with the 2005 Independence Intifada were the largest protests in Lebanon’s history—and they were spearheaded by Lebanese youth. Young Lebanese came to the streets of Beirut, many journeying to the city for the first time, in hopes this was the beginning of revolutionary change in their country (Young 2010). These protests reawakened youth to their political potential. It also, however, reminded the politicians of the same thing. Though the protests succeeded in forcing Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon, the Independence Intifada does not produce any fundamental change in the political trajectory of Lebanese politics. Though it had the potential to be a critical juncture, in the end the intifada failed to produce any new political direction (Geha 2016; Clark and Zahar 2015). Rather, even without Syria’s ‘protectorate’ in Lebanon, what the Independence Intifada revealed was that the factional, sectarian dynamics that have long characterized Lebanese politics were deeply embedded and capable of regeneration in spite of this major political disruption. Indeed, the post-2005 era has been characterized by the deepening of these factional sectarian divisions and dynamics. This is also true at the level of youth politics. Since the 2005 Intifada, increasing

¹ Samir Geagea, leader of the Lebanese Forces, was imprisoned in Lebanon from 1994-2005. Michel Aoun was in exile in France from 1991-2005. Both returned after the Independence Intifada.
numbers of youth have opted to support one of the major parties or coalitions (either March 14th or March 8th) of the Lebanese divide. After years of “searching for partisans” (El-Khazen 2003), Lebanon’s sect-based political parties are now flush with young supporters.

While most of the literature points to the networking of the political elites and the confessional system they protect as the main mechanisms of reproduction of sectarian dynamics, I argue that we also need to attend to how these dynamics were reproduced at grassroots levels, and particularly among youth—especially because so many of these newly politicized young Lebanese had initially been drawn to the protests in the hopes of radical change. I argue that the channelling of youth politics into the logic of Lebanon’s sectarian divisions is not an automatic outcome of its sectarian political system, nor is it just a product of manipulation by elites. Rather, it is also a result of the persistent and determined networking and activism of partisan youth themselves, whose activities co-opt efforts of independent youth to challenge the system, and restrict the space for an alternative youth politics free from sectarian and factional restrictions. A review of the recent history of student and youth politics in Lebanon, as well as a look at the demise and demobilization of independent youth activism in the Independence Intifada, illustrate how partisan youth networking constitutes a mechanism of the reproduction of sectarianism at the grassroots—in other words, from below.

**Student and Youth Politics before the War**

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2 Clark and Zahar (2014), for example, highlight the role of progressive youth organizations in the Independence Intifada, and Clark and Salloukh (2013) highlight the role of sectarian elites in reproducing ethnicity—both studies miss the specific role partisan youth play in these processes.
A brief examination of youth and student activism in prewar Lebanon provides the necessary context for understanding why sectarian parties and dynamics have come to permeate youth politics. In fact, Lebanon’s youth and students have not always been so beholden to partisan political parties. In the years prior to the civil war the Lebanese ‘student movement’ (al-Haraka al-Tullabiyya) was a unified, autonomous, adversarial movement that constituted a forceful actor in the Lebanese political field, and represented an important part of the emerging current of oppositional politics in the country (Traboulsi 2007; Petran 1987).

The 1960s and early 1970s were an era of unprecedented internal change, one that marked Lebanon’s entry into the age of ideology and mass politics. Oppositional politics during this time were manifested primarily though the realm of Lebanon’s civil society, most notably, leftist political parties and labour unions. This period is often referred to as the ‘heyday’ of political parties and constitutes a unique time in the history of Lebanese parties (El-Khazen 2003, 608). Parties of this era, mostly represented by the new Lebanese left (which included parties with Marxist, Leninist, Maoist, or Trotskyite orientations), were mass-based, militant, and strongly rooted in ideology, with platforms that advocated deep social change and transformation. The political parties of the day were involved in large scale mobilization and recruitment.

Although the activism of parties and labour unions dated back to the independence era, the student movement was a new element in the oppositional civil society mobilization of the time (El-Khazen 2000, 75). Motivated by the unequal and elitist structure of education, students and young Lebanese became increasingly politicized and organized in an intensity and magnitude that had not been seen before in Lebanon and rivalled the student movements of
the West. Political restlessness was the ‘norm’ for this generation of young Lebanese—themselves influenced by the plethora of leftist currents from around the globe. Sociologist Samih Farsoun, writing in 1973, describes the student upheaval as being triggered by the exposure of socioeconomic and political inequalities inherent in the Lebanese political and economic order of the day—which the students claimed was reinforced by the nature and structure of educational institutions (Farsoun 1973). The oppositional mood of students was captured by Lebanese scholar, and former student activist, Fawaz Traboulsi, who describes how “all occasions were suitable for demonstrations and sit-ins. There was no subject or cause we did not demonstrate for. From objections to the Roger’s plan\(^3\) to Iran’s occupation of the island of Abu Musa\(^4\)… to all the issues having to do with Lebanese society, to support for the Palestinian cause and funeral processions of its martyrs… At times, we did not know what we were demonstrating for; repressing one demonstration led to another to object to the repression of the earlier one and so on” (Traboulsi quoted in El-Khazen 2000, 75).\(^5\)

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\(^3\) The Rogers Plan was an American peace plan for the Middle East. It was announced in 1969 by US Secretary of State, William Rogers. The intended purpose was to break the deadlock in Israeli-Arab relations since the Six Day War. It was rejected for various reasons by both Israeli and Arab leaders as well as Soviet leaders at the time.  

\(^4\) Iran’s seizure of Abu Musa occurred in November 1971 immediately after British forces withdrew from the islands. It was the first time Iran had held the islands since the British captured them in 1921. The British, however, had transferred administration over the islands to the British-appointed Sharjah, one of the seven sheikdoms that would later form the UAE. The seizure thus became a source of tension between the Arab countries and Iran because the UAE (formed days after Iran’s invasion) also claimed the territory and the island had many Arab inhabitants.  

\(^5\) One of the only studies on rates of political engagement among university students, conducted by Nasr and Monte Palmer (1975), found that in prewar Lebanon a majority of Lebanese university students were politically active. Of the 1,339 interviewed (representing 10% of the entire Lebanese University student body) 52% said they were active in “overt political participation”— meaning through direct involvement in student organizations, protests, meetings, and rallies; a further 80% of students were generally positively predisposed to political participation (Nasr and Palmer 1975, 379). Furthermore, the study also found that one of the main factors which was positively correlated with active involvement was not family ties (which varied according to the strength and type of family tie as well as to their family’s occupation), but rather influence of peers, and especially from student leaders. “The data strongly support the general proposition that peers are agents of influence with respect to political activism” and the relationship between the influence of the peer group and rates of political involvement was one of the “most emphatic and consistent relationships” established by the study (385). By contrast, today’s
Initially students focused on demands for the ‘democratization’ and improvement of the Lebanese system of higher education, but, more and more, students began to draw connections between their educational grievances and other political and social inequalities in their country. Indeed, through demanding reform of the educational system, students were in effect targeting the heart of one of the key mechanisms for reproducing the unequal power structures of the Lebanese sectarian system. If student demands were to be met, it would mean making ‘revolutionary’ changes to Lebanese society (Farsoun 1973, 13).

In the years leading up to the civil war, the Lebanese sectarian political system was losing its legitimacy, and nothing demonstrated its bankruptcy more clearly than its approach to education. In her detailed account of the prewar and early war years in Lebanon, Tabitha Petran writes that “insofar as a state educational policy existed at all, it was that of the Maronite Catholic right to perpetuate Catholic advantage and Muslim disadvantage” (Petran 1987, 139). By the early 1970s this increasingly blatant approach had begun to produce turmoil in the schools and universities.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Lebanon had seen large growth both in its youth population and in secondary schools and universities. This was in part due to the rapid development of an accessible state-run system of secondary education under the presidency of Fouad Chehab (1958-1964). Thanks to Chehab’s reforms, youth from lower-income brackets and working-class families began to access secondary education in record numbers. Lebanon’s schools, however, were not set up to meet their needs, and the country soon faced an

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data show a stronger relationship between family and community background and type of political engagement (see Hanf 2007; Chatterji 2008).
educational crisis (Petran 1987, 83). By the late 1960s, the youth of Lebanon’s secondary schools were organizing extensive and unprecedented strikes. Two notable examples were in 1967 when secondary students struck over demands for Arabization of instruction, standardization of programs, and reductions in fees, and in 1970 when they held strikes protesting the cancellation of Arab equivalencies. In the latter case, the strikes grew and spread throughout the country. The cancellation of equivalencies was an important target because it was under the equivalency program that the Lebanese government accepted secondary school certificates granted by Syria and Egypt. Lebanon’s baccalaureate exams at this time tested students in only French or English, the languages of instruction of most private schools in the country. Youth who were unable to afford private school education and who did not have sufficient command of these languages were allowed, until the cancellation, to present a Syrian or Egyptian diploma. Cancellation of equivalencies in effect barred access to higher education for the underprivileged and, in the eyes of many, “represented cultural imperialism as well as a denial of Arabism and nationalism” (Petran 1987, 139). The policy ensured the continuation of class inequality in Lebanon, which was beginning to overlap to a greater and greater extent with sectarian affiliation.⁶ As Munir Bashshur wrote in 1988, “there is good reason to believe that there has been a mutual reinforcement between the religious affiliation of students and the schools they attended on the one hand, and their socio-economic bracket on the other” (Bashshur 1988, 52).

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⁶ It is important to note that in contemporary Lebanon wealth disparity cuts across religious sects, and regional disparities (Beirut versus the rest of the country) are more pronounced (Mackey 2006). Similarly, for the poorer Lebanese classes there are virtually no differences in social mobility: all poor Lebanese have low chances of moving up into a higher socioeconomic bracket. Moreover, the Muslim and Christian sects are far from being homogeneous in this regard. Maronites and Shiites of the middle classes, for example, have somewhat higher levels of social mobility than do middle-class Sunnis. See Mackey 2006; El-Khoury and Panizza 2001.
During these years, youth were also leading a widespread movement calling for the democratization of and improvement to the standard of public university education, more specifically, the full development of a truly national, state-run university. Though the Lebanese University had been established in 1953 as the first publicly funded state-run national university (as a counter to the fact the country was, up until then, served only by two elitist, private universities: the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Université Saint-Joseph [USJ]), it did not offer courses in areas such as medicine, engineering, or agricultural sciences. Lebanese youth correctly recognized that they were effectively being barred from entering higher-ranking professions. They were wholly unable to compete in the job market with those youth whose families could afford the privilege of private education at the well-established American University of Beirut or the Université Saint-Joseph.

During this era student strikes were “an almost daily occurrence” as students criticized the domination of higher education by the ruling class through private and mostly Christian schools as well as the fact that the Ministry of Education was dominated by the Maronite right (Farsoun 1973, 11; Petran 1987, 57). They rightly identified how the system of education operated to perpetuate sectarian class divisions in the country, and thus pushed for Arabization, standardization, greater access to schools nation-wide,7 and equal opportunity to enter higher-ranking professions (Farsoun 1973, 12). For example, student strikes broke out in 1965 when the Beirut Order of Advocates (which was completely dominated by the Maronite right) placed restrictions upon entering the legal profession for graduates from the state-run Lebanese University or Beirut Arab University. These universities had only recently established

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7 In 1970 Beirut and Mt. Lebanon held 69% of secondary schools (Petran 1987, 57)
law faculties and for the first time were offering low- and working-class Muslims the chance to earn law degrees. A law degree was widely understood to be a “passport to positions of power” in Lebanon, and up until then access to the profession had been carefully limited to preserve a Catholic predominance in the profession. When the first law students graduated from these public universities, the Beirut Order of Advocates refused to grant them membership. These restrictions sparked massive student protests and riots (Petran 1987, 82, 57).  

Student demands called for fundamental changes to the sectarian imbalances and elitist character of the educational system—essentially striking at the heart of the balance of power in Lebanon and at one of the mechanisms of its reproduction. The discrimination and lack of access they faced in the ‘shrinking’ job market underscored the inequality of education and how it worked to reproduce Maronite dominance. This strong, adversarial student movement was having an impact at the level of national politics, and played a significant part in the social movements erupting throughout the country at this time. It was quickly developing into a force the government could not wholly ignore (Petran 1987, 141). The student movement was also achieving certain notable successes—new programs and degrees of study at the Lebanese University were introduced, thus opening up the possibility of social advancement. As Farsoun stated at the time, “whatever education reforms that have been instituted by the state have been brought about by the agitation and activism... of the students themselves” (Farsoun 1973, 13).

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8 Eventually negative publicity provoked the president of the Beirut Order of Advocates (BOA) to accept the degrees under certain conditions. President Helou thus issued a decree stating that the diplomas would be accepted. At this point, in a bid to preserve their sectarian and economic dominance, the BOA turned around and placed additional requirements on admission such as the necessity of holding a PhD and fluency in a foreign language. They also increased their membership fees by 33% (Petran 1987, 82).
The backbone of the student movement at this time was the student council of the Lebanese University. Student politicization, however, was not limited to the public university. Students from the private institutions of the American University of Beirut and Université Saint-Joseph were also highly politicized and active in these prewar years. Enrolment at the private universities had increased in the decade leading up to the war, due to an overall rise in living standards in the 1960s and the expansion of the scholarship program in the same decade—something which led to a more diverse and politicized study body. In her history of AUB, Betty Anderson argues that in the 1970s AUB students were influential in “embedding” the university in the broader issues facing Arab political life (Anderson 2011). Up until then, the administration had generally been trying to prevent “external” politics from seeping onto campus. AUB students argued, however, that their engagement with political causes was part and parcel of their liberal education at the AUB. In this respect they helped the university “become of Beirut rather than merely existing in it.”9 Thus, students of both the private and the public institutions saw themselves in a vanguard role and both groups shared an idealism and dedication to effecting deep change in the foundations of society.10

The Deepening Radicalization of the Student Movement

Though their demands initially centred on the educational system, the political consciousness of students began to shift as they grew increasingly and painfully aware that reform of the educational system was not enough. Students also began to target the need for

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9 Indeed, in October 1970, *Newsweek* magazine christened the American University of Beirut “Guerrilla U” because “politics at AUB was so tied to the Palestine guerrilla movement.” See Anderson (2010).
10 Barakat (1977) and Farsoun (1973) especially have this view of student politics.
economic reforms. The ‘Lebanese economic miracle’ that had defined the period of rapid economic growth in the 1960s had been based on the expansion of the service economy, especially commercial and banking services, which made up two-thirds of the economy. But in the decade stretching from 1966 to 1975 signs of economic strain began to appear—the services sector became saturated and the banking sector contracted. As inflation rates rose, and the economy stagnated (one of the consequences of the Arab-Israeli wars), the substantial discrepancies in growth between the different regions of the country became glaringly apparent. Those discrepancies led to massive rural-to-urban migration, and the swelling of Beirut and its poor suburbs in particular. Coupled with an underdeveloped and politicized administration and inadequate legislation to cope with the evolving economic and social situation, Lebanon’s declining economy tore into the fabric of the society, and especially Lebanon’s rural areas, which were the main victims. The ‘miracle’ of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s had turned out to be fallacious.

Awareness of these glaring problems fed into the causes of the student movement. Students began to arrive at the conclusion that the problem was not that of adapting university programs to the service economy but of reorienting the economy to the production sectors—namely, the neglected agricultural and industrial sectors (Petran 1987, 57). Thus, student politics took a turn toward a more radical platform that espoused a ‘national economic model’ based upon the need to bolster national production.

The government of this time responded to student protests with both repression and bureaucratic interventions. On the repressive side, the government frequently brought in the army and government security forces to halt student demonstrations, resulting in numerous
injuries and—on one occasion in 1967—the death of an unarmed student protester. On the bureaucratic side, for example, after the 1967 clashes between students and the internal security forces (ISF), the Minister of Education established a commission to study the issues brought forth by the students, which helped eventually to end the student strike. However, as Petran describes, the commission was made up of “the high priests of sectarian education” and their suggested reforms only served to increase the imbalances in educational programs, making the problems worse (Petran 1987, 84).

The student movement also started to dovetail with leftist movements and parties, and encompass more general political demands for exploited workers and peasants (especially those in southern Lebanon), and, specifically, support for the Palestinian resistance movement and Lebanese mobilization against Israel (see Farsoun 1973 and Petran 1987). The most serious challenges Lebanon faced at this time, such as the Palestinian issues, which were fueled by events that were essentially external in origin, coincided at a time of great educational expansion and tremendous pressures from young Lebanese for reforms (Bashshur 1988, 54). Lebanon’s youth were more politicized than ever before.\(^\text{11}\)

Of course, youth were not completely united in their demands. There were divisions in the student movement, especially, and most significantly, between the progressive students and those students associated with the Christian right, particularly those of the right-wing,

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\(^{11}\) In his history of student politics at the AUB, Rabah (2009) argues that two external factors in particular helped to “energize student activism on campus.” These were the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the ensuing Palestinian Revolution—leading the AUB student council to appear as “little more than a mirror of the Palestinian Revolution” (Rabah 2009, 14). Rabah makes note, however, of the fact that while student activism was closely tied to, and thus reflected, the policy of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Lebanese allies, in fact, student actions diverged from the latter at many points, and demonstrated tremendous autonomy in their politics (ibid., loc. cit.). This is relevant as it provides some comparison for the degree (i.e., lack) of autonomy student activists have from the political party parties they are linked to today.
fascist, Kata’eb party (from which the Lebanese Forces later sprang). Provoked by the emerging movement for social change, which included many (but not only) Muslim youth demanding equality and inclusion, this period also saw the counter-mobilization of the Christian right. Right-wing Christian mobilization was based in substantial ‘fear of the Muslim street’ and ‘aggressive anti-Arabism.’ Maronite nationalism was also on the rise at this time, again embodied most significantly by the Kata’eb party which had begun to develop a more extensive party infrastructure and militia force. The Kata’eb party focused on the recruitment of youth in particular. In fact, one of the main reasons for the focus on youth recruitment and the formation of militias by the Maronite right was to ensure these same Maronite youth would not be swayed by the progressive camp. The parties of the Christian right wanted to “guarantee their youthful clientele would not be infected by ideas of progressive social change” (Petran 1987, 114). The Maronite bourgeoisie also looked increasingly to the Christian right parties, rather than the state, as the defender of their privileges, and by the early 1970s the mobilization of Christian militias—and support for them—reached new heights. That support was freely given in response to what they perceived as the serious threat of a strong emerging alliance between the resistance, the progressive parties, the students, and the underprivileged in Lebanon.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\) It is worth noting there were attempts within the Christian community to counter-act the growing cultivation of xenophobic Maronite nationalism based upon the cultivation of a sense of existential fear. Groups of Orthodox Christian and Catholic students, as well clerics and members of the intelligentsia, brought their voices into the fray and propagated ideas of co-existence, trying to assuage the fears of ordinary Christians. They also criticized “church-state collusion” and the fact that the “minority lives in insolent luxury while most Lebanese families do not earn enough for food and housing” (Haddad 1975 quoted in Petran 1987). Spearheading these campaigns for the injection of more progressive thought within the debates among the various communities was a small group of bishops from the Maronite Catholic and Orthodox churches called the “Caucus of Committed Christians.” This movement had an important audience among Christian youth and students in particular. Ultimately, however, they were too weak to counter the prevailing sectarian dynamics. Symbolizing the failure of these intra-Christian attempts was the incident that provoked the outbreak of the civil war—the Kata’eb’s attack on a bus carrying
Despite these divisions, however, one could argue that the student movement of prewar Lebanon achieved a significant degree of unity as a national oppositional movement, even in the midst of the heightened sectarian tension of the times. A survey by Theodor Hanf in 1971 underscores this point as it shows that while there were some differences in political orientation that ran along the lines of class and confession, the majority of young Lebanese were politicized along *ideological* lines—a striking difference from the situation among today’s youth and students (Theodor Hanf cited in Barakat 1977). Another notable difference between today’s youth and student activists, and the student movement of this era, was that students during the prewar years had a greater degree of autonomy from political parties, their leaders, and elites (Rabah 2009), despite the fact that many student activists of the time were also associated with political parties. In fact, in contrast to youth members of political parties today, youth members of the political parties at this time were effective in challenging their parties on several issues, strongly asserted their independence vis-à-vis their parent parties, and were often more adversarial than their party leaders (El-Khazen 2000, 76). Moreover, there were many groups and youth within the student movement who had no affiliation with a party whatsoever. Thus, in a way that was unprecedented at the time and which has not

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Palestinians returning from the Sabra refugee camp to their homes in Tel al-Zaatar, which killed 30 Palestinians, including women, children, and the aged.

13 Hanf is cited in footnote 9, for Chapter 4. In Barakat’s 1977 book on student politics.
14 Of course, as I mentioned above, unlike the elite-based, political parties of today, many political parties of this era were more mass-based and rooted in leftist or Arab regional ideological movements of the time.
15 This was especially true in the case of the Christian parties of the Kata’eb, the National Liberation Party, as well as the leftist Progressive Socialist Party.
16 An example is the ‘Harakat al-Wai,’ which was established at the LU in 1969 by a group of students from mainly Christian rural areas. This movement was centrist in orientation and provided an important outlet for political activism for a new generation of politically conscious students who did not subscribe to a particular party or ideology (El-Khazen 2000, 76).
happened since, Lebanese students were rallying for the rejection of the status quo.\textsuperscript{17} Lebanese youth and students were in concert with the patterns of youth and student engagement taking place throughout many regions of the world at this time. As Farid El-Khazen states, the 1960s and 1970s represented a time when “grand objectives, idealism, and dreams (of social change) swept the imagination of a restless Lebanese youth” as they sought fundamental changes to the political system (El-Khazen 2000, 77).

War Begins: The Collapse of the Student Movement and the Rise of the Militias

Lebanon’s educational system and the issues that surrounded it constituted a central field of contestation between oppositional political groups and Lebanon’s ruling elite. As the divisions within Lebanese society deepened, however, the student movement, too, began to suffer fragmentation. By the dawn of the civil war in the spring of 1975, divisions rather than solidarity characterized the student movement (Anderson 2010, 181). Halim Barakat, writing in 1977, theorized that this fragmentation occurred because of lack of cooperation of students across the country’s universities and colleges and the consequent failure to establish a general union for all students. He noted, in addition, that youth were starting to reflect the “authoritarian tendencies” prevailing in society. Youth leaders had begun fighting battles in order to improve their position and power rather than cooperating for the purpose of achieving

\textsuperscript{17} One may argue that the Lebanese Independence Intifada of 2005 represented a youth-led movement for political change. A closer examination (which comes below) shows, however, that the Independence Intifada was not as unified as it appeared nor did it constitute a sustained movement. Furthermore, the Intifada did not call for the rejection of the political system. Though some of the groups (i.e., the so-called ‘independent students’) associated with it were voicing demands for the downfall of the sectarian system, the majority of youth were affiliated with political parties and leaders whose aim was the more limited goal of freedom from Syrian hegemony. I discuss this more fully below.
broader goals (Barakat 1977, 183). Like the youth movements I examine in the postwar period, Lebanon’s youth activists of the 1970s were unable to transcend the domestic and international issues and forces which eventually pulled the country into war. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1975, Lebanon’s politicized youth were positioning themselves to be “captured and put to the service of the war machine” (Bashshur 1988, 63).

The first major change that took place during the war that affected youth and students directly was the geographical decentralization of university campuses—a process that facilitated militia activity and control over them. Starting with the Lebanese University (LU) in 1976, a case was made to open a branch in East Beirut (the LU was initially located in West Beirut) because of the risks facing the students as they traveled from East Beirut to the campus in West Beirut. Dubbed a ‘temporary measure’ at the time (in fact the campus remains until this day), the LU was allowed to open a satellite campus in East Beirut. This decree was signed by the right-wing Christian Minister of Education (and former president), Camille Chamoun. In the judgment of one observer, “it was Chamoun’s interest as the political leader of East Beirut that motivated his signing of the decree” (quoted in Bashshur 1988). The decree was initially rejected and contested by Muslim leaders of West Beirut, saying that it was a “step towards partitioning the university and a prelude to partitioning the whole country.” This argument against “partitioning” quickly subsided among all parties, however, and was replaced by arguments in favour of ‘decentralization,’ which soon came to be expected, and even demanded, by both sides (Bashshur 1988, 63-64). The private institutions of AUB and USJ were also affected in this way by the civil war. Since the USJ was already a decentralized institution, further decentralization was a relatively easy matter. The AUB, however, was a different case.
Initially the administration resisted the idea, but soon came under intense pressure to decentralize. The AUB finally agreed to organize an “Off Campus Program” (OCP) in East Beirut in 1983, as a temporary measure. Initially, the OCP was set up in the East Beirut neighbourhood of Achrafieh. When that neighbourhood came under heavy shelling soon after, it was forced to move even further east, into Jounieh, a coastal city 16 kilometres north of Beirut and the ‘heart’ of Christian territory. Unsurprisingly, the OCP soon came under the influence of Christian militias (Harik and Meho 1996, 74).

The fragmentation of the universities during the war made them into sites of militia operations and control. Their control over campuses was part of the overall role assumed by the militias as providers of a range of services, including paralegal, public, and social services, as well as education and even health care, to citizens during the civil war. The Lebanese state was helpless to affect the spiralling violence and unable to perform its basic public services. Citizens were caught in the crossfire of conflict and were forced to seek assistance from those who controlled their areas—namely, the armed fighters of local parties (Harik 1994, 1). Faced with little choice in the circumstances, Lebanese citizens were progressively drawn into ‘mafia-like’ relationships with the militias through force and coercion. Though little has been written about the activities of the Lebanese militias in the universities during the civil war (especially at USJ and AUB), historians of the civil war period state that these places of higher learning essentially became reservoirs for recruitment and places of indoctrination for the militias, and that they represented an important part of their overall strategy during the war (Harik and Meho 1996; Harik 1994; Faour and Al-Admine 1998; Oweini 1998).
These wartime dynamics affected the universities in different ways. At the Lebanese University, for example, control remained, in theory, with the central university administration. In practice, however, its various campuses came under control of the militias. Although the appointment of the Deans of the campuses was still done by the central administration, the campuses were under the de facto control of ‘directors’ whose appointment was the prerogative of the militias. Initially, the militia-appointed ‘directors’ performed strictly administrative roles. As the conflict wore on, however, they gradually took over a broader range of duties, including oversight of the degree programs and admission criteria—both of which were being constantly reformulated to best suit the needs of the militias (Bashshur 2004, 5). For example, at the LU the militias controlled curriculum and curriculum design, and the hiring of teaching staff; and they would often arrange for degrees to be granted to their chosen ‘clients.’¹⁸ They were also known to alter course content in the areas of politics and history to agree with their party narratives, and to promote teaching and enrolment in practically-oriented subjects that fit their needs and interest in maintaining their hegemony, such as paralegal training, nursing, medicine, and finance (Harik 1994). Militias used force to achieve their control of the LU which meant that the LU campuses frequently became the site of clashes between competing groups. It is no surprise that standards of higher education at the LU suffered as a consequence of the war, both in terms of teaching quality and content, as well as

¹⁸ According to an interview with history professor Abdul Arouf from the Lebanese University, conducted by Robert Chatterji in Beirut in 2009, the number of degrees granted by the LU during the war increased more than at any other university in Lebanon, and only the LU introduced the granting of doctorates during the war (Chatterji 2009).
in terms of material equipment and infrastructure (for example, the deterioration of the library system at the LU).\(^{19}\)

While the LU campuses were considered the property and territory of various militias, even “the embodiment of the militia system itself,” the private universities such as the AUB and USJ also suffered during the years of civil conflict, although to varying degrees (Chatterji 2009). These universities played more of a strategic role in the considerations of the militias. Specifically, the Kata’eb, and then later the Lebanese Forces, had control over the USJ campus in East Beirut, while the main AUB campus in West Beirut was a site of contestation between Amal, the PSP, and Hezbollah.

Unlike the LU, however, the leadership of the private universities was not under direct control of the militias, most likely because the administration made compromises with the militias and turned a blind eye to their presence and activities on their campuses (ibid.). The militias ensured their presence at the private universities by providing their youth members with funding and scholarships; the students whose education was being funded by the militias were, of course, beholden to them and carried out their activities on campus. They were highly active members of the student body. As Harik and Meho write, “partisan youth divided AUB’s campus into various political turfs, and plastered it with political posters and party flags”—not unlike what partisan student activists do today (Harik and Meho 1996, 70). Youth wings of the Christian militias, for example, were largely behind the push to create the OCP of AUB in 1983, as they made insistent demands to the administration for the establishment of a campus in

\(^{19}\) Some estimates state that the emigration of professors during the war reached 80% of Lebanese University faculty (Perthes 1994, 50).
Christian territory (Chatterji 2009). Active students were often given political recognition by the leaders, and the most promising went on to positions within the ruling inner circle of the militia—another practice that parallels today’s situation.

It is important to note, however, that politically-affiliated students did not constitute the majority on these campuses (see Chatterji 2009; Harik and Meho 1996; Oweini 1998). Many students, in fact, despised the behaviour of the militias at their institutions (see Harik and Meho 1996). However, as the violence wore on and increasingly touched their lives, students of “all levels and all types of political engagement” became caught up in the “mentalities of conflict” (Oweini 1998) and thus the visions of progressive social change that had once guided student politics were now being replaced by increasingly divided, violent power struggles: the realms of student politics and organizations were subsumed by the overwhelming forces of the war.20

In many cases, however, the partisan students were initially student leaders in their own right. In fact, many of the young leaders in the militias actually came from the ranks of student politics. They were student leaders first, and became militia members second. In other words, it was not simply a ‘top-down’ process whereby militias exerted control on campuses by planting their youth members into the universities. It was also a case of youth who were leaders in their own realms becoming increasingly politicized and finding new forms of political empowerment through the militias. One example of this phenomenon is Bashir Gemayel of the Kata’eb party. Gemayel was a prominent Christian student leader and member of the student wing of the

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20 Note that student opposition to the militias was rare during the war. Toward the end of the war, students rose up against the hegemony of the LF on campuses in East Beirut. To a large extent these were the students of the USJ and LU campuses in East Beirut who joined the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of Michel Aoun in order to fight the LF and challenge their claim to hegemony. The competition between these two groups continues today on the same campuses.
Kata’eb party at the USJ before the war. In 1976 Gemayel broke away from the Kata’eb and formed the Lebanese Forces (LF). Initially the LF acted as the armed wing of the Kata’eb party, but under Gemayel’s leadership the LF broke away from the Kata’eb to become its own entity, and Gemayel brought the militia under his full control. When Gemayel made the split, it was his base of student supporters from the USJ who formed the core of his following and new recruits and it was they who gave Gemayel the support he needed to succeed as leader of this new faction. Another example is Nabih Berri, leader of the Shiite party, Amal. It was during his years at the Lebanese University when Berri rose to become student body president and established himself as a well-known political activist. Besides these prominent leaders, politically-affiliated students at lower levels also found advantage in becoming militia members—and used their political connections to assert their own personal agendas, at times threatening their professors and university administrators to secure advantages for themselves (Harik and Meho 1996, 67). The strategy of funding youth in the private universities is an example of a ‘top-down’ mechanism that ensured the continuation of militia control over campuses; while the phenomenon of youth rising through the ranks of student politics and then finding advantage and opportunity within the militias is an example of a ‘bottom-up’ mechanism that also worked to reproduce and exacerbate divisions among students, if not in society more broadly. That dual process is a wartime example of the argument I am making about youth politics in Lebanon today—that partisan youth are active players in the reproduction of sectarian divisions.

The end of the civil war in Lebanon was abrupt and involved no rehabilitation process for the militias or their elites. Indeed, the Ta’if accord which officially ended the war in 1989
allowed the militia leaders to change hats instantly, going “from warlords to parliamentarians overnight” (El-Khazen 2003, 612). With the ending of hostilities, militias entered the postwar phase and had to adapt to a new state of affairs. They quickly tried to revert to the status they had before the war: to being political parties. In the early postwar years, however, parties maintained a political discourse that differed little from the wartime discourse, which did nothing to help their credibility among ordinary Lebanese. What little credibility the parties did have had been lost during the war as most Lebanese came to view them with distrust or even outright hostility. Thus, contrary to their ‘heyday’ in the late 1960s and early 1970s when ideological political parties attracted many young recruits, in the postwar era and up until the Independence Intifada of 2005 political parties had been largely unable to attract youth in large numbers. As I discuss below, this state of affairs changed in 2005.

In sum, what had started as a somewhat autonomous student movement was all but divided and destroyed by the forces unleashed by Lebanon’s civil war. Student politics, which

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21 Contrary to the way in which many other protracted civil conflicts have ended, the Lebanese civil war did not end with a peace conference held under international auspices that brought together the main protagonists. The closest Lebanon got to this was the Ta’if agreement—the implementation of which only sparked another round of conflict. As Farid el-Khazen writes, “The war ended with an act of war”—namely, with General Michel Aoun being removed from office by Syrian forces assisted by the Lebanese army who was loyal to the Ta’if government (2003, 612).

22 As I discuss in subsequent chapters, this is part of the reason new political movements such as Hariri’s Future Movement and Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement avoided registering as political parties until more recently (2007 and 2006 respectively).

23 The exception is Hezbollah, which has had success in recruiting young people to their movement throughout the postwar era. This is due to a combination of factors including the party’s unique status as an armed resistance movement against Israel, the on-going Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms in Lebanon, and the fact that leader Hassan Nasrallah combines both political and religious authority among his Shi’a followers (as he represents the ultimate religious scholarship for emulation for Shi’a who follow the Iranian brand of twelvers). No other party in Lebanon combines both political and religious authority in this way. Moreover, Hezbollah has the most extensive network of social welfare institutions of any of the parties, which it has developed since the end of the civil war. Among these are schools, hospitals, social welfare agencies, women’s NGOs, as well as programming for children and youth such as the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, and military training for new recruits who want to join the armed resistance. These extensive services and institutions allow Hezbollah to operate like a ‘state within a state.’
once focused on educational reform and addressing injustice and inequalities, became fragmented, co-opted, and ultimately reduced to ‘turf wars’ on university campuses, as they came under the ‘protection’ of one armed group or another. The history of the rise of student politics before and during the war provides important context for the politics of students and youth today. Not only does it help us to understand the origins of the current political divisions among Lebanese youth, it also highlights the dual process that created these divisions, and that the infiltration of the militias into the universities was not a one-way, top-down directive from militia elites to their ‘blind followers.’ By many accounts, the dominance of militias and the playing out of sectarian conflicts on campuses was also a product of youth activists, who, as student leaders in their own right, found advantage and opportunity within the militias and pursued both personal and political agendas through them.

**Student Politics after the War until 2005: “La grande absence”**

From 1990, when the war finally ended, and up until the massive protests of 2005 that resulted in the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanese students and youth were conspicuously absent from the political arena. The absence of youth activism was linked to two main postwar dilemmas. First, and specifically pertaining to students, the student movement suffered a great deal from the geographical division of university campuses during the war. Fadia Kiwan (2003) notes, for example, how the “scattering of students” into various different and separate centres

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24 Kiwan (2003) argued that students, and more specifically the existence of a student movement as a mechanism for expressing the demands of civil society, have been largely absent in Lebanon in the postwar era—“grande absence.”
weakened if not eliminated the potential of students to mobilize into an autonomous, active force and entrenched the sectarian divisions that had emerged between them during the war.

More generally, the youth and student activism of this time suffered under the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The era of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon meant a great deal of political repression such as restrictions on civil liberties introduced during the early 1990s, including bans on demonstrations, restrictive interpretations of the law of association, press censorship, electoral fraud and gerrymandering, as well as the deepening penetration of confessionalism and clientelism into the state.

There was some mobilization taking place within civil society during this period but it was ‘self-limiting’ in nature, in that the organizers did not seek radical changes, but rather incremental changes to various aspects of the Lebanese political system (such as lobbying for the reinstatement of municipal elections, for example). Furthermore, this organizing did not specifically emanate from youth and students but rather emerged from a small but effective network of progressive intellectuals and educated Beirutis (Kingston 2013, 71-76; Karam 2006, 2009). This network was inter-generational and inter-confessional, comprising a range of progressive actors from the prewar, wartime, and postwar periods, and made up from mostly the middle and upper classes (Kingston 2013, 72). These ‘civil actors’ were focused on redefining citizenship in their country, moving “away from one mediated by the increasingly entrenched structures of confessionalism and clientelism, towards one grounded in Lebanon’s republican principles” (ibid., loc. cit.). Together they formed think tanks and NGOs, created campaigns, and published articles all focusing on denouncing the corruption of the regime, calling for the respect of the rule of law, and opposing amendments of the constitution for
personal ends (Karam 2009, 57). Their ‘movement’ expanded and grew into other civil society associations and campaigns organized around various causes, including the defence of human rights, the rights of the disabled, protection of the environment, civil marriage, the defence of civil and political liberties, and free and fair elections. These groups and individuals are credited with numerous campaigns that emerged in the early postwar era, and brought particular attention to causes such as the law on associations and electoral reform, civil status versus personal status, the disappeared, and environmental policies, to name a few (Karam 2009, 57). More significantly, these civil actors reaffirmed the possibility of creating a truly civic space in Lebanon that could be free from communalism and clientelism. As Kingston writes, they “re-injected civic activism back into the prevailing rules of the game in the post-war era” (Kingston 2013, 64). They also paved the way for subsequent civic mobilizations, as Karam says, “detonating” further cycles of civic contestation in the 1990s (Karam 2006, 226).

At various points, prominent members of these civil networks attempted to bridge the civic–political divide, running for parliament in the 1990s and early 2000s. With one exception, their attempts largely failed. There were three main factors which stood in their way: first, the continued interference and manipulation by Syria in Lebanese elections; second,
the utter lack of limits on campaign financing and electoral spending (which meant they could not compete with the spending of the communal political elites); and finally, and perhaps most significantly, the fact that they were attempting to run independently of the familial and confessional ties that structure the Lebanese political field—and thus lacked the social capital that these ties provide (Kingston 2013, 75).

Though largely absent from the political or civil society scene, there were some murmurings of activity among partisan students, most prominently among the youth sympathetic to the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of Michel Aoun, and the Lebanese Forces (LF) of Samir Geagea—the two parties that had been banned immediately after the war by the Syrian-backed Lebanese regime (see Majed 2007).

Though the two parties had technically been banned for different reasons, their resistance against Syria was the primary factor. In the case of the FPM, Aoun had denounced the 1989 Ta’if accord (in which the second Lebanese republic was inaugurated under Syrian tutelage and backed by the USA) and the politicians who supported it. Aoun then led a ‘War of Liberation’ against the Syrian army in Lebanon in 1989 that ultimately failed but cost thousands of lives. When that happened, Aoun’s ‘Free Patriotic Movement’ was banned, and he was forced into exile in France in 1990 where he remained for 15 years. It was only after the Independence Intifada ushered in the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 that he returned to Lebanon.

Samir Geagea had also resisted Syrian presence in Lebanon under the Ta’if. Though he was warned of the possible consequences of his opposition, and offered safe passage out of the country, he refused to leave or back down. In 1994, Geagea was arrested and blamed for a bombing that took place in a church—a crime he did not commit. He was ultimately acquitted,
but found guilty of other crimes (specifically, four political assassinations that occurred during the war), given four life sentences, and imprisoned for eleven years. He remained in prison until the Syrian withdrawal in 2005, at which time he was pardoned. The Lebanese Forces, Geagea’s militia-turned-political-party, were thus ordered dissolved and all its activities were banned in Lebanon.

With the FPM and the LF parties now illegal, their official activities ceased. The activities of their young partisans, however, did not. Through informal networks and clandestine techniques, youth sympathetic to the FPM and the LF focused their efforts on resisting the Syrian presence in Lebanon, for which they were brutally repressed. They assumed the causes of their political parties in this era, effectively keeping them “alive in the minds of ordinary Lebanese” during their forced absence from the Lebanese political scene.

Pocketed within the relatively safe confines of the private universities, LF and FPM youth organized informal networks of other young Lebanese who resisted Syrian presence. Though still prone to its influence, the private universities provided students with some shelter from the Lebanese-Syrian security apparatus, and thus became a central site for their activism. At the Lebanese University, however, the penetration of pro-Syria parties (and thus pro-establishment parties) was especially deep and so LF and FPM youth there were forced to

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27 Charging Geagea with the church bombing was widely seen as a legal loop hole—a way to get around the general amnesty law, which pardoned all crimes committed before the end of the war 1990. Geagea had of course benefitted from this law as did most of the other political and militia leaders. Only Geagea, however, was sentenced, a clear indication that his imprisonment was politically motivated.

28 Abs, Interview with author, Beirut, December 2007.

29 An example of how the private universities were still prone to influence took place in April 2001, when AUB’s board of faculty Deans issued a ruling prohibiting the university’s student magazine, “Outlook,” from publishing articles that reveal the “political beliefs” of students (i.e., their opinions of Syrian presence in Lebanon). The decision came in reaction to an issue of the magazine dealing with Syrian-Lebanese relations that had been printed and was ready for distribution. The student publishers were forced to rip out a two-page article, entitled “Student parties debate Syrian presence,” before it hit the stands (Gambil 2003, 3).
keep an extremely “low profile” as it was “not opportune” for them to show their overt support for these parties during this era (Harik and Meho 1996, 76). Partisan youth also connected through the Internet, a channel which was still beyond the reach of the security forces at that time.

All anti-Syrian activity, even that which took place at the universities, was closely monitored by the Lebanese-Syrian security forces, and thus it was common for LF and FPM youth to be harassed, detained, imprisoned, and even tortured. Representing the worst of this brutality is the case of Ramzi Irani, who was abducted and later found dead in the trunk of his car on 20 May 2002 (Amnesty International 2002). Irani was an LF supporter and a student leader at the Lebanese University campus in West Beirut (Hamra). He had been helping to organize a series of events marking the eighth anniversary of the imprisonment of LF party leader Samir Geagea, when his activities caught the attention of the Syrian secret service in Lebanon. Though no one was ever charged with his murder, it was widely understood by partisan youth that the Lebanese-Syrian security apparatus were sending them “a very tough message.”

In my interviews with these youth activists from the early postwar period, intimidation by the secret police was a common theme. As one former youth activist with the FPM stated:

Three times the secret service went to my home. The last time they threatened my mother. She was very scared of them and of what could happen to me. They told her to ‘tell your baby to stop his activities or else we will hurt you.’ After this, I was forced to go in and report to them. When I went in I was interrogated for hours. They blindfolded me. They threatened me and forced me to sign statements saying I would cease my activities. I felt myself lucky though because many other youth were treated much worse than this.31

31 Abs, interview with author, Hamra, Beirut, December 2007.
Despite the risks, partisan youth persisted in their activism, carrying on the anti-Syrian cause of their parties in the absence of their leaders. In fact, activism against Syria was so risky at the time that many of the youth networks operated separately from each other, unaware of one another’s existence until they were jailed or detained at the same time. Jail thus became one of the first places where broader connections among these youth were made. As one former youth activist who was with the FPM explains:

There was no organization or party at that time. We were a bunch of youth, social clubs and students and we were all against Syria. We had to be so careful about our activities - so careful that we often didn’t even know about each other. I was arrested 28 separate times during my student days. It was a high risk to be an activist against Syria at that time. But being arrested helped us in one way and that was to make links with each other. While in jail we met others who had been arrested for the same cause. Jail became a place for building our relations and building links.32

Another youth activist from this time described how they also identified supporters within the Lebanese Army:

They took me in prison, took all my clothes and searched me – this was usual. When they went through my clothes the head guy found a picture of General Aoun in my wallet. He swore loudly and handed me over to another army officer who he instructed to take me away and beat me. He said ‘take him inside and show him where he should keep that picture.’ I was terrified. The army officer took me into a small room and then said to me: ‘Okay, scream like you are in agony’ and then he starting hitting the tables and the walls and banged the chairs around but did not hit me. He faked the beating. I knew then he was with our cause. This is how we found our supporters in the army.33

These young activists developed inventive and covert techniques to keep their goals and ideals alive in the face of potential brutal repression and arrest. The former youth activist with the FPM described how they promoted their leader to the wider public:

We found creative ways to get our message out. We collected stacks of bills and stamped them with pictures of General Aoun and then we would release the currency back into the public. Whenever we tried to disseminate leaflets we would get arrested. So, we did this instead. We stayed up nights stamping all the money. We didn’t want to have just a small amount. Then we’d put it back into circulation and all of a sudden you would see old ladies in the market using bills with the General’s face on it. It was beautiful.34

An LF activist described another clandestine campaign by the youth:

We developed a distinctive car horn honk that we would use. This was officially banned by parliament because they said it ‘created confessional feelings.’ Ha! It drove the security forces crazy! You’d do a honk and then another car would answer you with the honk response. You’d know you were both supporters. We would do this especially in the tunnels and especially on the way up to Jounieh [a Christian town north of Beirut] because in the tunnel you cannot tell which car was doing the honking. The police would be there waiting on the other end of the tunnel, trying to see which car it was that did it, but they could not do anything because there was no way to tell.35

It was these small, informal networks of partisan youth activists who were responsible for some of the most adversarial (and daring) demonstrations in the postwar era—demonstrations which triggered other protests in the adult realm. In 1997, for example, after the Murr TV network was forced by the Information Minister, Bassem As-Sabaa, to cancel a scheduled interview with General Michel Aoun in exile, hundreds of young people gathered outside the TV station to protest, and were brutally beaten. The pictures of Lebanese youth being brutalized and arrested by police and security forces made headline news, and sparked national outrage and student strikes in Lebanon’s major universities. The Lebanese bar association and the engineers’ union, moved by the youth action, also held strikes. One of the most significant results of the protest at the TV station, however, was the subsequent sit-in in front of the parliament buildings in Beirut which drew more than 2,000 youth from both

34 Abs, interview with author, Hamra, Beirut, December 2007.
Christian and Muslim groups—even groups that were against the FPM. These youth came together to defend freedom of speech and association and their right to demonstrate. This was the largest demonstration against Syrian hegemony up to that point, and was an important turning point for the youth because it highlighted the nascent cooperation between the LF and FPM youth and others—namely leftist, independent youth groups.36

In the years that followed, other protests took place, usually in response to incidents of brutalization and mistreatment by the Lebanese Syrian security apparatus—for example, the demonstration that followed the Lebanese Army’s invasion of a summer camp organized by FPM youth in August 2000, and the demonstration by students in December 2000 in support for the Lebanese detained in the Syrian prisons. One of the most significant demonstrations took place in Beirut in August 2000. These new activists joined the anti-Syrian resistance and formed student groups as well, including “Paulo Neruda” at Lebanese American University (LAU) and “Direct Action” at Balamand University, “Tanios Chaine” at Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), Taw ‘ya ‘ala al-Dimukratiya (Democratic Awakening) at Notre Dame University (NDU) and “Guevera” at The Arab University, among others. These leftist student groups reflected and further sparked intense debates among youth of the Lebanese Communist Party, which led to the creation of dissident groups within the party as well as the formation of youth groups among party members external to the party, such as the “Communist Students.” These youth attempted to reform the LCP, but “hit an iron wall” and, frustrated with the lack of reform—and especially the domination of Syria over the LCP leadership—they left the party (Daou 2015). Led by a prominent LCP member, Elias Atallah, a multi-generational group of LCP members split from the party. Together with the independent leftist student groups, and left-leaning intellectuals with no prior political affiliation (Samir Kassir, Ziad Majed, Elias Khoury are the main figures), they formed the Democratic Left Movement in 2004. These leftist independent activists did not, however, join forces with the LF and FPM youth until after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000. When this happened, the “floodgates of political contention were opened” (Daou). The main objections centred around two issues: the Syrian troops in Lebanon, and the illegitimacy of Hezbollah’s weapons, given that Israel no longer occupied Lebanese territory. Leftist parties split between these two protests: between those in support of the ‘Syrian presence’ and those against the ‘Syrian occupation.’ In this “duel,” leftist student organizations focused on protesting Syrian occupation, “thus crossing the divide the civil war had defined between west and east Beirut” (Daou 2015). Like the activism of the partisan youth associated with the FPM and the LF, the “slow burn activism” of these groups in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and their cooperation with the youth from the FPM and LF after 2000, formed the networks and built the protest experience that allowed for the “spontaneous” massive demonstrations that broke fourth in Lebanon in 2005 (see Nassif 2000).

36 There were also parallel forms of organization happening within independent and leftist circles of youth and students during this time—though it was not until after 2000 that these young activists joined in the anti-Syrian resistance. Their mobilization took place primarily at the private universities, through the creation of student groups. Beginning with the formation of Bila Haddood (No Frontiers) in 1997 at AUB, a group that still exists today, other like-minded students on other campuses formed student groups as well, including “Paulo Neruda” at Lebanese American University (LAU) and “Direct Action” at Balamand University, “Tanios Chaine” at Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), Taw ‘ya ‘ala al-Dimukratiya (Democratic Awakening) at Notre Dame University (NDU) and “Guevera” at The Arab University, among others. These leftist student groups reflected and further sparked intense debates among youth of the Lebanese Communist Party, which led to the creation of dissident groups within the party as well as the formation of youth groups among party members external to the party, such as the “Communist Students.” These youth attempted to reform the LCP, but “hit an iron wall” and, frustrated with the lack of reform—and especially the domination of Syria over the LCP leadership—they left the party (Daou 2015). Led by a prominent LCP member, Elias Atallah, a multi-generational group of LCP members split from the party. Together with the independent leftist student groups, and left-leaning intellectuals with no prior political affiliation (Samir Kassir, Ziad Majed, Elias Khoury are the main figures), they formed the Democratic Left Movement in 2004. These leftist independent activists did not, however, join forces with the LF and FPM youth until after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000. When this happened, the “floodgates of political contention were opened” (Daou). The main objections centred around two issues: the Syrian troops in Lebanon, and the illegitimacy of Hezbollah’s weapons, given that Israel no longer occupied Lebanese territory. Leftist parties split between these two protests: between those in support of the ‘Syrian presence’ and those against the ‘Syrian occupation.’ In this “duel,” leftist student organizations focused on protesting Syrian occupation, “thus crossing the divide the civil war had defined between west and east Beirut” (Daou 2015). Like the activism of the partisan youth associated with the FPM and the LF, the “slow burn activism” of these groups in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and their cooperation with the youth from the FPM and LF after 2000, formed the networks and built the protest experience that allowed for the “spontaneous” massive demonstrations that broke fourth in Lebanon in 2005 (see Nassif 2000).
place in response to the illegal arrest and detention of approximately 200 people, mostly youth and students belonging to FL and FPM, on 7 August 2001. That same day youth staged a sit-in in front of the National Museum, and again on 9 August, youth, accompanied by the parents of the detainees, staged another peaceful sit-in in front of the Justice Palace. Both demonstrations were brutally repressed and dozens of people were injured (RCPL 2002). There were further protests in 2002 which followed the cancellation of the results of the partial parliamentary election in Metn and the disqualification of the winning candidate, Gabriel Murr, owner of MTV.37

It is important to note that during this time partisan youth were acting completely independently from their leaders. They organized and collaborated with each other on their own initiative to form an informal and underground movement of young activists against the Syrian presence in Lebanon. It was a small, but effective, grassroots movement led by partisan youth. It was the partisan youth who, in advance of the political leaders, “broke the taboos” and defied “red lines” associated with raising the issue of Syrian presence in Lebanon (Majed 2007). One FPM activist of this time explains how it was the youth who reached out and forged the initial link with General Aoun in France—not the other way around:

It was us, the students who reached out and contacted General. We did it on our own initiative. We found him and introduced ourselves. He didn’t know us. We said: ‘we want to tell you that we agree with most of what you stand for.’ More students started to join the group at this point and it began to spread to other universities. Soon, we had groups at every university and we tried to organize and collaborate. Things snowballed and we could not even manage it at that time. Then we started to discuss about what type of hierarchy to have and how to organize, something that is necessary in any movement. We were organized into camps and each camp had a name. Ours was called

37 This was the election that Ghassan Moukheiber, the independent civic activist, was eventually awarded. As noted earlier, Moukhieber has since joined the FPM.
Tayyar “Lebanese Patriotic Current,” others were called “Free Student Current” et cetera. Eventually we started to feel more committed to a central cause which we believed at that time was represented by the General.38

After the death of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in 2000, and the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May of the same year, youth resistance against Syrian hegemony in Lebanon began to re-emerge more prominently in the public arena. With the Israelis gone, there was no longer the same “justification” for Syrian presence. The “floodgates of political contention were opened” and space for questioning the Syrian presence now held more legitimacy (Daou 2015). With cracks in the support for Pax Syriana slowly appearing, occasions such as the commemorations of Aoun’s Liberation war or Lebanese Independence Day (on 22 November) witnessed widespread demonstrations at universities such as the Université St-Joseph, and the East Beirut branch of the Lebanese University, as well as in front of public institutions such as the Justice Palace (a place in Beirut where the General Security Offices are located and where the arrested activists were sometimes detained).

It was also after the Israeli withdrawal that the partisan youth activists were joined in a more public manner by their independent, leftist counterparts. Whereas on the national stage Lebanon’s leftist parties were split between those in support of the ‘Syrian presence’ and those against the ‘Syrian occupation,’ the independent leftist student organizations, like their partisan counterparts, were in solidarity with those focused on the latter. With their increasing public support of the anti-Syrian cause, they also crossed “the divide the civil war had defined

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38 Abs, interview with author, Beirut. December 2007. At this point in time most of the student communication with General Aoun happened through phone calls and over the Internet—specifically MSN chat; apparently the General was a big MSN chat user. This method, albeit very slow, was generally outside the reach of the Syrian-Lebanese security forces.
between west and east Beirut” (Daou 2015). One of the independent leftist activists at that
time recalled:

We tried to do what we could in 1999, 2000, and 2001 in our own groups. But after
2000 we really came together with our Christian counterparts. We wanted secularism
and to kick the Syrians out. They did too. So, we started to align with them in student
elections.39

Then, in August 2001, the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutrous Sfeir toured the Druze
mountain region called the Chouf and visited Mukhtara, the home of PSP leader Walid
Jumblatt. This was the first time a Maronite Patriarch had visited the area in 200 years. The
purpose of this historic visit was to ease the enmity between the two communities that had
existed due to the conflict that began in 1860 and which had resumed in the Lebanese civil war
in 1983-1984.40 The visit was also significant, however, because it demonstrated that the
resistance against Syria (pocketed mainly in the Christian communities) now had broader
confessional support. The Druze, too, were beginning to shift toward joining the opposition
(that is to say, the opposition to Syria and Lebanon’s Syrian-backed government). These
developments were crucial because it meant that the resistance to Syria, which up to now had
been taken up mainly by partisan youth, now had cross-cutting and inter-sectarian alliances.
The Christian youth of the FPM and the LF were now joined not only by leftist independent
youth but also by the Druze youth of the Progressive Socialist Party (the youth organization of
which is called the Progressive Youth Organization, PYO). It is important to note, however, that
in fact the PYO had already been voicing their opposition to the Syrian presence in advance of

40 As mentioned in chapter two, the 1860 ‘war of mount Lebanon’ happened when Maronite peasants rose up
against their Druze overlords. That war resulted in tens of thousands of lost lives—mostly among the Maronites,
but the Druze and Muslim factions also suffered heavy losses.
their leader, Walid Jumblatt, who was not aligned with the anti-Syrian opposition until the visit from the Patriarch. One of the FPM activists explained:

We had been working with the PYO for over a year but they didn’t have full support from their party for their resistance activities. Now they did have full support from their party. But the PYO had been voicing their political concerns about the Syrian issue. Even though Walid Jumblatt was not saying he wanted Syrians out.41

In fact, the PYO youth had been voicing their support for the anti-Syrian cause in direct defiance of the position of their leader, Walid Jumblatt. In an unprecedented way, the youth of the PYO had turned against the official position of their parent party and their leader. Led at the time by Wael Abdu-Faour, PYO members began voicing criticism of their party’s leadership and organizational structure. They wanted greater transparency and accountability, and, importantly, they wanted their party to renounce its alignment with Syria and Hezbollah. Jumblatt handled the youths’ dissent by granting the PYO more autonomy vis-à-vis the PSP, thus allowing them free rein to forge links and new alliances with the Christian parties in student elections. This move, as it turned out, was the precursor to his own shift toward the opposition in 2001.42

Now that the youth of the FPM and LF were joined by the PYO and the leftist independents, their protests grew increasingly bold. The day of 11 September 2001 marked another important turning point in that it sparked the regionalization and internationalization of the Lebanese question. This was symbolized by the passage of the Syrian Accountability and

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41 Chamoun, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
42 This case (of autonomy and the demands of the PYO being met by their leader) is an interesting one as it stands in direct contrast to a similar case I discuss in chapter seven, when the demands of PYO youth are sabotaged by the leadership. What this suggests is that the youth in the PYO are granted free rein and autonomy as long as it suits the interests of the leader, Walid Jumblatt.
Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act at the beginning of 2003, and UN Resolution 1559 in
September 2004, both of which called for the transfer of responsibility for the Lebanese
question from the Syrians to the UN, and, in the case of 1559, the disbanding of the military
wing of Hezbollah.

Then, in September 2004, and despite widespread public opposition, the Syrian
government pushed Lebanon’s parliament to amend the constitution and enact a “one-time,
exceptional amendment” to article 49 of the constitution to extend the presidential term of
Emile Lahoud (widely seen as a “Syrian puppet” [Rubin 2009, 113]), which they did. These
events marked further important turning points in the growing outrage of young activists, and
Lebanese society as a whole, and played a significant role in the decision of youth activists to
cross ‘red lines’ in their protests against Syrian hegemony.

In large part, the linkages that these young activists formed were made at the level of
student elections at the universities. Students formed electoral alliances on their own initiative,
in order to compete for leadership of their student councils. These alliances, as one prominent
student activist of the time commented, became the “testing ground” for the collaboration that
later formed at the elite level. As this activist explained: “what we did informed the opposition
political leaders about what was and wasn’t possible. We helped show them what could and
couldn’t work.”

At the elite level, the opposition culminated in the emergence at the end of 2004 of a
new political coalition called the ‘Bristol Gathering.’ The Bristol Gathering was a broad-based

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44 Named for West Beirut’s Bristol Hotel, where the leaders met.
coalition of Lebanese parties that were against Syrian intervention in Lebanon and which included the Christian parties, the PSP, supporters of the LF and the FPM, and, just before he was killed, Rafiq Hariri and his Future Movement. The forming of inter-confessional linkages was crucial if the Syrian presence in Lebanon was ever going to be effectively opposed—and those linkages were forged first by youth. It was partisan youth who paved the way for the leaders’ opposition (Majed 2007, 15).

To sum up, this phase of partisan youth activism in the postwar era highlights several important points related to the arguments of this thesis. First, it is especially clear in this phase of post-civil war history that partisan youth had tremendous autonomy and independence. With their leaders absent from the scene, partisan youth led the anti-Syrian cause in Lebanon, clearing the way for the political elite to do the same. Furthermore, they laid the grassroots foundations for the massive demonstrations of 2005, which succeeded in getting the Syrians out of Lebanon. Had it not been for their years of networking, their accumulated learning and experience in conducting risky protests, and the inter-confessional linkages they built with other activist youth, it is doubtful that the protests of 2005 would have happened in the way they did, and that so many young Lebanese would have taken to the streets. Moreover, things might have been quite different for Samir Geagea of the Lebanese Forces and Michel Aoun of the Free Patriotic Movement had they not had such a strong base of active, experienced

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45 Hariri moved slowly and carefully toward the opposition to Syria (the backbone of which was the Christian-Druze alliance). He took pains to assuage the concerns of Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, and to shore up grassroots support, before giving his support more publicly. He was, however, determined that Lebanon should be under its own control—not that of Syrian-backed President Lahoud and the regime in Damascus. Hariri’s position was not, however, as deeply anti-Syrian as that of some of the opposition. Rather, he strove toward a vision of Lebanon and Syria as having ‘brotherly’ relations and mutual respect. Obviously, this did not go down well with the Syrians. It was in January 2005 that he decided the time was right to make a more public shift toward the opposition (‘the Bristol Gathering’). He was killed weeks later in a massive car bomb on 14 February 2005.
supporters when they re-entered the political scene in 2005, supporters whom they relied upon heavily as they sought to rebuild their parties and compete in the parliamentary elections later that summer. Indeed, these partisan youth became some of the main agents of these parties in subsequent years as their leaders re-established themselves in Lebanon’s political arena.46

It should also be noted that, though there was impressive cross-sectarian cooperation among youth during this era and leading up to and during the 2005 protests, theirs was not an ideologically defined movement, like the student movement of the pre-war years. ‘Right’ and ‘left’ distinctions were secondary (even tertiary) among these partisan activists. Instead, youth activism came together around a central cause of resisting Syrian hegemony. Likewise, the affiliations and causes of the majority of youth activists of this time were defined first and foremost by their partisan nature and attachment to a particular political leader—the exception being the small number of leftist, independent students and youth who were also a part of the

46 Writing about the FPM, Heiko Wimmen (2007) explains that by the time the Independence Intifada took place the youth activists of the FPM were in their fourth post-civil war cohort. This is also true for the youth activists of the LF. There are three generations of Aoun followers that Wimmen identifies. The first was born in the 1960s and early 70s, and participated in the wars launched by Aoun in the late 1980s at the end of the civil war. The second generation were the young activists born in the 1980s who were inspired by Aoun’s message of freedom and independence and who made up the core of the movement activists in Lebanon during Aoun’s period in exile in the 1990s and early 2000s. The third generation are the young people, many of whom were students, in high schools and universities, during the Independence Intifada of 2005. Similar generations exist among LF supporters, although they were smaller in number. It is the second generation of youth activists that I am discussing in this section (1990-2005). It was these young partisans who kept the name and vision of these two parties alive during their leaders’ absence. In the case of the FPM, these are also the ‘youth,’ in their 30s and early 40s at the time of this writing, who were especially disappointed in the direction of their party after Aoun’s return from France. Rather than bringing these young dedicated activists into the leadership positions of the newly built political party, Aoun sidelined them in favour of a handpicked inner circle of his own family members. This decision has created an insider/outsider dichotomy and led to deep internal tension within the FPM, discussed in greater detail in chapter seven. As I discuss in chapter six, it was the first and second generation of youth activists (those who had congregated around the presidential palace in 1989), who were the young urban professionals, often working in communications and the media, and who, when the time came for the Independence Intifada in 2005, were ready to act. They had a foundation of a decade-and-a-half of experience in spontaneous, decentralized political action under political repression. Moreover, as I discuss in chapter six, these media- and technology-savvy educated youth and young professionals leaped into action after Hariri’s assassination and carried messages that were “endowed with a Westernized veneer,” designed to capture the sympathy of an international (i.e., Western) audience (Wimmen 2007).
anti-Syrian cause. Thus, as I will discuss in the following section, though the activism of these partisan youth laid the foundations for the historic protests of 2005, it also helped to plant the seeds of their demise, particularly at the grassroots level of youth activists.

Before going on to the events of the Independence Intifada, however, it is important to reiterate that youth and student activism of this era was not an especially widespread phenomenon. The protests described above were the product of a relatively small, committed network of young activists. Others outside that network were captive to their feelings of political disenfranchisement and apathy. One of the FPM activists from this time stated:

A big frustration to our efforts came from our friends – I mean the other youth. There were so many of the youth who were only interested in clubbing and partying and who question us or would ridicule us and say forget about this – what are you doing? For what? You should forget about this stuff and go enjoy yourselves. And it was annoying and frustrating but sometimes it would make us think. It made us think if what we were doing in risking our lives was really worth it.47

Survey data from this period testify to the pervasive feeling of political alienation among young people (see Faour 1998; Chatterji 2008; Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia 2009; Hanf 2007). And observers of the student politics of this time remarked on the “general disenchantment with parties and their campus records, since the war” (Harik and Meho 1996, 75). It was not until the Independence Intifada that political energy was injected back into the lives of ordinary youth and these demonstrations succeeded in politicizing a new generation of young Lebanese. The question, however, is to what ends? It is to a discussion of the Independence Intifada that I now turn.

47 Abs, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
Independence Intifada: The Politicization of a New Generation

All these young people who took to the streets back in 2005 learned one very important thing; politics to them is no longer something that happens on a different planet. They had the experience that if they take action, they can actually make things happen.

- Sami Ofeish, political scientist, University of Balamand. (quoted in Wimmen 2007)

After the assassination of Rafiq Hariri on 14 February 2005, Lebanon witnessed a massive, peaceful ‘uprising’ demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. These were the largest demonstrations in Lebanon’s history, drawing approximately a quarter of the entire population to a rally on 14 March 2005. Although youth were not the only “masters” of these protests, there is no doubt they played a critical role (Majed 2007). In fact, it was during these historic protests that Lebanese youth caught national and international attention, as they reappeared as a substantial force for change on Lebanon’s national political stage. This was, however, a short-lived phenomenon.

Initially, it was student activists associated with the PYO, the Christian parties (especially the still banned LF and the FPM), together with independent leftist student groups and the newly formed Democratic Left Movement (DLM), who were the main orchestrators of the protest. Riding on their activist experience that came from having resisted Syrian hegemony

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48 This series of demonstrations has also been known as the ‘Cedar Revolution’—a term coined by an American official, Paula Dobriansky (US Under Secretary of State), at a time when other ‘colour revolutions’ in the Ukraine and Georgia also had ‘catchy brand names.’ It was the political allies of the recently assassinated Rafiq Hariri who came up with the term ‘Independence Intifada’ which was a term with more relevance to an Arabic audience and specifically a Sunni audience, because of the connotations it shared with Palestinian uprisings against Israel (see Young 2010, 3-4).

49 The two largest demonstrations were on March 8th, held by Hezbollah to “Thank Syria,” and on March 14th, demanding Syria withdraw. Although estimates of crowd sizes became topics of contention, most agree that close to 300,000 protesters came for the March 8th event, and about one million, a quarter of the entire population, for the March 14th rally. The two conflicting political coalitions took their names from the dates of these two rallies: the March 8th coalition and the March 14th coalition.

50 Although its roots date back to 1994, the Democratic Left Movement (DLM) was officially formed in late 2004 by former members of the Lebanese Communist Party who came together with leftist student activists. The student activists had since graduated from their universities and sought a new political platform for their engagement. The
since the 1990s, the youth of the FPM and LF joined with the youth of the PYO, the DLM, and independent leftist groups, who were the first people to come to Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square. It was they who ‘led the people to the streets’ and, in doing so, helped ordinary Lebanese overcome their wartime fears of street politics. These young activists also galvanized other Lebanese youth, who followed their individual, mostly university-based, leaders to the streets. Indeed, for many of these youth, politics had been something to avoid up to this point. Samir Khalaf, for one, has remarked that most youth prior to the Independence Intifada were uninterested in politics and more “interested in pleasure seeking, socializing and consumerism” (Khalaf 2012). This is partly why the Independence Intifada was cynically referred to as the ‘Gucci Revolution’—because of the participation of these stylish, young Lebanese. Still, there is little doubt that the Independence Intifada was a transformative and politicizing experience for the young generation of Lebanese youth (Ghattas 2005). As one of the heads of the PYO recalls:

DLM was barely a few months old when the Independence Intifada broke out, and quickly became one of the main orchestrators of the protests (one of their founders, Samir Kassir, was seen as the ‘face of the revolution’). The party claims that about half of all its members are youth under age 26. (See: http://www.lebanonwire.com/0504/05041201AFP.asp and: http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/14201.) As the political struggle between the March 8th and March 14th coalitions intensified after the protests, the DLM took the side of March 14th—to the disappointment of some of its members who would have preferred it play a more neutral role, and not be aligned with the neoliberal policies of Hariri’s Future Movement. Nonetheless, the DLM made inroads politically with the election of their Secretary General, Elias Atallah. His election, and style of politics, however, described by one member as a “one-man show” and “sidelining the youth in the party,” caused internal tensions in the DLM, exacerbated by the targeted assassinations of two of the DLM leaders (Samir Kassir and George Hawi). These assassinations were painful for the youth members, especially because the relatively young (45) Kassir, along with Ziad Majed, had been instrumental in forming the Democratic Leftist Movement. There were also other issues that caused tension, such as the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 (members were divided as to whether or not to support Hezbollah as an extra-state combat force, or whether it should be integrated into the Lebanese state), and internal tensions escalated. Those tensions were expressed in the split between the youth of the party and the supporters of Secretary General, Atallah. Events in 2008 (especially the March 8th occupation of west Beirut, including the DLM’s own offices) further damaged the party. Though Atallah’s leadership came to an end in 2010, which spurred increased activity in the party, elections were ultimately postponed due to the ‘security situation.’ By the time an election took place, it was two years late and only 100 members showed up to confirm the appointment of an agreed-upon list of candidates. To many, this marked the beginning of the end of the DLM, though the party continues to have a presence in Lebanese politics today (see Daou 2015).
It was only three hours after Hariri’s death that we called a meeting with all the heads of the youth departments from the opposition political parties. We said ‘the Syrian security regime has killed Rafiq Hariri!’ We did this first. We asked everyone to join us and to go out into the street. We rallied the other students who followed us to the square. This was the first organized demonstration of the intifada movement.⁵¹

The leaders of the political parties, however, had no strategy at this time. In fact, they initially failed to grasp the potential or the significance of what was happening in Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square or the political potential of the downtown camp, and left the young activists to their own devices.⁵² Here was a clear example of how the networking and activism of partisan youth works to reproduce sectarian boundaries. It was they who led these previously apolitical youth to the streets, and they who led their leaders to the youth movement that was already in motion. The youth movement started independently of the party elites, on the initiative of the partisan youth organizers working in conjunction with their leftist independent student counterparts. However, as we shall see, because the main organizers held partisan leanings and affiliations, when their leaders did eventually step in, they were ripe to follow them, and bring other youth along with them—clearly acting as a mechanism for the reproduction of these partisan affiliations, and thus sectarian boundaries, at the grassroots level.

The young protesters of the Independence Intifada were, as one observer described them, a “motley crew” of Christian secularists (FPM) and Christians from the far right (LF), as well as Druze leftists (PYO) and independent leftist students, along with young political “newbies” (Quilty 2005). Also visible at the demonstrations were the young supporters of Rafiq

⁵² Multiple sources and all my own interviews with actors at multiple levels who were involved in the Intifada confirm this. Numerous other researchers studying the period corroborate this point. See Wimmen 2014; Gahre 2007; Majed 2007; Sleiman 2006).
Hariri. The death of Hariri was the “dawning of a political consciousness” for many Sunni youth, the majority of whom had never previously been involved in politics before they attended the rallies of the Independence Intifada. Nadar Naqueeb, a leader of the Future Youth Association (FYA, which had functioned up to this point primarily as an organization for students who had received scholarships from the Hariri foundation), jumped into action after Hariri’s death, and rallied Sunni youth to attend the protests. Many of these Sunni youth had no previous political party affiliation, nor had they ever been members of any quasi-political youth organization. In interviews, several of them described themselves as “totally apolitical” until the death of Rafiq Hariri, at which point they “exploded into politics.” One Future Youth Association member who joined the protests at that time described his experience in this way:

I sobbed when I heard of the death of Rafiq Hariri. I ended up going down to Martyrs’ Square because I felt compelled to go. I went to mourn him and show my love for him and to demand the truth for his assassination. I just had to do something! I had never been to a political rally before this. It was a very new and very moving experience for me to be there. It was at this time I met the people of the Future Youth Association and I instantly felt I found my home. Now politics is not something I do, it is something I live.

In the first weeks of the demonstrations there was a “euphoric feeling” among the youth in attendance because the protests had a palpable and significant inter-sectarian nature. As Wimmen writes, the demonstrators:

...imagined themselves in highly emotional terms (and were portrayed this way by the media and by PR professionals contributing their skills to the cause) as a people re-uniting and re-establishing a sovereign political community through a genuine bottom-up movement, as opposed to the pretend reconciliation built on foreign domination that had been the hallmark of the 1990s (Wimmen 2014, 18).


54 Ashi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
This was indeed a transformative experience for many young people who had grown up in homogeneous sectarian cantons since the end of the war. As one young demonstrator described it: “We have gathered together youth from all different backgrounds here. We are overcoming our confessional differences to work towards common goals. We youth are finally coming together for the liberation of Lebanon.” 55

In her study of the Independence Intifada, Rayan Majed (2007) describes “Muslim youth carrying bibles and Christian youth carrying Korans” and how young people “met each other for the first time in the camps at Martyrs’ square” (Majed 2007, 47). The early days of the demonstrations had a feeling of “joie et la revolution” and attracted thousands of students and youth to the streets (ibid.). Says another young protester of this unique period: “The Intifada allowed us to express ourselves freely. Up to now we had been under persecution and repression by the regime because of our opinions.” 56 Furthermore, many of the youth felt exhilarated at being part of a political movement for the first time. One new youth activist described his feeling at being involved in the protests: “for the first time we were seen and heard. For the first time, I was fighting for something I believed in. It was exhilarating. The TV stations all reported on our activities.” 57 Another stated: “I never thought I would be participating in such events. But I am so inspired by Lebanese coming together.” 58 As Heiko Wimmen noted, with its “ecstatic enactments of national, cross-sectarian harmony and unity,” the Martyrs’ Square movement thus mobilized a political resource that enabled an especially

55 Halami, interview with author, Beirut, April 2005.
56 Beydoun, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
57 Salam, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
powerful claim to popular sovereignty, while at the same time removing the last shreds of legitimacy from the divisive and foreign-controlled official institutions nearby (Wimmen 2014, 18).

The young protesters started pitching tents on Beirut’s downtown Martyrs’ Square on the evening of 18 February, starting up a ‘Tent City’ which served as the focal point for the youths’ activism. The demonstrations continued to build in momentum as youth continued peacefully to defy the ban on protests that had been imposed by the Minister of the Interior. The first success was on 28 February when, in the face of decreasing authority and legitimacy, Prime Minister Omar Karami announced his resignation in a speech that was televised live and shown on a giant screen in Martyrs’ Square. This victory further energized the youth and created intense feelings of enthusiasm and the sense that ‘everything is possible.’ Furthermore, as Majed argues, while this success was the fruit of the joint efforts by all the actors of the Intifada, it was particularly a product of the efforts of the youth who were the ones who organized the streets and who cultivated the “peaceful, democratic insurrection” (Majed 2007, 56).

The young protesters were also responsible for initiating the first of the weekly Monday demonstrations in the three weeks after Hariri’s assassination. Those events served to provide momentum for the demonstrations which culminated in the historic million-people turnout on 14 March 2005. Activists describe the first of these protests as being so “massive” that it surprised both the youth and the opposition political leaders (Majed 2007, 27).

Importantly, youth brought new culture, new aesthetics, and new modes of protesting to these demonstrations that had never before been seen on the Lebanese political stage. They
injected creativity, humour, technology, and a sense of playfulness into these street
demonstrations. For example, students began a petition that grew to 200 metres long,
organized music concerts, rallied people via text message, and came up with pithy slogans like
“Ukraine did it, why don’t we?” and, “if you want the truth dial 1559” (Majed 2007, 22, 31).
Observers of the Independence Intifada have remarked that during this phase of these historic
protests youth exhibited genuine political agency. My own research supports this contention.
Youth worked in a democratic and collective manner, incorporating new people and ideas as
they came along (Chaoul 2007). In interviews with both independent and partisan activists of
this time, they describe themselves as organizing “by ourselves, on our own accord.”
Many also felt that they were fighting for a project of major political change: “In the camp we shared
the same objectives concerning the Syrian retreat and the truth of the Hariri assassination.
Some of us were also unified by a rejection of the prevailing political situation and a desire for
change, particularly in terms of the political class.”

In his work on the Independence Intifada, Melham Chaoul (2007) compares the protests
associated with the Independence Intifada with the prewar protests of the late 1960s and early
1970s. He described how the prewar protests, despite their more ideological and collective
goals, had very top-down “semi militaristic” characteristics: the strong personalization of
leadership, “unlimited” support for that leader, as well as an “obsession with unity and
common programmes” to the extent that differences or contradictions were concealed in order
to maintain the appearance of utter unanimity. Protests of that era were characterized by

60 Nadim, interview with author, Beirut, December 2007.
centralized control over decisions and media messages—even protest routes and chants were pre-dictated. Moreover, they typically used hardliner discourse, made uncompromising demands (for “total victory” etc.), and sought to convey that the protesters “were not there to have fun” (Chaoul 2007, 158). This was especially true for student demonstrators who had to impress upon onlookers that they “had not just granted themselves a day off to skip classes but rather to protest in order to better work and study” (ibid.).

In contrast, the protests associated with the Independence Intifada were very different, to the degree that Chaoul argues they represented a “rupture” with the style of protests that dominated Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s. Contrary to the vertical structures of the traditional political movements, and leadership’s top-down rapport with its ‘base,’ the spirit of the Independence Intifada initiated Lebanon into networks of horizontal connections, egalitarian relations, and the mobilization of diverse individuals from all corners of the country (ibid., 159-61). The 2005 protests were disordered, spontaneous, a ‘creative daily act.’ They incorporated humour, uplifting words, and performances. They were highly democratic and, at least initially, leadership was secondary in the Intifada. This new style of protest was both a product of and magnet for a new generation of Lebanese youth whose participation in Lebanon’s Intifada made political action dynamic, creative, and fun. Yet, as Wimmen astutely notes, “not everybody felt equally invited” to the party (Wimmen 2014, 18). It was impossible to miss (and quickly noted by political observers) the conspicuously low participation of Shiite Lebanese. Many Lebanese, especially those close to Hezbollah (who are primarily, but not entirely, Shiites), considered the Hariri assassination an “Israeli false-flag operation designed to
discredit Syria” and regarded the events in Martyrs’ Square as little more than products of American manipulation (ibid., loc. cit.; see also Chit 2006).

The response of the protesters in Martyrs’ Square was to “parade” individual Shiite participants in front of the media in an attempt to show their movement truly did span the sectarian spectrum (Wimmen 2014, 18; see also Bortolazzi 2013). Many had hoped that the Shiites would eventually join the movement. Then, on 8 March, Hezbollah organized its own rally to “thank Syria” for its patronage and for “standing by our side” for 15 years (BBC 2005). Waving Lebanese flags and signs reading, “No to foreign interference,” hundreds of thousands of Lebanese attended the 8 March rally. In fact, the turnout on 8 March dwarfed all previous rallies, and revealed the opposition’s claim to national unity to be a delusion. After this point the mood in Martyrs’ Square toward Hezbollah shifted, and anti-Shiite rhetoric gained a currency that “drove even a considerable number of non-Shiite activists away in disgust” (Wimmen 2014).61 Derogatory remarks toward Shiites were also noted at the time in online forums, Twitter, and Facebook. These remarks, mostly from the partisan activists, only served to undermine the inclusive appeal of the movement that the independent activists had been attempting to create.

One of the differences between the demonstrations of 8 and 14 March, for which the two major Lebanese political coalitions are named, were their fundamentally opposing views on Syria’s role in Lebanon and their opposing stances on Lebanon’s foreign and regional

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61 Wimmen (2014, 18) reports that in his interviews conducted during February 2005 with Shiites in the residential quarters supportive of Hezbollah, Hariri supporters hailing from lower-middle-class Sunni quarters were heard making slurs against Shiites, even before the 8 March rally. It is interesting to note Wimmen also reports that many Shiite youth actually felt “distant” from Hezbollah’s stance on Syria. This is because many felt that Syrians were taking away the low-paid jobs in the country—something they resented. Thus many Shiite youth were not as moved to participate in a demonstration “thanking” Syria for its presence in Lebanon.
orientation. Whereas March 14th turned toward the West and the Gulf Monarchies for support and urged neutrality in regional conflicts, March 8th allied themselves with Iran and Syria and championed a “no to foreign interference” stance toward the West, and in particular toward the United States and Israel.

The 8 March rally gave the opposition a strong incentive to up the ante, and organize an even larger rally for 14 March. Drawing on the “full scope of sectarian solidarity and clientelist networks at the disposal of the Hariri family” the opposition bussed in supporters from around the country and successfully rallied its base. Given that all the other sectarian communities were already onboard, the opposition succeeded in generating a turnout that trumped 8 March. As Wimmen writes, they underlined their political claim “through numerical rather than moral superiority.” What had begun with the creative protest of youth had deteriorated into a “sectarian headcount faithfully reflecting the demographic composition of the country” (Wimmen 2014, 19). Indeed, the historic turnout on 14 March was not just a product of Lebanese communities united in their demand for sovereignty and freedom. It was also a product of the competitive process of sectarian mobilization—as Michael Young writes, it was a “sectarian payback” and thus more of a reflection of “Lebanon’s pluralist cacophony than of its unity” (Young 2010, 53, 52).

March 14th was also the “day the youths were forgotten”: not one of the youth activists from the Tent City was invited to the podium to address the crowds. Instead, the political leaders stepped in and took turns giving speeches in what one commentator described as a “speech-sharing formula” and began to claim the youth-initiated movement as their own (Moawad 2011). The power of the ‘Freedom Camp’ (as the Tent City in Martyrs’ Square was
called) to generate political momentum and popular legitimacy had, by now, become plainly apparent to the political parties and their leaders. Moreover, the political parties, particularly Hariri’s Future Movement, had now begun to fund the demonstrations—giving the youth the financial lifeline they needed to continue their protests and sustain their camp. The youth activism that initiated the demonstrations, broke down the fears of street protests among ordinary Lebanese, and laid the groundwork for widespread public mobilization was now becoming divided along partisan lines. For the independent and unaffiliated youth who thought that Martyrs’ Square was the beginning of radical political transformation, March 14th marked the “denouement of the Independence Intifada”—the day the “carousel of fantasies” stopped (Young 2010, 54).

Though many, up to this point, had praised the unity of the youth, referring to the young protesters as “the united Lebanese youth, showing us the way of the future,” it was (like the opposition’s claims of national unity) largely an illusion. As I argued above, many of the youth activists who initially led people to Martyrs’ Square came to the movement as partisan activists. They came carrying both Lebanese flags as well as the flags of their parties and pictures of their leaders (Majed 2007, 36). They worked together, but “each with their own face” (ibid.). They cooperated across sectarian and political lines, but only to advance but one common goal: sovereignty from Syria. After that, as one unaffiliated Tent City protester explained, “we realized our goals were about as different as you could imagine. We were fighting together, but many of the youth had other agendas.”62

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Divisions quickly appeared between the youth who were politically independent and those who were supporters of a political party. The independents saw the Intifada as much more than just demonstrations against Syrian intervention. They sought a program of radical democratic renewal, which included an end to the sectarian system itself. The partisan youth activists, on the other hand, had different goals. The Christian youth of the FPM and the LF, for example, had the much more limited goal of Syrian withdrawal. They had no interest in ending the sectarian system, rather, they were more interested in getting their “fair share” within it.63

The youth with partisan sympathies were also interested in advancing the cause of their exiled and imprisoned leaders. They were demanding their release and return, and each sought to promote their leader above the other, as the head of the Christian community, and as the man who would fight for Christians in the postwar era—an era in which they largely felt their community had been denied.

In the case of the Sunni youth, the Hariri assassination had propelled them into politics in a new way. They had felt ‘orphaned’ after his death, and were motivated to attend the protests in order to demand the truth behind his assassination. These youth turned to the Future Movement with new purpose at this time—with an explicitly political purpose. Indeed, 2005 marked the beginning of the “lebanonization” of the Sunni community. They began to act as a minority sect whose existence was threatened (International Crisis Group 2010).

With the dramatic return of Aoun and Geagea to the heads of their parties (on 7 May and 26 July respectively) and the announcement of Saad Hariri, the son of Rafiq Hariri, as Future Movement’s new leader on 20 April 2005, partisan youth were emboldened in their

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respective causes. Indeed, March 14th was a “perfect merging of interests,” a day, “like Martyrs Square itself, that was whatever you wanted it to be” (Young 2010, 53).

Most of the literature on this period highlights the role of the elites in “claiming” the activism of youth, exerting “top-down control” on the youth movement, effectively “co-opting” it, and making it “impossible for youth to revolt against them” (Majed 2007; Bortolazzi 2013; Narwani 2015). While it would be naïve to doubt that the party leaders sought to capitalize on the youth activism for their own particular purposes, what is overlooked here is the voluntary and autonomous role that partisan youth activists played in facilitating the demise of (what many thought would be) a movement for more radical political change. For example, when the independent activists attempted to convert the structures that had been established in the tent city camp into a permanent civic movement, it was not the leaders who interfered, it was the partisan youth activists. Without ‘top-down’ instructions from their parties, it was they who suppressed the attempts of independent and unaffiliated youth to transform the protests into something more enduring (see also Sleiman 2006). The fact was that in the case of many of the partisan youth, namely those associated with the LF and FPM, they were not even in communication with their leaders up to this point, and their parties were not yet reorganized. Rather, they represented an informal network of partisan activists and were not yet being directed by their leaders. One independent protester who participated in the Independence Intifada recalled:

They had their own agenda, and it was not our agenda. We had never really been on the same page as them, but we had tried to open up to our Christian counterparts. Back then the FPM youth, at least, were still calling for secularism. After the 2005 demonstrations we wanted to build on our successes and create something that was truly independent. But our project clashed with theirs. So they made excuses, they argued against us. They said now is not the right time. They said a real revolution would
end up in bloodshed and chaos and that what we were doing was dangerous. They said we should work with them [i.e., the leaders and parties] if we want to make gains. They convinced many people of these arguments, too. But I believe they were just not interested in building something - they just wanted to make sure their group came out on top. They wanted their man to be the hero. How could we come together like this? We failed. It is a challenge we still face.64

The independent youth felt marginalized by the partisan youth in other ways as well.

Once their own leaders had taken to the podiums, partisan youth, especially those of the Future Movement and the PSP, for example, took it upon themselves to speak to the media and to the crowds on behalf of the independent youth protesters, dominating the airtime and effectively silencing their voices as a result (Moawad 2011).

In another, more symbolic, incident the independent youth activists of Martyrs’ Square had wanted to commemorate the closing of the demonstrations and the dismantling of ‘Tent City’ by holding a ceremony and handing out medals of honour to all the young activists who had taken part. The independent activists had organized all of this, but in the end their efforts were ‘sabotaged’ by the FPM activists who argued the event should be put off until General Aoun returned to Lebanon so that he could address the youth in person. She explains:

We were planning and deciding what would be the best way to end the demonstration. We thought that as part of the civil society initiative, we could give out medals to the activists there. Unfortunately, though, the FPM sabotaged everything. They wanted to hold off until General Aoun returned to Lebanon and gave a speech to the Youth and to the whole of Lebanon. They wanted to create the conditions for him to return a national hero, the long awaited hero who was finally coming back. They really sabotaged everything we tried to do. I have very bad memories about how they treated us and how they acted. It was a sour ending to a beautiful time. They ruined the event in the end. We couldn’t even have it. There was too much fighting. We just had to take our tents down and leave the square and that was that. Out of nowhere it was over. All that euphoria was gone.65

64 Mirna, interview with author, Beirut, December 2007.
Moreover, when unaffiliated, newly politicized youth were drawn to the Independence Intifada protests, it was often thanks to the grassroots efforts of the partisan activists who were reaching out to youth in their universities and communities, and drawing them into their specific partisan circles. For many youth, after all, Independence Intifada was the dawning of their political consciousness. They came to Martyrs’ Square without a defined political purpose, except in search of ‘something better.’ In spite of the fact that many of these new protesters claimed they sought “peace and democracy,”66 they were also young people whose lives had been shaped by the heavy legacies of the civil war. They had grown up in homogeneous communities, attended mainly homogeneous schools, and had families who had felt the sting of increasing economic insecurity. They were, therefore, susceptible to the mobilizing efforts of the partisan youth activists. One such protester described his journey toward the LF like this:

Up until 2005, I never believed in anything political. I never thought I’d be interested in politics. I remember getting the news of February 14th while my school bus drove me home. Then my friend asked me if I was aounie [i.e., FPM] or ouwaite [i.e., LF]. I just shrugged. I didn’t know what aounie or ouwaite meant. So I just said neither. We never discussed such things in my home. The only thing that my parents ever mentioned was that Syria needed to leave my hometown. But my friend encouraged me to join them at the protests. He said it was up to us as youth to change the future of our country. I decided to go. I saw hundreds of thousands at Hariri’s funeral. I saw the youth of Lebanon run to the streets every week. I saw the army try to stop them. I saw people sit down in Martyrs’ Square to fight for the freedom my country longed for. I felt my heart fill with joy. I met the other LF and FPM activists there, and spoke to them and they taught me their vision of change. By the time the 2005 elections rolled around I had taken sides. I decided then to become an ouwet supporter (LF). My parents, like so many other Christians that year, voted for Aoun. I actually feel proud of that moment too—the fact that I came into my own political opinion independently of my parents.67

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66 Young Christian who later joined the FPM, interview with author, Beirut, May 2005.
The partisan activists who took part in the Independence Intifada were thus a far cry from being ‘blind followers’ of the confessional elites, and the fact that the youth protests of the Intifada were eventually divided along partisan lines was not just a result of elite co-optation of the youth movement. Rather, partisan youth activists were pro-active creators of confessionally-based divisions in their own right. Operating at grassroots levels, it was they who rallied many previously apolitical youth to come to the streets. It was they who sowed the seeds of division among the youth, and who worked from below to prevent a more unified ‘civic’ movement from taking place. It was they who encouraged other youth, newly awakened to politics, to join their sectarian circles. They were the conduits of the political leaders into the protest camp of the youth—even while some of these leaders were still absent from the scene. They brought the causes of their leaders to youth at the grassroots and they argued for them to be the true heroes of the protests. Thus, not only did the partisan youth pioneer the anti-Syrian protests that built the foundation for the Independence Intifada in the first place; they also helped to create circumstances at the grassroots level that allowed Lebanon’s political elite to establish news bases of support among youth. They did this, first, by rallying previously unaffiliated youth to attend the protests and ‘baptizing’ them into their parties, and, second, by advancing partisan agendas among independent activists and suppressing and sabotaging their attempts to create a movement free from sectarian-based political affiliations. In short, partisan youth activists set the stage for the political leaders to renew their popular support, especially among youth.

The deepening sectarian divisions among youth in the aftermath of the March 14th demonstration were a bitter disappointment for those who had considered the Independence
Intifada to be the beginning of deeper change. One young independent protester stated: “[The intifada] was above all to effect change, but the partisan mentality prevents change. Many of our partners remain focused on their party agendas rather than agendas for change.” 68 Another put it this way:

With the launch of the intifada my parents were pessimistic. I told them then I didn’t want to share in their pessimism. I told them that I believed in the future. Now, I’ve begun to think like them. We have been pushed aside. I don’t know if we can still change things anymore. This feeling has only gotten worse since the elections. 69

Indeed, within a month of March 14th, ill feelings between partisan youth and independent youth had replaced the ‘good vibes’ of the protesters’ camp. As the elections drew near (scheduled for June 2005), the leaders started to prepare for their electoral interests and displayed their deep dedication, not to change and revolution, but “to their own survival” (Young 2010, 55). Some of the young protesters felt betrayed by the major parties. Many more, however, followed the leaders down their self-serving paths, for “complex, contradictory and unsatisfactory reasons of their own” (ibid.). As Ziad Majed recalls of the youth who took part in Tent City:

They did not form a strong movement to pressure their leaders. Maybe they did not have time to do so, or they were not capable of doing so. I believe there was a certain amount of romance about the camp. That is understandable. But the political impact of the camp was more symbolic than effective, and it is clear that the leaders are popular, and that they have legitimacy and that many of their acts are justified even by youth (Majed, quoted in Young 2010, 56).

The youth who had been acting with freedom and autonomy during the Intifada proceeded to “jump on the bandwagon” of their party leaders (Majed 2007; Chatterji 2008).

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One student noted how her partisan counterparts started quoting their leaders “like parrots, without critical minds, without a sense of rebellion” (quoted in Majed 2007, 60). Thus, the political parties absorbed the youth protests of 2005. For some young activists, such as those who were affiliated with the FPM and the LF, their beloved leaders had finally returned to the political scene after years of being unjustly banished. To not follow their leaders was “unthinkable.”

Other young devotees, such as the many young Sunni activists, gladly followed the son of their slain leader. Losing Hariri was like “losing a father.” Said one Future Movement activist: “there was no question we would give all our support to Saad.” For other young protesters, there was no clear political ‘home’ for them to return to as elections started to heat up. The closest political party for those youth activists who sought a real alternative to ‘traditional’ politics was the Democratic Left Movement (DLM) described above. Though this party played a leading role in the Intifada, and won the support of many youth, it was ultimately unable to compete with the power of the major sect-based parties. As one DLM member stated, “we were mice among giants.”

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70 Quote from Abs, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007—an FPM activist referring to the recent return of Michel Aoun to Lebanon and the reason that so many youth ‘blindly followed’ him into the alliance with Hezbollah in 2005.
72 Ibid.
73 The leader of the DLM, Samir Kassir was in fact called ‘the face of the revolution.’
74 It is important to note that the DLM has also been criticized by both insiders and outsiders as being unable to maintain ‘real independence’ on the Lebanese political scene. It has lost some credibility among members because it became increasingly embroiled in the politics of the March 14th coalition and, by some accounts, engaged in ‘political opportunism’ in order to get the one DLM MP, Elias Atallah, elected. As mentioned earlier, the DLM has also been criticized for the dominance of Atallah and his supporters in the party—at the expense of youth members. Thus, similar to other parties, it has been unable to provide a consistent alternative to the personalistic political style that characterizes so much of politics in Lebanon. It has also lacked consistency and clarity on its positions on the issue of secularization (one of its founding principles). As one DLM insider put it, “The party that hoped to promote a different way of doing politics has basically become a very Lebanese-style player.” The struggle of this party to maintain its independence vis-à-vis the current confessional division in Lebanon, as well as to work against the personalistic style of leadership, is evidence of the power of these dynamics and how strongly they have come to characterize the Lebanese political realm.
At a broader level, there were other, powerful, divisive forces which also began to take hold. For example, the return of assassination by car bomb “reenergized old confessional fears.” The car bombs also indicated the re-emergence of geostrategic politicking that surpassed the capacity of the independent youth to respond, and further bolstered the causes of partisan activists.\(^7\) Thus, by the time elections arrived in June, and with them “the resurgent sectarianism” so characteristic of Lebanese political dynamics, the protests were rechanneled into the “rhythms and mechanisms” of the sectarian logic that had characterized Lebanese politics for decades, and a new generation of young activists was delivered into the “arms of the sectarian strongmen that the system had always favoured” (Hirst 2010, 312).

In the years since the Intifada these internal divisions have been strengthened and reinforced by the growing geostrategic competition at the regional and global levels, as is often the case with Lebanese politics. This has been symbolized by Sunni fears of an emerging “Shi’a crescent” on the one hand, and the growing confrontation between the United States, Israel, and Iran (especially after the election of President Ahmadinajad in 2005) on the other (Kingston 2013, 80). The events of the 2011 Arab Spring and particularly the ongoing war in Syria have also served to intensify the divisions between the Lebanese communities along March 8\(^{th}\)—March 14\(^{th}\) lines. Thus, rather than marking the beginning of a period of political change, or, in other words, a critical juncture in Lebanese politics, the Independence Intifada was (yet another) case of the Lebanese system reinforcing and “defining its boundaries” and reminding

\(^7\) Most painful for the Independent youth was the assassination of Samir Kassir on 2 June 2005. He, along with Ziad Majed, was also instrumental in forming the Democratic Leftist Movement.
the Lebanese of the power of its “mechanisms of continuity” (Young 2010, 56).76 In the years that have followed the Independence Intifada, the Lebanese political field has continued to be characterized by the “deepening and institutionalisation of sectarian factionalism” which has entrenched divisions “as profound as the country has ever experienced” (Kingston 2013, 80; Hirst 2010, 312; see also Shebaya 2007).

One of the conclusions to be drawn about the Independence Intifada that is relevant to this study is that these historic and moving demonstrations politicized a generation of young people, many of whom had never been involved in politics before. The protests motivated Lebanese youth from diverse confessional backgrounds to follow the more experienced (in many cases, partisan) youth activists to the streets, and participate in the exhilarating demonstrations and the tent camp at Martyrs’ Square. Though the protests initially gave many youth a new and important experience of inter-confessional cooperation and novel feelings of political empowerment, this experience of unity and autonomy was ultimately short and fleeting. Most writers of this period talk about this fact when attempting to explain why a more profound change in the mentalities of young people did not occur—one that would have enabled them to join forces with the independent youth who sought more radical change. They cite the legacies of the civil war and the “hypnotic” power of the political leaders to induce a “communal delusion” among youth (Majed 2007; Young 2010; and Moawad 2012). While these explanations are not incorrect, I argue they are incomplete.

76 Young goes on to write that these “uncompromising mechanisms of continuity” were both the bane of the system for some, but also its safeguard against too-sudden political and social shifts that “might bring only chaos and violence.” Here Young is essentially taking a position in the larger debate on the pros and cons of a confessionally-based consociational political system and whether it is the answer to or the cause of Lebanon’s ongoing political woes.
What is overlooked in these analyses is the highly ambivalent role that partisan youth activists played in the Independence Intifada. On one hand, their activism in the years prior to these historic protests laid the foundation, built the inter-confessional networks, and broke the political barriers that paved the way for the massive public demonstrations of 2005. Though commentators described them as “spontaneous,” the reality was that they were built on the foundation of years of risky grassroots opposition by a network of autonomous, young, partisan activists working in partnership with independent leftist youth. Many, however, including many of the youth themselves, mistook the 2005 youth movement for being both unified and revolutionary. In reality, it was neither. This is where the other role of the partisan activists comes in. Their active involvement, paradoxically, both contributed to the movement’s cross-sectarian appeal, while also eventually undermining its inclusivity and unity. Partisan youth activists, for example, took clear sides when the March 8th demonstration occurred, and contributed to the anti-Shiite rhetoric that drove away the few Shiite participants who had joined them. This deepened the perception of the movement as a realignment of sectarian interests, rather than one that was truly unified. Furthermore, while partisan youth helped enable the Intifada, they also ensured it had a more limited goal. They worked hard at the grassroots to keep it focused on the narrower objective of Syrian withdrawal, and undermined the attempts of independent youth to push for more systemic change to the Lebanese political system. They also sabotaged independent youth by convincing them and others who might have joined them that their aim of overhauling the political system was ill-timed, if not dangerous. Moreover, the partisan activists demoralized the young activists who had sought something different, forcing them in some cases to abandon their activities and thus effectively
narrowing the grassroots space available for the political independents. In addition, partisan youth aggressively promoted *their* leaders as the heads of what was initially a bottom-up and leaderless movement, in effect, installing them in the role before they had even arrived on the scene. Their persistent activism also helped to mobilize—and to divide—the newly politicized youth who were drawn to Martyrs’ Square. Partisan youth drew young activists into partisan circles and thus set the stage for their parties to renew their support among a new generation of energetic Lebanese youth.

To pin the ‘blame’ for the demobilization of the grassroots youth movement solely on the actions of the elites and the system they favour is to miss an important part of the picture. It is to miss the role of experienced, politically savvy, young partisan activists who work to reproduce sectarian divisions from the bottom up. Though political elites did play a role in rallying their supporters (especially in the face of the March 8\textsuperscript{th} demonstrations) and facilitating the division of the movement in 2005, as did the confessionally-based electoral laws and institutions that swung into action in the June 2005 elections, leaving the explanation for the resurgence of the sectarian logic at that means we are in danger of overlooking the myriad of ways that the system is also reinforced by dynamics emanating from below. If we are to grasp more fully why so many youth rallied in support of the parties and turned their backs on the independent activists, we cannot ignore the divisive role played by partisan youth at the grassroots.\textsuperscript{77} Their networking and activism worked to create partisan affiliations and dynamics

\textsuperscript{77} As for the independents, they, too, suffered in the aftermath of the Independence Intifada. Many of the youth activists (who came from leftist student groups, such as AUB’s ‘No Frontiers’) decided at this time to join a new political party, the Democratic Left Movement (DLM), a party comprising former communists and university student activists. The DLM allied itself with the March 14\textsuperscript{th} coalition early on. But the evolution of the coalition into a bloc which defended the interests of Hariri’s Future Movement and became increasingly embroiled in its opposition with March 8\textsuperscript{th} weakened the foundation of the Democratic Left. Many of the young activists started to
among young protesters in the Intifada, thereby also helping to ensure the perpetuation of Lebanon’s sectarian legacy.

Before proceeding, it is important to highlight some of the shifts that occurred in the aftermath of the Independence Intifada that help frame this examination of Lebanese youth politics, and lay the groundwork for my subsequent chapters. One of the key shifts was the growing institutionalization of youth participation in the partisan political parties after 2005. Up until then, many of the ‘parties’ were not actually official political parties at all. Rather, they were uninstitutionalized movements based in specific sectarian communities that centred on a specific leader and his cause (i.e., Samir Geagea and Michel Aoun), or the patronage networks or a specific political leader (Rafiq Hariri) (El-Husseini 2012). It is only since 2006 that these movements (the Future Movement, FPM, and the LF are the main examples) have become official political parties. In transitioning from movement to fully fledged political party they have been undergoing the process of institutionalization, resulting in the establishment of “modern, broad-based party structures” more akin to parties of the West (Sensenig-Dabbous 2009). One component of this process has been the formalization of youth political participation, namely, the establishment of political party branches or ‘youth wings’ run by youth and dedicated to the activities of youth and students. In this way, partisan youth activism has been brought directly under the auspices (and control) of the political parties. I discuss the

see the DLM as succumbing to “political opportunism” (Majed quoted in Quilty 2005). Thus, there was no ‘political home’ for many of the youth who wished to position themselves outside of this sectarian rift, and who did not want to side with either of the major coalitions. There were also problems between the youth and the leadership of the DLM, the same types of problems that partisan youth encounter in their parties which I discuss in chapter seven. Youth in the DLM, for example, clashed with the leader, Elias Attallah, who “only knew how to run the party like a one man-show, call it ‘Lebanese Heritage’” said one youth member who also had his own political ambitions. They also clashed with the leadership around issues of financial transparency, and the fact that there was none. In both instances the youth were not entirely successful in implementing the changes they sought within the DLM.
consequences that the creation of the youth wings has had on youth politics in chapter seven, but there are three points that need to be emphasized here. First, the youth wings allow the parties to penetrate spheres of society that would otherwise be beyond their reach, such as the university campus, youth movements and networks in civil society, community-level engagement, and youths’ social lives. Second, although they are part of the political parties, youth wings are organized, driven, and led by youth. They represent one of the spheres where youth have (varying degrees of) autonomy over their affairs. They also represent a distinct layer of politics in Lebanon which is clearly related to ‘adult’ politics on the national level, but which also has its own complexities and dynamics. Third, while we now see some of the highest levels of youth engagement in the parties (possibly since the heyday of parties in the 1960s and 1970s),\textsuperscript{78} we also have to bear in mind the nature of the parties that youth have been mobilized into—for the most part, parties that are not based in platform or ideology, but rather are primarily structured around and exist to serve the interests of Lebanon’s political elites. As I discuss later in this thesis, this has led to the paradoxical situation whereby youth are more involved in political parties since 2005, yet have no greater voice or visibility in their parties or in mainstream politics. Nor have youth issues garnered more support from the party leaders in

\textsuperscript{78} The Chatterji survey showed high rates of political party participation among students in 2008. Nearly one-third of students surveyed were actively involved in the youth wing or student organization of a political party. Of course, in Lebanon, concrete statistical data about numbers of youth members were not given by the parties. There is a strong taboo against divulging numerical and statistical data in Lebanon for reasons of demographic sensitivities (the fact that the political power-sharing formula is based on the demographic size of each community). The issue of demographics is so contentious that an official census has not been done since 1932, although national household surveys have been conducted. In Lebanon no community, but especially the Christian community whose share of political power now likely outweighs their actual community size, wants their demographic details to be known lest attention be drawn to the need for altering the political power-sharing balance. This is the underlying reason for the paranoia surrounding the divulging of statistics in Lebanon. The political parties are highly secretive about divulging membership numbers. All of the parties claimed to have tens of thousands of young members. The issue is further complicated because, as discussed later, the nature of youth membership in parties in sometimes highly informal.
the years since 2005. Rather, goals such as empowering young people in politics, addressing youth unemployment, or lowering of the voting age have been routinely subordinated or sacrificed by the political elite to broader factional goals. I return to this in chapter seven.

In the following two chapters, I focus on the how members of the youth wings, i.e., partisan youth, have helped the political parties to penetrate those out-of-reach spheres of society. In the next chapter, I focus specifically on university politics and student elections. In the layer of Lebanese politics that the youth wings represent, student elections are the peak of their annual activities: they are the ultimate forum for youth politics in Lebanon. As the above discussion has shown, the foundation was laid for the implantation of the partisan parties into university campuses during the war as many of Lebanon’s universities were physically divided. After 2005 we now have the additional and intertwining dynamics of (a) an increasingly powerful sectarian division between the March 8th and March 14th blocs, together with (b) a more politicized young generation, and (c) the formal establishment of youth wings by the parties. These shifts have laid the groundwork for the intense sectarian dynamics that we see today in the realms of Lebanon’s universities. It is to an analysis of these university dynamics I now turn.
Chapter Four

Practising Sectarianism: Student Politics in Lebanon

It’s election night at the American University of Beirut. All the major TV networks are on campus. Having obtained official permission to be there, I am standing with the other dozen or more journalists in front of a crowd of a thousand students or more. It’s 8 p.m. at night but it’s still bright out because the area is awash in blinding flood lights. The students have been separated into two opposing sides by barricades and two giant television screens. March 8th is on the left, and Students at Work is on the right. I do not know where the independent supporters and their candidates are. Dr. Marwan Kisarwani, AUB’s Dean of Students, is standing on the stairs of West Hall, looking over the crowd. He leans over and explains that the giant screens are a new addition to the AUB elections, something to “help quell the tension and lighten the mood.” “It gives the students something else to focus on,” he says. As the tallies for the Student Representative Committees roll in, they are projected on the screens and each time one side of the crowd - the winning side - goes wild. In between the poll results, jokes and funny images appear on the screens. At one point, the screens ask the students to sing the national anthem – which they immediately do. The Dean’s plan seems to be working. The whole thing has the atmosphere of a rowdy sporting event rather than the heated political conflicts I was warned of. I realize, though, that this is the start of the evening, and most of the conflicts happen later, after the results are in and when the students are out on the surrounding streets. “That’s when the fun turns into fistfights” one of the journalists explains, “that’s why the army is also here.” While we all wait for results, I try to decipher the students’ Arabic chants. I hear the March 8th side chant something about “apples.” I don’t understand and ask someone to enlighten me. “They are saying ‘an apple a day keeps the doctor away,’” the same journalist explains. “They are referring to Samir Geagea, who is called the ‘Doctor’ because he went to medical school before he got into politics. The LF students call him ‘the Doctor’ as a sign of respect, but he didn’t actually ever finish his degree.” “Pretty funny,” I reply. As the victors’ names appeared on two separate screens, the opposing crowds respond with boos or shouts of victory. That year March 14th won.
Introduction

University student politics in Lebanon is serious business. Student elections are the ‘pinnacle’ of the academic year, a long-awaited climax to months of student organizing and campaigning. Moreover, student elections in Lebanon receive widespread, national attention by all of the country’s major news networks. When observing elections in person, it is hard not to be swept up by the emotionally charged atmosphere as thousands of students gather to hear the results. The fact that all the dozens of TV networks are also present—interviewing candidates on prime time news and reporting live as the results roll in—only adds to the heightened ambiance.

Why all the fuss? Because student politics in Lebanon are seen as a barometer of politics at the national level and a harbinger of things to come. They are routinely described as a “microcosm” of Lebanon’s politics, “reflections” of the adult political scene, and “a rehearsal for the real thing” (Caldwell 2011; Gatten 2013; Worth 2009). While student politics have always reflected national political dynamics to some extent, since 2005 they have become a “mirror image” of Lebanon’s sectarian divisions (Hijab 2008). Indeed, the penetration of the conventional political parties into Lebanon’s university campuses, especially since 2005, is striking. Universities have become major sites of partisan mobilization among youth in the post-2005 era. To enter a particular university campus or faculty is to step foot into a complex local arrangement of political groups and relationships. A 2013 study by the UNDP on youth in political parties, for example, states,

Today political parties play a key role in the political socialization of young people and prepare them to assume leadership roles, much of this is due to their presence on universities. The missions the parties undertake in their universities for the most part reproduce sectarian and partisan allegiances among youth,
who themselves lack an understanding of the repercussions of this on their society (Geha 2013).

In his study of the Free Patriotic Movement, LeFort further argues that Lebanese student elections constitute a “key institution” of the reproduction of sectarian categories, as defined by Clifford Geertz. They operate as a space of where “intergroup fragmentation” is “affirmed” (LeFort 2013a, 1).

Though many observers acknowledge universities as a site of partisan mobilization and the reproduction of sectarian categories, in both the scholarly and popular literature on the topic the activities of the political parties on university campuses are generally viewed as “elite strategies” or “elite interference” in the university sphere, i.e., the top-down methods of elites to extend and perpetuate their power.¹ This interpretation is in keeping with how much of the academic literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflict views youth and their relationship to elites more generally: the focus is on the strategies of the elites, and the youth are seen merely as followers (see Fearon and Laitin 2000). I argue that this interpretation is incomplete.

What is missing from the picture is the active and at times autonomous role youth play at the grassroots in the reproduction of sectarian categories. I argue that the recreation of partisan divisions among students on university campuses is not simply the product of elite manipulation of their passive young followers. Rather, it is also the product of partisan youth whose networking and activities help to channel student life and politics toward pre-existing partisan groups rooted in sectarian categories. True, campus politics end up mirroring national

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¹ Student politics and elections in Lebanon are routinely discussed in popular media, but there are few scholarly studies on this topic. Those that do exist generally discuss partisan youth only in relation to their leaders and tend to subscribe to the “elite instrumentalism” view. See for example: Clark and Salloukh 2013, 2013; LeFort 2013a and 2013b; Rowayheb 2014.
political dynamics, and are clearly the result of the diffusion of parties into the university campus, but it is youth who act as the conduits for the parties on the university campus. It is partisan youth who ‘call in’ their partisan affiliations in order to pursue multiple agendas—not just partisan ones—within their realms of competition. Youth are the ones who are constantly adapting and reformulating partisan affiliations in order to connect and compete with other youth. It is they who ensure the parties are present and relevant to the lives of young people. In doing so, they reproduce sectarianism at grassroots levels. This is not the work of Lebanon’s political elites; it is the work of youth who, in many cases, are working more autonomously from their parent political parties than is often assumed.

University politics illustrate how the activism and networking of partisan youth reproduce sectarian divisions and affiliations. For partisan youth, the universities’ elections are their ‘main act.’ They are the raison d’être of the youth wings of the political parties. To be sure, the effort of partisan youth on campus holds many benefits for the political parties. For example, partisan youth act as the intermediaries for their parties at this grassroots level; they enable their ‘deep reach’ into this realm of Lebanese society. It is they who ensure that the university sphere is not left open for the interventions of other, rival actors—such as independent political groups, or NGOs—who might sway youth into a more progressive camp. Partisan youth also reinvent their parties to suit the needs of youth on campus, ensuring they remain relevant to the lives of ordinary students. For example, it is partisan youth who turn war-time-militia-turned-political parties into the hosts of the ‘hottest parties’ for university students. Partisan youth make the political parties ‘cool.’ Campuses are also where partisan youth recruit new supporters for their political parties, providing them with a new generation
of educated supporters. Partisan youth also turn university elections into ‘testing grounds’ for their leaders’ new electoral alliances and strategies at the national level, and ‘training grounds’ for the next generation of students who will carry on the partisan tradition in their universities year after year. Lastly, partisan youth are the ones who do the hard work of campaigning to win student elections—elections that, when successful, bring increased legitimacy for their parties at the national level. In a country where national elections are widely seen as predetermined by the system, student elections, by contrast, are seen as freer and more democratic. To win student elections, therefore, means your party has genuine grassroots support, especially among the educated population of the country. These are the ways that partisan youth activism in universities ‘trickles up’ to benefit their parties and therefore also the ways that their networking and activities contribute to their parties’ continued position and dominance in Lebanon overall.

This is only half the picture, however. The university is also a realm of politics unto itself with its own dynamics which revolve around youth and are driven by youth and thus are distinct from the sphere of elites and their agendas. Partisan youth, after all, are not just the orchestrators of these dynamics, they are also participants. At the end of the day, partisan youth are still youth themselves and, as such, they pursue multiple agendas on campus—including social and personal ones—sometimes utilizing their partisan affiliations to assist them in achieving these non-partisan goals. They understand the trends, desires, tastes, and priorities of youth because they share them. They are not outsiders to the campus, they are insiders and peers. This means that they graft onto existing forms of relationships between youth, and onto existing youth priorities, as much as they also orient them in a partisan direction. In doing so,
they imbue everyday social relationships, places, and priorities with partisan meaning and identification, thereby contributing to the reproduction of sectarian boundaries among their student cohort from ‘within’ and “in real time”—as one student described it. If they were purely orchestrators, or ‘mini-instrumentalists,’ who blatantly used students for partisan purposes, they might not be so successful in diffusing their partisan affiliations among their peers. It is because they also share the social, personal, and academic priorities of their peers, and are insiders to the social networks on campus, that they can be effective transmitters of partisan sentiment, boundaries, and affiliations. This chapter on university politics in Lebanon aims to refocus and deepen our gaze onto grassroots realms and on those ‘often silent parties’ in our political analysis—youth. Doing so provides a fuller understanding of how sectarian identities are reproduced, organized, and mobilized politically, in the ‘nooks and crannies’ of everyday, ordinary life. In what follows I show how these categories are reproduced by actors and in places where the literature would expect to find it lacking: by highly educated, economically successful youth in western-oriented liberal arts universities such as the American University of Beirut. I discuss how partisan youth create social and political networks that reflect and reproduce partisan boundaries and identities on university campuses. They provide ‘unofficial orientations’ for new students; they compete to hold the ‘hottest parties;’ they organize student clubs; and, of course, they dominate student government and elections. In doing so they imbue ordinary student life with sectarian categories, erode the opportunities for alternative forms of sociability to emerge, and narrow the space for alternative politics to take hold free from the restrictions of sectarianism. I discuss how partisan youth create social and political networks that reflect and reproduce partisan boundaries and identities on university
campuses. This, I argue, is one of the ways that the networking of partisan youth acts as a feedback mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism from below.

The chapter is organized as follows. First I review how university politics have changed in Lebanon since 2005. I then show why universities should be understood as sites of politicization in Lebanon, looking specifically at the American University of Beirut (AUB). From there I examine the various strategies and ways that partisan youth imbue student life with partisan categories and affiliation. I then examine AUB’s student government and student elections more closely, breaking down the main strategies partisan youth use to dominate the process and outcomes of student elections year after year. I conclude with reflections on the central paradox: why it is so many students go along with this sectarian game despite the majority being ‘highly critical’ of partisan parties.

University Politics since 2005

Higher education in Lebanon is comprised of a myriad of universities, colleges, and institutes. There are approximately 47 institutions in total, most of which were established after the end of the civil war. Apart from the national Lebanese University (LU), all of these are private institutions, and several have communal moorings. Moreover, many of these private

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2 In 1991, Lebanon had only 7 universities and 15 institutes. A mere decade later, the number had doubled: by 2000 Lebanon had 24 universities and 19 institutes. Today the number stands at approximately 47, though some are quite small and have fewer than 100 students.

3 Meaning, many of the private institutions are connected to a specific confessional community or network of political elite. Indeed, public education in Lebanon has suffered from an increasing set of problems, among which are its decrease in relative size, higher costs, limited support, and corporatization. Annual public expenditures on higher education are very low, reaching 0.6 percent of the GDP and serving merely to cover administration and salary costs at LU; this percentage used to be 20% during the height of the civil war. In addition, the LU attracts mostly poor and middle-class students, and its graduates face a significant salary disadvantage. See Harb 2016.
institutions are concentrated around specific commercial purposes rather than offering programs in liberal arts and science (Davie 1997, 9; Zoaeter, Nasr, and Basbous 2002, 11). In 2011-12, there were 119,000 registered university students in Lebanon (46% males, 54% females), of whom only 40% attend the only public university—the Lebanese University (LU). The share of students in the LU has dropped by 25% since 2005, a decline due mainly to the increased number of private universities and institutes in Lebanon. The university landscape generally reflects the institutional, geographical, and political fragmentation of Lebanon’s educational sector overall. In the pre-war period, for example, Lebanon’s universities were stratified along both class and confessional Lines. This set of circumstances gave rise to a strong student movement that demanded more accessible higher education, socio-economic equality, Palestinian rights, and action on a myriad of other national and international issues. Though universities have long been spheres that are ‘penetrated’ by national political actors, historically they have not always produced student politics that are as divided along partisan and sectarian lines as they are today.

In the previous chapter I discussed the damaging legacy of the civil war on university student politics. During the civil war the universities were literally divided along geographical lines that reflected the sectarian conflict, which facilitated the control of the militias over many campuses. After the war, in the period of the 1990s and early 2000s (in between the signing of the Ta’if accord and the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri), politics at Lebanon’s universities, like politics elsewhere, were more muted—a product of the restrictions placed on freedom of expression and civil liberties by the Syrians. One of the main legacies of the war that continues today was that student elections had become proxy battlegrounds for partisan
political parties, an extension of the dominance they secured over campuses during the war.⁴ This was especially true for the Christian parties, the LF and the FPM. The private universities provided these students sanctuary from the Lebanese-Syrian security apparatus and allowed them to network, organize, and run in elections thereby testing their levels of support among students. Similarly, for other parties such as Amal, the PSP, the SSNP, and Hezbollah, post-war student elections were soon recognized as “a new instrument to secure their dominance,” especially at the campuses located in West Beirut (i.e., AUB) and the main campus of the LU (Hadat Campus) which is also located in West Beirut (Chatterji 2009, 6). Although students’ electoral campaigns were always ‘cloaked’ with various student issues, as they still are today, it was not until after the war that they were seen by the parties as a way to control territory and demonstrate dominance. In response to this, universities have implemented regulations prohibiting the presence of political parties on their campuses, including any display of party symbols or images. Universities may also cancel student elections altogether if deemed necessary. These measures have been taken to prevent triggering war-time conflicts and contributing to sectarian sentiment among the student body.

It is important to note, however, that even though student elections have been largely co-opted by partisan parties since the end of the war, student participation and engagement in the elections intensified only after 2005. In fact, prior to 2005, the majority of Lebanese university students were “disillusioned and disengaged” with politics and the parties, and voter

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⁴ University elections were reinstated at most universities in the early 1990s. They were reinstated at the LU in 1993, and the AUB in 1994, for example. However, except at the AUB, student elections have been suspended off and on at most of Lebanon’s universities since 2005, due to concerns that student elections would trigger conflict among students (which they actually have on many occasions).
turnout during student elections was often very low (Hanf and Salam 2003; Larkin 2010). It was the Independence Intifada and its aftermath that injected new energy into student elections in Lebanon. As discussed, thousands of young people were swept up by the exhilarating events and became newly politicized. When these protests fell apart, divided along partisan and sectarian lines, the energy of these newly politicized young people was channelled into the partisan groups—thanks in part, as I have argued, to the work of partisan youth activists. The former school president at Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), who graduated in 2005, described the change in student elections this way: “The elections at our universities here were not always so political. People were into general politics, like personal freedoms and economic reforms, but these days the students of the parties have taken over everything and it brings with it a more dangerous, militant vibe.”

After 2005 there were three main shifts that resulted in university elections becoming the heated, if not dangerous, contests they are today. First, the demonstrations of the Independence Intifada politicized a generation of young people who had been previously disengaged from politics. Many of these young people took sides after the Intifada, and opted to support, if not join, the conventional political parties. One of the unintended results of the Intifada was that it allowed the political parties to renew their support bases, especially among youth.

Second, after the Intifada several of the major political groups sought to establish themselves officially as political parties (namely Future, FPM, and LF). All three of these parties

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5 Maalouf, interview with author, USJ, Achrafieh, April 2011.
declared their intentions to embark on processes of institutionalization, which included the creation of the youth wings. One of the benefits of the youth wings for the parties is that they allow the parties to recruit people under the age of 21. The Ottoman-era law of associations, set in 1909 and which still governs Lebanese political parties today, makes it illegal to have political party members who are not yet 21. This means most students (who generally begin university at age 18) are unable officially to join a party for about three years—or until their senior year. Having a youth wing, however, which is officially separate from the parent party, allows parties to organize their youth supporters without violating this law. After 2005, many of the youth who had come out for the protests opted to support specific parties, and their energies were now being organized by and channelled into youth wings. Youth activism, which had been largely independent and autonomous up to that point, was now brought under the auspices and control of the political parties.

A major focus of these youth wings is securing a presence at the universities and, more specifically, competing in student elections. Student elections are the raison d’être of the youth wings. Though there are a variety of ways in which the youth wings of political parties are organized (which I discuss in more depth in chapter seven), most of them are structured according to their representation at the various universities. For example, youth wing leaders are organized according to those who oversee English-speaking private universities, French-speaking private universities, the Lebanese University, as well as the various regions of the country. Under these heads, there are local representatives who oversee a specific university, and then a representative for each separate campus of that university. There are also often

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6 I discuss this in more depth in chapter seven.
junior representatives assigned to each faculty, as well as representatives for each year of study within each program of study. The parties tend to have more representatives at the campuses where they have high levels of support among the students. The LFSA (Lebanese Forces Student Association, the youth wing of the Lebanese Forces), for example, concentrates on the Fanar and Jad ad Dib campuses of the Lebanese University, putting their most experienced and talented organizers there. These campuses are located in East Beirut, near the suburbs of Daqwana and Sin el Fil, where the party has a great deal of support.7

Besides having the parties’ youth wing members on campus, partisan students also organize their parties’ presence through student clubs. Partisan students either co-opt or create student clubs at their universities. The clubs provide a place for those youth who are sympathetic to, but not members of, the youth wing.8 The focus of the student clubs is student life on campus and the club members do not tend to engage in party-related activities off campus. I discuss this further below.

Third, after 2005, Lebanese politicians were now free(r) from Syrian interference in their domestic affairs. As each of the heads of the sectarian communities have sought to entrench and expand their power in this new era, and fill the political void left after Syria’s departure, partisan divisions have deepened and electoral contestation has escalated in national elections. No longer are elections predetermined affairs that are decided in advance in Damascus. Of course, the nature of the confessionally-based electoral system means results are still easy to forecast. However, in the districts where there are intra-sectarian battles, such as those

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7 According to the survey by Chatterji et al (2008), 62.5% of students on these campuses named Samir Geagea as their most beloved political figure.
8 I refer to these youth as the ‘fans.’
between the LF and the FPM (representing March 14th and March 8th respectively), results are much less predictable and can determine the overall success of a coalition. The overall increase in electoral competition nationally has meant that the stakes have been raised in elections in other realms as well, such as syndicates and universities. The university elections, however, are by far the largest, most heated, and most covered elections in the country outside of national elections. When March 8th or March 14th sweeps AUB’s elections, they are “scoring points in the political battle” and “proving their legitimacy among the educated population of Lebanon” (Humsi 2013).

Whether in the private universities or the Lebanese University, student elections in Lebanon since 2005 have thus become increasingly partisan, increasingly sectarian, and increasingly tension-filled events. They are covered by all the major media networks, as if they are crucial to the future of Lebanese political elites. (In most cases, the student governments at Lebanon’s universities are controlled by a certain political party, or one of the two major political coalitions.) Voter turnout among students has also risen dramatically since 2005—in

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9 There are 128 parliamentary seats and each one is reserved for a particular religious confession. The seats are distributed across 26 electoral districts. For example, the northern city of Tripoli has eight parliamentary seats, which are allocated as follows: five for Sunnis, one for Alawites, one for Maronites, and one for Greek Orthodox. In some areas religious confessions may not have a seat. For example, Sunnis do not have a seat in Ba’abda whereas the Shi’a have two seats, Maronites have three seats, and the Druze have a single seat. A voter can vote for all the confessions regardless of her own confessional identity. So, Sunni voters can still vote for the candidate they prefer to hold the Druze, Maronite, Shi’a, or Greek Orthodox seat for their district. This is called ‘block voting’ and usually the parties prepare a list of candidates well in advance (which is why results are often predictable). This allows the parties to maximize their chance of winning. Lebanese voters are not given a traditional ballot paper at the polling station. Instead they can either write the names of their candidates on a blank piece of paper, or bring a ‘prepared ballot paper’ to the polling station. The prepared ballot papers are usually passed out to voters by leaders of the community in advance, or on the day of voting by party loyalists waiting outside polling stations. This is one of the ways they can monitor who votes and how (the papers are printed slightly differently for each family in the area, for example) and this enables practices such as vote-buying.

10 There is considerably less hype (and media coverage) about the elections in syndicates, however, perhaps evidence of the energy and zeal partisan youth activists in particular bring to the campuses.
many places reaching close to 80% (Rowayheb 2014). As one student quipped when reflecting on the heated student elections at USJ, “after all, we can’t let the other side win!”\textsuperscript{11}

Since 2005, universities have also routinely cancelled elections, citing security concerns. Some universities are more volatile than others. Notre Dame University, the main campus of which is located in Zouk Mosbeh, which has a predominantly Christian student body, is an example of such volatility. Since 2006, its elections have been marked by conflict between the two rival groups, the FPM and the LF, who organize under the “Debate Club” and the “Social Club” on campus. The conflicts have become so severe that elections were suspended twice between 2006 and 2014. In another case, the USJ called in the army to calm an altercation between students over graffiti that was written on the university’s walls during an election. The graffiti said (in Arabic) “Chartouni we love you”—referring to Habib Chartouni, the 24-year-old SSNP member who, in 1982, assassinated Bashir Gemeyal, the senior Kata’eb party member and later founder and supreme commander of the Lebanese Forces. Hezbollah students were blamed for the graffiti and the incident ended up triggering clashes between students that were so severe the army was called in and the party leaders themselves became involved, calling for calm among their supporters. In yet another incident (since dubbed ’Black Thursday’) at the Arab University in Tariq al-Jadideh, an argument over chairs in the cafeteria resulted in clashes between partisan students that spilled onto the streets and ended up in bloodshed as several people were killed. There are dozens of such reports, most of them occurring in and around student elections.

\textsuperscript{11} Mai, third-year arts student at USJ, interview with author, USJ, Achrafieh, February 2008
Without a doubt, student elections are heated contests. Clearly, the dramatic increase both in student participation and in the dominance of the partisan parties in the process is not just an ‘automatic’ result of structural factors mentioned above, nor is it wholly the result of the instrumental use of young followers by manipulative elites. Rather, it is also the result of the actions of partisan youth, whose networking, organizing, and activism constitute a mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism among young people at the grassroots.

**The Case of the American University of Beirut (AUB)**

In this chapter I examine the case study of student politics and elections at the American University of Beirut (AUB). AUB is an excellent case study for examining student politics in Lebanon for several reasons. First, more than that of any other university in the country, the AUB study body is the most representative of Lebanon’s confessional diversity. No other institution has the same level of diversity among its student body. This also means all the major political parties are active at AUB’s campus, whereas other universities are usually dominated by just one or two of the major parties. At Notre Dame University (NDU), for example, 98% of the student body is Christian, and the majority of them are traditionally LF supporters (though there are still heated battles between the LF and the FPM at this campus). This is a product of the university’s confessional heritage and location in Louaize, which is in the heart of one of the Christian areas in Lebanon.12 The Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) is probably the next best case after AUB; however, as a French institution located in East Beirut it, too, has a predominantly Christian student body and therefore its campus politics also reflect the battle between

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12 This area is located north of Beirut and runs along the coastline and into the mountains.
Christian parties—though in recent years there has been more involvement of students associated with March 8th and specifically Hezbollah. The Lebanese American University (LAU) is another one of the more diverse universities in Lebanon. However, it is divided into two campuses (one in West Beirut and one in Jbeil), and thus, despite its overall diversity, its individual campuses are less representative. The AUB is the only university that is both diverse and has a single unified campus (as opposed to sub-campuses in different regions).

As to Lebanon’s only public institution, the Lebanese university (LU), there are several factors which make it a difficult place to study student politics. First, during the bulk of my fieldwork (2007-2009), elections at the LU had been cancelled.13 Second, the campus, as discussed, is divided up into several sub-campuses which are embedded in communities where one sectarian group dominates—thus, the campuses are often dominated by one or two parties. Furthermore, as the country’s only public university, the government appoints its administrators and heavily influences the selection of faculty members. Both are chosen less on the basis of objective qualifications than on their political affiliations (Gambil 2003). The LU

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13 Interestingly, in 2010, the youth leaders of the 18 major parties came together to lobby the LU administration to reinstate student elections. This joint effort was the product of a dialogue held in London UK, and facilitated by International Alert in December 2009. All of the youth leaders from the major Shiite, Sunni, Christian, and Druze parties decided they would work together and present a unified front to the LU administration demanding that student elections should be held. Their demands were met by the administration in 2010; however, elections have since been suspended again. When asked about how they felt regarding the cancellation of student elections, one LU student summed it up this way: “We want and don’t want student elections to be held. We envy the fuss that other universities have over elections, but after the incident involving the knife in the Faculty of Science this year some of us are glad there are no elections. Most LU students want the elections back though. It’s a mixed bag.” It should be noted that the LU is complicated as a case study of student elections for several other reasons, for example, because its campuses are dispersed throughout the capital and most are dominated by one party according to their location. Students who do not support that particular party have reported they face discrimination—not just by students but also by faculty. Indeed, as the country’s only public university, the LU is “steeped in politics,” and open to “extensive political meddling” from the top in the form of “appointments to the administration and faculty and all the way down to student admissions” (LU Senior Administrator, Interview with author, November 2008). The government appoints its administrators and heavily influences the selection of faculty members. Both are chosen less on the basis of objective qualifications than on their political affiliations (see Gambil 2003). In short, it is a highly penetrated institution.
itself is “steeped in politics,” open to “extensive political meddling” from the top in the form of “appointments to the administration and faculty and all the way down to student admissions.” Indeed, the LU went several months without a president in late 2000 because of what the university’s acting president called “a political struggle between government officials” (Gambil 2003). From the appointment of teachers and the design of curriculum to freedom of expression on campus, the LU is a highly penetrated institution which complicates the process of conducting research on its youth politics.

By contrast, AUB is home to some of the most open and democratic elections in civil society. In fact, AUB prides itself on having crafted one of the most democratic electoral laws in Lebanon. Moreover, while other universities are embedded within a certain confessional community and/or open to the influence of factional political forces, the AUB administration goes to great lengths to limit this type of influence. Political neutrality is seen as part of their institutional heritage. Because of their efforts to prohibit the presence of parties, AUB provides a particularly ‘clear view’ of the strategies partisan youth have utilized in order to overcome these restrictions on campus.

Furthermore, not only is AUB the most representative campus, and its elections the most democratic, its elections also hold great symbolic importance for many of the major political parties in Lebanon, and thus they have a particularly strong incentive to participate in them and win. It is where many of the political party leaders attended school. Nabih Berri, the

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14 Senior LU administrator, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
15 Having said this, over the course of my fieldwork (2007-2009) as well as the additional time I spent in Lebanon as an NGO Director (2009-2011), I had the opportunity to follow student politics on multiple campuses over four years. I observed that the tactics and strategies employed by the partisan activists at USJ, NDU, and LU as well as at other universities are very similar to my initial (and more in depth) observations at the AUB, the main difference being only that at AUB it was possible to observe all the major parties in action.
leader of Amal, Walid Jumblatt of the PSP, and Samir Geagea of the Lebanese Forces all attended AUB. The Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) was founded at AUB in 1932. For Hezbollah, having its students enrolled at the AUB (not to mention winning elections there) has come to symbolize the upwardly mobile status of the Shi’a and the cross-cutting popular support the party achieved in post-civil war Lebanon. Moreover, AUB is arguably Lebanon’s most prestigious university: over a third of the current cabinet, along with the prime minister, graduated from the AUB. Thus, in a country where no election is too obscure to be covered by the media, AUB’s elections still stand out. The work that goes into AUB’s elections “rivals that of national elections” (NOW September 4, 2008). For all of these reasons, AUB is an ideal case to examine for the dynamics of partisan activism on campus, and how partisan youth recreate sectarian divisions from below.

AUB presents an interesting puzzle, however. As part of its efforts to create the most democratic electoral system in the country and build a transparent system of student government, AUB explicitly protects non-partisan space and forms of political participation. In fact, AUB strictly prohibits all political parties from operating on campus and from taking part in student elections. AUB has banned the images, names, slogans, and flags of Lebanon’s sectarian

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16 It should also be noted that the AUB is an institution that generally serves a relatively privileged part of Lebanese society. Although there are numerous scholarships available to students, the AUB’s comparatively high tuition (students are charged between USD$500-900 for each credit, and require a total of 15 credits per semester in a standard Bachelor of Arts program) means it caters to the country’s middle and upper classes. From the perspective of socio-economic class, therefore, the student population is not representative of the national population (see Al-Amine 1997). For purposes of this study, however, this student population is appropriate since I am looking more specifically at educated middle-class youth. In general tuition at private universities ranges from $3,000 to $20,000 per year, whereas annual tuition in the state-run Lebanese University (LU) is under $500 and the entrance requirements are much less restrictive. Not surprisingly, most students at private universities are from middle- and upper-middle-class, often urban families, while LU students tend to come from poor, rural families. LU, which has branches throughout the country, has an enrollment of 72,000—roughly 60% of all university students in Lebanon.
leaders and parties—there are no fewer than 27 rules and regulations governing campaign
posters alone. Since 2009, the AUB administration has even requested the presence of
Lebanon’s national elections monitoring body (the Lebanese Association for Democratic
Elections, LADE) to observe and report on student elections. To quote AUB’s Dean of Students,
“the AUB’s elections are part and parcel of student education. They are the process through
which they learn to practise democracy.”17 Why, then, are both the process and the outcomes
of student elections still dominated by the partisan parties? How do the parties manage this?
One can easily understand why sectarian political dynamics are hegemonic in Lebanon’s
national elections, where the formal system enshrines specific sectarian representation and
quotas, but AUB’s system is completely non-sectarian; in fact, its rules insist that non-sectarian
space be created and protected. Yet, AUB’s annual elections are frequently described as a
“sectarian carnival” where the “parties dominate everything, use the results as evidence of
their popularity in the country, and then completely neglect student issues.”18 The stark
contrast between AUB’s formal system and the actual outcomes and process of elections
provides an excellent case in which to examine how and why partisan sectarian dynamics still
dominate youth politics on campus.

Specifically, I show how partisan youth utilize informal relationships and strategies to
overcome the formal restrictions on the participation of their parties, in much the same way
that their leaders utilize informal networks to secure their formal positions of power. This
works to create and strengthen partisan alliances among youth, thus imbuing student life and

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18 Hadar, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009. Also the AUB Secular Club cynically refers to AUB student
elections as the “annual carnival.” This is discussed further below.
politics with sectarian dynamics and divisions. Contrary to the common view of the scholarship on this topic, I argue that to understand the reproduction of sectarian categories we need to look past the typical view that this is the work of “the sectarian elites” who “infiltrate, besiege, co-opt” various realms of civic space (Clark and Salloukh 2013, 744). To see the effective infiltration of political parties as only a product of an elite-driven process is to neglect and misdiagnose the active role of partisan youth who, in the realm of their universities, are often the ones calling the shots, developing tactics, and finding innovative ways to attract other youth. As they do, they channel campus politics at AUB toward the major parties and narrow the space for alternative, non-sectarian politics to emerge—thereby reproducing sectarian dynamics from below.

The University as a Site of Politicization

Lebanese youth grow up surrounded by and embedded within sectarian-based networks, neighbourhoods, and relationships before they even set foot onto a university campus. For many families, everything from their access to basic services to their opportunities for employment is in some way connected to their communal identity. This is probably truer today than at any other time since independence. But even though the process of political socialization no doubt begins long before a young person enters post-secondary education, many scholars have identified the special role of the university in awakening the political consciousness of young Lebanese (Faour 1998; LeFort 2013a and 2013b; Maaroufi 2014; Rowayheb 2014). In his analysis of student engagement with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) of General Michel Aoun, LeFort argues that in Lebanon, “universities remain the place
where concrete engagement with a political party starts” (LeFort 2013b, 374). Although many aspects of youths’ lives are embedded within contexts that are heavily shaped by confessionalism, most youth are not politically active in the conventional parties until they enter university. In interviews, Lebanese students frequently described how it was at university where they first began to identify themselves as “politically active,” and where they first felt they began to express their own political voice.19 There are several reasons universities are sites of politicization for youth. First, the university is where most Lebanese youth get their first ‘taste’ of political agency and often the place where they are first encouraged to express their political voice. In most Lebanese high schools political activity is explicitly forbidden (though the schools themselves are not free from political influences). Universities, on the other hand, allow and even encourage youth to participate in political life. To this point many Lebanese universities cite providing civic and political education to students as part and parcel of their overall purpose (El Amin and Abou Chedid 2008). As the Dean of Students at AUB states:

University is where students begin their political education. We teach them critical thought. We teach them the principles of democracy and it is here they learn about society’s issues. They don’t just do this in the classroom. Participating in politics on campus is a big part of this education. It is where they get to practise democracy.20

Second, the start of university is also a time in a young person’s life when they begin to step outside of the protective realm of their families. Students may, for example, live away from home for the first time and reside in student dormitories. While in high school, students are still essentially considered children; at university, they are young adults. Though many Lebanese youth are by no means independent of their families when they enter university

19 In his study of student politics in Lebanon, Robert Chatterji (2008) makes a similar argument.
(indeed the great majority are financially dependent and many will live at home until they are married), beginning university is nonetheless a symbolic step toward adulthood.

Added to this new experience of political and social liberty is a third element: the fact that in Lebanon the legal voting age is 21. For most youth, this means they cannot vote in national or municipal elections until their senior year in university. Furthermore, Lebanese citizens are not allowed to run for public office until the age of 25. University elections thus become the main (if not the only) avenue for youth to participate in politics and express their political opinions, since they are excluded from Lebanon’s national and municipal elections. For many youth, voting in student elections at university is the first time they have ever cast a ballot, or had any say in deciding who leads them. Thus, university elections also represent an (often first) opportunity for students to publicly align themselves with a specific political group, issue, or set of ideas.

The ‘trouble’ is that because of the networking of partisan youth on campus, both the process and the outcomes of student elections are dominated by partisan parties. Elections are therefore not playing the role that university administrations would like them to play. As I will discuss, most student elections have little to do with the issues facing students and instead reflect the sectarian and partisan divisions that dominate politics at the national level. Rather than “practising democracy” as AUB’s Dean of Students would have it, students are instead learning to “practise” the factional political dynamics that shape politics at the national level.

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21 Besides being one of the oldest ages of majority in the region, many consider this law controversial because youth over 18 are still legally responsible for their actions and old enough for military service in Lebanon. Most youth see this as hugely hypocritical.
Student elections undoubtedly play a central role in the politicization of young Lebanese. They are a “peak” experience for students, a “climax” in the academic year (LeFort 2013b, 149). Student elections also give youth the illusion of playing a crucially important role in national politics. Student council elections at AUB are as tense as parliamentary elections and they routinely make the front pages and the national evening news. As the Vice Dean of Students at AUB describes it, students “feel that their votes actually matter to national politics... they feel as if they are influencing politics at the national scale.” The reality, however, is that students are denied an official voice in national politics, and confined (as one cynical professor described it) to the “playpen” of university elections—an arena that since 2005 has tended to reflect rather than direct politics on a broader scale. Perhaps more now than at any other time since the beginning of the civil war, student elections in Lebanon work to enliven and reinforce the partisan positions of youth. My argument is that this is a result of partisan students who use innovative and informal strategies to overcome formal rules that restrict the parties’ presence on campus and in this way act as a mechanism for the reproduction of Lebanon’s sectarian dynamics. It is to an analysis of these strategies I now turn.

The Partisan Colonization of Student Space and Student Life

When you step foot on this campus you’re entering a divided space. We try our best to avoid politics but it’s everywhere. Even cafeteria tables get divided up by the parties. -Third year engineering student at AUB, November 2007

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23 Whereas in the 1960s and 70s campuses provided a space where students came together to demand national educational reforms, and in the 1990s to 2000s provided a sanctuary for the anti-Syrian activism that helped create the foundations of the Independence Intifada, today, for the reasons explained above, Lebanese universities are sites where students learn to position themselves in relation to the sect-based divisions that dominate the Lebanese political field.
Securing the “Territory”

The fact that political parties are officially banned at AUB is widely seen as “a joke” among the students. Though they do not have official status, political parties operate on campus “between the rules.”24 One of the ways partisan students make their presence felt on campus is through occupying physical spaces and claiming them as their own. Much like the way youth gangs operate in their communities, partisan students colonize physical space on the university campus. This is true for many of the universities, not only AUB. The difference is that many other universities are divided into several campuses, or are situated within a neighbourhood where one sectarian community predominates. At AUB, however, the entire university is contained on one campus and so this phenomenon is brought into starker view. Partisan students identify and take over specific ‘territories’ as their own. Stepping foot on campus therefore means stepping foot onto a particular geographical configuration of political relationships. One student explained: “The Main Gate, the cafeteria, West Hall, and the Green Oval are all divvied up by the parties. It’s known that the green oval is March 8th territory right now for example.”25 Another student said that “the parties build their own domains on campus” and yet another student put it this way: “You don’t realize it at first but it doesn’t take long to figure it out. You know if someone is March 8th or March 14th by where they hang out on campus.”26 This physical division of territory among the groups has political repercussions as it reinforces the limited social contact between youth who are affiliated to the two different

blocs, March 8th and March 14th. The division becomes a social one, rooted in more than just political differences.

The strength of the divisions that exist on campus is illustrated by an example of an incident of cooperation between parties. This inter-party cooperation was the result of a new rule implemented by the administration in 2008 which unintentionally caused the relocation of partisan students. In 2008, the AUB administration decided to impose a ban on smoking throughout the entire campus, with the sole exception of one clearly designated smoking zone near the cafeteria. Suddenly, all student smokers were now forced to smoke together, such that political rivals were now crammed into the same tiny space rather than being dispersed throughout campus in their respective ‘territories.’ According to partisan students who were there, over the course of the academic year a great deal of political negotiation began happening in the smoking area. Student members of the PYO began a process of shuttle diplomacy—going back and forth between students of rival groups and facilitating communication between them. Specifically, the PYO students facilitated a relationship between students associated with the LFSA and students of the Palestinian Cultural Club. Traditionally, these two student groups have viewed each other as rivals, not only because they are on opposite sides of the March 8th–March 14th divide, but also because of a horrific civil war incident in 1982 when members of the Kata’eb party massacred innocent Palestinian civilians living in the Lebanese refugee camps of Sabre and Chatila. “They had never spoken to each other before we started going between them. We got them to the point where they were finally willing to at least speak to each other,”27 explained a PYO student member who was

instrumental in negotiating the relationship. The culmination of the PYO’s diplomatic efforts occurred later that year when, during the Israeli siege in Gaza in late 2008, the LFSA students agreed to participate in an on-campus campaign against Israeli brutality which was organized by the Palestinian Cultural Club. PYO members proudly referred to this in their interviews as an example of their efforts to “work toward overcoming partisan divisions between students.”

The way partisan students informally divide up the campus geography, creating a sectarian landscape which students must negotiate, as well as the complex political negotiation that takes place between partisan students, speak to the complexity and dynamism of university student politics. These dynamics take place at the grassroots, below the radar of the party leaders. The university is a parallel ‘political field’ that belongs to and is shaped by Lebanese youth—one where the networking of semi-autonomous partisan students acts as a mechanism of reproduction of sectarianism at the grassroots.²⁸

“Colonizing” Student Clubs

Officially, the student clubs at AUB are meant to “provide students with the ability to develop leadership and communication skills as well as enrich their experience outside the classroom and foster personal and professional development.”²⁹ It is an “open secret,” however, that many of the student clubs are de facto proxies for the political parties (Rowell 2013). Organizing a student club, or taking one over, is one of the main informal strategies partisan students use to overcome AUB’s formal restrictions on their campus presence. The

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²⁹ AUB Website: http://www.aub.edu.lb/sao/activities/org/Pages/index.aspx
club then becomes the main vehicle through which the party organizes student activities and a central site for the party’s operations during student elections.

The practice of “capturing” student clubs has been going on since the civil war (see Harik and Meho 1996). During the civil war the AUB administration attempted to forestall the takeover and politicization of student clubs and societies by selecting the student chairpersons of these clubs and societies themselves. Administrators would specifically choose popular students who declared their willingness to serve and who were not known to have political “entanglements” (ibid., 72). Today, the AUB administration has officially banned all political party activity on campus. Unofficially, however, the AUB administration is aware of the politicization of student clubs and even works with the partisan students. In explaining this contradiction between informal and formal practices, both the Dean and Vice Dean of Students explained they try to work with the partisan students rather than work against them, which they feel would create larger problems. The Dean of Students stated:

> We know the students who are with the parties and we try to work with them as much as possible. We feel if we do this then we can have more influence and a better relationship than if we tried to prevent them, which wouldn’t work anyway. But our focus is really on them as students. Our help is good for them as well especially because they do not always agree with their leaders on the outside. Being here at AUB helps give them more control over their own decisions. For instance, we had recently some problems with a particular political party that tried to encourage its students to generate troubles in the university. However, the students who belonged to that party came to us and together we found a way to help diffuse the tension so they would not have to do what their leaders were asking of them. It ended up the students were the ones who convinced their leaders to avoid causing strife in the campus.\(^{30}\)

The Dean’s comment indicates there is at times tension between the wishes of party leaders and those of their young partisans. It suggests that student partisans are not simply

\(^{30}\) Kisarwani, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
obeying orders, but rather finding ways to carve out their own sphere of control and redirect their leader’s decisions. Thus, even though elites give orders to their youth members, it does mean that young followers always carry them out—especially when they conflict with their own interests as students.

Interestingly, by informally allowing the partisan students to operate at AUB and working with them, the administration may be helping the partisan students achieve greater autonomy from their parties over their affairs, as well as encouraging them to focus on student needs as opposed to just partisan agendas. But because these partisan students are no doubt pursuing multiple agendas (including partisan ones), the administration is also undermining its own ultimate goal of reducing partisan influence in student life and student elections.

Setting aside the role of the AUB administration, the practice of ‘capturing’ student clubs has persisted at AUB year after year.\footnote{See the end of this chapter for examples of the logos of the AUB student clubs next to the flags of the political parties they represent.} It is a tactic that has been handed down to successive generations of partisan students who have continued to adapt and recreate it over the years.\footnote{For example, if a club appeared to be too politicized or if it acquired a negative reputation for some reason, partisan students would dissolve it and reorganize as a new club under a different name. Students also change the name of their clubs to reflect a different image that they seek to portray.} At AUB, the Youth Club, for example, is affiliated with the Future Movement, the Cultural Club of the South is affiliated with Hezbollah, the Social Club is affiliated with the Lebanese Forces, the Lebanese Communication Club (which recently changed its name from the ‘Heritage Club’) belongs to the PYO, the Freedom Club is associated with the Free Patriotic Movement, the Syrian Cultural Club is associated with the SSNP, the Discovery Club is associated with the Kata’eb party, the Lebanese Mission Club is affiliated with the Amal...
Movement, and the newly formed ‘Leadership Club’ comprises students who support former Prime Minister Miqati who, as prime minister, attempted to adopt a neutral position between March 8th and March 14th.

Organizing student clubs is one of the main ways the partisan political parties establish their presence and build their networks on campus. The clubs are democratic—each elects a leader on an annual basis. Though the clubs are often overseen by students who are members of the youth wings of the political parties, these students do not necessarily hold the leadership roles in the clubs themselves. Rather, these positions are given to the unaffiliated students, which helps to serve one of the primary (and unofficial) goals of the clubs—to attract new, as of yet unaffiliated, student recruits to the party. Students who become club members may or may not become youth wing members, but they do extend the party’s network of supporters on campus and assist in student elections.

Officially, club members assert that their main focus is on student education or their recreational role. Unofficially, youth wing members will explain the clubs are designed this way to attract incoming freshman and ‘neutral’ students and to provide a home for them that is not overtly political. As one AUB student who is also an LFSA member explains,

The LFSA has an AUB branch for people who are already youth wing members. But the Social Club is broader. Although some of the motives may be political, the main purpose behind Social Club is really education and making student life better. We have to be unbiased about what we do on campus otherwise we cannot be successful among the students. We hold fun activities like “The Annual AUB Welcome Party” or “The Soap Soccer” games. We lobbied to reinstate the class ring ceremony. We even got our socialite friend [name withheld] as the VP of the USFC this year. It’s about the stuff that the students want.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\) LFSA youth member and student, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007.
Clubs, in other words, are “politics lite,” as a student in the Youth Club explained. They are designed to be more inclusive, less political, and focused on enhancing student life. Each club has a specific purpose and focus which loosely corresponds to the culture of their party and the type of image they want to promote on campus. For example, the LFSA’s Social Club (as might be guessed by its name) focuses on social activities, whereas the FPM’s Freedom Club emphasizes their culture of activism. According to a Freedom Club member:

Our club members have always been staunch activists inside and outside of AUB. It started with our resistance against Syria and continues today. We try to raise awareness about national issues like freedom of speech and the media, art, Lebanese prisoners in Syria, and many other things. We do social stuff, too, but for us it’s about promoting student involvement. They don’t have to support the General if they don’t believe in the party, but everyone should still take an active part in their society. This is what Freedom Club is about.

To give another example, the members of the Communication Club (which is associated with the PSP) emphasize their independence as a student entity that works for students, and which is autonomous and separate from the PSP. As ironic as this may sound (i.e., a club which is clearly affiliated with a political party is promoting itself among students by emphasizing its independence from that political party), it makes perfect sense to its student members. As one explains:

We pride ourselves on our independence. The PYO has always been a very independent youth organization and people know this and respect this. Our main duty here is not to support our party. We are an entity within ourselves, we make decisions, we carry them through. From the students for the students. That is what we have done, what we do, and what we will keep doing.

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34 Rasha, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007.
The Communication Club’s emphasis on its independence from the PSP makes sense when we take into account the fact that many AUB students are ambivalent, if not downright skeptical, of the conventional political parties. Partisan students (correctly) recognize this and take strides to address the hesitation and ambivalence of students by creating student clubs that are more open and inclusive in their focus and atmosphere. They deliberately de-emphasize their partisanship and focus instead on specific student desires for things such as recreational activities like karaoke nights, parties, and soccer games, or even the desire of students to get involved in cross-cutting political issues such as the promotion of freedom of speech. Furthermore, partisan students who are actually members of a party’s youth wing generally avoid interfering in the activities and decision-making of the clubs, preferring instead to leave that up to the club members. Still, the fact remains that these clubs target and attract primarily students from their own confessional communities.\(^37\) Thus, though partisan students argue the purpose of the clubs is not just to recruit for their political party—in fact, many students do not become fully fledged members of the party—there can be little doubt that by promoting their clubs and recruiting students into them, they are facilitating the division of student life along confessional lines.

It must be emphasized, however, that though there is an underlying political purpose of the party-affiliated clubs, most of the focus is on student life at AUB. Through the student clubs, the parties translate themselves into entities that are relevant to AUB students. They compete for popularity, student involvement, and student appreciation through their work on many non-

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\(^{37}\) The Social Club, for example, is almost entirely comprised of Maronite Christian students; the Communication Club of Druze students; the Youth Club of Sunni students; The Cultural Club of the South of Shiite students, etc.
political projects, such as cafeteria seating, class ring ceremonies, or organizing social events for freshmen. These are the issues that preoccupy AUB’s student clubs and the partisan students who oversee them. We do not see here an example of a top-down strategy dictated by the party leaders for the purpose of promoting their position on the national arena. Rather, we see youth who are both students and partisans and who are preoccupied, like so many young people, with their own issues, their own webs of social relationships and realms of competition.

It is also important to note that not all student clubs are proxies for the conventional political parties. AUB in particular has long been a home to alternative and independent student clubs. These independent, leftist student clubs have constituted part of the base for Lebanon’s ‘new left’ which has emerged since the civil war. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s these clubs began to appear on university campuses across the country, and sought to defend secularism and promote politics that are independent of the major sect-based parties. They have continued their political activism through various channels over the years in their effort to dislodge the monopoly of sectarian leaders over Lebanese politics. These independent students, for example, formed the basis of the youth support for the Democratic Left Movement, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The group Bilâ Huddûd (‘No Frontiers’), which was formed at AUB in 1997 by independent leftist students, was one of the first clubs of this kind. It continues to exist today, and has played a pivotal role at AUB in carving out alternative political space and forging a path for student politics that are independent of sectarian and partisan affiliations. Bilâ Huddûd also was one of the student groups that was highly active in the Independence Intifada. Bilâ Huddûd, and independent students in general, have always managed to capture a segment of
the vote at AUB, though they are never able to truly compete with “the supremacy of the political parties” (LeFort 2013b, 110). The independent student groups frequently find themselves in the position of ‘kingmaker’ in student elections: because of the close competition between March 8th and March 14th, the independent votes often break the tie between the two major blocs. In the context of increasing polarization between the two coalitions, however, Bilā Huddûd and other independent groups at AUB have, at times, lost their legitimacy as a truly independent political group, because they are seen as taking a side when they are in the tie-breaking role. Between 2011 and 2012, a new independent student group began organizing at AUB under the name ‘Secular Club.’ These young activists have been determined to run in elections and remain independent of either the March 14th or the March 8th blocs.\footnote{They, too, have had some electoral successes—especially in 2013 and 2014 when they won their highest number of seats on the Student Representative Council (21 seats in total consisting of 17 SRC seats and 4 USFC seats), though still few in comparison to March 8th and March 14th.} Despite being small and despite being besieged by the parties, these independent student groups are a tenacious presence in student politics and have managed to have a great deal of influence—most importantly, in the non-partisan space they symbolize and create.

In sum, organizing and operating student clubs is one of the informal strategies that partisan students use to (successfully) overcome both the fact they are banned on campus as well as the fact that many students have mixed views toward the political parties. Though the clubs focus on student issues, there can be little doubt that they are also part of a deliberate technique employed by the students of the parties to extend and deepen the reach of their networks on campus.
During the first weeks of the academic year, as at most universities, there are a multitude of orientation activities which take place at AUB. It is also a busy time for the industrious partisan students who engage in a number of specific activities to attract new recruits, extend their networks, and assert the position of their parties on campus. Indeed, according to these industrious youth, “besides elections, the first weeks of classes are our busiest time. It’s a big rush to get to the new students” as one of the VPs of the Future Youth Organization explained. For all of the clubs and student organizations at AUB, the beginning of the year is a time when new members, especially freshman students, are recruited. This process starts with ‘Clubs Day’ which is the day when the 70 plus clubs at AUB set up stalls in front of West Hall on campus for the purpose of “promoting their club and recruiting new members,” according to AUB’s web site. Given that many of the clubs are run by the political parties, this day takes on political meaning and importance. The partisan clubs especially target freshmen students (who represent an “untouched” pool of potential election candidates) and attempt to recruit them as members. Securing the membership of a freshman in one’s club is deemed a “big score” for partisan students because, as members of the club, they are more likely to run on behalf of the party. Those who agree to run for a particular party in their first year of university are likely to run again as candidates in their subsequent years. As one partisan student with the PYO’s Communication Club described it: “Once they run with us, they see the advantages, they become a part of our network and we have them for life.”

40 Rabah, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, January 2008
41 Abu Zaki, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007
partisan student with the LF’s Social Club explained: “we need to get them into our networks right away so that they are not enticed by others, like the FPM or the independents.”

Partisan students obtain lists of the names of all incoming freshman students from the university administration. They then identify ‘their’ students by last name and make sure that members of the party are present to ‘welcome’ them when they arrive at AUB. A Druze student described her experience the year before when she was a freshman: “I used to get phone calls. They wouldn’t tell me who gave them my number. Later I found out that they had a list of students by name and religion and were calling me because they figured I’d be more likely to join them.” Since the intensification of competition between the parties since 2005, some parties now even go as far as to contact incoming students before they even reach university; this is especially true of the two rival Christian parties, the FPM and the LF. In interviews with freshman students, several acknowledged they had been contacted by either the LF or the FPM youth wings in the summer after their graduation from secondary school. A youth member of the PYO explained this strategy:

We do this because we know when they enter the campus they feel lost, especially if they are coming from smaller schools or cities. At AUB we have youth coming from all over the country, from all regions and backgrounds. Imagine a student coming from the North. He is new to the area, he doesn’t know the area and he doesn’t know anyone. We greet him and he will feel more comfortable. That’s what we are trying to do here in AUB: we are trying to show the students that our party is strong, but also that you can enjoy your time with us. When we hang out together, we organize talks, study sessions, we have fun, we have our laughs.

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43 It is often possible to guess a person’s religious sect and/or region of origin by their last name.
45 Rabah, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
The partisan students prepare extensive information packages for incoming students which include everything from invitations to upcoming social events, information on study groups, financial aid, student discounts, and many other items. One partisan activist quipped: “We provide the unofficial student orientation at AUB.” Some of the material incentives and benefits partisan student clubs are able to offer newcomers are impressive in comparison with the other student clubs—affiliated clubs often have funds available for exactly this purpose. One partisan student activist with the PYO described in detailed the items they offered to entice new student members:

There are lots of good things students get from us. They can get tickets for free parking, we connect them to scholarships and financial aid, we hold parties for the new students at nearby clubs, we get them discounts at restaurants near campus, we get them photocopied text books that are one tenth the price, past exams for every course, we organize study groups... there are hundreds of things we do for students.

In addition, partisan youth find all sorts of other creative ways to get their ( politicized) message out. One member of the PYO’s Communication Club, for example, was giving out remixes of Walid Jumblatt’s speeches. The PSP leader’s spoken word had been mixed with rap music and rhythms and burned onto CDs. One of the student recipients stated, “I like to listen to the mix of Abu Taymour [i.e., Walid Jumblatt] when I study for exams.”

46 Ghosn, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
47 Unsurprisingly, it was difficult to obtain reliable information about the amount of funding partisan students had at their disposal for the purposes of student orientation. From my observation, however, it did not seem that the amounts were very high. Moreover, the youth wings often claimed they did their own fundraising to support these activities, and that they were not simply receiving money from the parent party. Again, this could not be verified.
48 Marwan Interview with author Beirut February 2010. Abu Taymour is the affectionate term of Walid Jumblatt, meaning ‘Taymour’s Father.’ It is traditional to refer to people by the name of their offspring. Rami Ayash is a young, contemporary pop musician from Lebanon and specifically from the Chouf region where the majority of the Druze community lives. See Rivoal 2014 who has also noted the love of these mixed tapes among PSP supporters.
New students at AUB reported finding the support offered by the parties to be helpful, both academically and socially. Partisan networks provide a valued social network—as one student put it, “An instant group of friends.” Of course, it must be acknowledged that students are also likely to be drawn toward others who share their background. As recent ethnographic research, longitudinal survey data, and opinion polls suggest, the level of trust between youth of different sects is still low (see Yassin 2012; Larkin 2012, 121; and Hanf 2007). Their family’s attitudes toward other sects and the fact that since the end of the civil war many youth have grown up in “homogenous sectarian enclaves” are among the factors that explain this (Larkin 2012; Yassin 2012). Yet, the same research also shows that youth are drawn by the appeal and benefits of confessional diversity. In fact, they actively seek it out, especially in the liberal urban environment of Beirut (Yassin 2012). AUB is widely known as a symbol of liberalism and diversity in both Beirut and Lebanon more broadly and renowned for its extremely diverse, yet largely peaceful, campus. For example, a third-year engineering student and PYO member explained how AUB students have a special bond because of their identity as AUB students: “Our bond goes beyond politics. We are at the best university in our country and this creates its own bond and identity. ...with more education, comes more openness. At AUB, political activists from different sides show tolerance for each other’s views more than at other universities.” Students who choose to attend university here would be well aware of the atmosphere and culture of AUB, where diversity is embraced and celebrated. The point here is that it is not ‘automatic’ that new students at AUB would gravitate toward socializing only with

other students of their sects. Even in the divided context of Lebanon, at AUB such a process would require some facilitation. I am arguing that it is facilitated by the efforts and networking of partisan youth on campus.

Students frequently refer to the role that the partisan parties played in helping them to establish their social networks: “They create bonds between us,” explained one student.51 Another student who had recently joined the Freedom Club mentioned how the party (i.e., FPM) actually helped her to build a more confessionally diverse group of friends: “I never thought I would ever have friends from that party [i.e., Hezbollah], but now we know each other, we can share nargileh and enjoy together.”52 A young member of the Amal party explained how his contact with the Lebanese Mission Club, which is associated with the Amal Movement, was initially for social reasons, but then became political:

It was quite intimidating when I first arrived here. None of my friends came to this university so I didn’t know anyone here. I had no friends. I felt that if I was going to enjoy myself here I had to join a group. So, at first it was just social, but then I started to feel implicated in the politics. It is the way it is. There are so many different groups it is hard not to belong to one of them. I was encouraged by this group because I saw that they are a strong group on campus.53

When speaking to partisan students themselves, they viewed their activities as “a student service.” As one of the PYO students described it: “We are their welcoming committee. They feel at home with us because we are from the same community.” In an attempt to explain the situation, another student stated: “In America you have sororities and fraternities, in Lebanon, we have the political parties.”54

52 Khoury, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007. Nargileh is the Lebanese term for water pipes, also known as ‘Hooka’ or ‘Hubbly Bubbly.’
54 Habschi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
To conclude, from the moment they step foot on campus, students are entering a web of partisan networks that are being constructed by partisan students. Through their networking and activities on campus, partisan students colonize aspects of student life at AUB, imbuing something as benign as freshman orientation with sectarian character. Under the auspices of their student club, partisan students integrate themselves into the beginning of term activities. They identify and approach ‘their’ students before others, and encircle them with a slew of freebies, social activities, and advice that would be enticing to any incoming freshman. It is understandable that many unaffiliated newcomers to university utilize the partisan networks to negotiate the sometimes daunting world of social relationships on campus, especially during their first months at university. Through their student clubs, study groups, free parking passes, etc., partisan students actively build connections between students and the political parties. Because these parties are particularistic, divided, and sect-based, when partisan students engage in this type of networking with new students they are not only helping to form a student’s relationship to a particular party, they also entrenching sectarian divisions, contributing to sectarian dynamics, and narrowing the space where other, more cross-cutting relationships might otherwise take hold. Through integrating their partisan activities into standard university events, like orientation, they act as conduits for factional political agendas to enter the fabric of student life, and in so doing act as a mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism from below.
Partying and Politics: The Competition over Fun

The activities of partisan students on campus are multi-layered. As I have shown, partisan students actively seek to extend their party’s influence on campus. They are only effective, however, if they can genuinely connect and appeal to other students. So, as they aim to channel students toward engagement with their parties, they are also constantly responding and adapting to the interests, trends, and social relationships that exist among youth. As they do this, they in turn are also shaped by them. Partisan students are not, after all, removed from the networks they help create. As students themselves, they are insiders to the university campus, and very much a part of the campus scene. As LeFort states in his study of FPM students: “it is through the symbiosis with the student milieu that they [the youth members of the FPM] are able to legitimize their presence in universities... The FPM students have incorporated students’ sociability as much as they orient it” (LeFort 2013b, 147). This mutually constitutive process generates the specific ‘youth culture’ within the sphere of the university, and it is a product of youth, not political elites.

Of course, a large part of the youth culture at Lebanese universities, including AUB, revolves around having fun. Most university students want to socialize and enjoy themselves while pursuing higher education. Partisan youth are no different. They share a desire for fun and socializing, while also being motivated by a particularistic political project and perspective. In their bids to both participate in social life and promote their party among students, partisan youth often play the role of social convenor on campus. In fact, as the student who called the political parties the “sororities and fraternities of Lebanon” implied, partisan students are some of the most active organizers of social events at AUB. Students and faculty alike confirmed this.
As one professor, who acts an advisor for a student club at AUB, remarked, the partisan groups “often have less to do with politics and more to do with parties.”

At AUB there is a fierce competition between March 8th and March 14th parties over who can offer the students the best time. This competition occurs mainly between the two rival Christian parties, the LF and the FPM, and their allies. At the beginning and end of every academic year, these two groups face off in what is essentially a competition to hold the biggest, best, and ‘hottest’ party for AUB students. One student of AUB’s Social Club (which is affiliated with the LF) explained their effort in the fall of 2011:

We held our party in October in a club on Monot, it’s called Metis. It’s our annual ‘Welcome Back’ party. It was a huge success. We had DJs Lil’T and Mak, they’re the best. Over 500 people showed up. There wasn’t even enough parking! We got everyone out that night. We had all of them. We had students from Hezbollah, from PYO, from FPM, from Future, we had every one. We even had 50$ gift certificates for all the girls for some cosmetics. We throw the best party of the year and everyone knows it.

Not to be outdone, the Freedom Club (which is associated with the FPM) also organizes a massive social event for AUB students at the exact same time of year, usually within days of the Social Club’s event. Calling their party the “Fallback Party,” the Freedom Club organized a huge student event at a different venue in the same year (but with the same DJs). A Freedom Club member explained:

We were supposed to have ours on Monot too but there were too many guests! We broke the record this year with over 800 students! So we had it at Flight 32. It’s in the Habtoor Grand Hotel, which is very special for students. I think students were curious about the new location because it’s never been held there before. It was a night that will go down in AUB history!

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55 Hadar, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2009.
57 Ismail, interview with author, Beirut, January 2012.
In the spring, the two clubs face off again with another set of rival parties. The Social Club calls their spring event the “Spring Festival” and the Freedom Club calls theirs “Spring Back.” Again, these parties are massive events organized entirely by partisan students. The parties themselves are sponsored by local businesses in Beirut (hence the 50$ worth of free cosmetics for every female attendee) and, thus, students are targeted with a combination of political and commercial interests. The stories that emerge from the parties are talked about throughout the year. Pictures of the parties are plastered across social media as well as business websites such as Beiruting.com, Beirutnightlife.com, and Eventinglb.com. One student summed up the social importance of these events this way: “These parties can make or break your entire year, depending on what happens.”

Unlike student elections, these parties are not about competing for political position; they are about achieving social position. In the words of AUB students, they are about attracting “the coolest AUBites,” securing the “hottest clubs,” and organizing “killer events.” In fact, other than the occasional orange wristband (signifying an affiliation with the FPM) or the occasional LF hand signal (a triangle-shaped hand gesture made using both hands), there are few overt political displays at these events. As many students reiterated: “we try to keep politics out of it.” One student explained: “Nightlife is a big part of what we do and it is a big part of life in Lebanon. People relate to each other during nightlife in a way they may not in

58 Sakr, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2011.
59 Jabbour and Sakr, interviews with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2011.
60 Khalil, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2009.
other places. They might be political rivals, but they can still go to the same club and enjoy the party. ... "61

Moreover, the social networks of the partisan groups on campus often overlap because students have friends in various circles. If a student is affiliated with the LF’s Social Club, it does not mean they will forgo attending the Freedom Club’s party and vice versa. Students are aware of which group is organizing which event, but pick and choose which to attend for a myriad of reasons, many of which have little to do with politics. When asked why she attended a Youth Club event, one student explained: “I liked this guy, and he was close to Future, so I joined their club. It is pretty simple!”62

Even though students perceive the events to be non-political in nature, providing the best fun for students is another layer of competition between the partisan groups. The social success the parties achieve contributes to a partisan group’s overall position and reputation on campus, and plays a clear role in extending and strengthening the networks of partisan groups at the university. By throwing ever larger and more extravagant parties, the partisan student clubs compete for popularity—even notoriety—among students.63 For instance, in arguments that are at times reminiscent of the national debates over demographics, partisan students brag about having the largest number of attendees at their parties, and better still if they are able to attract a diversity of students, representing all confessional backgrounds. Student clubs demonstrate their social dominance through these numbers, and often publish the ‘results’ in

61 Ahmad, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, December 2009.
63 The more outrageous the stories that emerge from the parties, the more talked about and famous they become on campus. The stories of the social events that circulate on campus build a club’s image and reputation and bring them prestige. Having politically motivated conflicts break out at the parties, however, is negatively viewed.
AUB’s student newspaper, *Outlook*. The FPM student quoted above, for example, spoke of “record breaking” numbers at their party. An LF youth wing member explained: “Of course we try to outdo each other! We want to be known as the coolest political party for the youth in all of Lebanon. That is our goal!” 64 When asked why rival groups do not then boycott each other’s events, the same student, however, responded: “Because this isn’t about politics, it’s social. It’s more important not to miss out on the fun”—thus illustrating the multiple agendas, social and political, personal and partisan, which are at play in the field of competition between partisan students. 65

Besides the purely social events, partisan student clubs also organize events that are more obviously connected to their political perspectives and partisan agendas. Usually referred to as ‘cultural’ events, and always advertised as ‘non-partisan,’ these activities combine fun with the more substantive purposes of education on topics that are relevant to the party’s identity and political narrative. For example, the Freedom Club held a rope climbing demonstration by the Lebanese Army in 2009. This celebration of the strength and skill of the Lebanese Army connects to a core aspect of the FPM’s identity: their leader, Michel Aoun, was a General in the Lebanese Army during the war. It also distinguishes the FPM from their main rival, the Lebanese Forces—a party that is struggling to overcome its reputation as a war-time militia force which operated outside the bounds of the state. Thus, a seemingly simple student event, such as a rope-climbing contest, communicates multiple political messages to students. It underlines the FPM’s identity as a party that supports the strengthening of the Lebanese

64 Habschi, interview with author, Beirut, February 2008.
65 Ibid.
state institutions (and the Lebanese Army is one of the few respected state institutions),
connects its own image to the country’s military, and also contrasts itself to the extra-state and
bloody history of its primary political opponent, the Lebanese Forces—all in an afternoon’s
entertainment.

In another, less subtle, example, the Social Club organized an event honouring the late
Lebanese President-elect and founder of the Lebanese Forces, Bashir Gemayel. On their
Facebook page the Social Club gave assurances that the event was “not in support of any
political party” but rather a “cultural and historical event” (AUB Social Club Facebook page.
April 22 and 25 2016). Given that the event was honouring the party’s founder, however, no
one took their message of non-partisanship seriously (Abi-Ghannam 2016). The event was
especially controversial because of the reference its posters made to a speech in which
Gemayel also declared his intention to “annihilate” Palestinian influence in Lebanon.66 As it
happened, the Palestinian Cultural Club was holding an event at the same time and in the same
building to celebrate Palestinian music and heritage. When the administration threatened to
cancel both events due to the “electric” tension they were causing, the two clubs cooperated
and guaranteed the administration that their events would be conflict-free.67 The ‘cultural’
events are another example of how partisan students provide opportunities for socializing and
fun, while also transmitting their partisan narrative and sectarian identity.

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66 The reference on the event’s poster was: “I come with a very specific mission: 10452 km2.” These words are
extracted from Gemayel’s war-time speech in which he targeted foreign intervention and specifically Palestinian
and Syrian interventions in Lebanon. See Abi-Ghannam 2016.
67 While there were no clashes between the members of the Palestinian Cultural Club and the Social Club, there
were clashes with other students who claimed they were assaulted by LFSA students because they had openly
criticized the LF.
In sum, social events at AUB represent another terrain where partisan students compete with each other—in this case for social rather than political dominance. Through organizing student activities such as the massive “Fallback” parties, partisan students are able to insinuate their partisan politics into the fabric of student social life at AUB. Though the social events themselves are generally viewed as non-political, the fact that they are organized by rival partisan groups and at nearly identical times of the year is telling. Furthermore, despite their efforts to ‘keep politics out of it,’ the fact these ‘famous’ parties are orchestrated by the students of the political parties no doubt still works to build the parties’ reputations as ‘cool,’ thereby increasing their credibility among youth. To be sure, the idea to hold a colossal party at Bar Metis on Beirut’s Rue Monot did not originate with Michel Aoun or Samir Geagea, as part of their scheme to expand their political empires. Most of Lebanon’s ageing party elites are likely far removed from the ever-evolving trends and sensibilities of Lebanese youth. Their student members, however, are not. The idea to throw parties, hold rope-climbing competitions, lobby for ring ceremonies, organize karaoke nights, etc., comes from partisan students who, as youth themselves, relate to and share the desires of their peers. They, too, want to have fun, achieve social status, and be seen as ‘cool.’ It is precisely because they share these desires that they know what to do to garner ‘street cred’ among youth—which DJs to hire, which venue to choose, which incentives to offer, etc. And in the end, the fact they are socially successful also makes them more effective in diffusing partisan narratives and boundaries among their peers.
Elections at AUB: “The Annual Carnival”

As a mechanism, the election process in AUB is democratic, but on the ground, there is a discrepancy between what you want people to vote for, like student issues, and what they actually vote, the political parties and their friends. –
-Independent student candidate from Bilâ Huddûd (‘No Frontiers’), 2009

AUB’s elections are both ‘serious business’ for the political parties and a ‘pinnacle’ of student life at the university (Al-Jazeera 10 December 2009; LeFort 2013a and 2013b). AUB’s elections are so contentious that the administration has even solicited Lebanon’s independent, national elections monitoring organization (Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections [LADE]) to monitor them. From inviting independent observers, to installing CCTVs to monitor the voting and counting processes, to establishing no fewer than 27 rules and regulations governing campaign posters alone—AUB has strived to achieve a transparent, democratic, and non-sectarian process. Indeed, AUB’s formal regulations insist that non-sectarian space be created and protected in the election process. Political parties, their images, colours, slogans, and leaders, are formally prohibited from the entire process. Yet, despite the fact that voting procedures at AUB meet the highest standards of even international election procedures, and despite the strict ban on political parties, AUB’s student elections are still dominated by the major parties and this can, and often does, lead to “vitriolic sectarian divisions” between students (Rabah 2013).

As discussed above, since 2005 AUB’s elections have become increasingly politicized and intense. Marwan Kisarwani, AUB’s former Dean of Students who has watched student elections

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for nearly four decades, said that he “cannot remember a time when AUB student elections
have not been a mirror of larger society’s political dynamics” but that “It has really been since
2005 that they have become a sectarian contest.”\(^6^9\) The former Vice Dean (and now current
Dean) of Student Affairs agreed, stating the accusation of sectarianism in AUB elections “is
truer now than ever before.”\(^7^0\) In 2006, for example, and for the first time in the history of AUB,
security concerns caused the administration to shut down the vote counting and delay it for
two days. Newspaper reports claimed that AUB delayed the vote count because of the unruly
crowds which had gathered on Bliss Street and the heightened tension between students.\(^7^1\)
One might think that, given the heated contest, control over student council would mean
significant power and advantage for the party or coalition who controls it. But the student
councils at AUB are neither very active nor perceived to be very effective at the art of student
government. Once elected, student representatives frequently “fade into the background,
ever to be heard from again,” as one student described them.\(^7^2\) In fact, elections seem to be
less about being in office and affecting student government, and more about which side—
March 8\(^{th}\) or March 14\(^{th}\)—can get the most seats. To put it in F. G. Bailey’s terms, the “prize” is
simply winning the election to demonstrate that your side has the most supporters, as opposed
to gaining the power, influence, or advantage that accrues from being on student council

\(^6^9\) Kisarwani, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008. Dr. Kisarwani was Dean of Students from 2001 to
2010, and has been a faculty member at AUB as well as an avid observer of student politics since 1972.
\(^7^0\) Nizzameddin, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
\(^7^1\) On November 22, An-Nahar and on November 21, Al-Akhbar, As-Safir, Al-Mustaqbal, Al-Liwa, the Daily Star and
Al-Anwar carried the statement by Dean of Students Dr. Maroun Kisirwani regarding AUB SRC elections. The
Dean’s statement lauded the democracy, transparency and punctuality while also adding that some external
groups tried to politicize the elections. The Dean also justified the administration’s decision in postponing the vote
count. https://www.aub.edu.lb/communications/media/localnews/Pages/nov06.aspx
\(^7^2\) Talal, third-year arts student, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
(Bailey 1970). It is evidence of how student elections have been co-opted by the political parties and used as a tool to show their popularity among Lebanese. Again, this is not simply a result of elite manipulation; rather it is the culmination of the networking and activism of partisan youth who, in their capacities as both students and partisans, reproduce divisive partisan dynamics within this grassroots realm.

Structures of Student Government at AUB: In Theory and Practice

Formally, student government at AUB is organized through two main committees: the Student Representative Committee (SRC) and the University Student Faculty Committee (USFC). Within the SRC, there are two levels of student government. First, each of AUB’s seven faculties elects its own representative committee, made up of representatives from each year of study. These representatives (like all student representatives) are elected on an annual basis. Together these representatives make up the SRC, which comprises a total of 109 seats. These seats are distributed proportionally according to the enrolment numbers of each faculty. More than 330 students run for these seats every year (AUB 2014). Students from each faculty therefore elect a specific number of representatives to the SRC. The largest of the faculties is the faculty of arts and science (FAS) which has 33 seats on the SRC. The next largest faculty is the faculty of engineering and agriculture (FEA) which has 22 seats, followed by the faculty of agriculture and food science (FAFS) with 17 seats, the school of business (OBS) with 15 seats, and so on.

73 Bailey argues that politics, in every society, is a manifestation of competition for scarce “prizes.” People compete only because the prizes are in short supply. The value and nature of the “prize” depends on and varies according to the particular cultural peculiarities of the society in which it exists (21). In the case of youth politics at the AUB, the “prize” isn’t control over student council, it is simply winning the election, thus proving your side has more supporters.
the faculty of health science (FHS) with 9 seats, the faculty of medicine (FM) with 9 seats, and finally the school of nursing with 4 seats. The electoral contests in the FAS and the FEA are often the most heated because the faculties are so large. The SRC’s main purpose is to represent their students’ interests within their faculty. This includes matters such as defining academic standards, improving facilities (e.g., common rooms and study rooms), and improving services such as printing and computer labs. In 2012, changes were made to the electoral process at AUB in an effort to make it more democratic. Up until then, students directly elected only the SRC. The SRC would then choose from among its members the representatives who would go on to sit on the highest student governing body, the University Student Faculty Committee (USFC). This changed in 2012 when AUB redesigned the system to allow students to directly elect the members of the USFC as well as the Vice President of the USFC, which is the highest position in student office. This change was made to encourage student participation in the elections and to attempt to reduce the control of the political parties over the highest positions in student government. Before 2012, students elected to the SRC were often running on behalf of a specific political coalition, either March 8th or March 14th. The bloc that won the most seats on the SRC would then ‘claim’ the presidency for their side, as their candidates would always vote in line with their coalition. After 2012, the decision over who would hold the highest offices in student government was put directly into student hands. Nevertheless, according to results from the elections in 2013 and beyond, this procedural change has had no effect on the control of the political parties over the highest offices, as students elected to the SRC still vote in line with one of the two major coalitions (Mahdi 2013).
The USFC comprises 18 representatives from each faculty’s SRC including the Vice President of the USFC, who is a student. The Vice President of the USFC is the highest position in student government at AUB. Again, the number of representatives each faculty can send to the USFC is proportional to that faculty’s student enrolment. Seven faculty members also sit on the USFC.

The USFC has a broader scope of power and responsibilities than the SRC. It is the formal mechanism for the voice of the student body to be heard by the administration—the link between the students and the administration. Its primary role is to serve as a forum where student concerns can be voiced and addressed. The USFC also has jurisdiction over the use of the funds which are collected from students to support the student clubs and activities. Though the USFC can recommend courses of action to AUB’s Senate and President, it has no formal power to change AUB policies. Furthermore, although the USFC can take and implement decisions concerning student life, the faculty representatives on the USFC retain veto power and have final authority over all decisions. The faculty representatives also have a say over the agenda and activities of the USFC.

The activities and agenda of the SRCs, on the other hand, are entirely in the hands of the student representatives. However, the SRCs—either at the level of the individual faculties or as the entire 109-member SRC—do not have the power to implement any decisions. The SRC can only decide to forward their recommendations to the USFC. There is no set number of times that the SRC has to meet in an academic year—this decision is left in the hands of the student representatives. There is also no official requirement that the SRCs report back to the students they represent, although in recent years some SRCs have begun to release annual and interim
reports on their activities to the students in their faculties. The USFC, however, is required to meet every two weeks and minutes are supposed to be made public on the USFC website.

In practice, the various levels of student government do not function in the manner described in AUB’s bylaws. According to both faculty and students, the various SRCs rarely come together as a complete council, and communication between them occurs more informally along party lines.\(^{74}\) The effectiveness and communication of the SRCs vary considerably from faculty to faculty—something that has much to do with the degree to which the SRC is politicized, i.e. dominated by a particular political party. Factional political dynamics pervade the various levels of student government at AUB rendering it “either deadlocked, sluggish, or completely inactive” as one AUB professor and USFC faculty representative stated.\(^{75}\) For example, if a specific party and its allies hold the majority on a specific faculty’s SRC, then, at a minimum, the SRC will be able to function. If, however, the seats are divided more equally between the two blocs, then that SRC will likely experience deadlock and be unable to make decisions and pass on recommendations to the USFC. The more divided the SRC is along March 8\(^{th}\)–March 14\(^{th}\) lines, the more ineffective it is as a mechanism for the expression of students’ voices.

The allocation of seats between the two political coalitions is one way the SRCs are demobilized. The degree of politicization of the student representatives themselves is another. The largest of AUB’s faculties, the faculty of arts and science (FAS) and the faculty of engineering and architecture (FEA), for example, are traditionally the most politicized. Because

\(^{74}\) Kisarwani, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
\(^{75}\) Haydar, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
of their size, partisan students put a great deal of effort in winning these faculties, selecting their best, most dedicated student candidates to run for these seats. “The FAS battle is so fierce, and each and every FAS seat is a big victory,” said one student candidate for March 14th.  

Almost all members on the FEA and the FAS SRCs are affiliated to a political party, and the seats are also frequently closely divided between the two political blocs. The partisanship of the student representatives and the fact the seats are often nearly equally divided between March 8th and March 14th has meant these SRCs are “doubly ineffective” (Chatterji 2009, 47). If and when decisions do get made which result in some sort of achievement for student concerns, both March 8th and March 14th sides will “claim the victory as their doing and place the blame for the delays solely on the other side,” which only feeds political conflicts on campus. Indeed, during the election campaign in 2007 and 2009, I observed both March 8th and March 14th citing identical achievements of the FAS SRC as evidence of their side’s capacity to address student issues.

In contrast, the SRC of the faculty of medicine (FM) is not highly politicized. Because the FM is a small faculty, its SRC is also small, and is regarded as both active and effective. The FM’s SRC traditionally has very few partisan candidates and, tellingly, also one of the highest student voter turnouts (nearly always above 70%) (AUB 2014; Daily Star 25 November 2008).

The USFC is known to suffer from the same political divisions and deadlock as the SRCs. The difference is that the USFC is the only student body which, together with the

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76 Abdul Ibrahim student candidate, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2009.
77 Saleh, student candidate, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
78 Both sides claimed that the cafeteria construction was a result of their political bloc’s efforts to lobby the administration.
administration, holds the power to take decisions; the consequences, therefore, are more serious in terms of the ability of the student government to address student issues. According to non-partisan, independent student activists who have won seats on the USFC in the past (they belong to various independent groups and coalitions such as “Project Independent,” the “Secular Club,” and “No Frontiers”), the partisan students (who dominate the USFC) demonstrate “laziness and lack of interest” toward student needs and issues.79 “They don’t work through the system of government we have in place,” claimed the same student; “[t]hey prefer to rely on their own networks to get things done.”80 True, even in cases where one of the blocs does hold the majority of the seats in an SRC, it does not necessarily mean the SRC is more active, only that meetings and discussions are less turbulent. The level of activity in the SRC depends on how many student representatives are willing to take up issues and press for reforms. According to many students and administrators, it is often the non-partisan student representatives who devote the most energy to addressing student issues though the channels of student government. Addressing student demands is “not high on the list of concerns of the parties, despite what they may tell you in their campaign speeches.”81 Explains another independent student: “the parties just want to get elected. That is all they care about. They care about being the most popular among the AUB students.”82 Even the former Dean of Students stated: “it is a conundrum for us that students keep electing the representatives who do not seem to care about their demands.”83

79 Rayan, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
80 Ibid.
83 Kisarwani, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2010.
Unsurprisingly, partisan students who have held positions in either the SRC or the USFC see it differently. According to one student, affiliated with the Future Movement and who ran with March 14th, “it’s because we work together outside of AUB in our parties that makes us a strong group and allows us to work better inside AUB. In the end we’re all friends.”84 A similar sentiment was expressed by a partisan student affiliated with the PYO and a member of the FAS SRC while a sophomore, who stated that “political affiliations are the spinal cord and backup which supports the candidates.”85 Another student with the LF stated:

I have no problem expressing my support for the March 14 movement. The fact that politics are in our student elections can prove something to the entire country. The Lebanese political leaders are right now failing to work together. But we AUB students are getting things done. We have our differences but in the end we all care about student life at AUB. This is more than our leaders are managing to do together. We can send a good message to them and to the entire country.86

Another student with March 8th simply asked: “What is the problem with me expressing my political opinions and helping the student body at the same time?” Many interviewees suggested that partisan students, in a style which mimics the informal, clientelist practices of their party leaders, do still manage to address some students’ needs and issues, but do so through “informal channels,” or “direct communication with the faculty and administration,” rather than working through the elected student bodies.87

To summarize, student government at AUB is often divided between partisan students who are affiliated with the parties of Lebanon’s major political blocs, March 8th and March 14th. According to many, these affiliations have detrimental effects on the ability of these student

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84 Khoury, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007.
87 Nizzamaddine and Haydar, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
bodies to channel and address student concerns. Not only are divided SRCs prone to stagnation and deadlock in decision-making, but the more politicized the student representatives are, the more the debates between them also feed into political divisions between students on campus. In fact, there are many students on campus who are frustrated with the partisan domination of their student politics and government—the independent students being the main voices of opposition to the “sectarian state of affairs” that has come to characterize their student elections. Still, for reasons I shall explore below, AUB students continue to go along with it, voting in students who run with the major political blocs year after year, and rarely giving the independent candidates the support they need to “reclaim AUB elections.”

The other picture that emerges is that partisan students do not view themselves as just ‘mini-politicians’ or agents of their parties whose purpose is to extend their parties’ power. They are adamant in their focus on and support of AUB student concerns first and foremost. Clearly they act as conduits for the “transmission” of partisan affiliations, frames, and agendas on campus (LeFort 2013b), but they also come to the arena as youth, as students who are motivated by youth issues such as popularity, relationships, and student concerns. They use the elections to advance their party’s dominance but they also use their partisan identities to advance these concerns—a sort of instrumentalism from below.

88 This is how the Secular Club at AUB describes what they are trying to do in the AUB elections. See: https://www.facebook.com/secularclub/

89 LeFort uses this term to describe the “inter-generational transmission of narrative identity” among FPM youth and supporters in Lebanon (LeFort 2013b, 457, emphasis added).
The Mechanics of AUB’s Elections: “Ignorance on Bliss Street”

Securing Candidates

Student elections at AUB are usually held in November. The exact date is announced a month in advance by the Office of Student Affairs and the campaign period begins immediately. Student candidates must be nominated in advance and fulfill eligibility requirements (i.e., have a minimum GPA). Though the official campaign is usually only one or two weeks long, partisan students actually begin preparing for them on an informal basis months in advance, if not the year before.

Six to eight months in advance of the election announcement, partisan students begin recruiting candidates to run in elections. The focus of their early efforts is identifying desirable student candidates whom they recruit to run on behalf of their party and/or coalition. In order to win, they must assemble a list of candidates who represent all years of study in each faculty. Candidates are recruited to run on behalf of a student club and are drawn from the student members of the club, the party’s own youth wing, as well as from the wider student body. As mentioned, parties move quickly in order to recruit freshman students especially, because they, unlike students in higher years of study, cannot be recruited the year before. Their participation and nomination must be secured between the start of classes in September and the date of the elections. Student candidates who are not affiliated with the party’s youth wing but willing to run with one of the two major partisan coalitions are seen as especially valuable candidates. This is because having people who are “less political” (i.e., not known for their partisan

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90 This was a quote by a student at AUB referring to the politicization of the student elections at AUB, and the fact that the AUB is physically located on Bliss Street in West Beirut. It is a somewhat common (humourously derogatory) saying that is used by and aimed at AUB students.
affiliation) helps partisan students to cultivate the image that their candidate lists “are not too sectarian” and thus more likely to attract a greater number of voters.91 As one partisan student leader explained, “that way we can attract more neutral students and the ones who are just sympathetic to our side.”92 In fact, it is actually damaging for a partisan party to be seen as being “sectarian.”

As a professor at AUB who also acts as the advisor for the Secular Club stated, “students have had just enough civic education to know prejudice is wrong, and they should not express their prejudices in public, but many still hold the views.”93 Indeed, as mentioned above, research suggests that trust between youth of different confessional backgrounds is low (Hanf 2007). Youth are still, for example, skeptical of religiously mixed neighbourhoods and mixed marriages. Yet, the same research also shows they are drawn to the benefits and appeal of confessional diversity (Yassin 2012; see also Larkin 2012, 121). Lebanese scholar, Nasser Yassin, refers to this “co-existence without empathy” where youth want to embrace tolerance and diversity but are hindered from full acceptance of it due to the prevalence of inter/intra-sectarian stereotyping, symbolic spatial boundaries, and the endurance of local identities (Yassin 2012, 205). It is this hybrid combination of attitudes and views that results in students at AUB both not wanting the candidates they vote for to appear ‘too sectarian,’ while also still choosing to run and support partisan parties in elections.

Building lists of desirable candidates is the major preoccupation of partisan students in the lead-up to elections and they are constantly on the lookout for students willing to run.

93 Hadar, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2009.
When describing how they identify suitable candidates, partisan students said they focused on students with specific qualities, the most important of which is popularity, leading many students to complain that student elections, besides being overly partisan, are little more than a ‘popularity contest.’ A partisan student associated with the Amal movement explained, “we want people who will be able to get lots of friends to vote for them when the time comes.”

Indeed, the reasons student voters opt to support their peers who run with March 8th or March 14th may have as much to do with friendships and social dynamics as with partisan leanings—but they work to reproduce partisan identities and boundaries nonetheless.

But why do students agree to run for the major coalitions, especially considering that many students articulate frustration with the dominance and what (they describe as) “the infiltration” of the parties into student elections? In fact, most student candidates expressed ambivalence about running with a particular party. In the majority of cases students reported they made the choice to do it anyway simply because it increased their chances of winning. A former USFC president explained that students feel the need to have political affiliations as a prerequisite for running in the student elections because they think “this is the fast lane to victory. Parties are better organized, and have more experience than individual students when it comes to elections. They provide the security of having a group.”

Rasha, a student running on behalf of Future Youth (the Youth Club), explained why it is difficult not to run with a partisan group:

I am officially with Future Youth, but to me, I wish that youth had nothing to do with politics – or least with sectarian politics. You know, we need to change. We are the

future of change in Lebanon, so let us all work together. I don’t get it; why do we have to follow this leader? We all live in the same country; why can’t we just work together? But on the other hand you have to be with one of the big parties if you really want to win. If you are not, then you will be neglected just because no one has your back in the elections. If you run with a party, they will get their whole network to vote for you and they also give you lots of help. No one really takes the independent groups seriously anyway. They can’t get as many people to run with them because asking someone to run independent is like asking someone to lose. And it’s hard to convince someone to lose.96

Victor, a junior student who belonged to the Cultural Club of the South (the club associated with Hezbollah) expressed ambivalence about running with the March 8th coalition:

I am actually independent but I am running with March 8th. I’m doing this just because I want to get into student council, and then I want to change things because I don’t think political affiliation should be in the council. I know this sounds wrong but it is the only way. I am running with them because I have better chances, and also honestly I do not mind really running for them. I am from the south of Lebanon and I support Hezbollah – I support the resistance. So I am running with them in the elections. But it’s still because I don’t think that politics or political parties should be in student elections. I hope that next year the independents will be a bit stronger and the political affiliation within the university will lessen.97

Another student candidate, running for March 14th, admitted that running on behalf of one of the political coalitions was purely a strategic move on his part:

The main reason I am running is because it is good for my CV. If you are on SRC, it is very good to have on your resume. You also gain great experience and you meet many people and make many connections. I have much better chances if I run with SAW (Students at Work). I do not have to be a part of the party in order to run. We are not all members of the parties, there are some independent people running with us too. The March 14th students help organize us. They give us lots of support. They give us materials but they do not give us funding. We have to fund raise for our own activities. They show us how to campaign and help us promote the image that we want. And if we win, we help them show Lebanon that the March 14th will prevail. This is also a way to get into politics later in life because for sure you are going to make connections. Some of the people who are involved have these ambitions98

96 Rasha, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2007.
98 Alameh, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008. This student was referring to Wael Abou-Faour who was youth leader of the PYO and has since become an MP for the PSP.
Or as one female candidate with March 8th stated: “There’s just no room to be independent.”

Clearly, students have many mixed reasons for running with a political party in the student elections. The main draw for student candidates is that running with a party drastically increases your chances of winning a seat. Furthermore, having the experience of being on AUB’s SRC also “looks good on your CV” when you apply for jobs, as numerous students reported. There is also the fact that partisan students offer their candidates a range of electoral support including campaign training, campaign materials, and hundreds of campaigning hours. Partisan students have extensive networks which they rally in support of their candidates. Without one of the major coalitions on your side, “no one has your back” in elections, as one of the students quoted above said. Many student candidates, however, hold a combination of views. They may not be members of the political parties, but they do favour one side over the other. Victor, the March 8th candidate quoted above, described himself as both an independent as well as a supporter of the resistance (Hezbollah). Students may also have pragmatic reasons for running with parties, including using the party affiliation in order to get elected so they might then work to change the system of student government and elections from inside. In the end, though many students express frustration with the dominance of the parties in elections, they still continue to go along with it.

99 Female candidate with March 8th, interview with author, November 2007.
**Building Alliances**

Building electoral alliances is a key component of student elections. Though the alliances between parties often mirror those at the national level, they are not formed automatically and often involve days of delicate and sometimes tense negotiations between students over issues such as exactly how many of which party’s candidates will run, in which faculties, etc. At AUB, the March 14th alliance is composed of the Future Movement (Youth Club), the Lebanese Forces (Social Club), and the Kata’eb (Discovery Club)—and at various points since 2005 the PYO (Communication Club). These parties form an electoral alliance under the title of “Students at Work.” The March 8th coalition at AUB is usually comprised of the Free Patriotic Movement (Freedom Club), the Amal Movement (Lebanese Mission Club), Hezbollah (Cultural Club of the South), as well as the SSNP. In recent years the PYO has also joined the March 8th coalition.

In the preparations for elections, which as mentioned can last for many months, partisan students negotiate with their allies, share financial resources, build strategies, decide on candidate lists, and design joint campaigns that can maximize their reach among students. “We work intensely within our own organization and with our allies to agree on common election strategies and to build good lists of candidates. We even pool our budgets,” explained one PYO student organizer.100 Though there is no requirement that every religious sect be represented among the list of candidates, students will usually have long meetings to compile lists that are confessionally diverse and representative—informally importing the

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100 Semaan, March 14th student organizer with PYO, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
The nature (and struggles) of the alliances in student elections provide a fascinating window into how student elections reflect national political trends and into the nature of the relationship between partisan youth and their leaders. The freedom, or lack of thereof, that partisan students have to negotiate their own alliances in student elections speaks to the degree of flexibility and autonomy partisan students have over their own affairs on campus. The fact that student electoral alliances reflect national level alliances is often held up as evidence of the instrumental use of youth by the political elites, that is, the political party leaders instruct youth as to whom they can or cannot align with so as to either ‘test’ new strategies, or maximize their party’s chances of winning and therefore demonstrate its dominance. My research, however, suggests the notion of elite instrumentalism of youth is too crude a description for what actually takes place, and that there is a more nuanced and complex set of dynamics at play when it comes to partisan youth and their relationship to the elites. Though it would be a stretch to claim partisan youth have complete autonomy over their electoral alliances, I suggest that there is more negotiation, more elasticity, and more autonomy vis-à-vis youth and their leaders than is usually assumed. Consider the following two examples of electoral alliances which indicate that partisan youth have a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy than most assume.
During the student elections of 2008, the PYO students (the Communication Club, which at that time was called the “Arab Heritage Club”) surprised everyone by announcing that they would not run any candidates at all in the elections. The students associated with the other March 14th parties, and who were allied with the PSP, were intensely unhappy with the decision because it meant they would be short candidates and would have to ‘scramble’ at the last minute to find other suitable candidates from other supportive parties to run. The PYO students tried to make up for their sudden withdrawal by committing to helping their March 14th allies as much as possible and still urging their own students to vote for March 14th candidates.

Rumours abounded as to why the PYO refused to run candidates. The PYO students themselves explained that the decision was their way of protesting the current political direction of the parent party, the PSP, which was starting to distance itself from the March 14th coalition. PYO students stood at the entrance to the campus for three days distributing leaflets to their fellow students with a formal statement explaining this reason for their decision. PYO

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101 The AUB is where the PYO focuses most of its efforts and has the biggest presence. The AUB is cited by PYO members as being the most important university for the party. In fact, the PYO has had a presence at AUB for more than 50 years and as such has had the longest continuous presence of any of the youth wings on AUB’s campus. It also has symbolic importance as the alma mater of the PSP leader Walid Jumblatt, who graduated there with a bachelor’s degree in political science in 1982. According to Chatterji’s 2007-08 survey, AUB is the university with the highest percentage of Druze students whose first allegiance is to the PYO. The PYO’s student club at AUB was called the “Arab Heritage Club” and then changed its name to “Communication Club” as part of their shift in alliances (Abu Zaki, interview with author, Beirut, November 2010). The PYO has comparatively little presence in other universities in Lebanon. Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), for example, has few Druze students and thus the PYO does not have a committee there. The only other university with any significance for the PYO is the Lebanese University (LU) where the PYO has traditionally operated on the Hadat campus. Druze students report, however, that they have been caught uncomfortably in the shifting alliances of the party leader Walid Jumblatt, beginning with his realignment with the major Sunni and Maronite parties after 2002. Specifically, after 2005, Druze students at the Hadat campus of the LU felt vulnerable as the Hadat campus was under the control of the opposition (March 8th). After 2005, some PYO students reported choosing to move their courses from the Hadat campus to the East Beirut Campus (a March 14th stronghold) to avoid the tension they felt with the other students. Since Jumblatt has officially left the March 14th coalition and has repositioned his party as a more centrist one, it is likely that the relationships of the Druze students to March 14th students at the LU will have, once again, shifted as well.
students were quite impassioned about their stance and believed wholeheartedly in what they were doing. Others, however, had a more cynical view of the decision of these students and felt that the students were simply taking instructions from their leaders in the PSP. One senior PYO youth leader, who had himself been angered by the actions of the AUB students, said that the students’ decision probably had been “negotiated with the top.”102 As it happens, there were “rumblings” that Jumblatt was beginning to distance himself from the March 14th alliance at the national level around this time (Patrikarakos 2012). Though this split was not actually fully official until 2011, it is likely that it had begun with events that took place in May earlier that year, namely, the violent confrontations that broke out between March 8th and March 14th in West Beirut on 7 May 2008—a conflict which left the Druze students particularly vulnerable.103

Most observers tended to see the students’ decision not to run candidates as coming directly from the leader, Walid Jumblatt. But interviews with PSP insiders, as well with AUB faculty who were meeting with the students at the time, describe a more complex process of negotiation, communication, and decision-making between students and their leader. The Vice

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103 In May 2008, after nearly 18 months of political crisis and deadlock, the March 14th-dominated government attempted to shut down Hezbollah’s telecommunications network, as well as remove the airport security chief Wafic Shkeir over his alleged ties to Hezbollah. Hezbollah responded with a strong show of force and seized control over much of West Beirut—specifically areas of the city associated with Hariri’s Future Movement. The clashes that followed left 11 people dead and approximately 40 others wounded. These clashes led to the signing of the Doha agreement on 21 May 2008. As part of the March 14th government, Jumblatt was instrumental in cabinet’s decision to declare Hezbollah’s telecommunications network illegal. Just days before the conflict began, Jumblatt had also made “earth shattering accusations” against Hezbollah for the role they played in detaining Karim Pakzad, a French socialist dignitary who was in Beirut and being hosted by Walid Jumblatt. However, after the outbreak of violence in West Beirut, Jumblatt watched as his Future Movement allies were easily defeated, leaving the PSP alone and vulnerable in the confrontation with Hezbollah’s fighters. Although the shift in Jumblatt’s alliance did not begin publicly until summer of the following year, many speculated that the May events triggered his recognition of the need for more flexibility and accommodation vis-à-vis Hezbollah in order to protect his own group.
Dean of Student Affairs, who has been in close communication with partisan student activists and has observed student politics at AUB campus for nearly a decade, explained it this way:

It is hard to draw clear lines as to what is coming from the top and what is simmering on the ground and then works its way up. It’s a very complex relationship. From watching these elections over the years I have come to understand that the youth are not on a leash of their leaders. They are not being dragged into anything. I strongly disagree with this assessment. This group of students were really at risk last May. I remember them trying to get to campus while Hamra is occupied by their rivals. They felt vulnerable. They were clearly outnumbered. The students have told us they wanted to find their own direction away from their leaders and so we will support them in this. It is important for them to be able to express themselves to their leaders and make their own decisions if they disagree.\(^\text{104}\)

Similarly, a PSP insider described how the students of the PYO relate to and communicate with Jumblatt:

They express their concerns to him. The students told him ‘Walid, your language was a bit strong against Hezbollah and we felt threatened last May. We could have been hurt or killed....’ He must listen to the messages and concerns that are sent from below, and especially from the youth who have the closest connection to the grassroots. ...If they want to be more independent then that is their right.\(^\text{105}\)

One of the PYO student leaders at AUB explained that the students do have autonomy from their leaders in the PSP: “The leaders do not just tell us you have to do this or that. The final decision is ours... unlike other parties in Lebanon which do control more. We need our independence to work with the students here. We have to be able to negotiate as we see fit and for what is best for the students.”\(^\text{106}\)

Since 2008, the PYO has often switched positions in AUB’s student elections. In 2007-08 and 2009-10 the PYO sided with the March 14\(^{th}\) coalition. In 2008-09 they dropped out of the

\(^{104}\) Nizzameddin, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, December 2007.

\(^{105}\) N. Jumblatt, interview with author, Beirut, February 2008.

\(^{106}\) Dargham, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
March 14<sup>th</sup> coalition and did not run any candidates in the election, but worked on behalf of the March 14<sup>th</sup> bloc. In 2010-11 they sided with the March 8<sup>th</sup> coalition. And in 2011, they ran with the Independent group called ICAN (Independent Candidates). To some extent these shifts are reflective of Walid Jumblatt’s departure from March 14<sup>th</sup> which became official in 2011. At the level of AUB, the PYO is now considered a swing vote and both March 8<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> camps have attempted to co-opt and recruit their candidates each year. The PYO itself insists their switch is strictly for academic reasons, and say they want to focus purely on student demands.

Most tend to see the shifting alliances of the PYO during AUB elections as evidence of Walid Jumblatt’s manipulation of his student followers. As the youth leader of the Youth Club (the student club associated with Hariri’s Future Movement) stated: “He’s using them to test new strategic directions for the PSP.” To be sure, this is the common conception of the relationship between elites and their young followers. But given the evidence concerning the close communication, the negotiation, the influence, and the autonomy of the PYO youth vis-à-vis their leaders, this does not appear to be the case. While the power relationship between youth and their leaders in Lebanon’s political parties is undeniably asymmetrical, that does not mean that it is not flexible, nor does it mean that the ‘followers’ are not still able to influence ‘from below.’

“Culture Clash”: The March 8<sup>th</sup> Alliance Crumbles

The disintegration of the March 8<sup>th</sup> coalition in 2010 provides yet another illustration of the more negotiated and flexible relationship between youth and their leaders, and the autonomy they have over their own affairs. That year, the FPM students had concerns about
aligning with students from Amal, even though they were technically on the same side (March 8th). FPM students reported they did “not want to fraternize with the students of Amal” and preferred to work through Hezbollah, with whom they felt they had a stronger working relationship. One FPM student explained: “We just aren’t on the same page as them [i.e.: Amal]. We don’t get along at all. There is a culture clash with our parties. We really couldn’t be more different.”

Students associated with the FPM and Amal had been trying to come to an agreement in order to form a united coalition of March 8th parties in that year’s elections. It soon became apparent, however, that Amal was covertly attempting to form a rival campaign with the PYO students that would exclude the FPM (but possibly still include Hezbollah) and effectively compete with them in elections. The FPM students approached Hezbollah to discuss the situation and attempted to pressure Amal into joining their coalition. But because Hezbollah did not want to create a conflict with Amal, negotiations stalled and the FPM students were left in precarious positions. Relationships between all the groups were soon strained, and cooperation between them came to a standstill. As one FPM student who was caught up in the negotiations explained, “We have been meeting at our offices off campus to figure things out but in the meantime we are not revealing our list of candidates to anyone.”

Tensions increased when, in what one student described as “a game of chicken,” the various student clubs began creating separate campaign posters and signs that used only their own party’s colours as opposed to the dark blue/violet colour that was to be the campaign colour of the March 8th alliance that year.

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107 Fadi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2010.
Hezbollah students changed their posters to their traditional yellow, the FPM changed theirs to orange, and so on. A student associated with the PYO stated: “[T]his is politics. Everyone is threatening us in order to pressure us to settle for less than we should have. Everyone wants more than their share. But I predict we will come together.”

In the lead-up to elections, students from the FPM, Amal, and PYO reported having intense negotiations that would often go into the early hours of the following morning. These negotiations were no longer being held at AUB, but rather in the offices of the various political parties. One of the FPM students explained the process this way: “Of course we work together with our own youth leaders, they are involved in these negotiations because it is very complicated and there is a lot of tension between us. But we are the ones who decide what we want to do in the end.”

As it happens, in the end the alliance between FPM, Hezbollah, Amal, and the PSP did come together in time to compete in the SRC elections. For the first time in several years at AUB, March 8th won the majority of the seats. In the weeks following, however, when the USFC elections were held, the alliance between these parties disintegrated and the PYO and Amal students broke away from Hezbollah and the FPM, and seized the majority of the USFC seats, taking the presidency, and the ultimate victory, along with them.

In this case, the breakdown of the alliance was not reflective of any division or shift at the national level. It was, however, reflective of a conflict between FPM and Amal that had been brewing over the last five years. Though both the FPM and Amal share a common ally in

109 Ibid.
110 In 2010 AUB was still using the former system of having the SRC members elect the USFC council, as well as the VP position (Daily Star, 6 December 2010).
Hezbollah, the parties actually oppose each other on many levels, the main one being Aoun’s focus on the corruption and nepotism in the state. Indeed, the fact Aoun champions these issues is understood by many to be a self-serving political strategy being driven rather by altruistic motives—a way to undercut the power of his rivals. Moreover, many see it as inflammatory, dangerous, and threatening to the ‘order of things’ in Lebanon. Whether or not this is true, what is clear is that Nabih Berri, the leader of Amal, is probably the Lebanese politician who most epitomizes these practices, and thus perceives these declarations of Aoun’s as threats against his own power. The tension between the two parties was played out the following year in the 2009 parliamentary elections when the FPM challenged Amal’s hold on the mainly Christian city of Jezzine, in South Lebanon (LeFort 2013b, 160). Though Jezzine is a mainly Christian area, Berri has managed to secure his position there through clientelist networks that incorporated many Christian MPs. Their national alliance notwithstanding, Aoun wanted to compete in Jezzine with his own list of candidates as a way to demonstrate his status as the leader of Christians in Lebanon. The two parties did compete and the FPM won all three seats—something which angered Amal (ibid.).

Prior to this conflict between Amal and the FPM in the parliamentary elections, however, the FPM students from AUB were expressing their discontent with Amal directly to their leader, General Michel Aoun. One of the FPM students reported the communication like this:

I spoke to the General about the problem directly and I explained to him that the alliance with Amal is not working for us at AUB. I explained that we as students felt that we should not align with them in elections because they are not honest; they are not working with us in the good way. They are taking our votes but not giving us theirs and it is too frustrating to work with them. We are activists! We cannot tolerate this. The General told me I could do whatever I felt was right and that if we do not believe they
are good allies then we should not ally with them. He left it completely in our hands. The important thing he said is that we are building a movement based in the right issues not just winning seats.\textsuperscript{111}

Though the tension between the FPM and the Amal students might have been reflective of the tension between these parties at the national level, the dissolution of their electoral alliance was not.\textsuperscript{112} The negotiation, and politicking that occurred among the students of March 8\textsuperscript{th} that year were largely a product of dynamics at the student level, rather than the elite level. Moreover, as the quote directly above suggests, even when partisan students seek the counsel of their leader they may not just be getting instructions, but rather being advised to do as they see fit.

The fact that the youth leaders of the parties (i.e., the leaders of the youth wings who would oversee the partisan students at AUB) were at times involved in the negotiations indicates another level of complexity in the relationship. Youth wing leaders often play an intercalary role between the party leaders and the youth they represent at the grassroots, providing an additional, and sometimes uneasy, layer of negotiation between leaders and young followers. The youth leaders of Lebanon’s parties at times find themselves advocating for the leaders’ position to the youth members as well as advocating for the youths’ position to the leaders. The point is simply that the relationship between youth and their leaders is more elastic, complex, and negotiated than is often assumed.

\textsuperscript{111} Rawan, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, May 2010.
\textsuperscript{112} In the elections of 2009, Amal and the FPM competed in Jezzine, but officially remained in the same alliance.
Election Platforms: A “Thin Veneer” of Student Issues

Once the candidates are secured, and the alliances built, the various student coalitions begin their official campaigning. As in any election, part of the campaign is communicating your electoral platform. In the case of student elections in Lebanon, however, the electoral platforms of the major coalitions are “shallow” and “vacant” when it comes to articulating core student concerns. Since 2005 and the increasing political tension between March 8th and March 14th, students elections have been increasingly shaped by issues causing national and partisan divisions and less by the issues that affect students directly. Electoral platforms are put forth with little more than a veneer of student issues which supports the point that what is truly driving the elections is the desire of March 8th and March 14th students to flaunt their victories on campus. In other words, the focus of the partisan groups is more on simply winning, and less on what type of change they can effect once in government. No wonder, then, that the platforms are often “recycled,” as one student remarked.

The platforms of the March 14th Students at Work (SAW) campaign and that of the March 8th Students for Change (SFC) in both the 2007 and 2008 elections were hard to tell apart. In 2007, both coalitions asserted the need for ‘change’ without defining what that change was. Both blocs also referred to the expansion of study space, cafeteria construction, better dorms, longer reading period before exams, more financial aid, and student shuttle services from the opposite ends of campus. Both SAW and SFC also advertised the same achievements from the prior year’s student government, as examples of their own leadership.

113 Interviews with various AUB students at AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
and success in student government. The following year, in 2009, the platforms had changed very little save for the introduction of a clause rejecting tuition hikes. This trend continued in 2010 where again the majority of the candidates were campaigning on more or less the same platforms. As the Dean of Student Affairs stated, “Despite all the political factions, all those groups have the same campaign platform, the same demands.”

Another professor observed, “These people see the SRC as a stage, not an effective organ that could get things done to better the life of students.”

This is another way that AUB’s student elections mimic parliamentary elections: they are dominated by political slogans and partisanship, rather than a focus on actual issues, such as students’ rights and academic concerns. Explained one frustrated independent student, “We have candidates who are more concerned with the headlines of the newspapers than their responsibilities on the SRC!”

Partisan groups not only present shallow platforms regarding student issues, they also try to co-opt wider political issues that are a part of broader student consciousness and use them as a tool to demarcate their sides and rally support for their particularistic cause. For example, one student put it this way: “If you support the Syrian revolution, they say you must vote for March 14th. If you support the resistance against Israel (Hezbollah), they want to you vote for March 8th. There’s no home for those of us who support both.”

Nevertheless, though many suggest that AUB students are frustrated with this shallow and divided state of

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115 Nizzameddin, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2010.
116 Khalaf, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November, 2010. The observation that AUB’s opposing student coalitions often have nearly identical platforms and lists of achievements has also been made in various national newspapers (Mahdi, 5 November 2013; Naim, December 2008; Daily Star, 2009).
117 Khalil, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
118 Amin, self-described ‘neutral’ student, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, March 2011.
politics on their campus, it does not seem to deter the majority from voting these blocs in year after year (Serhan 2015).

One of the main student issues that has been sacrificed to the March 8th—March 14th divide is the ever-increasing tuition fees of the private universities. The parties (i.e., student clubs) all pay lip service to this issue in their student platforms but ultimately fail to address it effectively on behalf of their students. This is because partisan divisions inevitably get in the way, making it difficult for the students to sustain cooperation sufficiently to pressure the administration. In two incidents, the first in May 2010 and the second in February 2014, AUB students (led mainly by partisan student clubs) organized impressive, unified student strikes to protest recent tuition hikes. Each time students managed to disrupt and cancel classes for nearly a week. These strikes were covered in the media and celebrated for the apparent lack of partisan divisions among the students in the protest. Observers applauded the rival partisan student groups for “getting along better than their respective leaders off the campus.” In both 2010 and 2014, however, the strikes petered out as issues of strategy and approach divided the students along partisan lines and deteriorated into “slurs and insults” between students associated with the March 14th and March 8th blocs. Despite some concessions from

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119 In contrast, during the 1960s and 1970s, as discussed previously, student elections were often pivotal to the emergence of student demands on the national stage, even though students were still often affiliated with political parties (Favier 2004, 187). This continued, albeit to a lesser degree, in the late 1990s and early 2000s in resistance to Syria. Today, student organizations seem less able to diverge from their parties’ interests in order to focus on student issues. Rather we see the increasing incorporation of students into the conventional parties. On the tuition strikes see Rabah 2014; Mahdi 2014).
120 See: http://worstofaub.blogspot.ca/search/label/protest.
121 The disagreements were between students who were affiliated with March 14th parties on the one side and March 8th on the other. The March 8th students accused the VP (affiliated with the LFSA) of racism toward Muslims and Palestinians. The VP and his members in turn felt as though they were being portrayed by the other side as “stuck-up Christians” who only wanted to co-operate with the administration because they wanted to stay close to the centre of power and that they would “sacrifice the demands of students to do it.”
the administration, student felt that the AUB administration largely won the battles. A former student leader who writes about student politics for the Lebanese news source, NOW Lebanon, commented on how the AUB administration is learning that it can “bank on” the fact that AUB student protests will ultimately be unable to sustain pressure (Rabah 2014; Mahdi 2014).

In sum, the platforms of the student groups associated with the major political coalitions tend not to present a platform of substantive student concerns. Rather, they are often ‘recycled’ from previous years, and sometimes even bear striking similarity to the platform of the rival coalition. This is evidence that student issues are not the main thing that is driving competition in AUBs student election. Rather, partisan competition is. As we shall see, the campaign tactics, images, slogans, and posters used by the students during elections suggest that this has become an arena for partisan competition. Indeed, student elections are a time when partisan boundaries come alive—having been recreated and reproduced by partisan activists on the university campuses. It is a time when partisan labels ‘override’ other forms of student identity and affiliation and are paraded around in the ‘carnival’ of student elections at AUB. 

LeFort (2013a, 1) states that partisan labels “override” other forms of affiliation and sociability among students during student elections.
Partisan students are also known for adopting more aggressive tactics in order to garner student support, convince students to run for them in student elections, or discourage their competitors. In their efforts to recruit new supporters and potential candidates, partisan students are also on the lookout for individuals willing to perform the ‘less desirable’ activities on campus on behalf of the party, namely, the activities of the *qabadayat* (the singular form is *qabaday*). In Lebanon the term *qabaday* denotes an informal leader of a neighbourhood. Sometimes also referred to as gang leaders or “thugs,” in Lebanon *qabadayat* have been known to engage in practices such as demanding ‘protection’ money, arms dealing, smuggling, and other illicit activities, especially during the civil war. During periods of conflict and heightened tension, *qabadayat* sometimes set themselves up as ‘protectors’ of their communities, doing such things such as implementing check points, for example. In more recent times, *qabadayat* are active in rallying support for specific political leaders during elections and public political events. They are also the main actors who deal with informal exchanges such as vote-buying, intimidation, and other practices that are illegal, yet widespread, in Lebanese politics. *Qabadayat* may be feared, respected, or despised depending on who is speaking. Their role is “all about pressuring others” (Khachan 2011). In exchange, parties and political leaders provide them with support and protection from the police (Gilsenan 1996; Khachan 2011).

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124 This phrase is from a student, quoted in Clark and Salloukh (2013), who was describing the tactics of political parties vis-à-vis their independent rivals. It nicely sums up the style of campaign tactic I describe here.

125 This is how the VP of the Future Youth Sector described the activities of the students in this role—which in many instances amount to bullying.
In the realm of the universities and particularly during student elections, partisan students have resorted to ‘qabaday-esque’ activities.\textsuperscript{126} As one independent student and member of the Secular Club commented, “It amounts to bullying and peer pressure, but with a political agenda.”\textsuperscript{127} One Shi’a student at AUB, for example, describes what happened to him when he decided to run for the Sunni-based Future Movement of the March 14\textsuperscript{th} bloc rather than either of the Shi’a parties (Hezbollah or Amal) of the March 8\textsuperscript{th} coalition:

If you don’t follow who they think you should be following, they will try to change your mind and if they find they can’t they might threaten you. This actually happened to me last year. I was harassed by these guys from the Amal party. They called me a betrayer. They couldn’t believe I was a Shi’a who wanted to run with March 14\textsuperscript{th}. I got threatening phone calls, but I didn’t back down. Then they came to my house, and basically forced me to get in their car. They drove me around. I knew they were just trying to scare me. It didn’t work. I still ran with Students at Work that year and I won the seat. But this year I can’t bring myself to go through it again. I just don’t want the hassle. It also upset my family a lot. This is the life if you go against the current.\textsuperscript{128}

Another student, of Druze background, who was known for her academic achievements, described what happened to her when she refused to join the AUB chapter of the PYO.

It got really intense at times. I could say they actually threatened me, but maybe it didn’t quite amount to that. I just didn’t want to get involved in the party or in politics. I don’t believe in these kinds of politics. But they just didn’t let up. At first they were friendly, and flattering. They said they wanted me as a member because I am an excellent student and I had leadership talent and that I could really benefit from being involved. But I just said no. And I kept saying no, and it just got ugly. I had to go out of my way to avoid them on campus. I even had to switch classes and change my schedule so I wouldn’t have to be in the same class with them.\textsuperscript{129}

The students who take on these types of roles do so on a purely informal basis and are often not official members of the youth wings, but rather young party supporters. In interviews,

\textsuperscript{126} Chatterji (2009) also states this.
\textsuperscript{127} Raidy, interview with author, Hamra, Beirut, November 2008.
\textsuperscript{128} Abdou, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
\textsuperscript{129} Ghosn, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
partisan youth leaders expressed ambivalence toward the students who engage in these party ‘activities.’ On the one hand, leaders said that these students constitute the “muscle” of the party, which “is a part of doing politics in Lebanon.” On the other hand, leaders said that these students required a great deal of supervision and “have to be kept in check” as they often “take matters into their own hands and cause trouble for the party” and can generate a lot of unwanted negative feelings toward the parties.

Students of the Secular Club at AUB also reported being harassed in these ways by the political parties—usually through attempts to discourage or disrupt their events. The Secular Club hosts numerous events related to protest, civil society, and citizenship, including events dealing with political crises facing Lebanon. “It’s no secret we blame the political parties and their elites for these crises, and so do our speakers,” said one Secular Club member. In one incident in 2013 the Secular Club was mounting a campaign called “Take Back Council,” which was a concerted attempt by secular and independent clubs in several of Lebanon’s universities to pose a stronger challenge to the conventional parties in elections. When the club began to advertise the campaign, students of the partisan clubs (both March 14th and March 8th) pressured students to boycott the event. The posters advertising the events were also defaced, removed, or covered. One of the members of the Secular Club summed it up: “They do all of these things and yet they still try to get us to support their side in the elections. They still try to

130 Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
132 Talhouk, e-mail communication with author, November 2013.
co-opt us so they can claim the seats we win for their side. It’s unbelievable what they will do to get your vote.”

To conclude, partisan students not only recruit suitable candidates for student elections; they also seek to recruit students willing to engage in more aggressive tactics to subvert their rivals and intimidate students. By annoying, interfering, bullying, and disrupting, these student qabadayat are often effective in intimidating other students into complying with their demands. Though they mimic the informal tactics of adult politics, especially during the civil war, in times of tension, and during national elections, these strategies of ‘annoyance’ are not coming from elites—in fact the leaders often disapprove of such behaviour as it can tarnish the image of the party in the eyes of the public. Rather, these strategies are being reproduced and ‘practised’ by students themselves at the grassroots. It is a stark example of the way partisan youth are actively reproducing sectarian dynamics and boundaries at the campus level and, in doing so, narrowing the space for alternative groups who are independent from the parties to emerge.

_The Campaign Phase_

Though students are active months in advance of elections, the official campaigning period is only a week long and begins just before elections are held. Student groups are now allowed to campaign actively and openly. During the campaigns the campus is buzzing with activity. Student campaigners roam the campus, distributing flyers and free goods, and lobbying their networks in an effort to build support for their candidates. Every group or individual who

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133 Kassir, independent student, e-mail communication with author, 2013.
is involved with running the elections is also allowed to set up a booth. There are usually a few dozen booths lined up across a 50-metre path facing the West Hall at AUB’s upper campus. The row of booths is the epicentre of campaign activity. In the 2007 elections approximately 30 stalls were lined up in front the of West Hall of AUB’s upper campus. Though the order of the booths is supposedly random, one glance will tell you the stalls are actually placed according to the March 8th –March 14th political division. The first 14 stands are held by the coalition of student groups affiliated with March 14th. The next five are the “Alternative Front,” the student groups who are running as independents and without any affiliation to the parties. Their booths are literally in between the two major coalitions. The last 12 booths belong to the student groups associated with the parties of the March 8th coalition.

Though partisan students can openly campaign, the ban on party images, flags, and logos is still in place. Partisan students overcome the restrictions of the formal system at AUB by rebranding their party coalitions and using new names and images. At AUB, the “Students at Work” (SAW) coalition represents the political parties of the March 14th bloc. In 2007, the logo of the SAW campaign was a black outline of a student holding a pencil above their head. Students of the SAW coalition created this image in a deliberate attempt to both provoke and subvert their rivals. As one SAW student explained: “We took the Hezbollah logo with the yellow colour and AK-47, and replaced the gun with a pencil. It’s meant to say that we value education over violence. Our students love it.”134 The “Race for Change” coalition, with their logo of a race car on a red background, represents the March 8th bloc.135 According to an RFC

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135 The March 8th Coalition changed its name to “Students for Change” in 2013.
student their logo was meant to suggest that “Lebanon can no longer wait for political change so we are racing away from March 14th.” The displays at the booths clearly indicate the presence of the two rival political blocs, as everything from the goods they distribute to the matching outfits of the student campaigners is awash in either bright yellow or bright red, so there is no mistaking which alliance they belong to.

During the campaign period the communication between the partisan students at AUB and their leaders (i.e., the leaders of the parties’ youth wings) intensifies. The elections may be important for the parent parties, but they are the raison d’Être of the youth wings. While partisan students at times complained of “off-campus meddling” from their youth wing leaders, the leaders themselves stressed they mostly play “peace-building” roles, and were mainly engaged in trying to “settle conflicts and stop violence between students.”136 It is another example of the intercalary role of the youth wing leaders. They ultimately have the best interests of their party in mind but recognize they do not have ultimate control over their student members and that their student members are likely pursuing multiple agendas in their contests on campus. The vice president of the Future Youth Organization at the time of the 2008 elections described it this way:

During elections I am on the phone constantly with the students at the universities. There are fights and conflicts that are breaking out all the time between the students. And there are constant rumours. I have to call our students to get the story, and then I have to call their (youth wing) leader to work it out. We discuss it and manage it so it doesn’t get nasty or violent. It doesn’t always work…. I have to urge our students to take our advice but sometimes their personal issues get in the way. It’s often about personalities. If we aren’t careful we could have a full blown fight on our hands and that looks terrible for everyone. Of course our main agenda is to keep the peace and to win

the elections for the party. But the students have lots of other things going on. Lots of personal conflicts.\textsuperscript{137}

The above comments underscore the notion that students pursue multiple interests through the arena of student elections, and their supposedly partisan battles are intertwined with personal and social dynamics. Any conflict can get couched in partisan or even sectarian terms, like the battles over strategy during the student strikes, for example, even though they do not originate in sectarianism. Indeed, during student elections, partisan boundaries take on increased relevance, superseding other forms of identification that may exist among students. Like spectators at a high stakes football match, partisan students encourage youth to choose one of two sides and identify themselves with a team. Regardless whether a student’s choice is driven by a social connection, a quest for popularity, or even political ideology, it gets reduced to a partisan label. Despite the frustration of students with the dominance of the parties on campus and their failure to act as vehicles through which student issues and demands can be articulated, the status quo remains. The key to its persistence is the work of the partisan students who hand down these tactics to successive generations of students and whose relentless networking, activism, and leadership on campus ensures the reproduction of the ‘sectarian carnival’ year after year.

\textit{Campaign Financing and “Vote-buying”}

While financing from outside sources is strictly prohibited at AUB, it is widely understood that the political parties contribute thousands of dollars to fund campaigns.

\textsuperscript{137} Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, February 2008.
According to an article on the subject by Lebanon’s English language newspaper, *The Daily Star*, there are even accusations of vote-buying by the parties during university elections.\(^{138}\) It is well known that partisan students distribute free textbooks, copies of past exams, parking passes, pens, mobile phone cards, cupcakes, and other paraphernalia to their supporters. In 2008, for example, Hezbollah and their March 8\(^{th}\) allies gave out free ‘stress balls’ branded with their coalitions’ logo and name as a way of attracting students to their booth.\(^{139}\) While these types of items are small and fairly benign, there are other practices that are less so. For example, the parties have been accused of providing student candidates with extra ‘funding’ to cover expenses associated with running in the student elections and as an incentive to run with them in elections. In interviews, nearly all partisan students said this was a regular practice, but also tended to deny the practice happened in their own parties, claiming it was something that their rivals engaged in. One AUB graduate described the practice of using material incentives to “buy your vote” in this way:

> They try to bribe you. It went way beyond stress balls and cupcakes. They totally try to buy your vote. Some candidates used to promise to get you advance copies of exams. The more astute ones would give you a copy on dark blue paper so you can't make your own copies and start competing with them. They even offered to pay for all my phone cards for the campaign. That can add up to a few hundred dollars. It’s awful what they will do to get your vote.\(^{140}\)

Political party funding of student elections is said to have increased since 2005 after many of the national political movements created youth wings in the process of forming


\(^{139}\) In fact, stress balls are popular items to give away during elections. At AUB it has become a tradition that students later use them to throw at each other in what is called a “friendly battle” on Election Day.

\(^{140}\) Hashim, interview with author, AUB, Beirut, November 2008.
themselves as official political parties. In this way partisan youth activism has been formalized and youth wings given access to funds, bringing youth political participation, including the activism of youth in universities, under greater control of the leaders. Accordingly, leaders see that their partisans have access to funds and other resources during university elections (Rowayheb 2014, 197).

Though the amounts of money reported by the partisan students were not large (the Lebanese Forces Social Club members, for example, estimated their own budget to be close to 6000$ for elections in 2008), when combined with the budgets of one’s allies, it is entirely conceivable a coalition such as Students At Work could have a campaign budget of between 15,000$ and 20,000$—a sum that far surpasses the budgets of the few independent groups who attempt to challenge the parties in the elections each year. What is more, partisan students report that the larger the budget the party brings, the more influence they have in the coalition.141

_Election Day Tactics_

On election day the atmosphere on AUB’s campus is ‘electric.’ Security is extremely tight, with only accredited journalists, students, and staff and faculty being granted admission to the campus on that day. Political party members (who are not registered students at AUB) are strictly barred from entry on this day. Since 2005, army units are also stationed outside the campus and at the various entrances in case conflicts break out that surpass the capacity of the

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141 Mhanna, Interview over ice-cream with author, Beirut, February 2008.
AUB’s own security personnel to handle. The university has also installed cameras to monitor student activity as closely as possible.

Partisan student activists arrive on campus early, and set up an election day ‘headquarters’ in a place on campus that is within their ‘territory.’ The March 14th Students at Work coalition usually sets up their headquarters in front of the Olayan Business School—a faculty at which Future’s Youth Club is especially well represented. The March 8th headquarters is usually situated in front of the faculty of arts and science, which, as mentioned, is the largest and most competitive faculty at AUB. Much of the activity throughout the day takes place around these two headquarters.

Partisan student campaigners actively attempt to sway voters until the very last minute of election day. They have lists of the names of registered students in all the years and faculties, and often their phone numbers as well. Partisan students divide up names, and ensure students vote, often checking their names off as they enter the polling stations. Partisan students also use last-minute campaign strategies, such as inviting well-known political personalities onto campus. Although non-AUB students are not technically allowed on the campus, there have been several cases where political personalities from the political parties have themselves shown up at AUB during the campaigning phase to ‘encourage and congratulate’ their student activists.\footnote{Ahmad, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008. In 2008, for example, Ahmed Hariri, nephew of slain former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and cousin of Saad Hariri (the Lebanese Prime Minister at the time), appeared at AUB campus the day prior to elections and walked around the campus with an entourage while}
having discussions with Future Youth activists and supporters. Many students were angry at his appearance as they thought it should not have been allowed.143

Partisan students also engage in more negative tactics such as attempting to discredit their opponents the day before polls open. In 2008, for example, the FPM circulated a dossier in which the entire election budget of the FYO was published, along with the names and phone numbers of FYO members. The FYO in turn distributed brochures in which they detailed instances when students were directly and indirectly threatened by members of Race for Change parties, in particular, Hezbollah. As one observer of student politics stated: “the message was clear: Future Movement tries to win elections with money and Hezbollah tries to win elections with intimidation” (quoted in Chatterji 2009).

**Media Presence**

As mentioned earlier, student elections in Lebanon are covered extensively by the media. AUB’s are seen as the most prestigious and thus are covered by all the major newspapers and television channels—they have become a national event. The media presence is felt throughout the AUB campus on election day. Given that virtually all media outlets (including both TV stations and newspapers) are linked to a specific political party or leader, it is hardly surprising that the reporters from affiliated stations cover their party’s activities most closely. The Future TV (associated with Hariri’s Future Movement) and the Al-Manar TV (associated with Hezbollah) crews, for example, were both present during the 2008 elections and covered their student wing’s activities in detail. Journalists conduct interviews with student

candidates which often appear on the national evening news broadcasts, lending significance to
the elections and bringing a feeling of great importance and excitement to the students
themselves. One student explained that the presence of media “raises the stakes” for the
students and “stimulates” their party activism and “desire to present a good image to the
country; a professional image.”144 The abundant media presence on campus, however, also
exacerbates the political tension and, as one student expressed, “turns our elections into a big
show for the political parties.”145

Voting and Results: Victory for Everyone!

Polling stations are open for approximately six hours on the day of the elections, and
nearly 8,000 students vote (representing overall turnout rates of more than 60%, although the
rates vary from faculty to faculty).146 The polling stations are tightly controlled and monitored.
Every student must pass through security in order to access the polls. Since 2005, the AUB
administration has also been continuously attempting to improve their elections systems in
order to prevent fraud and provide a fair and transparent process. In 2009, for example, they
installed closed circuit television cameras in order to monitor student activity and record any
violations of the code of conduct during elections. AUB is also the first university to invite the
Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), Lebanon’s national elections monitoring
body, to monitor and report on AUB’s student elections, which they have been doing since

144 Abu Hassan, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
146 AUB Student Elections Statistical Figures 2013-2014
2009. LADE stations approximately 18 monitors throughout the faculties to observe the voting and counting procedures and produces a follow-up report for the university administration. In 2015 AUB introduced a new e-voting system which they described as “meticulous, reliable, and most importantly fool-proof as well as hack-proof” (AUB 2015). The new system utilized an internal server (as opposed to an Internet-based server) to prevent outside manipulation or hacking, and also guaranteed the anonymity of the voter—a contentious issue in the past as parties have tried to monitor how their students vote. The administration has also installed ID scanners so that no counterfeit student cards can be used. In 2015 LADE reported AUB’s election system to be above national standards (ibid.). Still not satisfied, AUB struck a committee of students and faculty to study a variety of electoral systems around the world, and it adopted yet another electoral system in early 2016. The new electoral law will enshrine a system of proportional representation which is designed to increase the representation of independent candidates who do not run with the major political blocs. The decision to accept this system came after months of deadlock between the student representatives of the USFC (AUB 2016).

As students enter the various buildings to vote, the partisan clubs and their supporters stand by at the important faculties. At the FAS, for example, partisan students line up along the fence that cordons off the entrance and chant political slogans and songs as students pass by on their way to vote. At this juncture, the parties also closely monitor who goes to vote, keeping close track of the students who have pledged their support for their candidates. One partisan student explains: “We know who has voted, when they voted, and where they voted.
We have our monitors at every faculty. If someone doesn’t show, we call them. We can know if they don’t come to vote. We’ll go pick them up and drive them to campus if we have to.147

The follow-up to the election period is often fraught with questions and contestation. Since 2005, the elections at AUB have been closely divided between March 8th and March 14th (each side usually wins between 40-55% of the seats every year), with the independent students usually winning approximately 15% of the seats.148 Though most years a clear winner eventually emerges, it has often been the result of independent candidates, or at times the PYO, playing the role of ‘kingmaker’ and swaying the final tally toward one side or the other with their votes for the Vice President of the USFC. Most years, each side manages to claim some sort of victory. If they do not win the VP of the USFC, then parties will highlight their other victories in specific faculties. In my interviews with youth wing leaders from all the major parties, there was not one who did not cite a recent electoral victory at AUB as evidence of their party’s growing support in Lebanon. Rival leaders often cited election results from the same election year, highlighting specific faculties or years of study in which their side won a majority of seats. As one student from USJ, another university with contested elections, lamented in 2009: “Elections ended yesterday but we still have no idea who actually won! Is it

147 Youssef, interview with author, Beirut, November 2008.
148 In 2008 March 14th won 49 seats, March 8th won 47 seats, and the remaining 14 seats went to independent candidates. In 2009 March 14th won 61 seats, while March 8th took 32, and Independents took 16. In 2010 March 8th won 55 seats, March 14th won 42, and Independents won 12. In 2011 March 8th won with 50 seats, March 14th won 44 seats, and the Independents won 15. In 2012 the election results were so close between March 14th and March 8th that both sides claimed victory. The websites of the LF and the FPM, for example, read: (from the LF) “A tie at AUB with a win in the ‘fortress’ of the FPM” and (from the FPM) “A win at AUB.” In 2013, March 8th won by another slim margin; however, the Independents won 13 seats of the 109 Student Representative Committee seats and 3 out of 18 in the more important USFC, making it one of their more impressive showings in elections at that level of student government. In 2014 March 14th won by another slim margin, and in 2015, March 8th won, again by a slim margin. The seats won by independent groups in those two years are roughly the same—approximately 15% of the final tally.
the FPM? Is it Lebanese Forces? Is it March 14th or is it March 8th?"149 Indeed, when reviewing results on the websites of both the FPM and the Lebanese Forces (Tayyar.org and Lebanese-Forces.com), both parties claimed to have won the elections at Université Saint-Joseph that year. What is more, despite the extremely close election results, both of the parties claim they “wiped” their rivals.150

In celebration of their victories, students are often personally contacted by the political party leaders, and members of the party’s student club are often invited to their respective leaders’ homes as part of the celebration. General Aoun, for example, regularly hosts his students in Rabieh after elections and Samir Geagea hosts the students of the LFSA at the LF party headquarters in Maarab. Congratulations from the party leaders are frequently delivered in front of the media (NOW Lebanon 8 December 2008; see also Geagea 2010). The accolades from their leaders are important to partisan students, especially those with long-term objectives in mind. As a former USFC president stated, “these are the people who want to climb up the political apparatus for one reason or another and think being in a political party as a student is a great debut.”151 In sum, partisan students are not only seeking the power and influence that comes with winning seats on student council. It appears, in fact, that the biggest prize is simply the winning. Winning elections at AUB, in one of the most democratic systems in the country, brings legitimacy and evidence of a party’s popularity, among young, educated

149 Rami (USJ student), interview with author, Achrafieh, Beirut, November 2009.
151 Hassan Mohanna, quoted in Main Gate (AUB 2006).
Lebanese, and is seen as an indicator of future success for the party on the national level—a prize which everyone manages to claim.

**Conclusion**

Student elections at the AUB are driven by the “transportation of the sectarian political logic onto campus” (Meshlib 2006). But what accounts for this ‘transportation’? Most observers of student politics in Lebanon, writing in both the popular and scholarly presses, see this as evidence of the instrumental use of youth by the Lebanese political elites who use their students’ electoral victories in universities as a way to increase their own political legitimacy. While it is not unreasonable to think that university elections might give the elites a nudge in the direction of greater credibility (though this claim has never been tested or measured as far as I know), to attribute the state of affairs on campuses to merely the manipulation or ‘brainwashing’\(^{152}\) of their young followers ignores the active and powerful role of youth themselves. The realm of university politics in Lebanon is not just a place where youth are toyed with by their leaders who have them do their bidding. It is a dynamic, multifaceted political realm where youth pursue multiple and sometimes contradictory agendas—not only partisan ones. Indeed, partisan students graft onto existing forms of sociability among youth as much as they also orient them and imbue them with partisanship dynamics (LeFort 2013b, 130). They are very much a part of the social and political networks they also seek to build. As such, they bring multiple agendas to the table including social and personal interests, the likes

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\(^{152}\) To reiterate, it is common to hear scholars and journalists to speak of Lebanese youth as being “brainwashed” and “manipulated” by their religious and political leaders who themselves “fear any change they may make would only lead to their destruction.” See Najjar 2015.
of which pervade the lives of young people around the world. Like their peers whom they try to influence and recruit during elections, partisan youth also want to have fun and be cool, and are concerned with a multitude of issues that are relevant to their immediate lives at the university—many of which have little to do with national politics. Clearly, part of the reason they are so effective in connecting partisan parties with youth is that they are youth themselves. They understand youth sensibilities and are also influenced by them. They co-create youth culture along partisan lines.

In this examination of partisan student activities on AUB’s campus, I have also illustrated how partisan students use a range of informal strategies to bypass and overcome the formal rules which restrict their parties’ presence on campus. From capturing student clubs and organizing student social life, to convincing students to become their candidates, and offering incentives for participation in their networks, these youth actively strengthen partisan affiliations and enlarge partisan networks among students at AUB. They play a powerful and active role in reproducing partisan—and thus sectarian—dynamics at this grassroots level. Moreover, much of this work occurs largely out of their leaders’ view. As I have shown, youth have varying degrees of autonomy over their decisions in the university. The notion that partisan youth are simply carrying out their leaders’ orders is too simplistic. Indeed, in some cases, youth may even be influencing their leaders from below. There is also the intercalary role of the youth wing leaders to consider—which, at a minimum, adds another layer of complexity to the relationship between elites and followers.

In addition, my above examination shows that the strategies that partisan youth use have essentially become informally institutionalized at the universities. Senior partisan students
‘pass down’ their tactics and strategies to successive generations of students each year. Specific techniques, like the annual fall and spring parties, the ‘unofficial’ freshman orientations, methods of recruitment, and election tactics have become the informal ‘rules of the game’ at AUB. The ‘colonized’ student clubs, which are renewed and re-registered by partisan students every fall, are another example of this phenomenon. Partisan students initiate new students into their circles and teach them these methods year after year, thus ensuring the continuation of these practices on campus. This alone is a strong example of how their efforts constitute a feedback mechanism which works ‘from below’ to sustain sectarian dynamics among youth.

Yet the key question remains: if, as we also often hear, so many students are frustrated with the ‘cult of personality and sectarianism’ that dominates their campus’s politics, why do they continue to go along with it? Why do not more students vote independent? And why do students continue to run for and elect either the March 8th or March 14th bloc even when they are known not to be effective in student government? Frustration among students with the fact that the political parties dominate student elections seems to be widespread, but election results year after year continue to show a heated race between March 8th and March 14th, with the independent students only ever winning a small (15%) portion of the seats. Exactly how widespread is the support for partisan political parties at AUB and why do students continue to support the parties in student elections?

Though few hard statistics exist on this, the one survey conducted in 2008 by Chatterji sheds some light. Overall, that study found that approximately 27% of students surveyed were
active in a partisan student organization. A further 44.5% of students said they were not active in a partisan student organization but did vote with the major blocs in elections, while 14% of students were not active in politics and did not vote in student elections. These statistics were roughly the same across sects (Sunnis had a slightly lower rate of political participation at 21%, whereas the Shi’a and Christian students were at 31% and 29% respectively).

Interestingly, the study also showed that the majority of university students were “aware and highly critical” of the activities of the partisan student organizations on campus. According to the survey, AUB students were the most critical, with 77% voicing strong criticism (Chatterji 2009). Yet, an almost equal number (76%) of AUB students still reported they “appreciated the advantages of the parties’ networks.”

In interviews, students echoed this finding. As the data indicate, students are both critical of partisan student networking, yet make use of the resources and networks they provide, and do so for many purposes, not just political ones. Youth use partisan networks pragmatically in order to pursue material, personal, and social goals. Holding a seat on SRC at AUB, for example, is understood to be an impressive addition to the CV of a newly graduated student looking for work. In an economic climate where rates of youth unemployment are

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153 Around 21% described themselves as “active” and an additional 7% of students were “very active” meaning they held an office in a partisan student organization (Chatterji 2009).

154 Though these rates of student involvement in a political party seem relatively high, they do not compare to the high rates of student participation in politics before the war (when 52% of 1,339 students surveyed said they were active in “overt political participation” — meaning through direct involvement in student organizations, protests, meetings, and rallies; and a further 80% of students were generally positively predisposed to political participation (Nasr and Palmer 1975, 379).

155 Ibid. Chatterji states: “Students are aware and fairly critical of the political/partisan nature of student organizations, however, they overwhelmingly support the system of student elections and appreciate the advantages of the network for their professional advancement.” His survey also shows that the majority of students still favour the predominant politician of their confessional community (although Christian students were split between Samir Geagea and Michel Aoun).
almost twice the national rate—and meaningful work for new graduates in Lebanon is especially scarce—it is of little wonder that anything that can assist in finding a job would be valued highly by university students.\textsuperscript{156} It is even more understandable that only 5\% of youth in Lebanon believe the job market is a meritocratic one, and 74\% believe their political connections are an important factor in finding a job (LCPS 2013).\textsuperscript{157} Students thus utilize their partisan identities to pursue these personal and material goals—a sort of instrumentalism ‘from below.’ What is more, this phenomenon appears to be more entrenched among students in private universities than students in public universities. The 2013 study by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies and International Alert, for example, found that 28\% of students in private universities felt that it was the duty of elected MPs to provide “personal services and favours” to their constituents—as compared to just 6\% of students from public universities (LCPS 2013). This reminds us that wealthier families are also embedded within and utilize clientelistic networks, and make use of these connections—not just the poor. It also makes it less puzzling as to why partisan and sectarian affiliations persist among educated and relatively economically secure youth, as opposed to the “desperate, poor” youth on whom the ethnicity literature tends to focus.

Additional incentives exist for partisan students—namely those who are actually members of a party’s youth wing—to drive student politics toward the interests of their parties.

\textsuperscript{156} Here is an example (albeit at Université Saint-Joseph) of how these connections for employment can work: At the USJ the LFSA invests the majority of its recruitment focus in the law faculty because it has a history of support there. LFSA members who graduate with law degrees tend to obtain employment within firms dominated by LF members. Interviewees did not deny the fact that a system of patronage is at work here: “The LF has influence in the bar association and legal syndicates and the LF alumni network works to provide employment placements for graduates” (Habschi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007).

\textsuperscript{157} The same study (conducted by International Alert and LCPS in 2013), also found that this practice appears to be more embedded in students.
Indeed, some partisan students aspire to have political careers. They are eager to gain a reputation as a promising leader, and to rise through the ranks of their parties as past student leaders have done before them. The arena of student politics for them is thus an opportunity to practise and display their leadership and political organizing abilities. As the former student president quoted above states, for these youth, success in student politics “is a way to make a strong political debut.”

Besides the various advantages that supporting the parties may afford students, there is also evidence that many young Lebanese, despite their ambivalence and frustrations with the system, still ‘buy into’ the politics of the competition between March 14th and March 8th. The fact student voter turnout remains high in spite of student frustrations is an indication of this.158 According to a former USFC president at AUB, “youth is supposedly the time to be idealistic and revolutionary, but most of the time, the Lebanese version of the rebellion of youth is actually part of the system here.”159 This, he states, is much due to the “driving force of the students who are enrolled in the parties” who generate partisan competition on campus through their student activities, networking, and pro-active role in student politics.160

Clearly, youth are political hybrids. Their politics encompass many ambivalent, contradictory, and ambiguous positions. They rail against ‘the system,’ yet use it to their own advantage if they can. They criticize the political class and their clientelistic networks, and yet seek incorporation in them. They articulate strong desires for less conflict and more democracy

158 Students who simply vote for the major blocs are unlikely to reap the same types of benefits as those who actually run for them. Besides the freebies and various student paraphernalia, the material benefits to these students are not substantial—yet, students continue to turn out in high numbers to vote to one of the two major coalitions.
159 Mohanna, quoted in Main Gate (AUB 2006).
160 Ibid., loc. cit.
in their country, and yet get swept up in the ‘team sport’-like competition between the dominant parties on their campus. Even at a university such as AUB, where the administration has endeavoured to create an inclusive atmosphere and carve out space for a different type of politics to emerge, student elections serve to energize and renew partisan dynamics and affiliations. Thus, student elections at AUB are not just giving students an opportunity to ‘practise democracy’ as the AUB administration would have it; they are a platform through which AUB’s students are also practising sectarianism. This state of affairs is a product of the networking and organizing efforts of partisan youth who act as the conduits for Lebanon’s factional political parties into the world of students. It is they who translate particularistic party agendas into events, organizations, and causes that appeal to young Lebanese. After all, it is not really crucial to Samir Geaga or Walid Jumblatt if their party wins the majority of sophomore seats in the faculty of engineering at AUB. It is, however, crucial to youth. Understanding this helps to explain not only why Lebanese parties have been so effective in penetrating so deeply into Lebanese society, but also how Lebanon’s informal and formal institutions are reproduced in various spaces and places. Understanding the active role of partisan youth in creating the dynamics that propel this reproduction helps us shed light on why sectarian identities are so ‘sticky’—and so persistent—even among a young generation born after the civil war. Sectarianism, after all, is a fluid and dynamic process; reliant on the existence of mechanisms of reproduction at multiple levels of society, and one that “never ceases to clothe itself in new garments” (Mermier and Mervin 2010, 8).
Selected logos of the AUB Student Clubs next to their political party logos

The Cultural Club of the South and Hezbollah

The Social Club and the Lebanese Forces

The Discovery Club and the Kata’eb
The Freedom Club and the Free Patriotic Movement

The Lebanese Mission Club and Amal

The Youth Club and the Future Movement

Source: 9 November 9 2010, *Outlook*, AUB student publication.
Samples of election materials from AUB student elections in 2015:
Chapter Five

The 2011 Lebanese Uprising to Bring Down the Sectarian Regime: Partisan Youth Activism and the Undoing of Non-partisan Civil Protest

This chapter examines the case of the “Anti-Sectarian Movement” (ASM) in Lebanon. Led primarily by secular, independent youth, the ASM was Lebanon’s answer to the Arab Spring. In this chapter I argue it provides another example of how the activism of partisan youth acts as a mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism at the grassroots—in this case, within civil society. In the words of one commentator, the story of the ASM is a story of “how sectarian student groups managed to co-opt a non-sectarian protest” (Abdul-Hussain 2011). The paradox is this: Lebanon’s movement to overthrow the sectarian regime resonated with youth from a range of political and confessional backgrounds who were genuinely drawn to the call for reform of the sectarian system. The reasons these youth were drawn to the anti-sectarian
movement, however, had, in some cases, sectarian underpinnings—their political aims were informed by their diverse partisan perspectives. The participation of those partisan youth in a movement that was attempting to challenge the very basis of the political parties’ power damaged the ASM from within and from without. From without, it tarnished the image of the movement in the eyes of the Lebanese public as one that was truly alternative and independent of the polarized politics of March 8th March 14th. From within, it turned internal debates about strategy and approach into partisan—even sectarian—arguments. Both effects weakened the ASM, rendering it vulnerable to the further meddling and co-opting efforts of the political elites, which was its ultimate undoing. This was not, however, simply a top-down process. The fractures in the ASM were sowed first at the grassroots level by the involvement of youth from Lebanon’s traditional parties. The case of the ASM therefore demonstrates that the activism and networking of partisan youth functions as a mechanism for the reproduction of sectarianism from below.

In the previous chapter I discussed how the networking and activities of partisan youth on campus works to recreate sectarianism ‘from below’ within the realm of the university by building student social and political networks along partisan lines and by translating the political parties (and the images of their leaders) into groups that are appealing and relevant to new generations of students. In this chapter, and much like the case of the Independence Intifada discussed in chapter three, I show how partisan youth recreate sectarian divisions within the realm of civil society and civic movements through their participation in the attempts of non-affiliated, ‘independent’ youth activists to challenge the sectarian system and its political class.
This chapter is organized as follows. First, I discuss the most common explanations for the demise of civil movements, such as the ASM, in Lebanon—namely, explanations that highlight the divisive shape of Lebanon’s sectarian institutions and various forms of instrumentalism of the political elite. I then discuss the evolution of the ASM, including its connection to previous civil society initiatives to promote secularism, and show how the ASM initially gained momentum and attracted a diverse array of young protesters. From here I go on to examine the challenges the movement faced and show the role of partisan youth in creating these challenges which ultimately led to the movement’s demise. I conclude with a brief discussion of the institutional factors that contributed to the movement’s failure, and reiterate my main argument, which is that the reproduction of these institutional configurations is not automatic, but rather depends on feedback mechanisms throughout society. Moreover, I argue that these are not just a top-down, elite-driven process, but rather that the involvement of partisan youth played an active and crucial role in dividing and ‘sectarianizing’ this movement ‘from below,’ thereby acting as a mechanism of reproduction of sectarianism within Lebanese civil society.

**Explaining the Failure of Lebanon’s ‘Spring’: How Lebanon’s Sectarian System Hampers Collective Action**

In early 2011, after the autocrats of Tunisia and Egypt were toppled, a wave of protests against authoritarianism, corruption, and state ineptitude swept across the Arab world. By late February this wave reached Lebanon. However, in contrast to the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia and Egypt that were the object of citizens’ protests, the Lebanese state presented protesters with a different set of obstacles: a weak state and a strong political class, who utilize
informal networks, ties to external actors, financial wealth, and sectarian sentiment to secure their power within their communities and thus their claim on resources. Led primarily by young, independent, civil society activists, Lebanese citizens began to protest the corruption of the political class and demand the end of the confessional system that perpetuates their rule. The ASM, which is also referred to as the movement to “Overthrow the Sectarian System” (OSS) (in Arabic Isqat an-Nizam at-Ta’ifiya), was officially launched as a unified campaign in February 2011. By March 2011, tens of thousands of Lebanese were taking to the streets. Their rallying slogan was “al-shaab yourid isqat al-nizam al-ta’ifi” (“the people want the fall of the sectarian regime”). This slogan was identical to the one used by protesters in Egypt and Tunisia (i.e., “the people want the fall of the regime”) except with the addition of the word “sectarian” (al-ta’ifi) to define the Lebanese regime. As one young protester explained, “Other Arab countries have one dictator, but in Lebanon we have at least seven or eight.”

At its height, the “Anti-Sectarian Movement,” as it had come to be called, attracted more than 20,000 protesters who marched through the streets of Beirut demanding an end to confessional government, political deadlock, and corruption. However, the movement that many had hoped would mark the start of a new era in Lebanon, as had been the case in Egypt and Tunisia, quickly “collapsed in on itself” and eventually fizzled and died (Al-Saadi 2014). Only four months after it began, and after “intense activism,” the ASM organizers decided to suspend their activities so as to “learn from the lessons and problems we faced and reflect on deep questions in order to draw some lines for the future.”

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1 Hassan Chouman, a 24-year-old protester, quoted in Ahram Online (AFP 2011).
ASM in the spring of 2012 attracted far fewer numbers than in 2011. By the start of 2013, the anti-sectarian movement was “comatose” (Al-Saadi 2014).

Why did these protests die? Why did Lebanon not experience an “Arab Spring”? After all, Lebanon is the one of the Arab countries where citizens have the freedom to demonstrate without the threat of brutal retaliation from the state that Egyptian and Tunisian activists risked facing. Lebanon has a vibrant and active civil society, and was one of the few Arab countries where citizens can legally and peacefully rid themselves of their leaders. Unlike the states of Tunisia and Egypt, the Lebanese political system, for all its shortcomings, is neither oppressive nor static. The relatively dynamic freedom that exists under this system gives room for unhindered development of public discussion and scope for venting political frustrations, far more than under a one-party regime (see Beshara 2012; Fakhoury 2014; Di Peri 2014; LCPS 2011). Moreover, there were many similar grievances shared between the young Lebanese who took to the streets and their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts. There was, for example, widespread and deep dissatisfaction with the political class among youth, high levels of regional media and Internet penetration, an historically large youth generation (‘youth bulge’), as well as high rates of unemployment among educated youth.³ Yet, Lebanon was the one country where the citizen-initiated action essentially ended itself. Without any retaliation or interference by the state, military, or security forces, Lebanon’s anti-regime protests died. What explains this?

³ According to research conducted by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies, only 3% of youth have confidence in the work of politicians in parliament. (See LCPS 2013.)
Most analysts point to the nature of the country’s confessional system as the root cause for the failure of the Arab Spring to flourish in Lebanon (see, for example, Beshara 2012; Di Peri 2014; Fakhoury 2014; Wimmen 2014). Indeed, in the literature on Lebanese politics and civil society, most agree that the rigid allocation of political power along religious lines has contributed to a crystallization of divisions based on religious identity that has served to “set the battle lines,” making the formation (let alone sustaining) of unified, cross-cutting movements difficult at best (Choucair 2006, 5). The strength of communal ties, which have become adaptive and resilient, over cross-cutting affiliations, such as class ties, which are weak and uneven, hampers the emergence of collective action. Moreover, the lack of a strong central state means there is no clear single target for social protest. As the comment from the protester above indicates, in Lebanon there is no single dictator to confront. Political power is distributed among the country’s religious communities under a system in which the groups can check the power of one another and expect freedom from the interference of others in their own affairs. While, on the one hand, this produces relative freedom for the organization of social protest, and the expression of grievances and disillusionment—both of which are widespread in Lebanon—on the other hand, when it comes to animosity toward the ruling class, the frustration is most often “disjointed and polarized, directed mainly at the existing political blocks and figureheads rather than at the system itself” (Beshara 2012, 3). People’s allegiance to their confessionally-based “sub-national spheres” tends to trump their allegiance to a national interest and thus unified actions to demand systemic change often fail (Sen 2011).

This institution-based argument is also the foundation for explanations that highlight the instrumental role of elites in undermining civic action such as the ASM. Because the
sectarian system is the basis of power of Lebanese elites, they have a “vested interest,” as Heiko Wimmen argues, in undermining peaceful movements that aim to unite people against their abusive power and they have control over the necessary means to do it: “institutions and followers prepared to apply violence, and media to frame it in ways that served the desired purpose” (Wimmen 2014, 6).

Scholars also explain the ASM’s demise as a result of the mounting domestic tension in Lebanon triggered by the conflicts in the region, most prominently the onset of war in neighbouring Syria. In times of heightened regional tension, the confessional divisions in Lebanon are also heightened, as each confessional community is allied with regional actors often on opposing sides of geopolitical conflicts. These alliances are the product of the supranational networking efforts of Lebanon’s political elites who cultivate ties with external patrons as a way of shoring up their power at home, making Lebanon a battleground for external interests—another by-product of the sectarian system and, more specifically, the elites’ instrumental use of it (Salloukh et al. 2015, 3).

When the Arab Spring protests began, different Lebanese parties found themselves on opposing sides of various regional struggles. While Hezbollah, like other political parties, initially came out in support of the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain, when the demonstrations began in Syria Hezbollah quickly took the side of the Assad regime, while other parties, such as the Sunni-based Future Movement, supported the Syrian protesters. As a country whose internal politics are so deeply influenced by external alliances and intervention by external actors, Lebanon’s political polarization has only deepened since the onset of the Syrian conflict.
Such polarization presents serious obstacles to the formation, let alone success, of cross-cutting social movements such as the ASM.

While I take no issue with these explanations, my objective is to look more deeply at how these ‘elite strategies’ and institutional configurations actually translate to the dynamics ‘on the ground’ at grassroots levels. What does it actually mean to say that Lebanon’s confessionally-based power-sharing system hampers collective action? As I have previously argued, institutions do not ‘automatically’ reproduce sectarianism, so precisely how are these divisions reproduced? To take at face value the idea that elites undermine civic movements through their instrumental control over followers, without also examining the active and relatively autonomous role other actors play in this dynamic, is to miss much of the picture of what transpires at the grassroots.

My argument is that participation of partisan youth in the protests of 2011 also worked to divide and demobilize the ASM, dividing it along sectarian lines. I suggest that this happened in three main ways. First, as Wimmen argues, the mere presence of young activists affiliated with ostensibly secular or non-sectarian political parties—namely, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)—rendered the relationship of the ASM to the sectarian political system that it vowed to overthrow “inherently ambiguous” (Wimmen 2014, 19). These are two long-established, traditional parties in Lebanon, and while they are technically secular, they do engage in strategic alliances with parties that have an “unequivocally sectarian” profile, specifically of the March 8th alliance, and advocate political positions that many Lebanese consider to belong to sectarian agendas (ibid.). This tarnished the image of ASM in the eyes of the Lebanese public, as a movement that was truly independent of
the sectarian parties. Second, the diverse political perspectives that partisan youth brought to
the ASM created significant internal divisions. Youth from the traditional political parties diluted
the original vision of the independent activists from a more ‘revolutionary’ stance, which called
for the end of the sectarian system in Lebanon and the denouncing of the Lebanese political
class, to a more ‘reformist’ stance, which called for pragmatic and strategic alliances with key
political parties—especially Hezbollah in its capacity as the leader of the resistance to Israeli
and American imperialism. This meant that discussions about the direction and tactics of the
movement quickly broke down into partisan arguments, which triggered sectarian tension
among the religiously and politically diverse participants who were taking part and turned what
began as an appeal for cross-sectarian solidarity into a forum for sectarian tension and
divisions. Partisan youth also increasingly attempted to control debate within the movement,
silencing independent activists who were critical of Hezbollah as well as shutting down
discussion on other civic topics central to the issue of secularism, such as civil marriage and
electoral reform. Finally, the rifts in the movement that were created as a result of the
involvement of partisan youth weakened the ASM internally, leaving it vulnerable to the
meddling and co-opting efforts of Lebanon’s politics elites, specifically by Nabih Berri, leader of
the Amal party. (The call for the abolishment of the sectarian system has been used to advance
partisan and sectarian agendas in Lebanon, particularly by the Shi’a parties, such as Amal and
Hezbollah, who would stand to gain the most under a majoritarian system.) Berri stepped in,
called for young Amal supporters to join the movement, and used his media network to
promote the issue of sectarian reform. This triggered the long-standing fears of the other
communities about their fate under a different type of political system, and contributed to the
overall ‘sectarianization’ of the anti-sectarian movement, causing it completely to lose any remaining credibility in the eyes of the public.

The Emergence of the Anti-Sectarian Movement

The anti-sectarian movement (ASM) emerged from a loose network of civil society organizations and actors that have been raising the issue of secularism for some time. Their efforts can be traced to the early post-war period in the 1990s when ‘self-limiting’ civic organizing began to surface after the war. As mentioned in chapter three, these groups were contained primarily within the networks of intellectuals and an educated circuit of progressive Beirutis, and included initiatives such as the Campaign for Municipal Elections, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE), and the campaigns for civil marriage and for lowering the voting age. These actors all supported the idea of a fully secular Lebanon and worked to ‘chip away’ at Lebanon’s confessional system either through electoral reform or the establishment of civil laws. Subsequent generations of young independent activists have carried on this loose ‘movement’ for secularism, including the generation of independent student activists who were behind the demonstrations of the 2005 Independence Intifada—and who were also deeply let down by the experience. Since 2005, independent activists have continued to be involved in groups and organizations that fight for the secular cause, including a number of independent leftist student clubs mentioned previously (including AUB’s Secular Club), a youth-run organization called *Nahwa al-Muwatiniya* (“Toward Citizenship”), a feminist collective called *Nassawiya* which was associated with the women’s rights organization KAFA, the leftist youth groups, “Union des Jeunes Libanais Démocratiques,” and “Le Mouvement de la
Société Civile,”⁴ and another pro-secular group called “Le Rassemblement Populaire pour la Laïcité” (Meier 2013, 6).

In 2010, these groups and individuals came together and organized under the banner of “Laique Pride.” Laique Pride started, as many youth protest initiatives have, through discussions on Facebook. The Laique Pride group defined itself as being composed of “Lebanese citizens who wish to live in dignity and equality with other co-citizens” (El-Houri 2012). It aimed to mobilize “for a secular civil, democratic state founded on citizenship that guarantees the expression of the country’s diversity, and secures equality and social justice—one of the main foundations of civil peace” (ibid.). The movement essentially involved a march in Beirut to celebrate secular pride, and draw attention to the issue (Galey and Ensor 2010). As well, the protesters made specific demands for an increase in the minimum wage and lower prices for basic goods as well as the right for women to pass on their nationality.⁵

Laique Pride succeeded in organizing the first major civil demonstration since the 2005 Independence Intifada, attracting roughly 5,000 people on 25 April 2010 to the march for secularism in Beirut (Meier 2013, 6). Laique Pride had planned to make this march an annual event, but in 2011 the march was postponed. With the revolutions raging in Egypt and Tunisia, the Laique Pride organizers, inspired by their Arab counterparts, decided to focus on building a movement to overthrow the sectarian regime instead. By the time Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 12 February 2011, Lebanese social media were ‘abuzz’ with calls for anti-

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⁴ Le Mouvement de la Société Civile was linked to the “Mouvement Social,” a long-standing NGO created in 2001 by Gregoire Haddad, a former Archbishop and well-known social activist. Haddad was known for years as the “Red Bishop of Beirut.”
⁵ Under Lebanese law, Lebanese women who marry foreign men are unable to pass on their nationality to their children or husband.
sectarian mobilization (Wimmen 2014, 16). The initial organizers of this new movement included the organizers of Laique Pride, as well as many young first-time activists, and some young members of non-sectarian political parties.6 A week before the first ASM march, Laique Pride organizers held a press conference to announce the 2011 ‘edition’ of their demonstration and their intention to focus their efforts on building the ASM (Meier 2013, 6).

Organization and mobilization of young protesters happened primarily on social media. The online discussions resulted in a march in Beirut on 27 February of about 2,000 people and grew to upward of 20,000 in less than a month. During this brief period there was a conscious effort to focus on social issues in order to maintain the image of ‘national unity’ and ‘non-partisanship’ on behalf of the organizers (Wimmen 2014, 9). As one of the young activists stated:

Our intention was to make this a movement for all, a place where every Lebanese could express their frustration at the problems with our political system, not just on this politician or that politician, which can only lead to politics and fighting.7

Another organizer put it this way:

If we do away with the confessional system and implement a secular state then we take away the pillars of power of the confessional politicians. This would be huge for our country. It could lead to many things changing, like a domino effect. We could begin of ridding ourselves of wasṭa and corruption. Most Lebanese cannot even imagine such a thing, but it can be done!8

The young protesters saw themselves following in Tunisia’s and Egypt’s footsteps. As one first-time demonstrator answered when asked her reasons for participating in the march: “

6 These included both members of Lebanon’s ‘traditional’ non-secular political parties (such as the Lebanese Communist Party or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, SSNP) as well as members of Lebanon’s newer non-sectarian parties, such as the Lebanese Green Party, the Democratic Renewal Movement, and the Democratic Left Movement.
7 Chouchair, interview with author, Beirut, February 2011.
8 Al-Alam, interview with author, Beirut, February 2011.
am here because I want to change the political system. I am sick and tired of the politicians stealing and their corruption. I want the end to the confessional state. I want a democratic, civil, secular state that is separate from religion.”

Another expressed that:

The sectarian system brings us nothing but misery. We Lebanese youth have nothing to do here in our own country. The leaders take everything and make divisions among us so we will not rise up against them. I want change to happen and I am impatient for it! This is why I am here.  

The largest march of the ASM was staged along the war-time ‘green line’ that separated Beirut into Muslim and Christian neighborhoods and ended at the Ministry of Electricity, a symbol for the protesters of the political bickering and incompetence that plagued their country and resulted in, among other things, an ongoing shortage in electricity. It is important to note that at this point in the demonstrations, none of the Lebanese political coalitions was spared criticism during the protests as protesters denounced the politicians of both of the rival camps (Sandels 2011).

The excitement and enthusiasm for the revolutions in neighbouring countries, along with a growing discontent with the political class, quickly drew many young Lebanese, from across the religious and political spectrum, to participate in the ASM. The excitement, at least initially, cut across the major political fault lines and united Lebanese activists for the first time since 2005. The organizers believed that the popular mobilization for social justice, more inclusive politics, and resistance against an abusive political class might truly succeed in “breaking down or tempering” the sectarian divisions that they viewed as “tools of domination generated by politicians to further their own ends” (Wimmen 2014, 19). The movement’s

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9 Haydar, interview with author, Beirut, February 2011.
10 Hassan, interview with author, Beirut, February 2011.
organizers, however, did see their movement differently than the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia. As many explained, they did not expect, nor were they actually trying to induce, immediate political change. Explained one 24-year-old protest organizer:

We can’t change such an old system in two or three months, I am looking for us to achieve results in 10 or 20 years. If we take down the sectarian regime now, we are going to suffer. Why? Because we don’t have an alternative... This movement is about starting the dialogue about a secular state.¹¹

As another protester and political blogger explained:

There is still lots of education that we need to do about what it means to have a secular state. This has to happen first because there are many fears in society. I spend my time explaining to Muslims that if we have a secular state that you can still pray, and to the Christians that if we live in a secular state that does not mean your freedom and right will be taken away by a Muslim majority. It doesn’t mean you’ll have Hassan Nasrallah as your president.¹²

Still, many young protesters saw the rise of the ASM as signalling a shift in the consciousness of the Lebanese, especially the youth. In an article on the ASM, Bassem Chit, a well-known Lebanese political activist, stated: “the emergence of this movement is a sign of a fundamental shift in the consciousness of a large segment of the Lebanese youth. It is due to the impact of the Arab revolutions, on the one hand, and on the other hand, their reactions to the clear failure of the political reality we live in Lebanon and the dominance of sectarian polarization between March 8 and March 14” (Chit 2012).

¹¹ Jaber, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.
The Demise of the Anti-Sectarian Movement

Only four months after it began these same organizers decided to end their protest activity and focus on “learning lessons and analysing the problems it faced, and drawing new lines for the future” (quoted in Meier 2013, 6). What happened? What led to such a quick demise of the ASM? First, organizers reported being “unprepared” for the “influx of new, young participants who brought pluralistic points of view” (Meier 2013, 6). Many of the young activists who joined the ASM had ties to one of the two political blocs, or to conventional political parties. In other words, some of these young activists supported both an anti-sectarian movement and a sect-based political party. In interviews, these participants did not see a contradiction or conflict between their affiliations with their parties, and their participation in a movement against sectarianism. As one young protester with ties to the Future movement explained, there was no contradiction in his mind about his support for Hariri on the one hand and his support for the ASM on the other. For him, the quarrel with the movement was based more in their economic ‘slant.’ He states:

Of course I am here. I hate the corruption and confessionalism in our society. I want democracy and freedom. This protest is the continuation of what we started in 2005 in our cedars revolution [i.e., the Independence Intifada]. It is a movement for everyone. The difference is that many here have a leftist slant and they think that they are the ‘official’ anti-sectarian movement, which is not right. This movement is for anyone who wants change. Why can’t I be pro-business and still be against sectarianism? 13

These activists brought a plurality of viewpoints and aspirations for the future of Lebanese politics and the place of specific politicians within it. Their support of a movement condemning the sectarian system was not necessarily the equivalent to a condemnation of the

13 Abu-Bakr, interview with author, March 2011.
politicians they favoured. What united them was a frustration with the status quo, and the excitement that other young people in the Arab world, just like them, were effecting revolutionary change in their countries. They were not, however, united in a specific vision for the future of Lebanese politics or for the role of the Lebanese state. It is also important to note that, at this point, young partisans were getting involved in the ASM on their own accord. They were not being compelled or instructed by their parties to take part. Although this likely did occur later, as I will discuss below, it was not the case with the initial protesters in the first demonstrations.

Thus, the ASM attracted a diverse array of participants, some of whom had ties to traditional parties. While this fit with the organizers’ vision of the movement as a truly cross-sectarian one, it also began to present serious challenges when it came time to decide on the nature of the movement’s strategy and approach. For example, heated debates took place over whether or not to globally condemn ties with the major political parties. Many wanted to avoid appearing that they, an anti-sectarian movement, were granting any sort of legitimacy to sectarian-based parties or leaders (meaning any of the parties in the March 8th and March 14th blocs). Others, including those participants with ties to the political parties, were not in favour of eschewing relationships with political leaders and parties, and argued instead that ‘strategic alliances’ with particular parties could have advantages for the movement in the long-term. This ‘revolutionary’ versus ‘pragmatic’ stance created huge rifts among the partisan and the independent activists. As one of the protesters on the ‘revolutionary’ side of this debate explained:

There are many young men and women who have participated in partisan activities publicly and privately. We have to work to make it more possible to allow these young
people to escape the traditional party frameworks. They are still affected by the personalities and the leaders of parties. They say they want to fight against corruption and confessionalism in society, and I think they do, but they need to get distance from their parties.\(^{14}\)

These internal divisions “bogged down” the movement, according to one organizer, as meetings became increasingly tense and dominated by the debates about the relative merits of agitating for change from ‘within’ versus taking a more revolutionary stance—debates, as one organizer put it, “that have no end.”\(^{15}\)

As the brief study on the 2011 movement by Wimmen also suggests, however, it was the involvement of the traditional, but ostensibly ‘non-sectarian,’ parties that really began to unravel the ASM (Wimmen 2014, 19), and specifically the involvement of youth activists who were affiliated with the traditional, but technically secular, parties of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). Though the ideological platforms of these parties are ostensibly secular and non-sectarian, both parties engage in strategic alliances with the political parties of March 8\(^{th}\), some of which have an undeniably sectarian character (ibid.). The Lebanese chapter of the SSNP, for example, has been a loyal client of the Baathist Syrian regime for decades, a strategic alliance it holds for the purpose of finding strong state actors to further its vision of a nation-state spanning the Fertile Crescent (Lewis 2011). It follows, then, that the SSNP has also been a faithful ally of Hezbollah, especially in the context of the growing political polarization after 2005. That support has included engaging in armed conflict on behalf of Hezbollah, namely during the clashes in 2008, when the SSNP played a prominent role in the occupation of West Beirut—a conflict in which many SSNP students were

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\(^{14}\) Mehdi, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.

\(^{15}\) Thebian, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.
directly involved. This support was subsequently rewarded by Hezbollah by the forging of electoral alliances that benefited the SSNP and by granting them cabinet posts (Wimmen 2014, 19).

As for the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), its members have long held an anti-Zionist viewpoint and supported resistance to imperialism. Especially since 2005, these stances have led the LCP into a tacit alliance with Hezbollah despite their past ideological differences, especially around the role of religion. Thus, despite their secular ideologies and platforms, both parties are clearly allies in the March 8th political coalition. Therefore, the involvement in the ASM of activists associated with these parties eroded the credibility of the movement as one that was truly in opposition to the sectarian political system.

The participation of both young partisan activists associated with conventional sect-based parties, as well as the activists associated with the technically secular, but pro-March 8th, parties, meant that serious fault lines began to appear within the movement. As one young activist reported:

The youth leading this movement are honest about their efforts, but they are avoiding the hot issues because they want to keep the peace, which raises questions for me. As for the others like the SSNP and the communists, I feel they are hijacking this movement. They say they are part of this civil, peaceful protest but let us face the facts, they represent remnants of leftist and fascist parties that hold no weight whatsoever towards real, democratic, and peaceful change in Lebanon. All you need to do to prove that is to disagree with them to their face, and then see what happens. No, I do not think they are interested in any real dialogue.16

Divisions also quickly surfaced between those activists who on one side felt that supporting the ‘resistance’ against Israel and the United States was a “paramount national

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16 Hassan, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011.
cause that all of society should rally around” and thus should also be central to the ASM’s aims (Wimmen 2014, 19). This stance translates into support for Hezbollah, and particularly its ‘special status’ within Lebanon as an armed entity and leader of this resistance. In disagreement were those activists who rejected the notion that Hezbollah deserved ‘special status’ and worried such a stance would compromise the movement’s cross-sectarian credibility and appeal.

When the independent activists then tried to push for the movement to take a stronger stance and denounce the entire Lebanese political class—even naming politicians by name as “the representatives of the sectarian regime” that was to be overthrown—lengthy and heated arguments ensued. In the end, the activists of the ASM reached an “uneasy compromise” which was to list the names of all the leaders of all the major sectarian parties, with the exception of Hezbollah, of which only the leader of its parliamentary group would be named. This left Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, its central figure, and the face of the Lebanese ‘resistance,’ untouched (ibid.).

This decision stirred animosity between activists in the movement and divided them further along partisan lines. The partisan youth with ties to March 14th parties felt slighted that the movement was vocally condemning “Hariri’s economic policies,” while at the same time refusing to take a clear stand against the issue of Hezbollah’s arms. They saw this as taking sides. Stated one such young activist:

Our rallies are being attended by groups with separate agendas. Some of the current groups organizing the rallies are overlooking the civic demands of many of us who are taking part. I want to talk about my security in a secular country. Calling for bringing down the sectarian system cannot be done without addressing the presence of a sectarian power that is armed and that has used its weapons on its home soil. To overthrow the sectarian system means we should all be equal regardless of our religions
and no one should have weapons except for our democratically elected state. I can’t even discuss this here because it’s seen as too divisive. I find this hypocritical.\textsuperscript{17}

Some protesters even gave accounts of more serious clashes, when the debates became physical and protesters were threatened and intimidated during meetings and marches. For example, one activist who was taking part in the ASM rally in March claimed he was approached by a group of young men claiming to be ASM organizers. They told him to put down his banner, which said, “I hate hunting and I hate its weapons”—an insinuation about Hezbollah’s weapons. When he refused, they hit him, physically removed the banner from his hands, and disappeared. According to this young protester, he was not the first person to experience this kind of treatment (Elali 2011).

Meanwhile the independent protesters felt that they were losing control of their movement and that the original vision, to demand the end of Lebanon’s sectarian political system, was being lost. One independent activist lamented the fact that activists had neglected calling for specific changes in laws that would create a more secular society. He stated:

\textit{Not once have we seriously talked about a plan to address civil issues and rights such as civil marriage or a new electoral law. Not once! On the contrary, the others mocked me when I made the suggestion to discuss the issues at last meetings.}\textsuperscript{18}

Another dismayed and frustrated independent protester exclaimed:

\textit{We’re fighting for non-sectarianism, and all the while sectarianism is making a mess of it! If we’re serious about non-sectarianism, then we must stop thinking like a sectarian! Don’t blame 8\textsuperscript{th} March. Don’t blame 14\textsuperscript{th} March. They both fall short of our vision of true secularism! The irony is too thick! We must stop looking at our problems through sectarian lenses if we are to escape from it. Secularism should at least start with ourselves!}\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Chaaban, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011. \\
\textsuperscript{19} Lydia, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.
Yet another independent activist stated:

> Our language and rhetoric is becoming too soft in order to absorb everyone, but it is failing to develop an action plan to enable supporters to try to challenge the existing system.20

Another independent activist, and also one of the organizers, named the problem directly:

> Our problem is with the members of the political parties wanting to take part in our movement. It is not working. It doesn’t make sense. Their involvement means we dilute our message. Or our message gets co-opted in one way or another. It means the movement becomes theirs. It is a farce. We cannot let this happen. We have to be clearer in our objectives.21

This marked the beginning of the sectarianization of the ASM. The equivocal stance of the activists toward naming (or rather, not naming) specific politicians was damaging not just because it created internal rifts. It was also damaging because it tarnished the image of the movement as truly anti-sectarian in the eyes of many of its activists as well as in the eyes of the Lebanese public—a public that is ‘practised’ at sniffing out subtle sectarian and partisan agendas (Wimmen 2014, 19). With the decision of the activists not to name Hassan Nasrallah directly, the ASM was increasingly portrayed by the media (especially media close to March 14th) as little more than March 8th propaganda (see e.g. Elali 2011). Initially the media on both sides of the political divide largely ignored the movement, or presented it as a “ragtag” movement of “immature young people, void of serious political convictions, just a bunch of bearded guys, wearing Che Guevara t-shirts”(activist Assad Thebian quoted in Bahlawan 2014).22 After the decision, however, media treatment of the movement began to shift toward

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20 Al-Salim, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.
21 Abou-Shakra, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011. It should be noted that in interviews the activists saw this as an attempt to discredit the movement, and were “totally unsurprised” considering virtually all media in Lebanon are owned by leading Lebanese politicians—the same political class they were going up against.
more blatantly sectarian partisan portrayals of the movement. This reinforced in the minds of both the public, as well as some activists within the movement, that the demand for an end to the sectarian political system (i.e., abolishing sectarian quotas, veto rights, etc.) was actually nothing more than a Shiite bid for majoritarianism (Wimmen 2014, 19).

To this point, there is a long-standing belief among the Lebanese public that if the sectarian system is abolished the Shi’a would benefit the most from the change, which triggers existential fear among other communities. That fear stems from the somewhat misguided understanding that reforming the sectarian system is equivalent to the introduction of majoritarianism. Despite the fact there has not been a census since 1943, it is generally known that the Shi’a have the largest and fastest growing population in Lebanon. Yet, under the current structure they hold less political power as compared to Christians and Sunnis (who have substantial but smaller populations).23 As such, the general view is that the Shi’a would have the most to gain and Christians and Sunnis would have much to lose if the sectarian system were to be reformed. It is true that besides civil society groups, the political will for reforming Lebanon’s consociational system largely comes from the March 8th bloc, and more specifically, the Hezbollah-Amal alliance. The March 8th bloc has demanded reform at the executive and legislative levels, and there have been several petitions for a scenario in which the three groups would share power at the executive level in a tripartite structure, for example. Reform of this nature would basically entrench the sectarian quota system further, but readjust it to create more equality between the three largest sects. The more radical proposal, of which Amal has

23 After the civil war, the Ta’if agreement redistributed executive power away from Christians, but it did so mainly by empowering the Sunnis. The Shites were given the position of speaker of the house, which partially addressed their previous marginalization—but kept them second to the prime minister’s (a Sunni) authority.
been the main promoter in recent years, is the introduction of a proportional representation system in which Lebanon is transformed into one electoral district. Under this scenario, instead of seats being reserved for specific communities, religious representation is the outcome of party performance in elections. Given that the Shi’a is the largest sect in Lebanon and yet underrepresented in the current system (approximately 35%—and yet under the current system are allocated only 27 seats, seven fewer than Maronites and equal to Sunnis), a proportional representation system would likely improve their political position and increase their number of seats.24

The image of the ASM as ‘a sectarian ploy’ was reinforced by the meddling and interference of the Amal leader, and long-time parliamentary speaker, Nabih Berri. Berri, a Shiite politician with an especially notorious reputation for exploiting the (Shiite) sectarian public employment quota for clientelistic purposes, did two things that hastened the movement’s demise. First, he encouraged his young supporters to take part in what he called the “just” demonstration against the sectarian regime in Lebanon, stressing the importance of the ASM and Amal’s historical support for ending confessionalism (Lebanon Wire 2011). Then, right at the height of the ASM’s protests in mid-March, the TV channel NBC (which is owned by Nabih Berri), broadcasted a documentary about the history of secular struggle in Lebanon and the need to implement the part of the Ta’if Accords that called for the abolishment of the sectarian system (ibid.).

24 Elias Muhanna argues there are also other outcomes of a PR system that interest March 8th, such as the dilution of a main rival, the Future Movement. The Future Movement currently exercises monopolistic political control over the Sunni community despite not obtaining the entire Sunni vote. The introduction of PR would probably fragment the Sunni vote by increasing the representation of independent Sunni political parties that have hitherto been marginalized under the majoritarian system (Muhanna 2012).
The ASM, which had initially managed to avoid this sectarian ‘baggage’ associated with reforming the confessional system, now crumbled under the full weight of it. With the ASM dividing internally along partisan lines, it would have been a feat for the activists to pull themselves out of the state of tension and acrimony that had increasingly eroded their movement, in order to rebuild their legitimacy and stand up to Berri’s interference. But the movement had been weakened internally—already itself divided along partisan lines. Berri’s meddling thus sealed the ASM’s fate. Young Amal supporters now joined the movement and, in partnership with the SSNP, attempted to take it over completely, sometimes even using threats (Meier 2013, 6). One of the initial organizers told me they were “pressured to share the leadership role with the youth affiliated with political parties.”25 Another non-partisan activist said: “We are outnumbered and out-maneuvered. We had been trying to make sure the forum was inclusive and this has been used against us to turn it into something that is completely the opposite of inclusive.”26 And as another activist stated:

We were not clear enough in our aspirations. We let everyone participate. We wanted to be open to everyone. At first it seemed good because we were all together, some of us since many years. But we were not clear about what lines we should draw. We wanted to discuss and decide everything together. But that meant that others could sabotage or co-opt out plans. We ended up being exploited by the same parties we are trying to protest—just like what happened in 2005. It gives me the impression that nothing new can ever happen in Lebanon.27

Yet another independent put it bluntly: “the problem is that many are asking for the abolishment of sectarianism in order to fulfill their sectarian plans!”

25 Chaaban, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011.
26 Ayoub, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011.
27 Baroudi, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011.
In addition to the elite meddling from above, and the divisive effects of partisan youth from below, there was the added weight of the onset of the Syrian uprising which brought with it increased sectarian tension in Lebanon—something which the ASM was unable to insulate itself from. When many of the ASM activists wanted to express their solidarity with the Syrian protests against the Assad regime, which they considered an extension of the ‘Arab Spring’ struggles against repressive governments in other parts of the Arab world, they met with serious resistance. Independent activists were “disheartened” to realize that many of their fellow activists in the ASM, particularly those with ties to March 8th, translated their support of Hezbollah’s ‘resistance’ agenda into support for the Assad regime (Wimmen 2014, 19). Social media forums associated with March 8th spread the notion that the Syrian uprising was dominated by Sunni extremists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which alarmed non-Sunni activists associated with the ASM, further dampening their willingness to support that cause. The original independent civil society activists who initially organized the ASM were now facing irreparable internal divisions in their movement as well as deliberate attempts from the political class to co-opt it. They felt they had lost all ability to maintain any legitimate cross-sectarian message, let alone inter-sectarian cooperation within the movement. Their public credibility was also totally wiped out. By summer of 2011, relations within the movement had turned completely acrimonious and many independent activists withdrew (ibid.). The ASM had died, only months after it was born. In the words of one secular, independent protester, “we were hijacked by our enemies.”

In the following year, there were several attempts by groups of secular, independent protesters, to re-launch anti-sectarian mobilization. One such effort managed to gather approximately 500 people on 27 February 2012, the one-year anniversary of the first ASM protest. Another refocused energy on the annual Laique Pride march, which successfully gathered crowds of approximately 3,000 people on 6 March 2012. Still other independent activists mobilized under the banner of a civil society group called the “Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform” (CCER), on 13 May 2012, to march toward Parliament demanding electoral reform and decreasing the voting age to 18. Though none of these efforts at mobilization triggered widespread protest, they did keep the frustration with the political class, as well as the hope for a different political system, alive in the awareness of the Lebanese public.29

After the demise of the ASM, independent activists were reflective about the experience in interviews. Some blamed themselves for not being “well enough organized” or for being too “open.” Most, however, pointed to the divisive impact of the involvement of the partisan youth. As one demonstrator said,

Until Lebanon’s young men and women completely dissociate themselves from their tribal leaders, whether it is the sectarian or secular parties, the Arab Spring will not be coming to Beirut.30

As another said:

Unfortunately, young Lebanese cannot distance themselves from tribal leaders due to the fact that Lebanon as a state has failed and most young Lebanese have to rely on support either financially or medically or socially from those leaders. Most youths are brain washed they cannot think beyond their area or beyond their sect regardless of who's right or wrong.31

29 Indeed, these protests helped build momentum for the widespread participation in the #YouStink demonstrations in 2015.
30 Doumit, interview with author, Beirut, June 2011.
31 Soufi, interview with author, Beirut, June 2011.
Along these lines, some activists felt the movement failed to gain momentum because it was unable to appeal to a large segment of Lebanese society—beyond the youth:

The movement failed to communicate any plans about how to ease the burden on the people, and to improve their quality of life. We failed to make a case for how the abolition of the sectarian system would improve economic conditions. How can people live dignified lives when the basic needs are not met? Why would they abandon their loyalty to their leader who provides for them when they have no alternative? This is why our message did not resonate with many Lebanese.\(^{32}\)

Other activists, however, were still hopeful, choosing to see this as “one step in a long road” toward the dismantling of Lebanon’s sectarian system. One protester lamented:

This movement is still in the beginning of the road. We haven’t reached a threshold that allows for a major civil disobedience that would topple all sectarian political and religious forces in Lebanon. 100 years of sectarian feudalism, civil wars, and corruption are not enough to ignite the people it seems. But this movement has prompted dialog online and offline, about what issues need to be raised and what steps need to be taken to save it. It has ignited hope!\(^{33}\)

As Bassam Chit, the well-known activist and movement organizer, wrote in an online post:

We are building new political convictions. And we are building more sophisticated awareness of the reality of the system, and the economic, social and political reality in which we live under daily. The movement is a journey for everyone and an educational journey for many activists and new activists (Chit 2012).

**Conclusion**

Why were the ASM protests unsuccessful in Lebanon? To begin, we know that Lebanon’s structural conditions present serious obstacles to the sustaining of movements for political change or reform. Scholars argue that the nature of the sectarian political system helps to “shield it from unified popular dissent” and allows it to “absorb protests” (LCPS 2011, 5). As

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32 Chamseddine, interview with author, Beirut, June 2011.
33 As-Salah, interview with author, Beirut, June 2011.
one of the protesters quoted above said, in Lebanon there is no single dictator to confront.

Political power is instead divided among the country’s sectarian communities in a system which grants them each freedom from interference from others and the ability to check the power of one another. This system has allowed Lebanon’s powerful political elites to invade and instrumentalize the state and structure politics in ways that secure their position and power within their own base and vis-à-vis other communal leaders. Lebanese elites use the state in paradoxical ways: they capture it to use it for their own advantage on the one hand, while hindering its development and ensuring its weakness on the other (Kingston 2013, 12). This leads to a fragmented society, of which one of the by-products is a relative degree of freedom to organize, protest, and challenge power. Indeed, the scope of venting political frustrations in Lebanon is far greater than it would be under a one-party authoritarian regime. The paradox is that the absence of this single target of oppression means that, while there is widespread disillusionment with the Lebanese political system and its political class (something that is even truer among the younger generation [LCPS 2011 and 2013; Hanf 2007; Chatterji 2008]), there is also a lack of consensus as to whom to target, or how, or for what ends. In a landscape as fragmented as Lebanon’s, where the nature of power is dispersed and centrifugal, it is difficult to form (let alone sustain) a cross-cutting movement, and a sustained cross-cutting movement is exactly what is needed if the system is to be effectively challenged. Instead, people’s disillusionment is disjointed and polarized, directed mainly at the existing political blocs and figureheads rather than at the system itself (Beshara 2012).34 The problem is complicated

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34 A February 2010 poll by Beirut-based Information International showed widespread disillusionment with the political system in Lebanon. In fact, 58% of Lebanese support the abolishment of the confessional system, however, only 40% of Lebanese had a correct interpretation of what abolishing confessionalism means (i.e.:
further because the call to reform the sectarian system has itself been co-opted by politicians to advance their factional, sectarian agendas, triggering sectarian fear within certain communities (namely Sunni and Maronite) about their own fate and existence within the country, thus entrenching sectarian divisions further.

As the independent activists quoted above surmised, one would be hard pressed to find Lebanese who would willingly abandon their (often vital) access to services and favours from their community’s political elites for the sake of fighting for a yet-to-be-determined political system, especially not when the state is seen as largely incapable of providing a viable alternative. The weaker the Lebanese state in the eyes of the public, the stronger the sway of the politicians becomes. As Sami Atallah states: “the system enjoys as much legitimacy as is bestowed on the politicians who have capacity to mobilise citizen support” (LCPS 2011, 6).

The consequence is the generation of a paradoxical cycle. The weaker the state apparatus is, the stronger the communal politicians. The stronger the politicians, the more divided politics becomes as every political issue—no matter how mundane—is coloured with each religious community’s fears of domination (if not annihilation) and a fixation on its share of power. As each politician manoeuvres for their advantage, political deadlock persists, and the more paralyzed, and thus the weaker and less legitimate, the state becomes in the eyes of the public. As the state is marginalized, power is spread throughout communities and their leaders. Thus, the sectarian system continues to enjoy relative legitimacy, not because the

abolishing confessional quotas in government). Also support varied widely according to sect (with Shiites overwhelmingly in favour and less than a third of Christians in favour) as well many also felt the “time was not right” to abolish the confessional system. This underscores my point above that while disillusionment is widespread, it is uneven across sect and there is no consensus as to what the next step would be. Thus people’s disillusionment gets easily divided. See: https://qifanabki.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/abolishing-confessionalism-poll.pdf
majority of the people truly support it, but rather because they do not see a clear or viable path forward toward reform that addresses their needs and fears. In such a divided system it is difficult to imagine how people could come together with enough force and momentum to topple their regime. This, of course, stands in stark contrast to other Arab regimes with strong states and a single authoritarian leader.

Another dimension of this argument is how the fragmentation of the political arena also complicates the sphere of civil society as a realm that can sustain cross-cutting movements for change. It is regimes, rather than states, that structure state-society relations and determine the ways in which citizens can access the political system, and thus the nature of the regime will also influence how associational life evolves and how it can access those in power (Kingston 2013, 12). In regimes with states that are highly formally institutionalized, political rules structuring relations between state and society are also likely to be highly formal in nature, embodied in constitutions and electoral laws. These are the types of political environments where NGOs and other civil associations can thrive, benefiting from their institutionalized, universal access to the state. However, in countries with weakly institutionalized states, or countries, like Lebanon, where informal rules are hegemonic, we see the emergence of hybrid regimes where formal and informal processes interweave. In these situations, the access of civil society actors to the state is likely to reflect the particularistic political dynamics generated by the regime’s hybridity, thus providing enduring advantages to some segments of civil society while disadvantaging others (ibid.). As Friedman and Hockstetler (2002) argue, the less formally institutionalized the regime structures and political society, the more difficult it is for civil society actors to link up with them and effect change. Indeed, one of the worst combinations
for actors within civil society interested in forming a unified movement would appear to be a country with a fragmented state and an uninstitutionalized (i.e., having weak formal institutions) regime structure that is dominated by powerful informal political networks—exactly as is the case in Lebanon. In other words, Lebanese civil society, although vibrant, open, and adversarial, cannot easily sustain cross-cutting movements for change.

Lebanese civil society, however, is not unique in this regard. In many developing and divided societies, civil society is not an autonomous realm, but rather a penetrated or “relational” realm, one that reflects and is determined by the socio-economic and political context in which it operates (Migdal 1994, 20). Scholars of Lebanese civil society write of the existence of “multiple” civil spheres, most commonly described by juxtaposing the terms *al-mujtama’a al-madani* and *al-mujtama’a al-ahli*, which translates to ‘civil society’ versus ‘communal society.’ This structural heterogeneity and fragmentation is bound to complicate the ability of the civil sphere to generate powerful social movements for change. It translates into a civil society that is characterized by a significant degree of internal contestation, and which is susceptible to the dynamics emanating from the political arena, ones which serve to exacerbate fragmentation, leaving “civic” civil society, as one Lebanese commentator expressed it, a “lost continent” (El-Hassan 2012).

Within such a formulation, the success of the sectarian system in “absorbing reform dynamics” should not come as a surprise. But what does all this actually tell us about how these institutional realities are manifested and reinforced at the grassroots? Although ample scholarly attention has been devoted to the structural and institutional configurations that complicate and “absorb” protesters’ efforts, much less attention is paid to how this actually happens ‘on
the ground.’ We still need to fill in the picture and understand how mechanisms of reproduction for this divided state of affairs operate throughout different levels of society.

Though the literature tends to focus on how elites manipulate and co-opt Lebanon’s oppositional protests ‘from above’, the case of the ASM illustrates that partisan youth also play an active role in the creation of sectarian dynamics that underpin and reinforce Lebanon’s divided institutional configuration—from below.

Partisan youth were drawn to the ASM for genuine reasons, not simply as agents of their manipulative elites.35 Young Lebanese want reform of the sectarian system, as recent polls indicate. Yet, as I have argued previously, Lebanese youth hold hybrid and ambivalent political views. They articulate seemingly contradictory positions—caught between their sect-based networks and partisan perspectives, on the one hand, and their desires for a more democratic and equitable country, on the other.36 This was evident in the multiple and very different reasons partisan youth from different parties had for participating in the ASM. The young activists from the LCP and the SSNP, for example, saw themselves as a ‘natural’ fit with this movement due to their traditionally secular ideologies. For these youth, however, their parties’ affiliations to March 8th meant that they also carried those partisan perspectives, particularly in their support of the special status of Hezbollah as a symbol of resistance to Israeli and American imperialism. As for the protesters associated with the March 14th parties, many of them also

35 This is with the exception of the Amal participants who got involved later in the movement and were driven more by their partisan agendas.

36 An unpublished study by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (2013) showed that the perceptions of youth regarding finding employment in Lebanon is a perfect example of this seemingly contradictory amalgamation of views: 3% of Lebanese youth are satisfied with the way democracy is exercised in Lebanon and a mere 3% of Lebanese youth have confidence in the Lebanese parliament. A whopping 73% of Lebanese youth, however, consider political connections as an important factor in finding a job; 55% of Lebanese youth report using these connections to find a job, even though only 25% feel it is legitimate to do so.
felt a sense of ownership over the ASM, and saw it as a continuation of the Independence
Intifada—the movement many saw as the real beginning of the Arab Spring. Their calls for
reform of the sectarian system, however, focused on the disarmament of their most powerful
sectarian rival, Hezbollah. They resented the fact that the ASM’s focus was less on this issue
and more on the economic policies associated with Rafiq Hariri. Even the Amal youth, who
were called on to participate by their own leader, saw the issue of abolishing the sectarian
system as ‘theirs’ given their party’s history as a vocal proponent of this type of reform.

The connection partisan youth activists had to the notion of anti-sectarian reform, as
well as the anti-sectarian movement itself, was thus complicated from the start, and held the
seeds of internal strife. It certainly did not fit with the original vision of the young independent
civic activists who started the movement in the first place. In their efforts to be open and
inclusive, and to present a unified front to the public, their vision and purpose were easily
dominated and eventually co-opted by their partisan counterparts. This left the ASM divided
and weak and therefore vulnerable to the manipulative interference from the political elite.

By looking closely at the political dynamics of these grassroots realms of society, we see
how the demise of the ASM was not only a result of manipulation from above. Nor was it the
‘automatic’ result of Lebanon’s factional formal and informal institutions. Rather, we see how
partisan youth activism took what began as a secular, independent movement of young civil
society activists and helped to transform it into yet another forum of sectarian dynamics. It is
an example of how the dynamics set into motion by Lebanon’s sectarian institutions are
reproduced by mechanisms of feedback that exist at multiple levels of society—in this case, the
activism of partisan youth which acts as a mechanism for the reproduction of sectarian
dynamics from below.

Where does this leave independent youth protest? Lebanese youth pushing for
secularism are caught in a paradoxical situation: room for advocacy, organizing, and protest
exists, and the widespread disillusionment with the sectarian system almost guarantees that
those activities take place. But because power and politics are both severely divided and very
informal, it is actually extremely difficult to challenge, let alone to effect major change to, the
Lebanese system. Young activists have energy, but their political impulses take them into
contradictory directions. They want democracy, even secularism, but their connection to these
issues is informed by their partisan and sectarian ties. They easily turn against their fellow
activists, making their movements vulnerable to internal divisions and co-optation by political
elites and leaving the small, yet tenacious, groups of independent civic activists “marooned on
embattled islands” within Lebanon’s ever-dynamic sectarian landscape (White 2004, 14).37

37 Discussing the variations in the balance of power between states and civil societies, White (2004) refers to civil
society in the context of a totalitarian state as “marooned on embattled islands.”
Chapter Six

New Image, Old Politics: How Partisan Youth Rejuvenate Political Parties

Introduction

In this and the following chapter I look ‘inside’ the sectarian system to the realm of partisan youths’ activities within their own political parties. Literature on youth in political parties discusses how the presence and support of youth helps a party to project a ‘modern’ and relevant image, and that being able to connect with and support the empowerment of the younger generation increases a party’s democratic credentials (Sloam 2007; McKinney and Rill 2009; Williams and Gulati 2008; McGlinchey 2009). While much has been written on the importance and recruitment of youth in political parties (mainly in relation to their declining numbers in the political parties in the West), little has been written on their role and contributions once they become members, this is especially so in the context of youth in the political parties of deeply divided societies. In this and the following chapter (chapters 6 and 7) I explore the case of the youth wings of the sect-based political parties in Lebanon. In this chapter, I analyse how the activities of youth within their parties has helped to renew and rejuvenate the style and appeal of Lebanon’s sect-based political parties. Through their sense of style, creativity, and fun, I show how partisan youth have helped these parties to become more attractive and relevant to Lebanon’s younger generation and renew their image among Lebanese youth. This, I argue, constitutes yet another way that the activities of partisan youth act as a mechanism for the reproduction and the renewal of sectarianism in Lebanon.
The case studies of the youth wings, however, demonstrate that partisan youth are interested in contributing to more than just a renewal of their party’s image. In chapter seven, I discuss the ways in which political party youth have also sought to influence more substantial change. In particular, partisan youth have pushed for greater institutionalization and democratic reforms within their parties. However, as I show in the next chapter, when it comes to their attempts to lobby for more substantial reforms, the efforts of partisan youth are shut down, frustrated, or denied by their leaders. In regard to the nature of youth autonomy, therefore, the youth wing case studies illustrate that when the activities and strategies of political party youth do not interfere with existing power dynamics, and work in the benefit of the elites and their parties, partisan youth operate relatively freely and autonomously. Indeed, the freedom they have is partly what allows them to be so effective in reaching youth. However, when youth in the youth wings engage in activities or activism that even remotely threaten, erode, or come into confrontation with elite power, the efforts of partisan youth are shut down, ignored, or frustrated. These two chapters illustrate how partisan youth, in the final assessment, contribute to the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarianism in Lebanon, but not to its reform.

In this chapter, I argue that partisan youth contribute to the renewal and rejuvenation of their parties in two key ways. First, youth have assisted in the introduction of new styles of political marketing and communication that include the use of new mediums (such as social media, billboards, and entertainment events), as well as new styles and aesthetics (such as branding, humour, and ‘American style’ advertising). This has helped their parties portray a more ‘modern’ image aimed specifically at attracting and appealing
to a younger generation. The increased involvement of youth in the political parties post-
2005 has coincided with a shift in the ways political parties have chosen to promote
themselves visually. There has been a break away from the ‘cult of personality’ style of
political campaigns that have dominated Lebanese politics in the past—an era of political
posters which often displayed little more than the face of a local za’im. Instead, since 2005,
there has been a turn toward slick, heavily designed brands, catchy slogans, and advertising
campaigns that embody youthful humour, sass, and style. Each party has also adopted a
specific colour. Not one of these elements was present before 2005 (Lutz 2013). Though
several scholars have noted the shift in style, no one has explicitly connected it to youth
involvement. My argument is that various post-civil war generations of partisan youth,
whether as student activists or young professionals in the private sector, have been a
driving force behind this shift in style.

Second, since the creation of the youth wings and the formalization of youth
participation in the parties, partisan youth activists have also spearheaded the
implementation of activities for youth at the community level. This has taken several forms,
from offering space at the political party offices where youth can socialize and interact with
each other out from underneath the watchful eye of their families, to organizing volunteer
events, international exchanges, and day trips for young people in Lebanese towns and
villages. In a country where there are very few public places available to youth where they
can hang out and socialize, the political party offices, and the youth activities the parties
organize, offer youth a rare place in the “transitional time” between school and home,
where they can spend time and interact with their peers (Deeb and Harb 2013, 61).\footnote{Lara Deeb and Mona Harb (2013, 61) talk about the ‘transitional time’ between school and home. Their insightful book explores notions and behaviour regarding pleasure and piety among Shiite youth in Beirut. They focus specifically on the rise of places and spaces where young, pious Muslims can pursue appropriate forms of leisure, namely the relatively recent proliferation of cafes in southern Beirut.} Like the work of partisan youth in the university, the community-based activities that partisan youth organize ensure the parties are able to penetrate and compete in multiple grassroots social milieus that might otherwise be beyond their reach. Rather than leaving these spaces open to other political actors, political parties seeking to advance themselves in all possible spheres of Lebanese society can accomplish this with the help of youth members.

In what follows I discuss these two aspects with respect to how partisan youth have worked to renew their parties. I argue that while partisan youth have certainly helped to rejuvenate the parties and widen their appeal, they have not helped to transform politics overall.\footnote{This is so despite their attempts to contribute more substantively to reform within their parties as I discuss in the next chapter.} Because their efforts are aimed at promoting the existing parties, they constitute a mechanism for the continuation and the rejuvenation of ‘politics as usual’ in Lebanon—giving Lebanon’s factional parties little more than a facelift.

**Shifting Style: Partisan Youth Activism and Political Advertising after 2005**

The Independence Intifada of 2005 marked a new era of political protest politics in Lebanon, one in which youth activists had a high profile and played a much celebrated role. The demonstrations of the Intifada embodied a style of protest politics that was new to Lebanon—they were full of creativity, innovation, new media, style, humour, joy, and even a playful, ‘carnival’-like atmosphere (Chaoul 2007, 159; Khatib 2013, 19). This was a first for
Lebanese street politics, and there can be little doubt it was ushered in by the young activists who took part. This new style, however, extended beyond the protests associated with the Independence Intifada. Just as the political leaders stepped in to adopt the ‘spontaneous and leaderless’ grassroots uprising as their own, in the years following 2005 they also began to adopt its youthful aesthetics—a shift, I argue, that was influenced by the networking of partisan youth in various roles and at various levels, namely, in their roles as activists at the grassroots and in their roles as designers and advertisers in the private sector. Together, they led the parties toward a new style of political advertising.

In the years that followed the Intifada and the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanon saw the intensification of more open and aggressive electoral political battles between the parties that were intended to communicate not only to a particular leader’s communal following, but to the entire Lebanese public (Khatib 2013).3 These political campaigns embodied a new style that has been described as ‘youthful,’ ‘modern,’ ‘creative,’ even ‘fun.’ The main example of this is what has been called the ‘political ad wars’ or the ‘billboard wars’ that gripped Lebanon from 2005 and up until the elections of 2009.4 During this period, Lebanon saw an explosion of political posters, banners, and billboards. These images, messages, and brands propagated by the political parties after 2005 were quite unlike the political posters of Lebanon’s past.

3 Note that part of the intensification of campaigning was due to the increased freedom created by the Syrian withdrawal.
4 The ‘billboard wars’ began to recede (somewhat) in 2008, when the country’s political leaders, following the Doha Agreement, decided to restrict what they called “political propaganda.” Having said this, the country was certainly plastered with posters during the summer elections of 2009.
Traditionally Lebanon’s political posters have been dominated by a style of campaigning aimed at reinforcing what Paula Schmitt (2009, 26) refers to as the three “insidious” aspects of Lebanese political culture: “sectarianism, clientelism and the cult of personality.” Up until the Intifada, Lebanese political billboards usually advertised a specific person—often with little more than a picture of the candidate’s or leader’s face, sometimes with no text at all. This changed after 2005 when there was a shift toward a new, slick, political aesthetic that emerged during the Independence Intifada of 2005 (Khatib 2013). Suddenly, political parties were employing everything from pithy slogans, puns, colourful images, massive billboards, pop music, cellphone messages, and Twitter. This new wave of political advertising has been discussed in the scholarly literature on Lebanese politics (see Chaoul 2007; Khatib 2013; Sukarieh 2012; Nasr 2010); the role of youth, however, is given only a passing glance in these analyses. My argument is that partisan youth, both the young activists on the ground, and an older cohort of partisan ‘youth’ in the private sector, were influential in contributing to this shift in style. The quantity and vigour of the political ad campaigns may well have had to do with the increased room for political competition after the Syrian departure, but the idea of using catchy slogans, jokes, and youthful images did not come from Lebanon’s aging political leaders and their coterie. This newfound playfulness in political advertising was also a result of the involvement of youth. The joyful, festive atmosphere that youth activists created in the streets emanated upward from the

5 In these accounts, the increased creativity and flurry of political advertising is chalked up to the increased space for political contestation in the wake of the Syrian withdrawal, or the influence of western political agendas as exercised through American-funding to local NGOs or the Beirut divisions of American ad agencies or NGOs (Sukarieh 2012). I agree both play a role; however, partisan Lebanese youth clearly also played a role in this phenomenon—both as activists at the grassroots as well as the young advertising professionals who promoted this ‘western style’ through the ad agencies where they worked in Beirut.
grassroots. It was observed, identified, and (re)packaged by older partisan ‘youth’ who were also active participants in the Intifada, but from a different vantage point. These partisans were young professionals in the advertising and design firms and the event-planning agencies of Beirut. The networking and activism of these young partisan professionals, in dialogue with young activists at the grassroots, has contributed to the shift in style that has been observed in Lebanese political advertising.

**Branding the Revolution: The Influence of Partisan Professionals**

It is difficult to be precise about the exact flow of ideas when it comes to the new materials, concepts, and style that overtook political marketing in Lebanon after 2005.6 What is clear is that this shift in style was a result of a combination of influences, both from youth at the grassroots as well as an older cohort of postwar ‘youth’ in the private sector. The older cohort of ‘youth’ I am referring to includes young professionals in their 30s and early 40s, some of whom were active in the resistance against the Syrian presence that took place in the 1990s and early 2000s in advance of the Independence Intifada.7 As I have previously argued, ‘youth’ is a relative term (see chapter one). In Lebanon, defining ‘youth’ in the political context means defining it in relation to power—more specifically, in relation

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6 In fact, in interviews with partisan youth, many claimed ownership over specific billboard ideas that were adopted by their parties. Also, many of the partisan advertising agencies I discuss here, like Quantum, employed youth who were also activists in the political parties.

7 I realize that including professionals in their early 40s may not fit with most perceptions of who the category of “youth” should include. However, many of youth leaders of the political parties are exactly this: late 30s and early 40s professionals. What is more, in relation to their leaders they still see themselves very much as ‘the youth.” The UNDP also makes this argument in relation to the category of ‘youth’ and in regard to youth and political participation in Lebanon (UNDP 2012).
to the generation that produced many of the ruling elites, many of whom have been their communities’ leaders since the civil war. People under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions in Lebanon, unless they are family members of deceased leaders. It is common, therefore, that even people in their early 40s are referred to as the ‘young generation’ in the context of political parties.

One of the most prominent examples of this partnership was the work led by an advertising executive named Eli Khoury. Like Samir Kassir, the young leader of the Democratic Left Movement who was assassinated (likely by Syrian forces) on 2 June 2005, Khoury represented a younger generation of liberal, urban Lebanese professionals who played a prominent role in the Independence Intifada and fervently supported March 14th. Khoury was (and still is) the CEO of the Beirut-based, pro-March 14th communications and PR firm, Quantum Communications. In his late 30s at the time of the Independence Intifada, Khoury observed the youthful activism, music, and creativity of the protests taking place in the streets and thought: “We need to brand it!” (quoted in Jafaar and Stephen 2009). Khoury was not just acting out of his professional interest as an ad executive (all his

8 Other examples include Georges Najim, a former student leader of the FPM who was in his late 20s at the time of the Independence Intifada, who co-founded the ‘advertising arm’ of the party, an agency called Clementine,” together with General Aoun’s daughter, Claudine Aoun Roukoz. Through Clementine, these former-student-activists-turned-advertising-professionals have produced nearly all of the FPM’s political billboards in the decade after 2005. The force behind the communications strategy of the Kata’eb party, Serge Dagher, is also a former student activist turned advertising professional. Dagher was the communications chief for the Kata’eb Party and general manager of the Rizk Group, who was coordinating the party’s election strategy in 2013. Unsurprisingly, many of these individuals see the shift in the style of image and communication among the parties as a positive development. It is “evidence of our democracy,” according to a young employee at Quantum Communications. Or, as another political marketer explained: “it is less like the traditional propaganda, which was only about appealing to your own community. Now it is about appealing to everyone; to the public at large.”

9 Kassir was a journalist and leading member/co-founder of the Democratic Left Movement. He was widely seen as the ‘face of the revolution’ in 2005. He was close to Elie Khoury. Kassir is discussed in chapter three.

10 Quantum was eventually bought by Saatchi and Saatchi and became its Beirut division.
work was done pro bono). He considered himself one of the activists. Along with Beirut’s Leo Burnett division, Quantum Communications pitched a tent among the activists and political parties in the ‘Tent City’ of Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square, where youth had been demonstrating since Hariri’s assassination. Khoury worked with grassroots activists as well as others in the private sector, such as Asma Andraos, a 33-year-old woman who worked for an event planning firm in Beirut.11 Together, in the early days of the Independence Intifada (February 2005), Khoury, Andraos, and Samir Kassir sought the support of Nora Jumblatt, the young wife of Walid Jumblatt and president of the Beiteddine music and arts festivals, who facilitated the linkages to other March 14th parties. It was Hariri’s Future Movement which then provided much of the funding for the team’s efforts. Khoury and his team collaborated with the activists to develop protest strategies. Explaining this robust collaboration, Khoury states:

Together we decided to form coordination committees and discussion groups. The committees included activists in the camp, as well as journalists, and us. We even arranged our group to meet with activists from other “colour revolutions” to discuss their experiences. We all worked together to work to create the colours, the image and the goals of this movement (quoted in Jafaar and Stephen 2009). 12

Having forged the links between the grassroots, the private sector, and political groups, this small team proceeded to ‘brand’ Lebanon’s Independence Intifada. They chose the opposition’s movement colours (red and white), created a logo, chose a slogan (“Independence 05”), and produced an assortment of merchandise such as banners,

11 Andraos, who described herself as “a sleepwalking bourgeoisie” who was politically “awakened by the Hariri bombing,” was actually picked by Time magazine as one of the 37 heroes of 2005 “who are changing the world for the better” (Macleod 2005).
12 They facilitated a discussion with a former Otpor! activist from the Rose revolution in Serbia who met with the youth to exchange information and share experiences about strategic nonviolent action in the lead-up to the 14 March demonstration.
scarves, baseball hats, pins, tattoos, and other ‘consumables.’ Importantly, the image was printed in Arabic, as well as in English and French, in order to appeal to international audiences.

As someone who had previous experience in activism in the postwar era, appealing to the international media was one of the main reasons Khoury wanted to brand the revolution. Besides bringing “coherence and focus” to a diverse and leaderless grassroots movement, Khoury felt the need to appeal directly to a western audience through the power of the international media. He states:

If you win the heart of the media and the heart of the international community, you will win the war. We needed to look unified, friendly, youthful and creative... We had lost out on opportunities in the past when the western media covered our efforts but there was nothing powerful visually to see. We needed to win their hearts and minds (quoted in Narwani 2015).
Politics as a Fashion Statement: The Lebanese Flag as an “Identity Brand”

The decision to use the Lebanese flag, as opposed to political party flags (which was the norm), in the major protest which took place on March 14th is a good example of the effects of the combination of spontaneity of the young activists and the expertise of the partisan professionals. Early on in the demonstrations, Khoury, together with Nora Jumblatt and others, had apparently urged the political leaders, Walid Jumblatt, Samir Geagea, and Rafiq Hariri, to leave their party flags at home and instead to wave only the Lebanese flag in the demonstrations. This was an unconventional decision for leaders to make when it came to protests and rallies. In demonstrations prior to those of 2005, the visual symbols were mainly the faces of the leaders, the flags of the parties, and the flags of their regional allies. The Lebanese flag was rarely present. The leaders reluctantly agreed, however, and took what some described as a “great gamble” (Nora Jumblatt quoted in Jaafar and Stephen 2006). It was a gamble that paid off.

Thanks to the urging of Khoury and his team, the Lebanese flag became ubiquitous in the opposition’s demonstrations. It was the young activists in Martyrs’ Square, however, who broke with tradition and wore the Lebanese flag as capes, body art, bandanas, fingernail paint, tattoos, scarves, even food, turning the flag into what Lina Khatib (2013, 20) describes as a “fashion statement.” The March 14th rallies became a carnival, and the flag became “a Lebanese identity brand” (Nasr 2012). Specifically, this ‘brand’ was about showcasing Lebanon to the international community, and to their political rivals, as a ‘modern,’ cosmopolitan, joyful, life-loving, unified country. March 14th appropriated the national symbol of the Lebanese flag to communicate their vision, and that their protesters’
demands were in the best interest of the entire county, not just a specific sect or community. The use of the Lebanese flag in this way was a novel element of the protests of this time. It was also remarkably successful in capturing the attention of international media, especially the western media.

The success was so great that in the rival demonstrations led by Hezbollah and their supporters (what would become the March 8th bloc), young protesters also adopted the Lebanese flag (as opposed to the party’s yellow and green flag) to frame their political demands of maintaining respectful ties with Syria and opposing western intervention in Lebanon, as being in the country’s best interest. For possibly the first time in Lebanese history, the national symbol of the Lebanese flag had become a contested visual marker of a claimed national cause. The causes of both sides were still, to be sure, rooted in sectarian-based divisions and interests, but the difference was that this time the groups were not only expressing them through specific community-based symbols, they were expressing them through the use (some would say appropriation) of a national symbol. This contest over Lebanon’s national direction was captured in the comment of one young demonstrator who lamented: “Whose Lebanon is this anyway?!”

The example of the flag, as well as the political brand and accompanying merchandise with the label “Independence 05,” illustrates how the energy and youthful ‘vibe’ was identified, appropriated, and repackaged by young partisan professionals in Beirut’s private sector. The latter forged linkages with the political elites, urging them to

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adopt their strategy, and then delivered the political ‘products’ back down to the streets for these young activists to ‘consume.’

Two important points need to be made before proceeding. First, to be clear, this period marked the emergence of a new political style, but not new political dynamics. It was, at the end of the day, still produced by partisan political marketers who were interested in directing politics toward the interests of the established powerful groups. Moreover, the type of politics that was being promoted was the western-allied, neo-liberal economic agenda of (what was to become) the March 14th political bloc. Politics was turned into consumable merchandise, built on an “ideology of consumption” that was embodied in the paraphernalia (Khatib 2013, 22). Youth could consume products as part of their political activism. The Future Movement even went so far as to encourage the Lebanese people to go shopping during the upheaval, to show support for their country’s economy (Khatib 2013, 21). These efforts worked well with image-conscious Lebanese youth, whose focus on materialism is often noted in the literature (see e.g. Haugbolle 2013; Cleveland, Laroche, and Hallab 2013; Kegels 2010; Harmon 2008). The Independence Intifada was even sarcastically dubbed the “Gucci Revolution” to denote the affluence, consumerism, and trend consciousness of many of its young participants (Ghattas 2005).14 Aseem Nasr (2010) claims that the dominance of materialism and consumption has plagued the country since the civil war, and argues that consumption has emerged as an “act of resistance” against

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14 Ghattas (2005) writes: “Some people here are jokingly calling the phenomenon ‘the Gucci revolution’—not because they are dismissive of the demonstrations, but because so many of those waving the Lebanese flag on the street are really very unlikely protesters. There are girls in tight skirts and high heels, carrying expensive leather bags, as well as men in business suits or trendy tennis shoes.”
the turmoil people feel in their lives. People “consume products, cars, clothes, that give an
illusion of living in a stable cosmopolitan place” (Nasr 2010, 13). Regardless of whether or
not we agree that the consumption patterns of Lebanese youth are an act of political
resistance, what the Intifada made clear is that this style of political advertising fit well with
the sensibilities of the youth protesters. This was no coincidence. I argue that it is the work
of partisan youth themselves, both in the streets and in the boardrooms, whose efforts to
bring a new style to the existing political parties helped give them a renewed appeal among
Lebanese youth.

I now turn to two examples of political campaigns—what came to be known as the
‘billboard wars’—between the March 14th and March 8th blocs to illustrate my argument
that partisan ‘youth’ at a variety of levels have ‘rejuvenated’ the image of the political
parties through this new style of political campaigning and marketing, that is aimed at
youth.

“Billboard Wars” in Lebanon and the Influence of Partisan Youth

It’s a Lebanese tradition that during election season every street in every village,
town, or city, is literally plastered in posters. Typically, these posters are of faces, and
maybe (but not always) a name, the face of the local za‘im is usually enough. Like
monuments, banners, and other visual material, political parties use them as a means of
both communication and demarcation in the Lebanese geography (Maasri 2009). For social
scientists, they are therefore rich sources of social and political history as well as an ever-
present, ever-evolving part of Lebanese politics (Haugbolle 2010a). Though the style and
tone has changed over the course of Lebanese history, what has remained consistent is that political posters (including billboards) have remained a “symbolic site of hegemonic struggle” in Lebanese politics.\(^{15}\) They have been used to maintain the “cults of reverence” of various Lebanese zu’am\(a\), who, as we know, are often also the leaders of their sectarian communities. What is new since 2005 is a hip, ‘cheeky,’ even humorous, attitude and style—one that explicitly targets youth. As I have argued, this style is a product of partisan youth at various levels—both as activists and as private sector professionals.

This is well illustrated in the ‘billboard wars’ between the March 14\(^{th}\) and March 8\(^{th}\) blocs. As I shall show, partisan youth activists have contributed to new styles, images, and technologies which their parties have taken up since 2005. These billboard wars provide an excellent example of the attempt of parties to portray a more ‘modern’ and ‘youthful’ image, and the role of youth in this change.

In wake of the Syrian withdrawal, and with the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006, the years following 2005 represented a period of extreme division between the March 8\(^{th}\) and the March 14\(^{th}\) blocs—a division that persists to this day. In 2007, as the crisis mounted and the political deadlock was at its height, a slew of billboards suddenly appeared around the country carrying a simple slogan: “I Love Life. The billboards were red and white with a dash of green, the colours of the Lebanese flag, and came in all three languages, Arabic,

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\(^{15}\) Massri (2009) discusses political posters mainly in terms of their maintenance of personality ‘cults.’ Although she does not put it in these terms, she does, however, also show how in the years leading up to the civil war ‘grassroots’ figures, like local artists and musicians, have influenced political campaign style, especially of the Lebanese Left, which had ties to many of the country’s artists before the war. She calls this the “artistic zenith” of Lebanese political posters (though she looks only at war-time posters). My argument is that, in the era since 2005, the inspiration for Lebanese political campaigning has been strongly influenced by (and also tries to cater to) youth, as a result of the unprecedented presence and participation of youth, especially partisan youth, in politics of this time.
English, and French. Unlike the political posters of Lebanon’s recent past, these billboards contained no face or name of a prominent politician, no party logo, and no obvious signature or symbol of a specific political bloc. Nonetheless, it was quickly apparent to everyone that the campaign was initiated by March 14th. In fact, the “I Love life” campaign was orchestrated by Elie Khoury at Quantum Communications, and financed by the Hariris.


AFP Photo by Oussama Ayoub. 31 December 2006.
According to its creators the campaign was supposed to be a “celebration of life” and included not only billboards, but also television commercials, T-shirts, even handbags, that were mass produced across the country with the slogan “I Love Life.” The campaign also sponsored events, such as a New Year’s Eve pop concert and party in downtown Beirut attended by more than 15,000 people, and which ended in a massive seafront fireworks display.

According to its own website, the mission of the “I Love Life” campaign was:

[T]o challenge citizens across the country to take hold of their future.... We understand the Culture of Life, as opposed to the Culture of Death, as a deep, well-developed sense capable of discerning true values and interpreting authentic needs in our communities and society. We want to take a stand of empowerment and embrace the change towards a new life, towards a fresh perspective that would entail new social and economic norms (Lebanon-ilovelife.com).

Elie Khoury further explained that the campaign was intended to “rally the politically homeless,” and to project a message to the international community. “We want to tell the world that, regardless of whatever they see on their TV screens, the Lebanese want to live and move ahead,” stated Khoury (quoted in Blandford 2007).

“I Love Life” was released in the immediate aftermath of the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, in which March 14th’s most powerful rival, Hezbollah, was widely seen as emerging victorious—despite the massive damage they endured. Its ‘generic’ rhetoric and supposed political neutrality notwithstanding, it was clear to most that the campaign was directed against Hezbollah. Through the slogan “I Love Life,” the March 14th camp sought to position itself in opposition to March 8th (i.e., Hezbollah), and their Syrian and Iranian

16 Not to be outdone, opposition supporters launched their fireworks moments later, “bathing downtown Beirut in flashes of colour” (Blandford 2007).
backers. They positioned themselves as representing ‘life,’ ‘freedom,’ and ‘love,’ as opposed to the ‘culture of martyrdom’ and ‘culture of death’ that (in their view) characterized their opposition. As Mayssoun Sukarieh (2012) argues, this also underscored their message to the international community (i.e., the USA, France, and their regional allies Saudi Arabia and, at the time, Egypt) that March 14th embraces ‘western values,’ and allies itself with the USA and American and EU foreign policy toward the Middle East.¹⁷ Even Prime Minister Fouad Siniora chimed in, claiming the March 14th forces embraced the: “…culture of life, which can defend Lebanon and its Arabism, rather than the culture of death meant to destroy Lebanon. Our agenda is to build and construct, while others have a program to obstruct. Our policy is to negotiate; theirs is to deter” (Siniora quoted on May 10, 2009).

**Enter the Opposition**

As Michael Young writes, the “I Love Life” campaign “hit a sensitive spot” with Hezbollah (Young 2010, 133). Hezbollah (correctly) interpreted the campaign as a direct attack against them. Quickly, the opposition developed a counter-campaign in which they adopted the exact image and wording of March 14th’s “I Love Life” billboards, but with important additions. Underneath the “I Love Life” slogan, and printed in type that was

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¹⁷ There is also evidence to suggest that the “I Love Life” campaign was supported by USAID. Though I was unable to confirm this directly with USAID in Beirut, this fact has been referenced by Sukarieh (2012). According to Sukarieh, “I Love Life” was one of three campaigns in the Middle East, all promoted and partially funded by USAID and designed by Saatchi and Saatchi offices in the region. Regardless of the extent to which USAID actually funded this campaign (by all accounts the Hariris constituted the bulk of its funding), the “I Love Life” campaign, like its predecessor, “Independence 05,” can be understood as part of the trend of branding politics. Sukarieh argues this “constitutes the export of domestic American political tactics and strategies through which the democratic political process is micro-managed by professional marketing elites, and is then transformed into a commodified, consumerist spectacle” (Sukarieh 2012, 122).
meant to look as though it was written by hand, the opposition added their punch line: “I Love Life... with dignity,” “I Love Life... without debt,” “I Love Life... in multi-colours,” and “I Love Life... unddictated,” are but a few examples. The opposition billboards were, in turn, a criticism of the neoliberal economic policies propagated by the March 14th bloc, which have left so many Lebanese without adequate income or security, as well as of their embrace of American policies.

The opposition billboards also directly targeted youth with slogans such as “I Love life... I have class,” and “I Love Life... I’m going out” (a reference to the love of pleasure and the partying lifestyle of many young Lebanese), and “I Love Life... I’m staying here” (a reference to the many youth who are forced to leave in order to find gainful employment, but who would rather stay in Lebanon). Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, commented on March 8th’s billboard campaign stating: “For us, as a party of the opposition, it’s not that the March 14 forces love life and we don’t—we were shocked by this slogan when it first came out. We want to show them that we too love life and are against death” (quoted in Sukarieh 2012, 123). In a television interview on NTV (owned by Nabih Berri, leader of Amal, and a Hezbollah ally), a representative from FPM stated:

...we are not exclusive; we want to live all together; and rather than what their private sector campaign suggests, we spread a culture of life; we love life. What is needed is to sit and define what kind of life we want to live — a life with dignity, security, economic prosperity; a life that will provide Lebanese youth with work and

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18 The notion of ‘multiple colours’ is a reference to the religious diversity of Lebanon.
19 A reference to the opposition’s claims that the Lebanese government (i.e., March 14th) takes its marching orders from the United States.
20 Unlike March 14th, the opposition ‘signed’ their billboards with a rainbow, symbolizing (or so they thought) the religious diversity of Lebanon. Only after the billboards were already mounted was it pointed out to them that the rainbow is also the global symbol of LGBT pride—something that their designers were apparently unaware of and that reportedly embarrassed the opposition.
allow them to live in Lebanon and not emigrate; a life with no debts, a life for all of us together (quoted in Sukarieh 2007).

“We want life without debts” Photo credit: Mourad Diouri.

“We want life with dignity”
We want life in Lebanon" Photo credit: Mourad Diouri

The “I Love Life” campaign sparked intense criticism and debate. It was accused of racism in its implicit portrayal of the Shiite-led resistance movement against Israel as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘death-loving’ versus the ‘westernized’ and therefore ‘civilized’ pro-government March 14th parties. Indeed, the campaign was a blatant example of the way in which problems in the Arab world have often been framed in ‘cultural’ terms, not only by
Western observers, but also by local Arab elites. Such analysis understands the problems with the Arab world as a product of Arab culture, or more precisely, “cultural flaws that (are) holding the region back” and therefore, must be “fixed” if the region is to move forward and join the global community of advanced and developed nations (Sukarieh 2012, 123).

This criticism was not missed by the young activists sympathetic to Hezbollah and the March 8th coalition. From the platform of their online forums and blogs these youth responded with a campaign of their own highlighting what they saw as March 14th’s embrace of not only the USA’s foreign policy agenda, but also its economic one: the expansion of neoliberalism in the Arab region. Their funny and cynical response to the campaign which flooded Lebanese social media highlighted what they felt to be the real love of March 14th—not life but capitalism (Diouri 2008).

The “I Love Life campaign was just the beginning of the so-called ‘billboard wars’ that typified this new sense of political style that was sweeping across Lebanon.21 Another

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21 Much of the competition that spawned the “Be Beautiful and Vote” campaign was fuelled by the rivalry between the FPM and the Christian parties of March 14th (Kata’eb and Lebanese Forces) competing for Christian votes. Though the new style and aesthetic has swept across the sectarian and political spectrum, the turn toward highly commercialized, PR, and advertising firms has been more characteristic of the March 14th parties. The opposition parties, such as Hezbollah and Amal, specifically do not face the same intra-sectarian challenge from across the political divide. They have tended to opt for in-house media teams who adopt certain aspects of ‘Americanized’ styles and infuse them with local elements resulting in ‘hybridized’ styles (Khatib 2013, 37). Also see Meris 2013.
much discussed example of Lebanon’s ‘billboard wars’ was the “Be Beautiful and Vote” campaign created by the FPM’s advertising arm, Clementine. Clementine was founded by Georges Najim, a former student leader of the FPM who was in his late 20s at the time of the Independence Intifada, and by General Aoun’s daughter, Claudine Aoun Roukoz. Through Clementine, these former-student-activists-turned-advertising-professionals have produced nearly all of the FPM’s political billboards in the decade after 2005. In this particular billboard, a young woman looks over her shoulder while the slogan beneath her reads: “Be Beautiful and Vote.” This, according to Sami Saab, the creative director of Clementine, was supposed to be a positive twist on the French expression “Sois belle et tais-toi” (“Be beautiful and shut up”).

Election posters in Beirut, June 2009. Photo credit: Joseph Barrack
Another billboard from the same campaign showed similar pictures of stylish Lebanese youth accompanied by the words “Je Vote Orange”—a reference to FPM’s official colour.

Unsurprisingly, the FPM campaign was highly criticized and accused of being blatantly sexist. The matter was not helped by the fact that in the elections that year (2009), the FPM did not nominate a single female candidate. The billboards gave rise to a counter-campaign from March 14th which also involved a young woman, facing the observer head-on, with the slogan “Be Equal and Vote.”

Besides the battles of the billboards, another novel element in the style of political advertising was the use of humour and puns—a first for the traditional parties in Lebanon. An example was the “I think there I am” billboard by March 14th which made a pun on the
western philosophical saying. In interviews partisan students who worked for Quantum at the time claimed it was their idea.²²

Youth leaders in the Lebanese Forces Students Association, for example, claimed that they had the ideas for many of the party’s advertising campaigns between 2005 and 2009. The head of foreign affairs for LFSA explained the role of the LFSA in promoting the idea of a billboard campaign to the parent party:

We had the idea for new slogans and new billboards that would be placed along the highway as you go up north from Beirut. Usually the party just puts up posters in the villages where we have support but we thought this would get us much more exposure. We felt strongly about this need to have a better brand. We took our idea all the way up our chain of command. Finally, Charbil Eid [the LFSA president in 2007] presented it to Dr. Geagea. The leadership decided to adopt our marketing approach and our slogans. For example, the “Our country; our colours; never change.” This slogan was our idea.²³

Though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origins of the specific campaign ideas, what is clear is that they were a combination of initiatives of partisan youth both as party activists

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²² Rabah, interview with author, Beirut, June 2009.
²³ Habschi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
Youth in the Political Parties: ‘Teaching the Old Guard New Tricks’

Youth members of the political parties’ youth wings have also played a significant role in promoting the new political aesthetics and styles of communication that have helped to make their leaders seem ‘cool,’ thereby rejuvenating the image of the elites. For example, a senior member of the LFSA reported:

We [youth in the LFSA] met with the party executive and urged them to hire an American PR firm who would help us rethink the party’s image and logo and slogans. We explained to them it was necessary to reach more of the Christian youth because so many still think of the Dr. [i.e., Samir Geagea] as a criminal. They still have a negative image of our party from the war. We needed to show them he’s changed and we’ve changed.24

Youth have spearheaded trends such as changing their Facebook profiles to a party’s avatar, wearing stickers or buttons on their backpacks, and using colour-coded clothing and accessories to display their partisanship. Partisan youth at the grassroots are making political parties ‘cool’ and in doing so rejuvenating the image of what is otherwise a group of aging, wartime militia-leaders-turned-political-elites.

One example that is often remarked upon because of its obvious display of contradictions was the trend among young female FPM supporters at universities to pair the Hezbollah flag with styles of clothing that would likely be taboo in conservative Shiite circles. The look often included pairing orange (the colour of their party), green, and yellow

accessories (e.g., bandanas, belts, etc.) with short T-shirts or tank tops and low-rise jeans.

The intertwining of the chic, urban aesthetic popular among Beirut’s student population with the Hezbollah flag became a new ‘look’ that young FPM supporters sport to denote their affiliation with their party and their support of the party’s alliance with Hezbollah. One FPM supporter described the trend as “our version of ‘rebel chic’.”

Another way in which partisan youth are renewing their parties among youth is through the introduction of information and communication technologies, particularly in the online world. The Lebanese Forces Students Association (LFSA) provides an example.\(^{26}\) The LFSA established the party’s first Facebook page and immediately attracted close to 80,000 new followers, the majority of whom were between the ages of 18 and 34.\(^{27}\) LFSA members were also largely responsible for training older party members in the use of ICTs. One member of the LFSA explained how the youth wing had been instrumental in the renewal process: “...We also had to teach (older party members) that they really do have to use Twitter and Facebook! Honestly, I thought their heads would explode! Just try explaining Twitter to an old militia fighter! We set up our entire website and digital strategy.”\(^{28}\)

The youth of the PYO also established, and continues to coordinate, the Internet presence of the PSP. This includes the party websites as well as Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of both the PSP and PYO.\(^{29}\) In fact, since 2005 there has been an explosion of vibrant and energetic debate among ordinary Lebanese carried out on blogs, online news, social networking sites, and Internet chat forums. As one young activist explained: “Youth want quick inspirational statements. Before you would see politicians giving a speech for 30 or 40

\(^{26}\) Since the re-emergence of the Lebanese Forces on the political scene in 2005, the party has been attempting to renew its image and reputation, an initiative that has been promoted by Geagea himself. The LFSA has played a significant role in the process.

\(^{27}\) See: https://www.facebook.com/lebanese.forces.official.page/likes

\(^{28}\) Tawk (head of American universities for LSFA), interview with author, Beirut, 2007.

\(^{29}\) The PYO also runs the PSP newspaper “al-Anbaa” which covers the party’s activities. In interviews the PYO activists claim that the fact they run the paper allows them to subtly influence and communicate their agendas to their party. States one PYO leader, “Through the paper we can embed ourselves and our views in the mental space of the party while at the same time maintaining our distance.” See below for more on the attempt of the PYO to maintain distance.
minutes. Most young people I know are not going to sit through that. They want to be able to read it on their phone.” A young activist with the Future movement, referencing the young age of their leader, Saad Hariri, quipped: “At least Saad knows how make it fit in 140 characters.”

Unsurprisingly, it is the youth who have spearheaded the creation of these forums for their parties and make up the bulk of the users. Most of the political parties now maintain online message-boards and these are often managed by young members. One of the most prominent of these forums is The Orange Room, the online forum for FPM members. Established in 2004 by FPM students, the site has close to 20,000 registered users and has registered nearly 800,000 comments over 25,000 threads. Contributors have developed their own shorthand (General Michael Aoun is known as GMA, for example, Nasrallah as SHN) and debate a wide range of issues. The unbounded and impassioned arguments on this ‘no-frills’ website make it one of the most active forums for debate within the party and retains the air of “an aggrieved and strident underground opposition—the legacy of a movement that took shape as a diffuse network of ideologically-committed university students and young professionals” (Muhanna 2009). The debates in The Orange Room as well as other online forums provide an expansive window on the identity and evolution of the parties through the opinions, aspirations, and grievances of their most plentiful supporters—Lebanese youth.

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[30] In July 2007, the FPM also launched its own broadcasting channel, called Orange TV (OTV) and in June 2009 a radio station called Sawt Al Mada (Voice of Scope). In both cases youth and students were central to the process and design of the stations. Many student activists also became employed there.
It is important to note the ambiguous role of social media here. The democratic potential of social media has garnered much attention, especially for its role in the Arab Spring. To be sure, usage rates for Facebook, Twitter, and other social platforms are very high in Lebanon as they are used by youth of all backgrounds. As we saw in the case of the ASM in 2011, Facebook was where the initial discussions about some of the original protests began. Lebanon is also a culture of young bloggers who are critical of the status quo and garner much international attention. But as the above analysis shows, there is also evidence to suggest that social media use can also reinforce existing divisions. It is, after all, a tool and as such the type of outcome it helps to generate is dependent on the people using it. A recent UN study on Lebanon, for example, found that social media in Lebanon tend to reinforce partisanship and sectarian affiliation for youth rather than acting as a platform for overcoming these divisions. The study states “The emergence of the means of social media and internet communication strengthens the ability of young people to participate politically but does not mean that their participation is more towards democratic ends.” This is because, as I show in this thesis, one of the primary political outlets for youth are the sect-based political parties. Youth are, as the study says, “deeply involved in them” (UNDP 2012). Thus, if the trend of youth changing their profile pictures to their political party avatars is any indication, social media are often just another platform for the expression of sectarian-based partisanship.

Partisan youth have also pressured their parent parties to adopt a more ‘modern’ political party style and appearance in their political messages. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Beirut, an American organization which is technically non-
partisan but acts as the foreign affairs NGO of the Democratic Party of the USA, the youth wings of the Free Patriotic Movement, Future Movement, Kata’eb, Lebanese Forces, and Progressive Socialist Party all lobbied their leaders to attend a ‘campaign school’ (hosted by NDI) for election candidates, where strategies and techniques for effective political campaigns were discussed.\textsuperscript{31}

In sum, I am arguing that the shift in style of the Lebanese political parties has been driven by the increased presence and visibility of youth in politics post-2005 as well as by the presence of an older cohort of young partisan professionals in the private sector. What started as an ‘organic’ infusion of youth culture in the protests of 2005 was then taken, packaged, and commodified by older partisan ‘youth’ working in partisan advertising agencies—often linked to the west. They understood the power of appealing to an international audience. Together, these elements have combined to result in a shift in political advertising away from the militant images or personal portraits of the past and toward a younger, pithier, sexier, and more commercial style.

The new style of political campaigns, and their accompanying events and products, clearly seek to appeal explicitly to a younger audience—and appeal they do. Lebanese youth eagerly consume the paraphernalia of the parties, displaying the symbols of their partisan affiliations like badges or as if they were fans of a sports team. In turn, the Lebanese leaders are offered a new lease on life among the younger generation. It is a superficial, yet effective, transformation of politics—an upgraded appearance but without any change to

\textsuperscript{31} NDI was also active in supporting youth movements in other ‘coloured revolutions.’ Mhanna, communication with author, Beirut, December 2009.
the underlying political dynamics. Moreover, as is often the case in Lebanon, political interests are inextricably tied to economic ones. The work of partisan professionals in advertising agencies does not end when the polls close. The advertising agencies that successfully get their candidates elected are often rewarded with lucrative government contracts, most often from ministries controlled by their respective parties and their allies. Clementine, the FPM’s agency behind “Be Beautiful and Vote,” for example, has executed campaigns for the Telecommunication and Energy ministries. The Kata’eb party’s agency, Rizk group, has executed projects for the Ministry of Social Affairs, among others (Lutz 2013). The design and advertising agencies also often provide coveted employment for partisan activists after they graduate from university. Numerous youth activists I interviewed had gone to work for the advertising firms that represented their party.

Whether it be at the grassroots, in their youth wings, or in their advertising agencies, partisan youth have spearheaded a new wave of commercialized politics for the young masses, transforming them into “a commodified, consumerist spectacle” (Sukarieh 2012, 128) with the clear purpose of advancing the interests of the existing parties and their elites. It is another way in which partisan youth contribute to the reproduction and renewal of sectarian dynamics in the Lebanese political field, especially among youth. I now turn to a discussion of the second way that youth in the political parties’ youth wings act as a mechanism for the reproduction and rejuvenation of sectarianism, namely, through the creation and organization of activities, events, and spaces for youth where they can hang out, socialize, and engage in their communities.
Youth of the Marada Party in Zgharta, Northern Lebanon

32 The Marada Party is a Christian party, part of the March 8th coalition, and popular in northern Lebanon. This photo is from the publicly accessible Facebook page of Marada Youth.
Partisan youth also help to renew and rejuvenate the image and relevance of political parties among youth through their role in organizing and overseeing activities and events for young people in their communities. Similar to the way partisan youth organize social activities for students on campuses, they also do this in the towns and villages where their parties have local support. Youth wings of political parties organize everything from sports and recreational activities, to trips away from home, to community development activities, and more. In addition, the political party offices themselves have become places where youth can go to socialize and hang out with their peers, without incurring the costs associated with frequenting cafés, restaurants, or shopping malls, and away from the watchful presence of their families. In Lebanon political parties have become a hub of
activity for the types of programs usually associated with municipal community centres or non-governmental community-based organizations like the YMCA. All of these activities fall under the jurisdiction of the political parties’ youth wings, and partisan youth have autonomy when it comes to the design and planning of these events. Although the parent parties sometimes contribute funds, youth wings also do much of the fundraising for these events themselves.

Through these activities, political parties fill an important void in Lebanon—the space between home, school, and commercial arenas (such as cafes or the mall) where youth can hang out and socialize with each other. Like youth elsewhere, young Lebanese seek opportunities for both fun and meaningful ways to spend their time. They want to be active and involved in their communities and they want spaces for recreation and social interaction outside the realm of their attentive families and away from their teachers and the pressures associated with their educational institutions. Because most youth live with their parents until they are married, they have little, if any, privacy in their homes. After work or school or on weekends, many young people do not want to go straight home, but would rather seek out a place to be with their peers.33 Lebanese towns and cities, however, offer very few public spaces where youth can congregate and socialize. Practically everything, even the beaches of the country’s coast, has been privatized. In Beirut itself there is only the seaside corniche,34 the one remaining public beach, and a handful of parks (some of which have been closed for some time). Though there is some public life in city

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33 Deeb and Harb (2013, 61) talk about the “transitional time” between school and home. Their work explores notions and behaviour regarding pleasure and piety among Shiite youth in Beirut.
34 The Corniche is the seaside promenade of central Beirut and one of the few public spaces in the city.
streets, it consists mainly of young men who congregate on street corners, monitoring the neighbourhood, smoking arguileh, playing cards, and checking out the passers-by (Harb 2016, 19). That space, however, is increasingly associated with a “stigmatized lower class” of “threatening” young men who are “prone to substance abuse, harassment and unruly behaviour” (ibid.). City streets are therefore not generally seen as appropriate places for young people—and this is true in youths’ own perception, as well as in their families’. Youth want places to go, but they are also keenly aware of what is and is not acceptable behaviour, and most want to follow the rules.35

Within the walls of privately-owned businesses such as restaurants, cafes, and shopping malls, there is a great deal of socializing and interacting among Lebanese of all ages including youth.36 On weekends families flock to the shopping malls and let their young children play games, run around, and ride their bikes down their wide halls as if they were in a public park. Shopping malls also attract young people, even those with lesser financial means, who come to “roam around, exhibit their bodies and gaze at each other” (Harb 2016, 20). As Mona Harb and Lara Deeb (2013) have shown, cafes are also used in this way by youth in search of acceptable leisure activities. Youth get around the expense associated with malls and cafes in the usual ways, by “ordering one drink which they make last for hours, or by leaving the mall for a nearby sandwich shop to purchase cheap food and drinks, then returning to resume their procession” (Harb 2016, 20). Still, though these places are certainly popular with Lebanese youth, as are the bars and nightclubs of Beirut,  

35 Deeb and Harb (2013) discuss how Shiite youth, for example, seek pleasure but also want to live pious lives.  
36 See Deeb and Harb (2013) in which they examine the numerous cafes that have sprung up in southern Beirut. These cafes are very popular with Shiite youth.
with 70% of the country earning $10,000 per year or less, few young people can afford to frequent them on a regular basis. In this country, which has a profound lack of public spaces, political parties, and more specifically the youth wings of the political parties, are also giving young people their own space.

**Political Party Offices: “Refuges in Times of Boredom”**

In conducting my research, it was impossible to escape the impression that the youth offices of political parties are highly social places. They are frequently full of young men and women, sitting around, smoking cigarettes or arguileh, playing cards, joking with each other, watching TV, and consuming any number of the endless varieties of Lebanese street food. Such was the case for virtually every youth wing office I visited over the course of my research. To enter a youth wing office is to find a bunch of young people simply hanging out.

Political party offices are often open into the evening hours, especially in the smaller towns and villages. One evening at a busy FPM office in Jdeideh, a Christian area on the coast northeast of Beirut, the young members explained they had gathered for the purpose of planning a party for FPM youth in the community at a downtown Beirut bar named Basement, while in the next room other youth were engaged in a heated game of ping pong. As one of these young members explained: “We get together here, we talk politics, or we just hang out. The office is a place we can be and that brings us together.”

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37 See Maroun (2012), where she draws the same conclusion about the importance of political party offices providing social space for Lebanese youth.

about the social aspect of their party offices, youth wing leaders fully embraced and
acknowledged the idea. An executive member of the LFSA explained:

We keep the office open at night for this reason. It gives youth a safe place to be. It is especially important for the kids in the lower class neighbourhoods. They can come here, and we do our best to help them financially with the food or other fun activities. It is way less expensive than other options. 39

Another leader from the National Liberal Party remarked:

The youth who come here are mainly between 16 and 22. They are not necessarily very political. They don’t come here because they are political. They are coming because they want to hang out and have fun. This is part of the culture we want to create. It is part of our purpose. 40

And one young LFSA member stated: “Honestly, there aren’t too many other places we could be out right now.” 41

An additional draw for youth is that the political party office is often deemed more acceptable by their parents as compared to other places where they might be spending time. A political party office is still seen as “a disciplined and safe” space, as opposed to other places youth might be drawn to—like the streets or nightclubs (Maroun 2012). A young party member explained how his parents feel: “They prefer I am here than if I was hanging out on the streets. It is better to be here than to be out.” 42

Party offices are also hubs for community engagement and community development activities. In the course of my research I encountered youth wings organizing community clean-up days, tree planting events, AIDS awareness events, National Cancer days, “Biking

for Peace,” among others, as well as more involved events such as summer camps and international group trips. The PYO, for example, hosts annual week-long summer camps that bring together youth aged 18-25 from across the country to talk about youth issues and politics. In keeping with the PYO’s progressive political roots, these camps aim to ‘break down sectarian barriers’ and facilitate discussion on issues as diverse as electoral reform, lowering the voting age, establishing a senate and abolishing political sectarianism, and drug abuse.

Through the youth wings, young members also have the opportunity to participate in coveted international trips. All of the youth wings, for example, hold memberships in international umbrella groups for youth in political organizations. Often these international organizations provide funding for youth travel, especially for youth from the global south. The PYO, for example, is a member of the International Socialists Youth, and regularly hosts international youth events, and their youth wing members regularly attend conferences abroad. The LFSA has international affiliations with other politically conservative and Christian youth organizations, and in 2010, for example, hosted a convention called “Crossing the Boundaries” for youth delegates from 27 different countries through their partnership with the Democrat Youth Community of Europe (DEMYC). The DEMYC itself is the international umbrella organization for the youth wings of Christian-Democratic and Conservative, and like-minded parties of Europe and one of the strongest political youth organizations in Europe. I attended this event. See also Sikmic 2010.

43 Between 2007 and 2008, members of the LFSA’s foreign relations department took part in no fewer than six international conferences with youth wings of other Christian parties and Conservative political parties. Says one observer: “all of the youth wings of the parties are extremely well networked internationally. They travel constantly. Their youth leaders get sent around the world all the time to represent their parties” (Mhanna, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009).

44 The DEMYC is the international umbrella organization of the youth wings of Christian-Democratic, Conservative, and like-minded parties of Europe and one of the strongest political youth organizations in Europe. I attended this event. See also Sikmic 2010.
Christian Conservative parties of Europe. These conferences hosted by the youth wings of the political parties provide (for some, rare) opportunities for Lebanese youth to travel outside of the region, and are extremely popular with youth wing members. One young member of the Muslim Brotherhood explained:

It is rare that we get to take trips especially to Europe. Exchanges through my university are too expensive and my family does not travel. Last year I got to go Denmark, and this year I am going to the UK. I learn so much and these memories I will have with me forever.45

Another draw of the activities political parties organize is that they often bring together youth from around the country. Young people have the chance to mingle with peers who share a similar background, but who are not from their home towns—something one young member of the FPM described as “Lebanese match-making services.”46 Indeed, besides finding employment, finding a relationship is another preoccupation of many Lebanese youth—as it is for young people anywhere. Because many of the youth wings’ activities are of a highly social nature, it follows that the potential for dating is a part of it, and in Lebanon, “love has unfortunately not been spared from politicization.”47 Many partisan youth mentioned political affiliation as being in the “top three” considerations when it comes to finding a potential mate. As a young member of the LFSA stated: “first you

45 Dandashli, interview with author, Beirut, March 2011.
46 Youth who grow up in towns and villages often have extended family networks within their home town, and also tend to have known each other for much of their lives.
47 A study conducted by Michael Oghia (2012, 111) at the American University of Beirut, which surveyed only AUB students, found that the importance placed on “similar political ideas” varied in several ways. It was ranked more highly by senior students and graduate students than it was by freshman and sophomores, and it was also ranked highly by Christian students from mixed Christian backgrounds (i.e., Greek Orthodox and Maronite). Similarly, Shi’a students also ranked it as highly important, even though they ranked “being with someone from the same sect” as less important than did students from other sects. Oghia concludes that in Lebanon “love has not been spared from politicization” as it is a religious, sectarian, and even political struggle, because, traditionally, romantic relationships did not relate to happiness and instead partnering was related to pragmatism: uniting families to secure and safeguard social capital and resources.
have to consider religion and social status and then political party. After that you can think about love.”

Another prominent way that political parties engage youth is through sport, both at an amateur community level, and through professional sports teams. Youth are often the most populous group of fans attending games. As Danyle Reiche (2011, 261) explains, literature on sport in divided countries often focuses on how it can play a unifying role, but Lebanon presents us with the opposite case where sports, especially professional sports, work to entrench sectarian divisions. In everything from basketball and soccer to swimming and table tennis, Lebanon’s sports teams are usually religiously homogenous and affiliated with the political parties. Political parties fund and support them, and demand loyalty in return. The teams are required to wear the colour of their parties and post large pictures of ‘their’ politicians at their matches, and fans in the stadiums are more often heard shouting the names of the politicians, rather than the names of the teams (ibid., 265). At times, matches have become so heated that the government has imposed complete bans on public attendance for fear of violence.49 When it comes to youth, sports in Lebanon have proved to be an effective “instrument for mobilising followers” (Reiche 2011, 271).

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48 Eli, interview with author, Beirut, November 2010.
49 There was a government ban in the aftermath of the Israeli war in 2006, due to increased political tension, as well as after 2012 due to the Syrian war, which was lifted only in March 2016 (Khodr 2007; Daily Star 19 March 2016).
From Socializing to Socialization: Building Loyalty among New Recruits

Though many youth wing members highlight the ‘purely social’ nature of their activities, there can be little doubt that they are also designed to secure an enduring sense of loyalty to the party and socialize new and potential members into the party’s ideology and ‘culture.’ This is another area where the youth wings play the leading role. Partisan activists often remarked on the need for ‘teaching’ new recruits about the party, its history and importance. It has been particularly important in those parties that face intra-sectarian competition, such as the Christian parties (the LF and FPM in particular). The youth wing of the Future Movement, however, is also choosing to organize more integrative activities for youth as they face challenges from new and more radical groups within the Sunni community who capture the attention of young people.

Just as they do through their ‘educational’ and ‘cultural’ events in the university, partisan youth seek to integrate new members through combining social outings with events that also hold symbolic importance to their party. For example, they organize numerous commemorative events that honour party founders, significant battles, or religious events. For instance, the LFSA organizes events for their young recruits on the anniversary of the death of their founder, Bashir Gemayel (14 September), the festival of Mar Maron, the founder of the Maronite Christian Church, and major Christian holidays. LFSA recruits are also taken on an annual trip to meet the Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Butrus Sfeir who, though he is technically non-partisan, maintains a close connection to LF
leader Samir Geagea.\textsuperscript{50} The opportunity to meet the local pre-eminent religious figure for their religious community under the auspices of the LFSA helps to fuse allegiance and loyalty to the party with religious identity. An LFSA member bluntly explained: “we want to tie our party’s destiny with the destiny of the Christians in Lebanon in their minds.”\textsuperscript{51}

Youth wings also organize meetings between potential recruits and the party leader, often at the leader’s mansion or party headquarters.\textsuperscript{52} LFSA, for example, organizes a day trip for all of its youth members from across the country to meet and greet their leader, Samir Geagea, and his wife, Strida Geagea, at the heavily fortified LF headquarters in Maarab. Youth are able to shake hands with the couple, and are given food and party paraphernalia as tokens of appreciation. PSP leader, Walid Jumblatt, also receives weekly delegations of PYO youth at his mansion in the Chouf. Youth who have attended these meetings report “feeling like I was in the presence of a very great and wise man,” or of being “star struck.” One new PYO member described it this way: “I had the opportunity to meet him [Walid Jumblatt] and shake his hand. I felt that this is a man who has been through a lot. I respect him very much. It was very emotional for me to meet him.” A professor (and avid observer of youth politics) at the AUB explained: “Meeting the leader can be a very emotional experience for these young people. They get swept away by the

\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, Patriarch Sfeir has been called “Geagea’s godfather.” See Qazzi (2013). The widespread perception among LSFA members is that the Patriarch Sfair favours the LF. As the head of the LFSA foreign relations department put it: “Our patriarch does not like General Aoun. He is with the LF but he cannot come out and say this publicly” (Habschi, interview with author, Beirut, December 2007).

\textsuperscript{51} Haroush, interview with author, Achrafieh, December 2010.

\textsuperscript{52} All the youth wings from the parties I interviewed (Hezbollah, Amal, FPM, LF, PSP, and Future) organized these commemorative and symbolic activities and described them in interviews. Hezbollah, however, was the only party where youth members (organized through their educational mobilization unit) did not meet their leader in person. These youth did, however, meet with other prominent senior officials from the party. I attended numerous events organized by the youth wings, especially by the LFSA. The LFSA had a keen interest in publicizing their extensive youth programming.
stature of these leaders. They become their heroes.”53 ‘Meet and greet’ events also give young party recruits an opportunity to mix with the older members of the party, including former youth leaders who have since been promoted to official positions in the parent party. This can make a great impression on many young members, since a number report having similar desires to climb the ranks of their parties. Overall, young members described the experience of meeting party leaders as meaningful and having strengthened their bond to the party and to the leader in particular.

Political parties also organize educational workshops and even ‘schools’ for teaching new and potential recruits the core messages and ideology of the party. Hezbollah has the most extensive programme of education, beginning with their al-Mahdi scouts and continuing through to secondary education in the al-Mahdi schools. These programmes and schools were not the products of youth engagement, however, but rather core institutions of Hezbollah’s extensive institutional network, and unique among parties in Lebanon. For the other parties the educational programmes are less comprehensive and, in many cases, they are organized by the youth wings. The youth wings of the LF, FPM, and the Future Movement, for example, all organized political educational and training programmes for their members.

In the case of the LF and the FPM, the senior youth activists in the youth wings said these types of activities were necessary in order to counteract ‘superficial’ adoption of party ideology. A member of the LFSA explained:

Before 2005, during the Syrian occupation if you were involved in the LF you were taking huge risks. It was not casual involvement, it was dangerous and it took great

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courage and commitment. We risked everything. Today the youth we meet do not need courage. They can get lots of benefits from their involvement and they do not pay a high price. For some of them it is fun. That is fine, but we also need to show them it’s more than just karaoke nights! 54

The LFSA even organized an internal ‘university’ in 2008 to help in the process of educating and training new members. The programme consists of several weeks of education during the summer months and covered topics such as the history and mission of the Lebanese forces, and the history of the civil war, as told by the LF.55 This programme was also designed to help the youth leaders identify new party talent. Though documentation on the internal university was limited, interviewees stated that courses are taught by university professors who are affiliated with the LF. For anyone wanting to hold an official position in the LFSA the course is mandatory. In reality, because the LFSA has a highly structured and hierarchical system, many youth have some sort of ‘official’ position within it, and thus numerous youth actually do complete this training. As Chatterji (2008) states, the school helps to form a “connection to the past” for young recruits and “fulfils an eminently integrative function” for a generation who themselves did not experience the events of the civil war.56

The FPM also organized a committee to develop a programme of political education (al-Tathqif al-Siyasiya) which targeted youth specifically. It included sessions on framing the work of the FPM as ‘activism’ as opposed to ‘partisan loyalty,’ and included the history of the civil war as well as leadership training.

54 Tawk, interview with author, Beirut, December 2007.
55 As mention earlier in this thesis, Lebanese youth are not taught any history of the civil war. Lebanese history books end with independence in 1943. There is no national history curriculum.
56 In interviews, young LFSA members often made identical historical references and explanations for why they support their party—an observation also made by other researchers on youth politics (Chatterji 2008).
The youth wing of the Future Movement (called the Future Youth Sector), a relative newcomer to the political arena, is also trying to integrate their new recruits.\textsuperscript{57} New members of the FYS were more likely than new recruits from other parties to have no previous political experience (Chatterji 2008).\textsuperscript{58} As the leaders of the FYS recognize, their young supporters are “not well culturally integrated into the party.”\textsuperscript{59} The youth wing activities of the FYS, therefore, have concentrated on trying to create a sense of identity around the Future movement itself. The FYS have organized extensive youth activities that aim to celebrate the heroism of Rafiq Hariri, and the quest for the truth surrounding his assassination. They also have numerous events that centre on the opportunity to meet the leader, Saad Hariri, and include visits to the Qortiem palace, which the VP of the Youth Sector said was “a great tool” for securing the loyalty of young people to the party. The challenge facing the FYS, however, is the draw of radical Sunni groups, who are also competing for new members.

Our biggest challengers aren’t the other sects; they are the Islamists. They are the ones who are competing against us. We are still far more popular among the youth, but the worse things get in this country, the more appealing the Islamists are to the youth who don’t know any better ways to do politics.\textsuperscript{60}

Indeed, until recent years Islamist arguments did not resonate with the majority of Lebanon’s Sunni Muslims. But with the death of Rafiq Hariri two things happened: one, the

\textsuperscript{57} The movement has only recently begun to focus on high school recruitment and party engagement. Furthermore, it was only recently that the Future Movement initiated a boy scouts programme (in 2008), unlike many of the other political parties which have had scouts movements for decades.

\textsuperscript{58} And as a senior member of the Progressive Youth Organization stated: “We had to teach them how to be activists back in 2005. They didn’t know how to hold a demonstration, we had to show them! They used to show up to the protests in suits!”

\textsuperscript{59} Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.

\textsuperscript{60} Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
sense of persecution and solidarity among the Lebanese Sunnis deepened, and two, there was a huge leadership vacuum left when he died. Politically, Hariri’s rise to power in Lebanon came at the expense of the traditional Sunni zu’ama. During the 1990s, and especially after his relationship with Assad in Syria soured, Hariri focused on building himself up as the predominant Sunni politician in the country. In so doing, he worked systematically to exclude, co-opt, or neutralize other Sunni politicians (Abdel-Latif 2008, 2). He came to be identified as the leader of the Sunna par excellence, and when he was killed it was often said that the Lebanese Sunnis were ‘orphaned.’ The death of Hariri arguably ‘Lebanonized’ the Sunna, meaning, contrary to their history to date, Lebanese Sunnis began to act not only as a sect among other sects, but also “as a minority whose existence was threatened, whose leaders were targeted, and whose sense of victimization was deep” (ibid.). Though the Future Movement has the majority of support of Sunnis in Lebanon, it is far from being a coherent and integrated party—something youth leaders are aware of and are attempting to address through their youth programmes.61

Youth leaders feel they have an added challenge in combating the radical sectarian rhetoric of other Sunni groups. Since Hariri’s assassination, and the subsequent accusations that Hezbollah was to blame, sectarian tensions between the Shi’a and the Sunni have

61 FYS leaders admitted that they often feel they are more like an “umbrella for various Sunni groups” rather than a coherent party (Mnaima, interview with author, Beirut, December 2008). The Sunni groups and parties in Lebanon are numerous. They include: Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya (the Islamic Brotherhood), Jabhat al¬’Amal al-Islami (Islamic Action Front, founded in 2006 by Sheikh Fathi Yakan), Hizb at-Tahrir (the Party of Liberation, demanding the restoration of the Caliphate), Harakat at-Tawhid al-Islami (the Islamic Unification Movement), Majmu’at ad-Dinniyyeh (the Dinniyyeh Group), Fateh al-Islam, and Al-Ahbash. In addition to these, there are followers of Omar Karameh and his son as well as supporters of Nagib Miqati, and fans of MP Muhammad as-Safadi. These groups range from Salafists to al-Qaeda’s proxy organizations, and have a range of views on issues such as Syria (from anti-Syrian to pro-Syrian). They also have different external regional ties—some with Saudi Arabia, others to Egyptian and Turkish organizations. The degree to which they promote an Islamic agenda also varies.
reached unprecedented levels not seen since the civil war. Anti-Shi’a rhetoric has come to permeate the everyday discourse of ordinary Lebanese Sunnis. The Future Movement leadership has at times utilized sectarian rhetoric, thus fanning the flames of sectarian tension, in order to shore up the support of its base (Cammett 2014). This has definitely played a role in the recent politicization of young Sunnis, but it has also been difficult for the Future Movement to control and left some Sunni youth vulnerable to extremist leaders who have a stronger message of sectarian hatred.

The role of the Future Youth Sector is interesting here. Youth members in the FYS see themselves as being ‘useful’ to the party because they make more radical statements without suffering the same level of criticism as the party would. A Future Youth member states:

The reality is we can be much more radical than our older leaders – and we are. I mean politically, we do not have to ease the tone as much. We are young, we can sound revolutionary. We can say radical things that they [the parent party] cannot say. This helps them. It can work to their advantage, because it can mobilize more young supporters for them. Then they can always claim “oh that was just what our youth said, that was not from us.” You know what I mean, they get the benefit of having passionate youth while still being able to sound moderate themselves.62

Though FYS youth leaders claim they can control their young supporters, other members cast doubt on this claim, and expressed concern over the dangers of attracting radical young members. As one FYS member stated:

We have had so many new members join in the past 5 years, which is great. But we need to educate them because some of them are full of fire but do not understand the right way to do politics. They can be impulsive, they ride around in their cars shouting slurs and doing vandalism and it can cause real problems for us.63

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63 Ashi, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
Another member put it this way:

Some of our youth feel Future is not doing enough to protect the Sunna. We have to fight this perception. We have to look like we don’t compromise. But actually we do have to compromise. It’s a tightrope we have to walk. It ends up creating a lot of unnecessary tension with us and them [i.e., referring to the Shi’a].

The youth wing of the Future Movement is clearly playing a delicate and crucial role in the political mobilization of young Sunnis.

In sum, whether it be through their offices, events, or activities, partisan youth are providing spaces where youth can mingle, play games, and enjoy each other without incurring expenses. They are also providing opportunities for youth to fill their free time with useful and meaningful activities. As one journalist described it, they have become a “refuge in times of boredom” (Maroun 2012), for young people during an uncertain time in their lives—a time when they are facing ambiguous futures and bleak prospects for employment, in a precarious country plagued by conflict.

In this chapter I have examined the activities of partisan youth which contribute not just to reproduction, but also to the renewal and rejuvenation of partisanship and sectarian dynamics among Lebanese youth. Specifically, I have shown how youth in the youth wings of the political parties have helped their parties “move into the 21st century,” as one young partisan activist put it. They have done so through introducing new technologies, styles, brands, and modes of communicating within their parties. Their activities have also ensured that the parties are able to enter the lives and spaces of youth in meaningful ways. In Lebanon it is the mainly the parties that organize the community events which allow youth

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64 Fakhereddine, interview with author, Beirut, December 2009.
to get involved and “give back” to their villages and volunteer in their communities. The parties also create spaces and activities where youth can meet up, hang out, and socialize, outside the confines of their homes or schools. These activities and strategies are not planned and dictated by the party elites. Neither are these youth simply doing the bidding of their leaders. On the contrary, youth are bringing in their own expertise, their own sense of style, their own sense of the priorities and desires of their peers, and they are executing these activities and strategies themselves through various platforms, namely the youth wings of the political parties. It is partisan youth, not the leaders, who understand what will appeal to young people. That their efforts also work in the benefit of their leaders’ agendas is also true. These are youth, after all, who have partisan sympathies and affiliations. However, this does not mean that youth are ‘blindly’ following the party elites, or that they are devoid of autonomy. Indeed, when it comes to the activities of the youth wings, partisan youth have a great deal of autonomy over their own affairs. Partisan youth have the freedom to innovate and to reinvent their parties to suit the needs, interests, and priorities of youth in their communities. The fact that they have this freedom is what allows them to be so effective at keeping the political parties relevant to the lives of Lebanese youth, as well as at forging enduring connections between youth and the political parties and the party leaders. This constitutes another example of how partisan youth contribute to reinforcing and recreating partisan and sectarian boundaries among young people at grassroots levels. The ‘renewing’ of sectarianism is not just an elite driven process. The activities of partisan also act as a mechanism of feedback for the reproduction and renewal of sectarianism in Lebanon from below.
As we shall see in the following chapter, however, youth autonomy only extends so far. My research shows that partisan youth have often been interested in transforming more than just their party’s image. Partisan youth have, at times, lobbied for greater democracy and accountability within their own parties. The cases I examine in the following chapter, however, show how these types efforts have been largely thwarted. As I argue, the closer youth come to the centres of power in Lebanon, i.e.: when their efforts threaten to encroach upon or erode the power of the elites, the less autonomy and influence they have.
Chapter Seven

More Politicization, Less Political Voice: Partisan Youth Attempts to Reform from Within

In the previous chapter I discussed how the activism of partisan youth has helped to renew and rejuvenate the image and relevance of the political parties among youth. In this chapter I argue that the rejuvenation, however, is only skin-deep. In fact, many of the youth in the Lebanese political parties want to change more than just their party’s reputation or image. Youth in political parties also push for increased institutionalization within their parties, specifically, in the form of more democratic, meritocratic, and transparent internal procedures and systems of accountability. In this chapter, I discuss four examples of youths’ efforts to reform their parties from within: the Free Patriotic Movement, led by General Michel Aoun; the Lebanese Forces, led by Samir Geagea—Aoun’s main rival, and the other leading force in Lebanon’s Christian community; the Progressive Socialist Party, the party that represents almost 97% of the Druze in Lebanon, led by Walid Jumblatt; and the Future Movement, the Sunni-based party founded by the assassinated former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, and now led by his son, Saad Hariri. Through these case studies I discuss the efforts of partisan youth to influence change within their parties, and how their efforts have repeatedly been stymied and thwarted by the party elites. Whereas I previously emphasized the varying degrees of autonomy and freedom young partisans have over their own realms of politics (i.e., university campuses and youth-led movements in civil society), here I show that the closer youth are to the centres of power, namely the power and influence of their leaders, the less autonomy and influence they have. In each of the examples of partisan youth attempting to lobby for change, they have been blocked in various ways by their leaders. So, while their leaders pay lip service
to the idea of ‘youth empowerment,’ my research shows there is little genuine interest in accommodating or even seriously considering their desires for meaningful reform.

The autonomy youth have is thus a limited one. As these case studies illustrate, there is a threshold where the balance between the autonomy of youth versus the power of the surrounding structure ‘tips’ in favour of those forces that maintain existing power dynamics - most prominently, the factional social and economic power of the Lebanese elites. Youth are allowed to contribute to their parties and shape politics, as long as it does not contradict the interests of the party elites, and does not threaten or limit their ultimate power and control. It is a clear example of the power and resilience of the Lebanese sectarian political system, and particularly the role of the elites in maintaining it. Youth may rejuvenate, but they may not reform.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I review important aspects of the nature of Lebanese political parties and, specifically, why and how they are not simply ‘sectarian.’ From there, I examine youth involvement in political parties, especially since 2005, returning to the paradox I first mentioned in chapter three. That paradox is that while youth have become more involved in political parties, they have actually been less visible, and had less voice in Lebanese politics overall—both within their parties, and in the national arena. Nor has their increased participation resulted in greater attention to the issues that plague Lebanese youth. I briefly examine the campaign to lower the voting age to illustrate this point. I argue that the reason youth have become simultaneously more mobilized into the parties while increasingly demobilized as a political constituency is (unsurprisingly) connected to the nature of the parties themselves—as organizations that exist for the purpose of pursuing factional agendas and
serving the interests of Lebanon’s elite. The final section of this chapter is devoted to four case studies of youth attempts to lobby for reforms within their parties, particularly in the area of institutionalization, and how, in each case, their efforts were stymied by the party elites.

**Political Parties and the Sectarian System in Lebanon**

Lebanon has a vibrant and competitive multi-party system that has traditionally stood out as one of the most democratic in the Arab region. Political parties in Lebanon have been active since the state was first formed in the 1920s and, according to some, are seen as some of the most ‘western’ in the Arab world (Sensenig-Dabbous 2009). Lebanese historian, Farid el-Khazen, writes that Lebanese political parties have emerged in several “generations” (2003, 610). The first generation of parties was established during the Mandate era (1920-1943). Examples of parties from this era include: the Lebanese Communist party, the Kata’eb (Phalange), the Progressive Socialist Party, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. While these parties began as ideological movements and were influenced to various degrees by the European left or extreme right, other parties that formed in the early part of the 20th century were essentially a way for local traditional elites (zu’ama) “to lend a modern aspect to older power structures based on personality, family, clan, and religion” (Suleiman 1967, xvi). The second wave of parties was established after independence (1943-1975) and included many Leftist parties (such as the Organization of Communist Action, The Independent Nasserite Movement), as well as the first major Shi’ite party, Amal, and the Maronite-based National Liberation Party, to name a few. By the eve of the civil war (1975-76), these parties and other political forces had become profoundly divided into two main coalitions. On one side was the
Lebanese National Movement, a leftist and nationalist alliance led by Kamal Jumblatt, leader of the Progressive Socialist Party; on the other side the Lebanese Front, a right-wing conservative alliance, led by the Maronite Kata’eb Party. After 1982, many political parties were transformed into militias, and the parties eventually became totally controlled by their military wings (Krayem 1997). Thus, the third generation of political parties, which was established during wartime (1975-1990), includes many that initially began as militias. Some of the major parties in Lebanon today fall into this category, including the Lebanese Forces, Hezbollah, and Marada, among others. A fourth generation of parties could now be added to el-Khazen’s categories: those that have been established in the postwar era and particularly in the aftermath of the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. These include prominent parties such as the Future Movement, Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement, as well as the leftist Democratic Left Movement. Each of these parties existed in the form of social movements before 2005, but were not legalized until after the Independence Intifada.

Because Lebanon, unlike other Arab countries, has never been governed by an authoritarian regime with a single ruling party or official state ideology, its parties are multiple and diverse—reflective of the wide range of political, communal, and ideological platforms within the Lebanese political field as well as the Arab region more widely. There are approximately 90 active parties in Lebanon today, as well as a number of independent politicians. Only about 21 of these parties have seats in parliament, however (IFES 2009).

Lebanese parties have benefited from the open and competitive political process that characterizes national politics in the sense there are very few restrictions placed upon them. In fact, Lebanese parties function largely unregulated—Lebanon has no political party law, though
civil society activists have been demanding one for some time. The constitution guarantees the right of association, and thus indirectly the right to organize political parties. Beyond this, Lebanese parties are regulated only by a 1909 (Ottoman-era) law of associations, the same law that governs NGOs. Like any non-profit organization, political leaders and movements must register with the Ministry of Interior. They then enjoy the right to manage their finances autonomously, open banks accounts, and accept gifts. Parties are obliged to keep three sets of files: one on membership, one on decisions of their executive committees, and one on the activities of their association, which must be submitted annually and made available to authorities when requested (Sensenig-Dabbous 2009). This open legal framework for the operation of political parties has allowed them to engage in a whole host of activities and receive unlimited funds from domestic and foreign patrons. It also allows for the unusual situation in which a group like Hezbollah can be both a legal political party as well as an armed entity (Salamey 2014, 122).

As I have discussed previously, the nature of the sectarian system in Lebanon, in which power is shared between the sectarian communities and guarantees them freedom from interference, has created a relative degree of freedom for actors—including space for political parties to organize and compete. Lebanon has traditionally stood out in the Arab region for this reason. The opportunity for democratic competition does not mean that Lebanese political parties are democratic, however—far from it. As discussed in chapter two, Lebanon’s electoral system, established during the Mandate era, has traditionally worked to the advantage of local factionalized elites. Thus, despite the openness, the majority of Lebanon’s political parties still revolve around a handful of powerful families and have not become vehicles through which
Lebanese voters are integrated and represented. Even those political parties that began with clear ideological platforms have had trouble maintaining, let alone building, any cross-sectarian support, and hence have remained strongly associated with a particular sectarian community. If parties are to achieve any sort of electoral success in Lebanon, they need to be organized along the same lines as the broader factionalized struggle for political power and resources in the country. As Labib Yamak argued in the 1960s, “Lebanon had plenty of political parties but lacked a party system” (quoted in Kingston 2013, 44)—a statement that clearly resonates still today.

Because of the nature of the confessional political system in Lebanon and the formal and informal institutions that underpin it, political parties in Lebanon have become “relatively autonomous communal infrastructure networks” whose maintenance and sustainability have been closely associated with “the prevalence of nepotistic relationships of patronage existing between members of the sectarian community and their populist leaders” (Salamey 2014, 124). Few parties have been able to overcome the “personality cults” of their leaders or the “confessional barrier” in their make-up and organization (el-Khazen 2003).

Another important aspect of the undemocratic nature of Lebanese political parties is the fact that many are family-run ventures. Very few leaders of Lebanese political parties are actually elected. Rather, party leadership is often passed down through successive generations (Joseph 2011, 636). A testament to the strength of familial politics in Lebanon is the fact that even parties that began with strong ideological orientations have since drifted into personality or family-driven politics, and been unable to maintain cohesion and abide by their original political platform (el-Khazen 2003, 606). Though political sectarianism is what is most often
highlighted in scholarship on Lebanon, political familism is an equally compelling framework. In fact, some scholars have argued that “the whole political history of Lebanon can be described in terms of a handful of prominent families competing to reaffirm their name, power, and privilege in their respective regions or political constituencies” and that “nothing in the last three decades has transpired to dilute or undermine such elements” (Khalaf 2003, 119-120). Moreover, once initiated into political life, virtually all of Lebanon’s major families enjoy uninterrupted tenure in successive chambers of parliament.

Among contemporary examples of prominent family-run political parties are the Hariri family who control the political leadership roles of the Future Movement. Former Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri inherited his post in government and the leadership of the Future Movement from his father and former prime minister, the late Rafiq Hariri. Similarly, Walid Jumblatt inherited his post as leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) from his father, Kamal Jumblatt, and is grooming his son, Teymour, to take over. In the FPM, family members of Michel Aoun (most notably his son-in-law Gibran Bassil) have also been placed in key leadership positions as opposed to others who were active in the postwar era while Aoun was in exile. This has angered many of the younger generation of activists.

However, as Suad Joseph argues, political familism is not just a matter of father/son succession, but also the notion that political leaders assimilate the “norms, idioms, and moralities of kinship and the mobilisation of these codes into their political practice” which

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1 Although Walid Jumblatt has recently sent mixed messages in this regard. In an interview with Ghassan Charbel in November 2011, Jumblatt reportedly said that it is better if his son does not work in politics (see Charbel 2011).

2 This example will be discussed further below. These are but a few examples of the prominence of family ties in Lebanese politics. See Salamey (2012, 121).
adds further legitimacy to political familism and the family dynasties of Lebanon (Joseph 2011, 156). She states, “Political leaders bring their extended kin into government; they treat the state as a source of resources to dole out to kin and kin-like relations. They tolerate, even expect civil servants to ‘take care’ of their kin and they deploy the kinship networks of their clients and followers to mobilize their own political following” (ibid., loc. cit.).

The point here is that Lebanese parties are not simply ‘sectarian.’ They are far more complex than this. They incorporate numerous and overlapping ties including those based in clientelism, familism, and geography, which may in fact overlap with religious affiliation, but which are also often much more relevant than religious identity to the daily lives of Lebanese citizens. True, Lebanese parties have many of the characteristics of sectarian parties (or, in the terms used by Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond [2003] in their influential typology—“ethnicity-based” parties).3 For instance, they tend to promote narrow goals that foreground the interests of their particular community rather than focusing on advancing a program for all of society. They also have no trouble employing powerfully emotive symbolic issues of identity (i.e., sectarian rhetoric) to advance their goals and rally their support base. Furthermore, their support base is generally religiously homogenous. It is important to understand, however, that their use of sectarianism is by no means a fixed behaviour. Rather, it is one of many different ‘tools’ in the strategic arsenal of Lebanese political parties. Parties might eschew or use sectarian rhetoric to varying degrees at different historical periods and depending on the audience and context.4

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3 In their typology this is the definition of an “ethnicity-based party” (2003, 183).
4 The case of the Sunni-based Future Movement is a good example. Its emphasis on its Sunni credentials has varied drastically in different periods and contexts. Despite its largely Sunni support base, from its beginning the Future
Moreover, while Lebanese political leaders do strive to be seen as vigilant guardians of their communal interests, they also typically “have no problem joining ranks with representatives of other confessions to marginalize their co-religionists when it suits their interests” (Wimmen 2007). Even those Lebanese leaders with long histories of antagonism and rivalry will temporarily ‘suspend their differences’ and band together to ward off attempts to strengthen the Lebanese state, lest their ability to control it and utilize it for their own particularistic purposes be weakened—a contemporary example of “inter-elite networking,” which Kingston highlighted as a feedback mechanism for the entrenchment of sectarianism during the Mandate era. For these reasons as well as others, such as the lack of formal organization within the parties, the low level of ideological adherence, and the dominance of patron-client relationships over the parties’ functioning, I would argue that Lebanese parties are better described (in the terms of Diamond and Gunther’s typology) as “elite-based clientelistic” parties, as opposed to being labeled as simply “sectarian.”

In sum, though many observers emphasize the sectarian nature of Lebanese politics, it is crucial to stress that the strategies, tactics, and goals of political leaders are often far more multifaceted and complex than the goal of advancing the demands and security of their

Movement was essentially the political machinery of Rafiq al-Hariri and his family. It was the product of his personal fortune and his personal political and economic vision for Lebanon. Initially, the Future Movement made robust and sincere efforts to appeal to a cross-sectarian Lebanese audience, for example, by funding the university careers of thousands of students from all sectarian backgrounds. In the years since his assassination on 14 February 2005, the subsequent Syrian departure, and the rush of each party to secure their hold over their communities, Future party insiders admit that “Future Movement leaders have increasingly emphasised the sectarian identity of the party” through their messages and appeals (Cammett 2014, 11).

5 Lebanese parties are defined in different ways in the scholarship. Melanie Cammet (2014), for example, acknowledges the fluidity of parties’ behaviour at different historical junctures, but ultimately chooses to define and treat them as sectarian, or “ethnic”-based parties. Suad Joseph, as discussed above, highlights the prominence of familism over sectarianism in Lebanese parties, and Roula El-Husseini (2012, 40) tends to view the parties as “elite-based clientelistic” parties in relation to the Diamond-Gunther typology.
sectarian communities. I would argue that the goal that remains most constant among party leaders is not necessarily their sectarian aims, but rather their attempt to increase and secure their personal positions of power. In this way, as Michael Young argues, “that which enhances power and legitimacy in Lebanon is not so very different than what enhances power and legitimacy elsewhere” (Young 2010, 80). Or, in the words of Samir Khalaf:

Confessionalism in Lebanon is often made the scapegoat for abuses whose roots lie elsewhere. For example, in my view, the abuses of marja’yah or taba’iyah [clientelism] are far more egregious in their character and have more pervasive implications. Indeed, the seemingly sanctimonious and self-righteous communal predispositions underlying sectarian loyalties become expedient disguises for the aggrandizing and self-seeking interests which sustain patron-client ties (Khalaf 2003, 110).

The Paradox of Youth in Political Parties: More Political Participation, Less Political Voice

The first half of the 1970s was an unprecedented era of youth politicization, including youth mobilization into political parties—mainly those associated with the Lebanese left (El-Khazen 2003, 609). The civil war, however, put an end to this unique period. As the parties became increasingly militarized, turning themselves entirely into militias and ‘enthusiastically’ embracing violence, they lost any credibility they had had in the prewar years (ibid., 606). Many Lebanese (especially those who lived through the war) still view political parties with deep skepticism, mistrust, or even outright hostility due to the brutal role they played in the civil war (El-Husseini 2012, 39; El-Khazen 2003, 614). This is part of the reason some postwar political movements (the FPM and Future Movement, for example) have avoided officially registering themselves as political parties until relatively recently (i.e., post-2005).

Thus, while in the early 1970s the parties reached a peak in their ability to expand and recruit new members (and especially youth), in the 1990s and early 2000s that trend was
reversed. As I discussed in chapter three, before the 2005 Independence Intifada there was widespread disenfranchisement from and apathy toward the political parties. With the exception of Hezbollah, parties were largely unable to attract new recruits at all. Few political parties had any base of youth members, save for the PYO, and the small underground networks of youth activists associated with the LF and the FPM. Writing during this time (2003), Farid el-Khazen stated that the “deepest crisis” facing Lebanon’s political parties in this era was their failure to offer an alternative form of political engagement and activism, particularly for youth, that was any different from the “traditional” political elites (El-Khazen 2003, 620). Political parties, he stated, were “in search of partisans.”

This changed after the Independence Intifada and the tit-for-tat demonstrations between what is now the March 14th and March 8th coalitions. Since 2005, increasing numbers of youth have opted to support, join, and run (in student elections) with the major parties. Lebanese political parties, once again, are enjoying widespread support among youth. As I have

6 Hezbollah is the notable exception. This party has had success in recruiting young people to their movement throughout the postwar era. This is likely due to a combination of factors including the party’s unique status as an armed resistance movement to Israel, the on-going Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms in Lebanon, and the fact that leader Hassan Nasrallah combines both political and religious authority among his Shi’a followers (as he represents the ultimate religious scholarship for emulation for Shi’a who follow the Iranian brand of twelvers). No other party in Lebanon combines both political and religious authority in this way. Moreover, Hezbollah has the most extensive network of social welfare institutions of any of the parties. This includes schools, hospitals, social welfare agencies, women’s NGOs, as well as programming for children and youth such as the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, and military training for new recruits who want to join the armed resistance. Hezbollah recruits and starts training youth at very young ages. Al-Mahdi Scouts can range in age from 4-17, but typically start around 6 years old. When scouts reach the age of 16 or 17, they can join the party’s military ranks or opt to continue their education through the party (Blandford 2011).

7 As discussed in the chapter three, it was youth (Christian and Leftist youth activists) who were spearheading the risky public protests against Syrian presence in Lebanon during this period.

8 He goes on to state that in this period (prior to Syrian withdrawal) the system that emerged post-war did not help parties fulfill their roles as vehicles for reform and change or fulfill their democratic function. Rather, under Syrian tutelage, political pluralism had “a predetermined margin,” and competition between government and opposition was “confined to that margin.” In such a system, political parties sought to maintain the status quo despite its damaging impact on political pluralism and the democratic process. In this way, argues el-Khazen, Lebanese parties at that time were “performing functions similar to those in authoritarian regimes” (2003, 623-624).
argued, this is in part due to the role of partisan youth in recreating political dynamics that work to reinforce and reproduce Lebanon’s sectarian legacy at the grassroots, in various spheres of youth politics.

Thus, 2005 marked a turning point—not for Lebanese politics overall, where the same factional dynamics once again took hold, but for the increased engagement of youth in the major sect-based political parties of Lebanon. It marked the beginning of an era of renewed political energy and support among youth—very likely the highest levels of youth engagement since the ‘heyday’ of parties in the 1960s and 1970s. However, whereas the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of a youth-led movement (in the form of an autonomous student movement) which pressed for specific youth- and student-related causes (i.e., educational reform and equitable employment) in conjunction with leftist party causes, the post-2005 period has seen youth mobilized into parties that exist primarily to serve the interests of Lebanon’s political elites. As I show further on, while youth have become more involved in political parties since 2005, youth themselves have not had greater voice or visibility in their parties or in mainstream politics, nor have youth issues garnered more support from the party leaders. Rather, goals such as empowering a new generation of young people in politics, or addressing youth issues such as unemployment, or lowering of the voting age, have been routinely subordinated or sacrificed by the political elite to broader factional goals. I argue that partisan youth activists themselves are complicit in this process—prioritizing their partisan allegiances over coming together to address common issues that affect the lives of the young people they supposedly lead. Indeed, one is hard pressed to find an example of a youth wing
leader from a mainstream political party who is particularly active in advocating for youth—as opposed to factional—issues.

Two processes have contributed to this state of affairs: the integration of youth into the political parties and the consolidation of their participation in the newly created youth wings, which, I argue, helps to contain and control partisan youth activism; and the legacy of the deepening polarization in Lebanese politics and society more broadly—forces which have proved too difficult for youth to overcome. I now turn to a discussion of these two factors.

Youth Wings of the Political Parties

I make two arguments about the youth wings of political parties: first, that the creation of the youth wings has worked to contain youth political participation and facilitated the control and influence of political party leaders over youth, and second, that the political affiliations of youth to their parties have made it increasingly difficult for youth to overcome divisions and work together—even on issues where their interests would seemingly align. Thus, despite their increasing involvement in the parties, the voice of youth has become more marginalized in politics overall. This is clearly an example of the limits on their autonomy. The example of the ‘Lebanese Campaign to Lower the Voting Age,’ which I discuss at the end of this section, exemplifies these dynamics.

Before moving on to a discussion of their political dynamics, it is useful to examine briefly the structure and nature of the youth wings themselves. One of the main reasons for the existence of youth wings in the first place is to overcome the legal barriers around having members under the age of 21. As mentioned in chapter four, the Ottoman era law of 1909
which still governs political parties in Lebanon today) prohibits parties from having members under the age of 21. This means most students (who generally begin university at age 18) are unable officially to join a party for about three years. However, having a student and youth wing that is officially separate from the parent party allows parties to organize their youth supporters without violating this law.

Another point to make about the nature of youth wings is that the membership youth do hold, regardless of their age, is often of an informal type. Many parties do not issue official memberships for their younger members, even in the youth wings, for several reasons. Agnes Favier, who has studied Lebanese student movements, argues it is a matter of strategy for parties: because of the fierce competition between rival parties, especially between parties of the same sect, they naturally want to attract as many new young members as possible, and making the process of party adherence open and non-committal is simply more effective for attracting young people (Favier 2004, 194). Not issuing official memberships is also linked to the fact that informal membership allows youth more personal flexibility vis-à-vis their families. In interviews youth often cited their families’ concerns as a reason why they were not official members of a party. This way, they explained, they can participate but still claim to their families that they are not officially members—an important matter when it comes to a young person’s ability to appease their family’s concerns about their political involvement. Familial influence still plays a powerful role in the lives and decisions of young Lebanese, despite the fact that on the surface this generation seems to have greater independence from their families. As stated earlier, many Lebanese families continue to carry a negative image of political parties and politics more generally, and dislike the idea of their children being involved
in politics. Furthermore, many youth prefer informal membership status to avoid the (often significant) time commitment that is required of official members. Finally, the need for official memberships and membership cards was simply not seen as that significant an issue by many youth, perhaps because of the highly informal nature of politics in Lebanon overall.

Informality, however, is a double-edged sword. The other consequence of allowing youth only an informal role, and excluding them from the possibility of a formalized position, even a low-ranking one, is that it ensures that youth are denied a formal voice in the party or decision-making, thereby leaving them unable to participate officially in internal party affairs. A recent UNDP report on youth in political parties stated: “Most of the political decisions are taken during the closed-door meetings that exclude young people, thus young people are deprived of the opportunity to be involved or to have a voice” (Beyond Development 2014). Regardless, most students and youth are not card-carrying members of political parties, but rather tend to have informal membership in the parties’ youth wings or student committees.

Prior to 2005, some of the key political parties did not even have youth wings. This was the case for both the leading Christian parties, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Future Movement, and the Lebanese Forces, for example. Other parties such as the Progressive Socialist Party and Kata’eb have had student and youth wings since the 1970s, and Hezbollah organized their ‘educational mobilization’ in the early 1990s.

Youth wings of the parties are organized in a variety of ways. In some cases, like the Free Patriotic Movement, or the Shiite Amal Movement, for example, there is no distinct youth organization. Rather, youth and student ‘members’ fall under the jurisdiction of the branches of the parties that oversee activities at specific universities. Another model is the Progressive
Socialist Party (PSP), which set up a distinct youth division named the Progressive Youth Organization (PYO). The PYO is an officially separate entity, and though it is clearly linked to the PSP it legally operates as its own organization and places a great deal of importance on its independence. In fact, in interviews some PYO members said they plan to stay in the PYO in the future, even after are legally allowed to join the PSP, and do not plan not to become members of the PSP.⁹ They claimed this was because they preferred the greater democracy and flexibility they have within their own organization as opposed to what they would face as members of the PSP. This makes sense when we think of these young partisan activists as political ‘hybrids’—simultaneously wanting greater democracy and accountability in their parties and in Lebanon, but also, in their desire to be active citizens in their communities, tending to participate in confessionally-based organizations.

The Lebanese Communist Party’s youth organization represents another style of youth involvement. In the case of the LCP, there are several options available to youth: membership in the party’s youth committee, which is a part of the LCP, membership in the student union which is officially independent from the LCP (although widely known as an auxiliary group), or membership in both. Finally, Hezbollah represents yet another formulation. Though widely seen as the party that is most effective at mobilizing youth, Hezbollah does not actually have a separate youth wing. Rather it has an ‘educational mobilization’ unit which oversees youth and student activities, as well as the al-mahdi schools and scouting programmes for children as young as four years of age. Moreover, no formal membership exists at any level in Hezbollah. As Na’im Qassem, deputy general secretary of the party explains, belonging to Hezbollah is not

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⁹ There is no official age limit on membership in the PYO.
dependent on official membership as the party functions more like a “nation” (Qassem 2006). Thus, like the FPM, youth and students may participate in Hezbollah’s social or political activities, on or off campus, without any official membership or status. For all parties, regardless of types of membership and affiliation, student and youth activity is monitored, and the most promising young ‘members’ are frequently selected by party officials for official integration within the parent party and higher positions.

There are varying degrees of autonomy of youth and students vis-à-vis their parent parties. In interviews, partisan youth claim they have complete autonomy over their members and areas of jurisdiction, such as youth wing affairs, or on the university campus, for example. This is true on paper, but because so much of what happens in parties happens informally, it is difficult to gauge the extent of the autonomy of youth wings. Moreover, because the leaders of the youth wings are, in all but one case, unelected appointees from the top, official autonomy may not hold much significance (I return to this point below). Partisan youth report that groups such as the PYO and the LCP’s Union of Progressive Youth (those that are legal entities in their own right and officially separate from their parties) are generally seen as having the ‘longest leash’ for their leaders, whereas Hezbollah youth ‘members’ are generally seen as having little, if any, autonomy, and the highest degree of internal party discipline. Even in the cases where youth activists claim to have genuine autonomy from their leaders, as I show below, when they

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10 Many Hezbollah leaders have stated this. Hezbollah, they claim, is “not an organization, for its members carry no cards and bear no specific responsibilities” (quoted in Ranstorp 1997, 41).

11 Many of the leaders of the youth wings I met when first interviewing in 2007 had moved into the parent party and into higher positions by the time I left Lebanon in the summer of 2011. The former youth leader of the LF, for example, had become head of election mobilization for Beirut; the former youth leader of the Kata’eb had become a political advisor to the president. The former head of the educational mobilization unit for Hezbollah was also promoted within the party.
attempt to lobby for reforms that would, even in small ways, encroach on the control and power of the leadership, there is clear interference from above to shut down their efforts.

Variations in structure, organization, and types of membership aside, the fact remains that the bulk of what happens with youth in political parties, and in parties more generally, happens in informal and unstructured ways. Indeed, most of the inner workings of Lebanese political parties are “inconsistent” with democratic practices and principles (Salloukh 2009, 137). Though formal systems and institutions are present within the parties (and partisan youth can explain them in detail in interviews), it is also widely understood that these systems are rarely put into practice and constitute little more than words on paper. Lebanese political parties suffer from an absence of internal accountability in areas of finance, decision making, the appointment of leadership positions, to name but a few, and most decisions are made by an elite few and behind closed doors (Wickberg 2012).

Rather than being an opportunity for youth to have a greater voice in the party, and thereby Lebanese politics more broadly, participation of youth in youth wings seems to be doing the opposite: it contributes to the marginalisation of young people from the central decision-making process in their parties as well as to the silencing of youth issues on the national level. Given that Lebanese parties are not effective vehicles for the expression of voters’ preferences, but rather vehicles for promoting the interests of the leaders, it follows that when it comes to their young adherents, the parties effectively absorb and utilize youth participation but only insofar as it serves their factional and elitist agendas. Leaders frequently call upon youth to attend demonstrations and rallies, and rely heavily on the efforts of their young adherents to demonstrate their popularity through winning university elections, and for
their invaluable grassroots work during national elections. They have failed, however, to create genuine opportunities for the political empowerment of youth. For the most part, youth are shut out of the decision-making process in parties—something all of the conventional sect-based parties have in common.12

For example, though in many of the parties the leaders of the youth wings have a seat on the executive committee of the parent party (something that is often cited by young members as evidence of their youth wing’s importance), in all but one case the youth leaders of the conventional parties are not democratically elected by their members. Rather, they are ‘hand-picked’ and appointed by the leader himself. The sole exception is the Progressive Youth Organization (PYO) of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) where youth members are allowed to elect their own representative. This ensures that whoever holds the position is unlikely to bring any adversarial views to the executive committee. Even in the case of the PYO, however, as I discuss further below, the party leadership has been known to interfere to ensure a ‘favourable’ outcome for itself. Even when youth have attempted to lobby for more democratic accountability just within the confines of their youth wings, they have repeatedly been denied and shut down by their leadership.

Another example of the failure of parties to promote youth leadership in politics is the diminishing role of the charismatic young leaders of the parties since 2005. During the Independence Intifada, there were several partisan leaders who were often in the media

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12 In this way, the experience of youth in the political parties is similar to the experience of Lebanese women in political parties. Women have been systematically excluded from decision-making in the political parties of which they were a part, while often being called upon for rallies and to promote the party’s image. Women were also relegated to the women’s committees of parties and excluded from positions of power.
spotlight during demonstrations, but have since “disappeared from the public eye” after having been “absorbed” into their parties. States one young Lebanese researcher:

In 2005 you saw young leaders like Nader Naqueeb of the Future movement, or Daniel Spiro of the Lebanese Forces front and centre, giving speeches, leading students, and being very charismatic leaders in their own right. They were leaders who rose into their positions through elections in universities. Youth respected them. They were the face of their movements. But since they have been promoted into the ranks of the parties, they’ve disappeared from the public eye. You never hear from them anymore. They’ve been absorbed. Now all the youth wing leaders are hand-picked by the party leaders. Some of the youth have complained. They don’t feel their opinions are represented like they were before.13

This stands in stark contrast to the amount of lip service Lebanese leaders pay to the idea of empowering youth, especially since the protests of 2005 when youth were suddenly front and centre in national politics. Samir Geagea has stated: “building a strong government is impossible without the youth, because no nation could be built without the help of its youth” (quoted in Rowayheb 2014, 198). Michel Aoun, who frequently addresses youth and students, has said: “Lebanon’s youth, you are the voice that is capable of bringing (our) convictions to the public.” PSP leader Walid Jumblatt has also “saluted” the “rebellious” youth, who he said “have played a seminal role in politics since March 14, 2005” (Saida Online News 2011). And at an appearance at a massive rally in Martyrs’ Square on 13 March 2011 (exactly, it should be noted, at the time when independent organizers were attempting to mount their challenge to the sectarian regime in the form of the Anti-Sectarian Movement), Saad Hariri ascended to the podium, removed his suit jacket and his tie, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and spoke to his supporters in Lebanese Arabic (as opposed to the traditional classical Arabic) saying, “Young men of Lebanon! Young women of Lebanon! We are the youth, we are Lebanese! We want to

speak! I came here to speak to you informally using the language of the youth! You are March 14!”\textsuperscript{14}—a gesture that was described by one Lebanese blogger as “Hariri 2.0.”\textsuperscript{15}

When all is said and done, however, none of these leaders has made any genuine efforts to promote youth issues or to encourage the political representation of youth whether it be at the national level or within their parties, despite clearly having the ability to do so (Rowayheb 2014, 184). During the 2005 and 2009 elections, for example, the average age of the MPs and cabinet ministers representing the LF and FPM was well above 50, with the eldest candidates in their mid- to late-70s (ibid., 199). The only candidates that Geagea and Aoun added who were relatively young (i.e., in their early 40s) were those who could either bring considerable financial resources or ensure them a large number of votes, or people who were already inside the family circle.\textsuperscript{16} In other words, even with all of the attention youth and their activism garnered in 2005 from the political establishment, and the testaments by the party leaders to the “vital role of youth” to the “democratic future” of Lebanon, the actions of the political elite betray their dedication to maintaining the political status quo. As I discuss in the second half of this chapter, the voices of youth have been overlooked, sacrificed, or ignored since 2005, as their leaders continue to display their commitment, not to youth empowerment, but to maintaining their personal power and pursuing their factional agendas.

The other dynamic that has led to the marginalization of youth and youth issues that deserves mention is the increasingly divisive dynamics of the Lebanese political sphere overall

\textsuperscript{14}Saad Hariri quoted in Luca (2011)
\textsuperscript{15} http://beirutspring.com/blog/2011/03/13/hariris-speech-political-theater-and-the-saudi-kings-poster/
\textsuperscript{16} Such as Nicolas Sehanou, who brought in considerable resources and ensured a high number of votes. He was the youngest FPM candidate in 2009 and ran in Beirut in the parliamentary elections that year. Another example is Gibran Bassil, who was the youngest candidate on the FPM list in 2005, and who is Aoun’s son-in-law. See Rowayheb (2014) for more on this.
since 2005, which partisan youth, now more deeply embedded within their parties, are unable to transcend. The Vice Dean of Student Affairs at a prominent Lebanese university states: “youth mobilisation is frequently divided along partisan lines because youth from the political parties will ultimately side with their leaders’ positions at the expense of collective youth mobilisation for a wider cause.”17 There are relatively few forums where youth wing members can meet as representatives of their parties. In the few that exist, partisan youth have been “unwilling to divulge even the slightest detail about the challenges they face in their parties,” or be “even be remotely self-reflective of their positions”18 when working across party lines. Instead, they tend to repeat the arguments of their leaders, in what one observer described as a “reflex” of solidarity, especially during times of heightened tension (LeFort 2013b, 141).

For instance, during one three-day dialogue for the youth leaders of the 18 major parties which was organized by a European-based peacebuilding agency, the youth “spent the majority of the time parroting the same lines as their leaders and rarely veered from these positions” (Bray-Collins 2010). This meeting, held in December 2009 in London, UK, was the first time since 2005 that the youth leaders from all the major parties had met. The dialogue had aimed to provide a forum for the discussion of youth issues (such as rising costs of university tuition, the creation of a national student card, lowering of the voting age, and unemployment). A Lebanese scholar who observed the proceedings stated: “These are not actually leaders of youth engaged. They are not engaged for their own generation; they are here to assert the

18 Chahine, interview with author, Beirut, January 2010.
same arguments of their leaders. Most of them advance these arguments in spite of the facts, as if they have no idea of what the actual facts on these issues are.\textsuperscript{19}

Reflecting on the proceedings, one of the youth participants who was there representing an independent Lebanese NGO stated:

Why do we fight these battles? They are not even our battles! They belong to our parent’s generation! Look around you, what do you see in Lebanon? All my friends leave the country because they can’t find a job, they can’t vote, the only public university is destroyed, there is no real freedom, no public transportation, no social security... But the big question for most of our youth is whether you are March 8\textsuperscript{th} and March 14\textsuperscript{th}! It’s absolute madness.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{The Campaign to Lower the Voting Age}

The campaign to lower the voting age provides an excellent example of how both these dynamics, the role of the leaders and the complicity of partisan youth, work to marginalize youth and youth issues in the political sphere and sacrifice them for factional interests.

At 21, the voting age in Lebanon is one of the highest in the Arab region. In recent years there has been a push by civil society activists and non-aligned youth to have the age of suffrage lowered from 21 to 18.\textsuperscript{21} Many youth are frustrated that at age 18 they can be tried as adults in a court of law, and fight in the Lebanese military, but are still denied the right to vote. The movement to have the age lowered, however, has seen little support from the political parties. Rather, the campaign has stemmed from civil society groups and western-funded youth shadow government participants. The reason for this is that, like many other issues that touch

\textsuperscript{20} Kiwan, interview with author, London, January 2010.
\textsuperscript{21} The Lebanese constitution holds youth responsible for their actions at the age of 18, and Lebanese youth are eligible to join the military and work in the public sector starting at the age of 18, thus many youth believe they should have the right to vote at age 18.
on the area of demographics, the issue of voting age is fraught with sectarian fear and is a flashpoint for sectarian division. Christian parties oppose the lowering of the voting age because of the belief that Muslim youth outnumber Christian youth. Thus, lowering the voting age would disproportionately increase the number of Muslim voters. Christian groups also believe the reform would symbolize a step toward direct popular representation in Lebanon, and thus they see it potentially eroding their share of political power, especially if Lebanon should ever see reform of its consociational political system. Shiite parties, on the other hand, are in favour of lowering the voting age for exactly the opposite reason. Though exact numbers are unavailable, many analysts claim that a lower voting age would make a minimal difference in the proportion of registered voters by sect. Furthermore, even if it were to be passed, because of the law which requires voters to vote in the electoral districts or municipalities where their family of origin is registered, and not where they live, the electoral impact of new voters would be negligible.

The response of Christian parties has been to counter the proposal to lower the voting age with the demand that it be ‘balanced’ by allowing all expatriate Lebanese to vote in elections. This demand is also based in the (flawed) perception that most Lebanese expats are Christian, and that they would vote for Christian parties. Irrespective of these facts, the point here is that issue of lowering the voting age has become a “flashpoint for sectarian suspicion,

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22 For reasons explained earlier, Lebanon has not had a census since 1932.
23 See Muhanna (2010). The law requiring voters to vote in the district of their ancestral home is another example of how electoral laws maintain the sectarian system in Lebanon.
24 Between 1992 and 2007, 39% of Lebanese who left their homeland were Christian, 27% Shia, 23% Sunni, and 9% Druze, according to Kasparian (2009). Furthermore, this right was actually granted in the amended 2008 electoral law, allowing all registered expat Lebanese citizens the right to vote in the 2009 elections. In interviews with LF members at the time, they bragged about having flown “tens of thousands” of voters back to Lebanon to vote in these elections.
fear, and threat that provokes Christian-Muslim tension and ignited concerns about the stability of the country’s tenuous power-sharing political system” (Project on Middle East Democracy 2010; Nash 29 January 2010).

On 19 March 2009, the Lebanese parliament voted unanimously to adopt a constitutional law to reduce the voting age in Lebanon from 21 years to 18 years, but the constitutional amendment that was required to put this into effect was not promulgated. The same leaders who championed the political empowerment of youth abstained from voting when the bill was brought to parliament on 22 February 2010, thus ensuring it would not pass. Those who voted in favour of the bill were the March 8th Shiite parties, Hezbollah, Amal, and their allies.25

While publicly the youth wings aligned themselves with their party’s stance, in interviews some of the youth wing leaders revealed more ambivalence toward their parties’ positions on this issue. Referring to the partisan youth activists of the Shiite parties who had demonstrated for their political rights outside parliament, the FPM youth leader expressed his desires for this reform:

This is a highly sensitive topic and right now it is being used by Amal as a political tool. This is what I am against and that is why we are not in these demonstrations. But of course, I support the issue. The difficulty is with the party. They have to remain sensitive to the concerns of the [Christian] community. But I feel it is ridiculous that Lebanese youth are silenced in this way in our country’s politics.26

The foreign affairs representative of the Lebanese Forces Students Association, on the other hand, summarized the LFSA’s position by saying that “we would support lowering the

25 Allies such as the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP).
26 Chamoun, interview with author, Beirut, March 2010.
voting age as long as the Lebanese diaspora will be allowed to vote, but only on this condition. Otherwise it unfairly benefits the other side.”

27 This is what one Lebanese scholar described as “the bizarre situation” in which young Lebanese political activists, despite whatever their actual positions on the issue might be, “are actually arguing against their own right to vote.”

28 He stated:

It is hard to believe that youth argue against their own right to vote. It’s a bizarre situation. Then you have the others (March 8th parties) who bring up the issue only to ruffle political feathers and provoke their rivals. They want to embarrass them [youth in Christian parties] and make them appear hypocritical. But even they do not really devote serious effort to the cause. To them it is a political tool. They’ll drop it or raise it as it serves their interests.

Another young researcher, involved in the civil society-driven campaign for electoral reform, stated: "We were surprised to find many youth in the parties would not support lowering the voting age... I find it ironic they do all of the work for their parties’ campaigns, but then come Election Day, they can't even vote for their beloved leaders.”

29 Lebanese youth face a paradox: the more they are involved in the political parties, the less they are able to influence politics and promote their demands in the political arena. Youth political participation has been formalized into the spheres of the youth wings, which in theory should give youth a platform to voice their demands, but in practice it has meant that youth have gone from having a more visible role in politics and from being leaders in their own right, to being unofficial members of parties whose leadership excludes them from real power, influence, and decision-making while utilizing them to promote their personal and parochial

28 Faour, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
29 Moawad, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
interests. The political party leaders have no problem reaping the benefits of youth involvement, but make no genuine efforts to promote youth empowerment or youth issues whether on the national stage or within their own parties. Moreover, the Lebanese political field has become increasingly fractious and conflictual since 2005, and the ability of partisan youth activists to come together for a common cause is riddled with problems and conflicts which they are unable to transcend, despite the ambivalent and hybrid political positions they may hold, as the case of lowering the voting age shows.

Youth Demands Denied: The Limits of Youth Autonomy in the Political Parties

Thus far I have explored the autonomy partisan youth have vis-à-vis their political parties. The independence the youth wings, as I have argued, is crucial to the ability of youth to create and initiate practices in spheres of life that might otherwise be beyond the reach of the political parties, such as university campuses and clubs, youth-led civil society protests, online forums, and the social life of youth. Although these grassroots spaces may not be crucial spheres of influence for the continued power and position of the politicians, they are spheres of life that are crucial to youth. My argument is that the networking and activism of partisan youth in these spheres recreates political dynamics that reinforce Lebanon’s sectarian political field, thus constituting a mechanism of reproduction deep within Lebanese society.

There can be little doubt that the autonomy of partisan youth has clear limits. Youth wing members are given a wide berth by their leaders when it comes to planning and organizing their own activities, competing in university politics, creating online communities, even aiding in the production of new campaign materials; but when they attempt to influence
more than superficial change, their efforts are obstructed, derailed, and shut down by the same leaders to whom they give their loyalty. Partisan youth themselves have demanded more substantive changes within their parties. Over the course of interviewing Lebanese youth over several years, I learned that in many cases youth wing members were pushing for the implementation of democratic procedures and systems of accountability within their own parties. In many cases youth were advocating for greater institutionalization within their parties, specifically around the issue of internal elections (rarely held in most parties where the leaders often enjoy perpetual power).

In what follows, I discuss four cases of attempts by partisan youth to instigate changes that would have resulted in greater internal democracy and transparency. In each case, the youth were shut down or denied by their leadership. The cases are from four of the major political parties in Lebanon: the Maronite Christian Lebanese Forces, the Druze-based Progressive Socialist Party; the Sunni-based Future Movement; and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement. These cases are illustrative examples of youth attempts to reform the inner workings of their political parties and the thwarting of their efforts by the party leadership. These cases also demonstrate that the closer youth are to the centres of power—namely, to the leaders of the political parties, Lebanon’s highest echelon of political elites—the

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30 It is worth noting that the issue of internal reform, and youth demands for it, was a contentious matter among partisan youth. While all of the youth wing members I interviewed talked extensively about their efforts to push for these types of changes, it was seen as a private ‘internal matter,’ and not to be aired publicly. Indeed, it was only after several meetings that took place over several years that members would openly discuss these ‘internal’ matters with me. By contrast, in public meetings I attended where representatives from the youth wings were present, youth members would vehemently defend their parties’ decisions (about not instigating internal elections, for example) even when those decisions were clearly at their own expense. To publicly air their grievances about their parties, particularly in a forum with youth from other (rival) parties, would have been seen as a significant betrayal. See also Beyond Development (2014), which noted the vehemence with which youth defended the undemocratic practices of their parties.
less autonomy or influence they have. It is an example of the power and resilience of the Lebanese sectarian political system, and particularly the role of the elites in maintaining it.

*The Progressive Youth Organization (PYO)*

PYO Student during 2008 elections at the American University of Beirut. Photo: Elinor Bray-Collins

PYO Youth at a March 14th rally in 2008. Photo: Elinor Bray-Collins
The Progressive Youth Organization is the youth wing of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and is one of the oldest and most experienced youth organizations of all the Lebanese parties. The PYO was established in 1970 by the former leader of the PSP, Kamal Jumblatt. The PYO stands out among the traditional parties in that it is the only one that holds regular leadership elections where youth wing members directly elect their representatives. In all of the other major parties the leaders of the youth wings are chosen by the party’s leader. For this reason, the PYO is also seen as having the most autonomy and independence, the “longest leash”\textsuperscript{31} vis-à-vis the parent party. In fact, PYO members do not consider their organization to be a ‘wing’ of the PSP at all, but rather a “connected, but independent, organization for students and youth.”\textsuperscript{32} The PYO has thus been called the “most resilient against the disease of one-man parties... because many of its young members do not see Walid Jumblatt as a ‘bek’ (chieftain) but merely as party president” (Choufi 2013). The degree of independence the PYO has from the PSP, however, is open for question, as there is evidence of interference and attempts by the PSP to manipulate the PYO’s elections. This is discussed in more detail below.

The overwhelming majority of PYO members and supporters are Druze, and most come from the Chouf region of Lebanon.\textsuperscript{33} Despite officially being a secular party that is “open to everyone” its leaders claim there is a high degree of “internal cultural cohesion” in the PYO.\textsuperscript{34}

Though its young members insist otherwise, the PSP has become a party that exists first and foremost for the protection of the Druze community in Lebanon and to secure the

\textsuperscript{31} Mhanna, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
\textsuperscript{32} Achkar, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
\textsuperscript{33} According to Chatterji’s 2008 survey, 58.7% of university students who support the PSP come from the Chouf, Ba’abda, or Alaih—all Druze-dominated regions of Lebanon. A further 14.7% came from the Druze areas of the West Bekaa and Rasya.
\textsuperscript{34} Rabah, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
continuity of the Jumblatt leadership.\textsuperscript{35} It began, however, with another vision—that of the ‘socialist idealist’ Kamal Jumblatt in 1949. Kamal Jumblatt opposed the sectarian character of Lebanese politics and through the creation of the PSP sought to promote a program of secularism and socialism, and reach out beyond his base of support in the Druze community. Jumblatt senior led the Lebanese left up until the beginning of the civil war when he was assassinated—as it is widely believed—by Syrian forces. His son, Walid, still in his 20s, assumed leadership of the PSP in the midst of the civil war and quickly established a reputation as a pragmatic, sectarian chieftain.

The Jumblatt family was, and arguably still is, a feudal elite family. They have dominated Druze politics for hundreds of years and still enjoy an overwhelming majority of support among Druze.\textsuperscript{36} As such, Jumblatt has few concerns about intra-Druze competitors, which has permitted him to focus on areas of concern beyond their community (Karlin 2011). In contemporary politics, Jumblatt has concentrated on navigating the complicated reality of the Lebanese political field by constantly shifting alliances between the major blocs, as well as in relation to regional and international actors. In doing so, Jumblatt has frequently changed the balance of power in the country, which has earned him the title of ‘kingmaker’ in Lebanese

\textsuperscript{35} The Druze sect is an Islamic sect that emerged in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century. It is often considered heretical by Sunni and Shia Muslims because of the difference in traditions and beliefs based on alternative interpretations of Islam. The Lebanese Druze have survived by relying on a strong military tradition. At one time they were a leading force in Lebanese politics. In the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, for example, the Druze leader Fakhr-al-Din II played a critical role in establishing the borders of a self-governing Lebanese state. But later, in 1860, the Druze community’s military success in a war with Lebanon’s Maronite Christians facilitated the entry of Western powers—notably France—into Lebanese territory to protect the Maronites (Karlin 2011). Although their relations with Lebanon’s other sectarian populations have ebbed and flowed over the last century and a half, the Druze have a firmly established place in Lebanese politics.

\textsuperscript{36} Only a small percentage of the Druze population follow the rival party, the Lebanese Democratic Party, which is essentially the party of the Druze Arslan dynasty, one of Lebanon’s historically powerful political families but which retains only a small percentage of Druze support today.
politics. Thus, despite being a tiny minority in Lebanon (just 5% of the population), the community plays a significant role in determining outcomes in Lebanese politics. This pattern of shifting allegiances and tie-breaking also plays out at the level of student politics—as the Druze students often determine which side, March 8th or March 14th, ultimately gets to claim the presidency of the university student councils.

The PYO is the largest and one of the most important institutions within the PSP, and has close ties with the PSP leadership. As PYO activists have stated, however, “We are loyal to Walid Jumblatt, but we also want to keep some distance.” PYO members explain that they wish to preserve the autonomy they have over their own affairs, political positions, and agendas. Unlike other parties where youth members rarely speak of any internal tension between the youth wing and the parent party, PYO youth will discuss their criticism of the PSP. Many, for example, are critical of the shift away from Kamal Jumblatt’s original ideas of socialism toward the sect-centred clientelistic party that the PSP has become under Walid Jumblatt. “These are our origins and we want to return to them,” stated one AUB member of the PYO. “We want to get away from being a group for just the Druze and work towards a more consistent socialist political direction.” Despite this criticism, the power structure of the PSP and the role of Walid Jumblatt as its undisputed (and unelected) leader are not truly in question. Even with the relative independence of the PYO, however, the organization has never come close to mounting a challenge to the leadership of Walid Jumblatt. On the

39 This has been affirmed through interviews with the PYO leaders as well as one interview with a PYO member who decided to withdraw from the party because of this lack of internal democracy and adherence to the principles of Kamal Jumblatt.
contrary, Walid Jumblatt is ‘prized’ among the young members of the PYO, especially so for his pragmatism and “flexibility.”

**Interference from above in the PYO Elections**

Perhaps some of the strongest evidence that the PYO does in fact have some degree of independence as a youth wing is, ironically, the fact that in the last few years there have been reports that the leadership of the PSP has tried to infiltrate it and manipulate the outcomes of the PYO’s internal elections.\(^{40}\) Elections were held in the PYO in 2011.\(^{41}\) At the time, an individual named Ayman Kamaieddine was elected Secretary General by a wide margin over his opponent, Hussam Harb.\(^{42}\) By all accounts, the elections were viewed as democratic and fair, which, according to observers, meant that the youth organization was “still in good health, despite being the youth wing of a sectarian party headed by someone with a feudal title” (Choufi 2013).

These elections passed without incident, and PYO members were satisfied with the process and results—until 2013 when Kamaieddine, unable to find gainful employment inside Lebanon, made a decision to leave the country to secure work. With a year left in his term, early elections had to be held. Then, with little notice and no explanation or consultative process, the PYO leadership decided to suspend the elections, despite the vacancy of the top post. Questions about how and why this decision was made created huge upset in the

\(^{40}\) Obviously, if the PYO did not have any genuine autonomy from the PSP, there would be no need for interference.

\(^{41}\) Leadership elections are held every three years.

\(^{42}\) Hussam Harb is the son of a retired brigadier general, Raja Harb, who has played a key role in the PSP.
The suspension of the elections, according to party members as well as other observers, was a result of pressure from above.

Within the PYO, there are two opposing approaches. On one side there is the ‘democratic, institutional approach,’ which has been represented by current PSP Youth Commissar, Rayan Achkar, as well as the out-going Secretary General, Kamaleddine. According to multiple sources this approach has the overwhelming majority of support of the young members. On the other side, however, is the influence of the PSP leader, Walid Jumblatt, which is exercised though his son, Taymour Jumblatt, together with a former PYO leader, now turned PSP MP, Wael Abu Faour. The latter approach, as one PYO member lamented, represents “the graveyard of our dreams” (quoted in Choufi 2013).

Apparently, Taymour Jumblatt and Wael Abou Faor resent the growing influence Rayan Achkar has in the organization and see it as potentially threatening to their ability to have the PYO execute Taymour’s (i.e., Walid Jumblatt’s) orders (Choufi 2013). The PSP is therefore seeking a new PYO leadership over whom the leader would have more influence.

PYO youth explained that if elections were to have been held after Kamaleddine's departure, anyone named by Abu Faour and Taymour Jumblatt would certainly not have been elected. Thus, the decision was made at the top of the PSP to suspend the youth organization’s elections, with only “flimsy arguments” offered, and Rayan Achkar was “made to understand that he needs to resign.” PYO youth further asserted that the interference by the PSP has continued to take place in the form of a committee of three high-ranking PSP officials who were

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43 Al-Alawam, communication with author, Washington DC/Toronto, October 2013.
44 Ibid.
appointed to “follow up” the PYO. PSP members categorically denied this claim, stating that the elections were postponed in order to give the PYO “the opportunity to strengthen and develop their internal regulations” and that “Taymour does not interfere in the party’s affairs” (Khamis quoted in Choufi 2013). PYO members feel differently, however, and many expressed that this type of meddling could spell the end of the PYO as they know it—as the only youth wing of a major party in Lebanon that has some semblance of independence.

The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)

The second case study I examine is the efforts by the youth and students in the Free Patriotic Movement to combat nepotism in their party and lobby for more democratic institutions, such as internal elections.

At the end of the 1980s, as prime minister of one of two rival factions competing for power at the time, the army general Michel Aoun led a war against the Syrian army in
Lebanon.\textsuperscript{45} Aoun opposed the Syrian presence in Lebanon, which was called for by the Ta’if accord—the agreement brokered by foreign powers and Lebanese political elites that eventually ended the war. Aoun denounced the politicians who supported Ta’if as traitors and launched his “War of Liberation.” Over the months that followed and the brutal fighting which killed thousands, Aoun lost his military venture and was forced into exile in France in 1990. He remained there for 15 years while the second Lebanese republic was inaugurated, under Syrian tutelage and backed by the USA. Aoun’s supporters did not disappear, however. The movement—or “Aounist current” as it was often referred to—remained in the form of thousands of young student followers who saw in Aoun a true hero for Lebanese independence and freedom.

More than any of the other political parties in Lebanon, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), as it was named, owes its continued presence and popularity to a base of young activists at the grassroots. When Aoun finally reappeared in Lebanon in 2005, following the Independence Intifada and after the Syrian withdrawal, he was greeted by tens of thousands of youth like a long-awaited hero—and for many young Lebanese, he was exactly that. When his electoral bloc obtained 21 of the 128 seats in Parliament later that year, the party received 44,000 membership requests in a matter of a few months (ICG 2008). What started 15 years prior as a military standoff had, by 2005, evolved into a social movement comprised mainly of young, educated, middle-class Christian youth.

\textsuperscript{45} Michel Aoun is one of the most divisive figures in Lebanese Politics. To his admirers, he is “a larger-than-life figure who has come to lead Lebanon’s Christians—weak and divided since the end of the civil war—back to their former prominence, and to set the country on a path to national reconciliation and economic sustainability” (Muhanna 2009). To his critics, “Napolaoun” is a “divisive megalomaniac willing to stop at nothing to become president of Lebanon”—even join forces with his former arch-nemesis Syria and its Lebanese allies—in order to fight his way to the top of Lebanon’s political hierarchy (Fattah 2007).
There are a few reasons why Aoun became so deeply popular with youth. Aoun positioned himself as a populist and anti-establishment figure. He denounced corruption, criticized the political class, which in his eyes represented “the symbiosis of the power of money, sectarianism and militia rule,” and called for extensive reform (ibid.). He also had strong “anti-Syrian credentials” (Wimmen 2007).46 Though his “war of liberation” against Syria in 1989-1990 proved a costly failure (and resulted in his exile), his predictions about allowing Syria into the country proved correct. The Syrian presence in Lebanon following the civil war created deep resentment among the Lebanese, and in particular the Christians, as people suffered under the “arbitrary and parasitic reign of the Syrian secret services and their Lebanese stooges” (ibid.). Lebanon under Syrian tutelage meant political repression, restrictions on civil liberties, electoral fraud, and, crucially, the deepening penetration of clientelism and corruption into the state. These circumstances inspired resistance among many youth, but specifically among educated, middle-class Christian youth who felt politically isolated in the postwar era of Pax Syriana.

After Aoun’s exile, and the banning of the Lebanese Forces in 1994, there was no other leader or political structure to organize or build on the resentment toward Syrian presence. While some youth activists were loyal to the militant, Christian, Lebanese Forces, far more were drawn to the informal and secular movement in support of Aoun. The LF’s Samir Geagea, after all, had gained the reputation of being one of the vilest of the warlords. This was not so much because Geagea’s acts were any worse than any of the other leaders, but because Geagea’s

46 Although brief, Wimmen’s article is one of the best pieces written on Aoun’s popularity post-2005. It is one of the few that identifies the phenomenon of youth support for the movement—though it does not go into depth on the youth issue. I draw on Wimmen’s insights here as well as on those in Muhanna 2009.
biggest battles were often against his own sect. Many in the Christian communities could never forgive him. Moreover, many Christian youth of the educated middle class had seen their community’s share of power decrease because of Sunni dominance in the postwar era; and as members of the middle class, they had lost the most from the deepening of systemic clientelism after the war. French geographer and anthropologist Beltram Dumontier, who has conducted fieldwork in the Beirut suburb of ‘Ayn al-Rummana, notes that, whereas those at the bottom of the social ladder use wasṭa (connections) as a matter of survival, and those at the top level hold the keys, “it is those in the middle who could do better for themselves if the system were to become more open and meritocratic” (quoted in Wimmen 2007). Aoun’s calls for “stamping out corruption and clientelism” in the state thus had strong appeal.

The FPM became an expert at adopting an “activist stance,” positioning themselves as the outsiders in Lebanese politics and depicting March 14th as the same class of politicians who profited from the Syrian presence in the postwar era and the cause of Lebanon’s many problems (Muhanna 2009). Many, however, dismiss Aoun’s proclamations as ‘sheer populism’ and see his vows to “confront political feudalism” as little more than self-serving, political jabs at his March 14th rivals Saad al-Hariri, Walid Jumblatt, and Amin Gemayel. Indeed, as one observer noted, out of all the politicians at that time, Aoun would have had “absolutely nothing to lose and much to gain” by acting on his pledges to clean up government (Gambill 2007).

Whether genuine, self-serving, or something in between, Aoun’s fiery activist speech inspired many youth. The young followers of Aoun see themselves first and foremost as

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47 A predominantly Maronite Christian quarter of Beirut adjacent to the Shi’a dominated areas (where Hezbollah enjoys widespread popularity), Shiyah and Harat Hurayk.
activists rather than partisans, fighting for political reform, greater transparency, and a truly democratic Lebanese State. As a prominent member of the FPM explained in an interview in August 2005: “Our goal is not small. We want to change the entire system, and we are the only party who can do it.” By 2006, the FPM had become a fully legal political party and thousands of youth joined its ranks—something that many of its young members had at one time never dreamed of doing. Explains one ‘Aounie’ who was active in the years leading up to 2005:

I never thought I would join a political party. I thought the political parties were corrupt. I was an activist—the parties were part of the problem, not the solution! I was with the tayyar [the Aounist movement] because these were the only people who thought like I did about the Syrians. We shared this. We risked ourselves for what we believed in.49

Despite their anti-establishment origins, however, 60,000 Lebanese are now card-carrying members of the FPM party and, according to leaders, nearly 70% of them are under the age of 30 (LeFort 2014). In describing this group of young activists, Sami Ofeish, a political scientist at the University of Balamand, states: “All these young people who took to the streets back in 2005 learned one very important thing, politics to them is no longer something that happens on a different planet. They had the experience that if they take action, they can actually make things happen” (quoted in Wimmen 2007).

These young activists, turned political party members, believed in their ability to create change, and believed their party was the vehicle through which their change could be made. Yet, despite the remarkable politicization of young Lebanese who fueled the success of the FPM and who gained a reputation of “standing tall in the face of repression,” today the FPM is a long

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48 Alain Aoun, interview with author, Beirut, August 2005.
way from representing a genuinely new type of political player on the Lebanese political field, let alone undermining the status quo. It has instead become, as Wimmen (2007) argues, a “movement centred around a single charismatic leader, who is venerated to the verge of personality cult, with a notable tendency to establish a strong family presence at the top echelons.” Moreover, despite the presence of numerous prominent and respected youth members, youth have been almost completely excluded from the upper ranks, in favour of Aoun’s preference to place his family in the highest positions. What happened to the party? And, more specifically, what has happened to the youth activism that drove this party’s initial success?

**The “Sectarian Secularists”**

While it is true that the FPM is more secular in its outlook and operations and professes to challenge the corruption, clientelism, and nepotism that characterizes the Lebanese political field, many of the actions of the party, and the leader in particular, betray the fact the FPM has not fulfilled its stated goal of becoming something new, but rather has adopted many of the same practices it professes to undermine. It is widely believed, for example, that Aoun’s greatest ambition is to become president, and that he will stop at nothing to achieve this goal. Aoun’s critics see him as threatening to disrupt the delicate balance of power with his calls to “confront political feudalism,” and as using the concepts of “national interest, the constitutional process or the integrity of institutions as weapons in the eternal struggle for power and position” (Wimmen 2007). Others see his secularist rhetoric as underpinned with

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50 Wimmen (2007) refers to the FPM as the “sectarian secularists.”
sectarian sentiment. The Aounists, who are mainly Maronite Christians, still feel marginalized by other Lebanese and primarily by the Sunnis, as manifested in the political machinery of the Future movement and the dominance of the Hariri family. Thus, Aoun’s demands for greater secularism has overtones of sectarianism as they are mainly directed against a perceived Sunni takeover of state institutions. As one young political activist stated: “What they mean by ‘more secularism’ is ‘less Sunnis, more Christians’.” The FPM also capitalizes on Christian fears of being ‘drowned’ in a sea of more than 250 million Muslim Arabs surrounding Lebanon, the only country in the region to guarantee them full legal equality (Wimmen 2007).

Given these conditions, one of Aoun’s most controversial moves since his return to Lebanon has been the alliance with Hezbollah. No partnership in the post-Syrian era has garnered more attention and speculation than the pact between the secular nationalist party of the former army General who built his career on being the champion of the anti-Syrian resistance and the party most intimate with and supportive of Syria—the conservative, deeply Shiite, party of Hezbollah. The two parties signed a memorandum of understanding in February 2006 which addressed joint positions on issues ranging from the nature of democracy and electoral reform to the security sector in Lebanon. Many of the young FPM partisans considered this an outrageous and “inexplicable” step. One young FPM supporter stated:

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51 Mhanna, interview with author, Beirut, September 2009. Hence Wimmen’s “Sectarian Secularist” label.
52 Not all of his supporters were in favour of his alliance with Hezbollah: Many young FPM partisans, as well as members of leftist parties and opponents of political sectarianism, considered it a courageous step by two parties eager to put a long history of antagonism behind them. For others—including many FPM supporters who were already uneasy with their party’s opposition to the burgeoning March 14th movement—the memorandum with Hezbollah was “a step too far” (Muhanna, 2009). Joining forces with the party that many saw as Syria’s proxy in Lebanon was more than they could handle. To some young supporters the decision was “incomprehensible” (Khoury, interview with author, Beirut, May 2009). Michael Young also notes that while this is not the first attempt by the political establishment to influence Hezbollah’s activities through negotiation, what is unique about the FPM approach is the degree to which it seems to be based on a willingness to give Hezbollah an equal stake in articulating a vision for producing long-term stability in Lebanon.
“Initially I felt betrayed. This was my movement. The movement I risked my safety for and gave years of my life to. I threw all my support behind the General when he returned. And what did he go and do!? He betrayed everything we had fought for.”

Speculation abounds on the rationale behind this move. Most commonly, it was seen as Aoun’s attempt to catapult his way to the presidency after the expiration of Emile Lahoud’s term in 2007. Some analysts claim this is plausible because of a theory that Aoun reached an agreement with the Syrian regime which facilitated his return to Lebanon in April 2005, on the condition that he not join the March 14th coalition, which called for the impeachment of the Syria-backed president, Emile Lahoud. Others, however, claim that Aoun was willing to join forces with March 14th and oust Lahoud, but only if he would be designated the man to replace him. Elias Muhanna (2009) notes, however, that many underestimate exactly how deep the animosity runs between Aoun and the leaders of March 14th—indeed, Lebanon observer Gary Gambil states that despite the anti-Syrian rhetoric of the March 14th coalition, that they would have rather had the Syrian backed politician, Emile Lahoud, in the presidency than accept Aoun’s ascension (Gambil 2007). Aoun has similarly deep bitterness toward the leaders of March 14th. To him and his party these politicians were little better than the Syrian occupiers themselves. Rafiq Hariri and Walid Jumblatt in particular were “unambiguous symbols of the

54 When Aoun returned from exile after the Independence Intifada in 2005, he was not taken very seriously by the leading politicians of March 14th (the anti-Syrian opposition) at that time. This was clear in the lead-up to the elections of 2005, when, in the complex bargaining over the number of slots on cross-confessional electoral lists, Aoun was offered only a meagre number of seats in return for joining the opposition (Muhanna 2009). Aoun rejected joining the opposition and instead ran a list of “no-name” candidates who, to everyone’s surprise, won the majority of those seats, leaving the opposition with a small majority over March 8th. As it turned out, Aoun was supported by the majority of Christians—including those who had taken to the streets earlier that year to demand independence. More precisely, Aoun secured 40% of the Christian vote in 2005, a share which rose to a whopping 70% in the Christian areas (Lebanese pollster Abbo Saad, quoted in Muhanna 2009).
corruption and cronyism of the Syrian era, and the primary beneficiaries of the Ta’if Accord,” which had ushered in Syrian hegemony in the first place and redistributed power within both the legislative and executive branches of government at the expense of Lebanese Christians (Muhanna 2009). Also, after the elections of 2005, Aoun considered himself, not Hariri, to be entitled to lead the anti-Syrian movement, especially given he had emerged as the most popular Christian leader in Lebanon. Thus, when it was clear that Aoun was shut out of the March 14th coalition, observers say, he looked elsewhere for a partnership to strengthen his influence, namely, to the number one enemy of March 14th, Hezbollah.

There are other interpretations of the FPM’s alliance with Hezbollah that see it as much deeper than pure pragmatism. For one thing, the agendas of the two parties are, in many ways, closer to each other than the other more clientelist, neopatrimonial parties of Lebanon. For example, both are dedicated to stamping out corruption and cronyism in politics and the economy, and both emphasize state reform. For another, the Shiite-Maronite partnership also provides a degree of inter-sectarian stability in the deeply polarized country. Both parties felt isolated in the rising tide of the March 14th dominance post-2005, led by Hariri. And both parties represent minorities in a region dominated by Sunnis. Regardless of the reasons behind it, the pact between the FPM and Hezbollah has passed the test of time and has remained stable despite turbulent episodes including the Israeli war in 2006 and the violent confrontations between March 8th and March 14th in 2008, which included the occupation of West Beirut by Hezbollah and their allies.

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55 As one FPM insider put it “They are still fighting the battle of the civil war of 1989” (Chamoun, interview with author, Beirut, December 2010).
56 Hezbollah is seen as being ‘cleaner’ and less corruptible than other parties (Cammett 2014).
While the alliance with Hezbollah alienated some of the FPM base, most have come to support and even celebrate it. In fact, the memorandum of understanding between the two parties was written by student members from both parties. As Ziad Abs, a prominent student activist with the FPM (currently a professional in Beirut), explained: “It took months to come this agreement. It was a very long and difficult process. It was not just thrown together for strategic reasons. We worked very hard on every word, every paragraph. We went back and forth between us, our leadership and them and their leadership. The process was a good one and built the trust between us.”

Whether it was based in realpolitik or deeper ideological considerations, the real motivations that lie behind the FPM’s strategic partnership with Hezbollah remains difficult to discern. Moreover, the extent to which the party is truly committed to secularism or underpinned by sectarian calculations is also up for debate. Where we find a more telling picture of the FPM’s inability to become a new type of political party in Lebanon is in its internal politics. It is here where we see how student and youth activists have been sidelined and shut down, as their concerns and grievances are generally ignored by their leader.

**Students Sideline**

One of the most hotly debated issues within the FPM has been the process (or lack thereof) of institutionalization, a process that began when the FPM made the transition to becoming a fully-fledged political party, which it officially did in 2006. It is over this issue—building more transparent, democratic internal policies and practices—that the most tension arises between FPM youth and the older generation of FPM supporters. “We wanted to work on our internal hierarchy and organization and emphasise our commitment to secularism and
democracy,” said one student activist.  

Says another party insider who was instrumental in the creation of the party, “We wanted to form a new type of political relation with our members, based on ideas and not the partisan practices of the past.”  

Since the general’s return, however, little more than a basic structure has been developed within the FPM, much to the frustration and discontent of the student and youth members, in particular a core group who were the student activists during the period of Aoun’s exile. Their biggest issue of contention is internal elections. The FPM leadership promised to hold internal elections in 2008 and even created a central committee to oversee the process, but repeatedly failed to do so. Citing “logistical and administrative” reasons for the delays, General Aoun proceeded to cultivate and groom his son-in-law, Gibran Bassil, to take over as party president. Aoun’s tendency to handpick his relatives for top positions, and the favouritism Aoun has shown toward Bassil in particular—a figure who lacks wide support among the base, especially among the youth—has created deep conflict and division. On the FPM’s discussion board, the Orange Room, members denounce the hypocrisy of their party, citing the nepotism and lack of transparency in a party

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59 The extent of the institutionalization was the establishment of a pyramidal hierarchy: the president overseeing a central committee which in turn oversees the work of 16 different committees, each organized according to a function and/or region. Committees include: syndicates and unions, youth and students, media and political affairs, diaspora, schools, etc. Interestingly, the party created two kinds of memberships: the “activists” (al-multazimun) and “associated members” (al-Muaddidun). The former type has the right to participate in the meetings of the local and national councils of the party as well as the right to apply for a position within the party. The latter have fewer obligations, but are ineligible to assume a position within the FPM. Both types of members have to be committed to the party’s rules and regulations and to hold party-issued cards. The total number of both types of members is approximately 60,000 (Chatterji, 2008; LeFort 2013). Students, however, are not required to hold formal membership in the FPM. This is due to the legalities of the law of associations which prohibits members under 20 years of age, but also because it makes it easier for the FPM at attract a wider youth audience (Favier 2004, 194). Students are under the supervision of the student and youth committee of the party, which is run by youth who are official party members.
that criticizes its rivals for exactly this behaviour. “Aoun has managed to concentrate all the power in the hands of his own family. He has the ultimate control,” explained a party insider who was also one of the former student activists in the period leading up to 2005.

Many young FPM supporters stated that though they wanted internal elections they were willing to accept the delays because they did not want the party to suffer from internal divisions before the national elections took place in June 2009. As one young activist stated:

The General knows there is division in the movement. We will clash with each other in these (internal) elections. Since we are coming up to the parliamentary elections it is not the right time to have them. How healthy would it be to raise these issues now? We will wait until we see a chance to advance our cause. We have to advance it step by step.

There have also been concerns raised over the way in which the party’s finances have been managed. After the Israeli war in 2006, for example, several contracts to rebuild the southern suburbs were given directly to Aoun’s family members. Moreover, donations received during elections, including the financial contributions from expatriate Lebanese who supported the FPM, were paid directly into the personal accounts of Aoun and his family members, or into the accounts of the OTV (Orange Television) which is managed by one of his other sons-in-laws, Roy al-Hashem (ICG 2008).

Although the inner dynamics and politics are typically guarded, several reports as well as some interviewees described the situation in the FPM as being divided between two main

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60 Furthermore, Aoun does not have any sons, but two of his three daughters are married to leading figures in the movement. The favouritism and subsequent appointment of his son-in-law as the party’s Vice President has thus been described as a “double insult” by party insiders who have noted not only the creation of the Aoun family dynasty, but also the exclusion of women from top posts. Indeed, the FPM has also been criticized for failing to appoint women to leadership positions despite having numerous prominent female activists within their ranks.

61 This became public knowledge when Wikileaks published a number of internal emails from the FPM.

camps (ibid.). On one side, there are the younger members who make up most of the rank and
file of the party. These young members are represented internally by a few prominent
members, now in their early 40s, who were student activists during the period of Aoun’s exile,
as well as by a prominent party member who still resides in France.63 This side represents the
‘base’ of the party and is behind the drive for greater internal institutionalization and
democracy. One of these prominent FPM activists stated, “We want this to be a truly
democratic movement. We are against clientelism and corruption in our own party and in the
country. We will push for this transformation from within.”64

On the other side are those more ‘traditional’ members, including many older followers
of General Aoun. The same FPM activist explained:

The old timers are satisfied with the way it is now, which is somewhere between a
movement without hierarchy and institutions and a party... the General is here, we have
our bodies, but it is not formally organized. It is still relying on informal structures. The
old timers are just satisfied with this. There is a big, big debate about this. The old timers
are satisfied with being at the top, and working in this informal way, in a clientelistic
way. This way they are more empowered. They benefit because of their age benefit,
their status, etc. Whereas the young are only empowered to some extent. The old
timers say ‘but you, the youth, are influencing our psychology’ and we are saying, ‘no,
that is not enough, let us be institutional. Let’s institutionalise this. You shouldn’t have
influence just because you are Mr. X, it should be fair, and it should be institutionalised.’
This is a big part of our internal debates right now.65

The main concern of these members is the creation of institutions within the party and the
scheduling of the regular internal elections. One member described how this group prepared an

63 It should be noted that even this side, however, includes members of Aoun’s family, namely, his nephew, Alain
Aoun, who was a student activist in the postwar era. Unlike Gibran Bassil, Alain Aoun is not ‘close’ to his uncle.
However, as will be discussed, he has shown that he can still be influenced by Aoun and thus ultimately considered
part of the family dynasty despite his activism within the party.
64 Ziad Abs, interview with author, Beirut, February 2008.
65 Ibid.
extensive program and proposals for internal elections only to have them quashed by the leadership:

We prepared a big campaign about how it should be done. Not just in the way some big guy goes on TV and says ‘You should vote for me,’ but real platforms and elections. Unfortunately, our proposal was not taken up and the elections were delayed. But this is our continual cause.66

In fact, the demands of the youth within the FPM have been subject to more than simply delays and unfulfilled promises. They have been subject to attempts from the leadership, including Aoun himself, to discredit individuals within the group. In 2008, for example, it was reported that Aoun reproached those involved and formed a disciplinary committee to investigate alleged “corruption” among this group inside FPM, charges that were reportedly made by none other than Gibran Bassil, Aoun’s chosen successor.67

Even ‘unofficial’ youth members in the FPM’s student and youth wings have been let down by the party’s lack of interest in their concerns. When youth members pressured the leadership to support the bill lowering the voting age, they were, initially, proud that their party supported it. When parliament voted on the bill in February 2010, however, the FPM ended up rejecting it citing the usual sectarian calculations (i.e., that it should not pass without a similar amendment that would allow Lebanese citizens living abroad to vote in national elections as well). Youth’s reactions to this rejection were mixed. While some supported the fact that the expat voting must be included, others felt let down by their party. One member stated: “the


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promises (of the party) proved today to be void of meaning and seriousness. The young people will remember.”

Finally, in August 2015, nearly a decade after the party was formed, the FPM held internal elections. They were, according to many reports, a deeply flawed affair. Amid allegations of interference from FPM president General Aoun himself, Gibran Bassil’s only real challenger (the ‘opposition’ candidate, Alain Aoun) suddenly dropped out, leaving Bassil in a virtually uncontested race. Moreover, in the months preceding the elections, Bassil (who held the post of VP) changed the internal rules of the FPM in order to strengthen the president’s prerogatives with regard to the politburo, with an eye to consolidating his power as president after his victory (Young August 28, 2015). Overall, the long awaited, highly anticipated internal elections were seen by the young rank and file of the FPM as “a farce,” a “pathetic family affair,” but not, however, a surprise. As one young FPM activist wrote on the day the decision to hold elections was announced, “the FPM leaders have finally agreed to hold internal elections this September. Given this decision, I would like to congratulate, in advance, Gibran Bassil on his victory.”

As for Aoun’s young followers, when listening to them speak or reading their comments on the Orange Room discussion forum, it is difficult to distinguish whether their priority is for Aoun to become the undisputed leader of the Christians, or to achieve the secular, reformist

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68 Hanna, interview with author, Beirut, February 2010.
69 Alain Aoun was quoted as saying the “time is not ripe.”
agenda that he espouses. The youth of the FPM are an example of what I call the ‘hybridity’ of youths’ politics. They seek transparency and democracy, yet they remain committed to ‘GMA’ and continue to follow him like a ‘saviour’ despite his hypocrisy when it comes to his leadership and management of the FPM (Young 2010, 228).

The Lebanese Forces Student Association (LFSA)

The third case study I discuss is the Lebanese Forces Students Association (LFSA). Like the FPM, the Lebanese Forces had a loyal following of youth and students who, though not as numerous as the FPM, were an integral part of the anti-Syrian activism and organizing that took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The LF itself began as an off-shoot of the Kata’eb party. It was officially formed in 1976 in reaction to the armed Palestinian presence in Lebanon at the time. The LF played a contentious and bloody role during the civil war, often perpetrating violence against other Christians, and thereby gaining a negative reputation among many of their own sect. The LF supported the Ta’if Agreement in 1989, turned themselves into a political party, and laid down their arms in exchange for a role within the new government. Samir Geagea, formerly a warlord, took up the leadership of the new political party. The period from 1992 to 1994 was used to train a new generation of political leaders. Geagea had hoped to revitalize a base of citizen support, and convince people that the door was closed on the LF’s militia past. However, in what was widely seen as an illegitimate trial, Geagea was accused of sponsoring an attack on a church in the Christian area of Jounieh, sentenced to life imprisonment, and incarcerated in 1994. Like the FPM, the LF was then banned from politics and forced underground.
This clandestine student movement, which adopted the return of their leader and anti-Syrian activism (Syria was behind the leader’s imprisonment) as their main cause, lasted for more than a decade. These students are credited with ‘keeping the party alive’ while Samir Geagea was imprisoned and until his release.

During the years the LF was officially banned in Lebanon (1994-2005), LF youth continued their activities on university campuses and through the Internet. LF students were even in regular, close contact with Strida Geagea, the wife of Samir Geagea (herself active in the Lebanese Forces party through student activism at the Lebanese American University), who in turn was the only person allowed to see her husband while he was in prison.\(^2\)

In 2005, along with their FPM counterparts as well as youth from the PYO and independent movements, LF youth took centre stage in the Independence Intifada. It was after Geagea was released from prison on 26 July 2005 following an amnesty law passed by a large majority in Parliament that the LF concentrated on re-establishing the party’s activist apparatus and the Lebanese Forces Students Association (LFSA) was officially formed.

Upon his return Geagea announced a promise to transform the LF into a “party of organizations and institutions” (quoted in al-Qazzi 2013b) At this time the LF also implemented political party training sessions for senior figures (which, as stated above, the LFSA had a hand in), strengthened their financial foundation by recovering the party’s property which had been confiscated in 1994 by the intelligence services, and worked on cementing their presence among the diaspora.\(^3\) In terms of their domestic support base, one of the main missions of the

\(^2\) The Lebanese American University (LAU) is another fairly prestigious, private university in Lebanon.
\(^3\) The LF opened offices and representations in Africa, the Gulf, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and strengthened their presence in Venezuela, Brazil, and Europe (ICG 2008).
party was to expand beyond their traditional areas of influence. They sought to reach out to communities in other regions of the country, as well as to the urban middle classes and youth. This was accomplished partly through the party’s efforts at building support among university students. The youth of the LFSA was the driving force behind this initiative.

Six years later, in 2011, the LF held a ‘founding conference’ at which the internal bylaws were agreed upon. Among the changes that were institutionalized at this time were regular elections—internal leadership elections were to be held every four years. Though five years have passed since the implementation of these new bylaws, there have been no leadership elections scheduled as of yet. The party also declared they were granting official memberships to new members and especially young members (21 years of age and over). According to the LF Secretary General, the aim was to integrate supporters into the official membership base, especially among the ‘new generation’ and students. However, restrictions were placed on new members, including the rule that each new applicant had to have two existing members personally vouch for them. According to one observer, this provided evidence of the fact that the LF had no intention of reaching a larger public beyond the ‘cultural intimacy’ of their Maronite base, and that it was comfortable with its status as a Christian party with a deeply sectarian orientation (al-Qazzi 2013b; Haugbolle 2002).

The LF is very hierarchical and has a clear chain of command from the top down. One observer of the LF described it as having a “high degree of internal discipline. It is basically a militia structure that has had party structure transposed onto it. They can point to their new bylaws and institutions, but to be sure these democratic structures will never produce any
Indeed, the LF is highly protective of, even secretive about, their inner workings. Even researchers or journalists wanting to study the youth wing are steered to the LFSA’s well-groomed ‘public and international relations’ representatives. In this way, LF’s “modus operandi is very similar to that of Hezbollah, giving the two organizations the distinction of being the only groups in Lebanon to operate in this manner” (Al-Qazzi 2013a).

The LF has numerous departments, each dealing with specific issues such as media, security, finance, political relations, church relations, etc. All of these departments have heads who are linked to the one person at the top of the pyramid: Samir Geagea. Geagea follows this system with precision. It allows him to “interfere in – as well as monitor – the work of the departments” (al-Qazzi 2013a). The LFSA is no exception. The president of the LFSA has weekly meetings with party leader Samir Geagea. The purpose of the meetings was described by an LFSA executive as “a weekly report on rumours or trends circulating among youth and students... we hear the rumours of the youth and their families and we give this perspective to our leaders. We are the eyes and ears of the party at the grassroots.”

The structure of the LFSA mirrors that of the LF. It operates officially as a department within the LF as opposed to having status as its own organization (such as the PYO, for example). The LFSA is headed by a president, who oversees the executive committee members, who in turn oversee a series of regional and university-based departments, each with their own presidents and executive committee. With so many positions to fill, LFSA members quickly

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74 Mhanna, interview with author. Beirut. April 2009
75 Habschi, interview with author, Achrafieh, February 2008.
receive an official title after they join. As one member of the AUB LFSA committee explained, “everyone gets a title. The students like this. It makes them feel important.”

True, everyone may have a title, but no one in the LSFA has an official voice in party decisions, including in the election of their own leader. Like the other major parties, with the exception of the PYO, the LFSA does not hold internal elections. The president of the LFSA is appointed by Geagea himself. The members of the executive committee, as well as the heads of the various departments within the LFSA (department of French Universities, American universities, colleges, foreign relations, public relations, etc.), are in turn appointed by a selection committee made up of senior LFSA members, including the president. The selection process for these positions includes the nomination of four potential candidates made by the outgoing person, and then the final choice is made by the committee. The president of the LFSA has the final say over who is given the position.

Members of the LFSA complain about the lack of democracy and transparency in the appointment of their leaders but felt that the issue of internal reform was not prioritized because of the ‘situation’ in Lebanon. Georges, a university student and an LFSA member, put it this way: “We want to be able to vote for them, it is our right. I think we will be able to do this eventually, I believe the Dr. [Samir Geagea] wants us to be able to exercise our democratic rights in the party, but he cannot implement change now because of the political tension.” Another student stated, “Yes, we want to vote. It is a good practice, even if we would still respect the Dr.’s choice. It would make a difference for the long-term health of our party.” Another long-time youth activist in the party furthered this view stating, “our party is still not

76 Kalim, interview with author, Beirut, November 2007.
based in merit. It is based in connections. If we are to survive this must be changed.”77 To date, however, the LF has not allowed the LFSA to hold its own elections, nor has it held its own leadership elections. The demands of youth to be able to elect their own leader have been ignored by the party.

The desire for internal reform has created tension within the LF, albeit to a lesser extent than has been the case with the FPM. Part of the tension stems from the success the party has had in expanding into new areas and communities, especially in the realm of youth and students. The LF has had many new youth join the party which has resulted in the party being pulled in two different directions—one by a support base still marked by the militia experience, and, on the other, by a new generation in the process of being established. The ‘new generation’ consisted mainly of youth and students who fall under the jurisdiction of the LFSA. It is among them that the desire for internal reform is strongest. Though youth members say they want elections within the parent party, their efforts are focused on greater freedom and democracy within their own youth wing.

In one example, the LFSA was invited to attend an international event for youth in political parties organized by a Danish Aid organization. Thirty youth representatives of political parties in Lebanon and Denmark gathered in a hotel in Brummana for a six-day Political Advocacy seminar during which they drafted a document entitled, “Youth Declaration on Lowering the Voting Age.” Many of the group members had never met before, let alone worked together for a common goal. Stated one participant, “This showed us how much we don’t know each other, and how much dialogue and understanding is still needed between us. We carry the

77 Author’s group interview with LFSA members in Bcharre, January 2008.
same biases and stereotypes of each other that have existed since the war.” 78 Though the process went well, the ‘traditional’ arguments were nevertheless voiced by the parties. The LFSA representative, for example, strongly advocated for the ‘full package’ of reforms, referring to the granting of expatriate voting rights if the voting age was to be lowered. Despite the fact that the group obliged and redrafted the declaration to the satisfaction of the LFSA representative, at the very last minute he was forbidden to sign the document.

In another example, during an international meeting of youth leaders of political parties in London in 2009 held by an international peacebuilding NGO called International Alert, the youth leaders showed they were well aware of their limits and openly discussed the realities of what they could or could not achieve together. The PYO leader stated:

We would all like to be able to do more, but we need to focus on what we can actually accomplish. We all know that if Youssef (referring to the Hezbollah participant) decides to discuss his party’s arms, he will be kicked out when he goes home. We have to stick to the places where we can actually make change. 79

There are a few things to point out about these examples. First, youth members of the parties will regurgitate, almost to the word, the stance of their leaders. One representative of a small secular independent party bemoaned this tendency:

Where is our role as youth? Are we not reproducing the same fears and mistakes of our ‘mentors’ from the first generation? Haven’t we learned anything? I ask, are we even willing to learn from the past? It seems like we have a tendency to very successfully reproduce old-generation politics in our dynamics between youth, and that is not very constructive. 80

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Second, even though the limits to what youth members of parties are allowed to do are, without a doubt, set by the top of the party, it is often the senior youth wing leaders who enforce the party line. Whether they are directed to do so or do so on their own accord is an open question. While youth wing leaders insist they have autonomy over their own affairs, given that the majority of them are hand-picked appointees from the top the result is the same. Despite their efforts to create a more meritocratic and democratic youth wing, the LFSA has strict limits, which are often self-imposed. Thus, though it has increased its institutional structures on paper, the LF remains a highly organized, top-down party, which is at once extremely effective at attracting new youth, and also deeply resistant to their demands for change.

The Future Youth Sector (FYS)

“It’s basically a group of teenagers – it’s one of the main teenage parties in Lebanon”\(^81\)

The final case study I examine is the Future Youth Sector. The Future Movement (Tayyar Al-Mustaqbal) was created by Rafiq Hariri in 1992. It was not until two years after his assassination in 2007, however, that The Future Movement reformulated itself into a political party, and only in 2009 was it officially registered.

\(^{81}\) http://www.shoofimafi.com/lebanese_groups_clubs.cfm?country=International
The Lebanese Sunni community has been the least organized politically. Unlike the other sects, there has never been a dominant Sunni-based party with equally strong representation in all areas of the country. Rather, even at the height of Sunni mobilization (1969-1982), there were several groups under which Lebanon’s Sunna were organized. Only Nasserism—as a movement rather than an organized force, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—as a structured political-military organization, came close to providing an umbrella for all Sunni factions, including the ‘traditional’ Sunni zu’ama (Sayigh 2013). Hariri’s Future Movement is certainly the most significant organization to capture Sunni loyalty since then, but according to many analysts the Future Movement is more of a vehicle for mobilizing votes at election time than a fully-fledged political party or movement (Cammett 2014; Sayigh 2013).

82 The most prominent being the Murabitoun in Beirut, the Popular Nasserite Organization in Sidon, and the 24th of Tishrin Movement (followed by the Islamic Unification Movement) in Tripoli.
When Future reorganized after 2005, some effort was devoted to consolidating the wave of youth support and participation that emerged after Hariri’s assassination. The Future Youth Sector was thus created in 2007. Prior to this, youth involvement had been organized under the auspices of the ‘Future Youth Association’ (FYA)—an organization created by AUB students Nader Naqueeb and Nadar Hariri as well as others, such as Bilal Hamad and Karim Said, in 1995 and officially recognized on 14 May 1997. The purpose of the FYA was to provide an organizational affiliation for students who had received educational scholarships from the Hariri foundation and to involve them in volunteer and promotional activities.\textsuperscript{83} It was not until 2005 that the FYA seriously entered the political fray. In the wake of the Hariri’s death, FYA was propelled into the political spotlight and began to take on a more political purpose—demanding the truth about Hariri’s assassination, and officially joining the sovereignty movement. During the heady days of February and March 2005, the president of the FYA, Nader Naqueeb, was highly visible, doing televised interviews, giving political speeches, rallying youth at protests, etc. This is also when the FYA attracted many new followers—namely, many Sunni youth who had, up till that point, been apolitical.

Between 2005 and 2007, the FYS had the largest increases in membership (Chatterji 2008). What is more, Sunni students demonstrated a high degree of loyalty, according to Chatterji’s survey, by the fact that 92.6% of Sunni students voted for the Future candidates in their campus elections.\textsuperscript{84} The Future Movement leadership also invested significant financial

\textsuperscript{83} These scholarships are open to all Lebanese university students and were part of Rafiq Hariri’s vision to “create an army of educated people” for Lebanon.

\textsuperscript{84} Ironically, despite their voting loyalty, FYS members appear to be the least politically integrated of the youth organizations, according to Chatterji’s survey, which was indicated by the diverse ways in which Sunni youth defined themselves politically. While Sunni youth are generally consistent in their love for Rafiq Hariri, they are inconsistent in their other political attitudes and views. This is also reflective of the fact that the Sunni community
resources in the FYS. Senior members of the Future Movement described the FYS as the most active section of the party, referring to it as the “heart of the party machine” and the “driving force” of the party. The youth of the FYS agree. One senior FYS member explained how the youth wing has assisted the FM because they actually have had more election experience than their parent party, and more political experience than other sectors of the FM:

The Future Movement, as a political party, is very new to elections – we aren’t. We have run in many elections in every university campus in Lebanon. They have only been involved in national elections once as a political party! We go through the election process every year in the universities. We know what it means to have a platform and run candidates, and campaign. We also have way more members than any other section in the party and we can get them mobilised at a moment’s notice. We make more political speeches, issue more communiqués, and hold more press conferences than any other section in the party. Look at the syndicates section, for example, they are always too focused on their own internal dynamics – you rarely see them in the public eye. We are way more visible. We are the only section with our own website.85

After the FYS was officially created in 2007, its leaders attempted to establish internal institutions, clear organizational structures, and internal regulations.86 The VP of FYS at the time astutely explained:

We are obsessed by institutionalisation. We truly want to become a real political party. But it is an uphill battle. We are basically taking a system of patronage and trying to create the structure and culture of a political party. Right now everything is based on

in Lebanon as a whole has traditionally been much less politically organized, as well as the fact that there are other, more radical Sunni groups who have also begun to attract youth support, as discussed above.

86 The FYO is headed by a president who is appointed by the parent party (until 2009 this was Ahmad Hariri, the nephew of Rafiq Hariri; as of this writing the president is Wissam Chebli). The president, together with two vice presidents (one in charge of students and organizations, the other in charge of media and politics), a treasurer, and a foreign and international relations officer are the positions that constitute the FYO’s executive committee. The next level of hierarchy is the central committee, which is comprised of the heads of the offices in each of the Lebanese regions as well as the head of high schools and the head for universities. Under the central committee are the regional offices. Each region has its own office, with a local head, treasurer, and representatives for each high schools and university in that specific region. Every regional office has its own executive committee. Though there are no official data (according to the senior members of the FYO), the number of people who hold some sort of position with the FYO is approximately 500. These members are what are referred to as ‘active members.’ In terms of FYO supporters, however, senior members claimed the numbers are easily in the tens of thousands.
favours and relationships. It’s all informal. But what is in the future if some idiot comes and runs the show? Without an institution around him, everything would fall apart. He needs a system that works and that surrounds him. It is the same for us; we have to have a strong structure and strong processes so that people can be held accountable for their actions. This is what we hope we can create in the FYS. In this regard we are far more advanced than they [i.e., the parent party] are!87

A clear example of this was the request of the FYS to be given an annual budget by their parent party, for which they would be held accountable, a simple request that was never granted. A FYS member explained:

It is not because they don’t want to give us the money. In fact, we deliberately asked for less than the total of what they ended up giving us last year, just to make a point. They denied us because they prefer to dole out the money piecemeal. They want to keep tight control. So if we want money, one of us has to go ask for a favour.88

Another member stated:

The budget is a very, very hot topic. We were saying we want a budget. We are building a website, we are publishing a magazine, we are setting up an office, etc. But then others get mad. The people around Saad, they get jealous, because we are getting so much attention. We did get these things done and people did get angry. Many people were not happy about how much we are doing with the FYS.89

FYS youth describe their efforts to create accountable institutions, even within their own ranks, as being “highly unpopular” among Saad Hariri’s inner circle of advisors, who have an interest in maintaining a “very informal and loose system of organization” when it came to the FYS. The VP of FYS explained: “They are trying to keep the old system functioning; they do not want any change that would undermine their own personal position because that would

89 Wissam, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
undermine their control. I hope we can force it to happen, but the men around Saad are obstructing us.”

One senior FYS member said that FYS wants to push ahead with their efforts because if they wait for the FM to “evolve” it would be “like waiting for Godot, it may never happen.”

Another senior member described the frustration of having to “wait until Saad was in a good mood” before requests were made. “To them, we are children, and they are the parents” he said. The VP of FYS illuminated the situation further:

The people who surround Saad do not like the fact we are getting ourselves so organized. They do not want the FYS to have too much independence or structure. All of the guys around Saad are worried about any one of the Katahs [sectors] becoming too powerful. They do not want this because it makes it more difficult for them to control everything and they just want to be able to control it all. They want to be able to give a guy at FYS a call and say: ‘Send me 400 kids to this demo’ or ‘make a statement to the press that says this...’ or ‘give this kid a post because we need his family.’ They want to be able to use of FYS as they see fit. For them, we are a tool – that’s it.

Though in 2007-2009 many of the senior FYS members spoke about the intention to establish internal regulations such as internal elections, nothing had progressed in this regard and the structure of the FYS has remained much the same.

However determined the youth of the FYS are, they also make expert use of the informal system they decry. The same VP who described himself as “obsessed with institutionalization” also bragged about his ability to “get whatever I want, whenever I want” from Saad Hariri and about how the FYS regularly uses the name of their (appointed) leader, Ahmed Hariri, to protect them from the higher ups, because “he is the nephew of Rafiq and son

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90 Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
91 Reem, interview with author, Beirut, December 2009.
92 Fakhereddine, interview with author, Beirut, December 2009.
93 Mashnooq, interview with author, Beirut, November 2009.
of Bahiha, they know they cannot mess with him.”94 This betrays the ambivalence he and many other youth have toward the highly personalistic, centralized, and informal system of power that permeates politics and society. On the one hand, they decry the lack of transparency and accountability in their parties, and their country, but on the other, make use of the system themselves. Indeed, when there is little other choice available, it is not difficult to understand why they do. Again, this speaks to my argument about the ‘hybridity’ of youth when it comes to how they relate to and negotiate the sectarian-based, informal, and clientelistic systems of power in which they find themselves.

Conclusion

It should be clear that Lebanese youth are active citizens and desiring of change. They articulate desires for a more Weberian-type state and accountable formal institutions, greater democracy, and the end of corruption in the state. But when youth seek to participate actively in their societies, they tend to gravitate toward involvement in their communal organizations rather than civic, independent ones, out of a sense of what Ahmed Beydoun calls “voluntary servitude” where active citizens in postwar Lebanon have tended to limit their involvement to the confines of their confessional communities and often in the service of projects and organizations associated with the communal leaders and parties (Beydoun 2003, 80).95 This is evidence of the depth and power of Lebanon’s informal institutions and the deep reach of

94 Ibid.
95 Beydoun further suggests that those who do not conform to the “generalised confessionalism” and seek to express their identities in non-confessional ways, increasingly feel like “renegades” as the space for this type of non-confessional expression has become ever tighter (79-80).
communal (and politically affiliated) organizations in Lebanese society. Whether it be through the partisan ‘study groups’ at AUB, or the political party offices in small towns that offer youth nightly games of ping pong and take-out food, an affiliated environmental NGO, or a prospect of future employment, it is hardly surprising that so many youth are drawn into partisan networks, especially when there are so few other options available. Those who have managed to break out of the partisan networks and establish their own platforms, such as the Democratic Left Movement or Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections, are usually able to do so because they have the (considerable) resources to build their own platforms and do not have to rely as heavily on partisan networks to access opportunities.

As discussed in chapter four, on university politics, it is important to distinguish, however, that though many youth are drawn into these networks, it is not necessarily for reasons of sectarian antipathy, but because they are pursuing other personal agendas, such as socializing, volunteering, or job hunting. It is unfair and inaccurate to label the young partisans as simply ‘followers.’ While they do ‘follow’ the paths worn for them within their society, they also resist what they refer to as the ‘traditional’ ways of doing politics. Youth, even partisan youth, are frustrated with nepotism, corruption, and the personalistic practices they correctly observe among their leaders and in their own parties, and as the four cases discussed above illustrate, they are attempting to do something about them. In each of these four major parties, youth members have sought greater accountability, democracy, transparency, and meritocracy. True, they do so within the confines of their sect-based political parties, but it indicates an awareness and frustration with the of the problems that the informality of politics creates in their country.
As these cases have also shown, however, the efforts of youth to implement even the slightest of changes, the creation of an annual budget, for example, are thwarted, denied, or otherwise obstructed by their leadership, who tolerate not even the slightest erosion of their ability to control. As long as Lebanese leaders continue to look at politics from the vantage point of their own personal and parochial interests, seeing their parties as little more than vehicles for maximizing their power and position vis-à-vis their rivals, and as long as they continue to lead their parties in more or less authoritarian fashions, the youth of the Lebanese parties will have little chance to improve their representation or advance their demands within their parties, let alone advance their issues on a national scale (Rowayheb 2014).96 Similarly, as long as youth in political parties continue to reiterate and support the positions of their leaders, especially when it comes to issues relating to their own empowerment, their leaders will not be compelled to change. These elitist and factional dynamics limit the autonomy of partisan youth, which in turn ensures that their role at grassroots levels and within the spheres of youth politics will remain one of reproducing sectarian dynamics, despite the sometimes hybrid and ambivalent political positions they might hold.

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96 Rowayheb makes this point about the position of women and youth in the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement specifically. I am arguing this is true for youth in all of the major political parties.
Conclusion

Despite being of relatively recent origin, Lebanon’s sectarian system is well entrenched. It is, to use the language of historical institutionalism, a deeply path-dependent political system. It is embedded both formally, through the country’s formal confessionally-based consociational political system and its accompanying institutions, and informally, through the social and economic networks of the Lebanese elites. The stability of Lebanon’s sectarian institutional configuration, however, is not ‘automatic.’ Nor is it a product of the primordial nature of religious identities, ancient hatreds between communities, or the political culture of Middle Easterners. Indeed, if we are to take seriously the notion that sectarian identities are constructed, fluid, dynamic, and changeable—as I have done—then we need to be able to use the constructivist approach to account for their persistence, not just for how they change (Schatz 2004, xx). We can assume that if sectarian categories persist over time, they do so because of the existence of mechanisms which reinforce Lebanon’s factional, communal politics, and thus work to sustain its sectarian political order. This is the approach I take in this study.

Recognizing sectarianism in Lebanon in both its formal institutional and informal forms as the product of a complex and contingent interplay of various social, political, and economic forces, I aim to bring focus to different and finer levels of analysis and to the political actors and political realms that are often overlooked—namely, youth and youth politics. This, I argue, allows us to gain a more complete understanding of the mechanisms of reproduction behind Lebanese sectarianism, which, in the words of Kathleen Thelen, are the “key to understanding
important elements of both stability and change in political life” (1999, 401). It also, however, allows us to gain a fuller understanding of how informal and formal institutional configurations are continually adapted, revitalized and renewed among young people – something that is no doubt key to their continuity.

After the events of the Arab Spring, when thousands of young people flooded their cities’ streets demanding reform of the regimes that many political analysts thought would endure for years to come, it was puzzling to many why Lebanese youth, who share numerous demographic similarities with their Arab counterparts, still opted to support the established political leaders in their own country. It was not as if the shortcomings of these leaders were a secret. On the contrary, Lebanese youth themselves are highly critical of their leaders and do not trust them. So what explains the continued support by Lebanese youth of the political class? Furthermore, why do the same old political parties still have legitimacy—even ‘cool’ status—among young people? How are partisan affiliations and sectarian dynamics reproduced among youth?

The literature on youth and ethnicity provides limited insight when it comes to the role of youth in the reproduction of communal politics. The tendency has been to focus in an isolated fashion on their roles as followers of elites, to depict youth as the obedient flocks who are ‘easily manipulated’ or used as the ‘tools’ of their leaders. For reasons the literature does not fully explain, youth are generally seen as quite willing to follow elites down their self-serving paths. One of the main arguments of this thesis is that while elite-based explanations clearly have merit, they provide only partial answers to the question why sectarianism persists among youth. In particular, they fail to capture fully the complexity of the realm of youth
politics, their relative autonomy, the ambiguity of youths’ political views, the elastic and complex nature of the relationship between youth and their leaders, and the range of contingent reasons that drive youths’ participation in communal movements.

Studies of Lebanese politics also commonly point to the powerful role of elites in maintaining the system: their networking with international patrons, their instrumental use of the state, their willingness to join ranks to prevent challenges to their power or the strengthening of state institutions, and their ability to mobilize and manipulate their followers. I accept these elite-based explanations, but argue that it is not only the elites whose networking maintains the hegemony of informal, factionalized power in Lebanon. These dynamics are also being created and reproduced by actors, like youth, ‘from below.’ I have contended that youth play an active and powerful role in both the reinforcement and the renewal of sectarian categories, especially those youth with partisan affiliations and sympathies. Their networking in the universities, among civil society movements, and with youth in their communities create political dynamics which reproduce and rejuvenate sectarianism in these grassroots spheres of life and politics, thereby also serving as a mechanism for the reproduction of Lebanon’s sectarian institutional configuration overall. Partisan youth are the conduits of the political parties into these spheres of youth life and politics, spheres that might otherwise be beyond the reach of the parties. It is partisan youth who allow the parties to penetrate deeply into these ‘nooks and crannies’ of Lebanese society. But they do not do act simply as agents of the political parties acting on instructions from their leaders. They are active innovators and strategic thinkers in their own right, and they pursue many agendas, not simply factional ones.
In this study I have shed light on the variety of ways in which partisan youth operate in these spheres. In their universities partisan youth use creative, informal strategies that have been passed down by previous cohorts of partisan students, to overcome the formal rules of the universities which ban them from campus. Partisan students organize freshman orientations, throw parties, form study groups, and compete in student elections. They transform their parties into the facilitators of social life on campus, as well as dominate student elections, making it difficult for independent students to expand their popularity and influence beyond a small foothold. In Lebanon’s recent civil society movements, which have been led by both partisan and independent youth, the mere presence of partisan youth activists complicates the ability of protests to appear independent and mount a challenge to the political system while still retaining credibility and legitimacy among the broader public. Even when partisan youth participate in them out of genuine desires for political reform, the debates that emerge between them and their fellow activists take on partisan and sectarian overtones which lead to divisions, or, at times, end up co-opting these movements completely.

The young Lebanese who support the political parties have also had an impact on the parties themselves. They have brought youth culture and aesthetics to these wartime political parties and new credibility to their aging elites among young Lebanese. They have led their parties to new technologies, infused them with new styles, and even humour. In their roles as advertisers and designers, older cohorts of partisan ‘youth’ have adopted, commodified, and repackaged youthful styles, and ushered in a new era of political campaign styles—styles which directly target youth. In the context of deepening political polarization in Lebanon, these ads work on their intended audience. Youth identify with them, they take sides, and thus their
connection to the established parties and the dominant March 14th-March 8th blocs is enlivened—without any actual change in the parties’ politics. Partisan youth also forge social networks along partisan lines among youth in their communities. In a country with a profound lack of public space, their activities provide youth with a place to be outside of the confines of school and home and school; a place where they can socialize without the presence of their families’ attentive gaze.

Through these activities partisan youth are ensuring that the political parties get a ‘new lease on life’ among young people. They ensure the leaders and their parties remain present, appealing, and relevant to the lives of young Lebanese. They draw youth into their circles, forge relationships and social networks between them, expand their sense of opportunities, and build enduring relationships between youth, the parties, and the leaders, thereby orienting their political energy toward the established elites. In doing so they do not just reinforce and fortify the connections of youth to the political parties and renew their appeal; they also simultaneously narrow the space for alternative types of politics and connections to emerge among young people. Specifically, they erode the space for a politics to form free of partisan and sectarian affiliations and dynamics. They also complicate and frustrate the attempts by non-affiliated, ‘independent’ youth activists to challenge the sectarian status quo—which in their universities’ student elections or in youth-led movements of Lebanon’s civil society. At times this happens through the deliberate disruption of independent youth efforts—take the defacing of AUB’s Secular Club’s event posters, or the harassment of students who try to stay neutral, as but two examples. More often, however, partisan youth demobilize independent
youth politics by ultimately prioritizing their partisan causes and affiliations over cross-cutting youth issues and movements.

This scenario is repeated time and time again: youth-led protests initially succeed in generating mobilization, but ultimately end up ‘fizzling out’ and succumbing to internal divisions among activists who are themselves unable to overcome their own partisan sympathies, alliances, and perspectives for the sake of the cause. Agnes Favier (2004) draws this conclusion from her study of the December 1997 student movement, and in the present study we have seen several examples of this pattern. The first was Lebanon’s historic Independence Intifada of 2005, where youth were initially united, but only for a brief moment, as it gradually became clear they held to ultimately different goals. Partisan youth activism had laid the foundations for the protests that led to the Syrian withdrawal—the most significant civil mobilization in Lebanese history, and which was achieved through their cooperation with independent youth. Their activism, however, also stymied the efforts of independent activists to push for more fundamental political change—as they began prioritizing their partisan goals after Syria withdrew. The May 2010 and 2014 student strikes at AUB against the rise of tuition fees were also ultimately hamstrung by partisan divisions. In these cases, debates over strategy vis-à-vis the administration disintegrated into sectarian slurs and partisan conflicts between students. This was one of the main reasons the student strikes did not spread to other universities. And again in early 2011 we saw the Anti-Sectarian Movement slowly but surely unravel due to the internal divisions between the activists—many of whom had partisan ties—as well as the later efforts of partisan youth to co-opt the movement’s strategic direction for factional ends.
Partisan youth activism and networking thus constitutes a mechanism for the reproduction and the rejuvenation of sectarianism in these grassroots spheres. But what does this mean for the future of Lebanese youth politics? What does it say about the likelihood that Lebanese youth will form a more unified movement—as they did in the 1960s and 1970s—to demand the political changes needed to improve their current and future lives? Recent events in Lebanon give some indication of the answers to this question, while also highlighting and underlining the arguments I have made in this study.

In the summer of 2015 Lebanon once again erupted in youth protests. This time, the precipitating cause of the protests was the country’s garbage crisis—more specifically, the paralyzed government’s inability to collect the growing mounds of trash. Protesters were demanding more than a solution to the trash crisis, however; they were calling for full parliamentary elections and a reboot of the entire government. Moreover, this time their demands were in alignment with the desires of a majority of Lebanese who were equally appalled (Muhanna 2015). The ‘#YouStink’ movement, as it came to be called, had a very different air from previous protests. The language of the young activists was more daring and...

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1 The #YouStink movement formed in opposition to the paralyzed Lebanese government’s inability to collect the garbage, which had been accumulating in the streets of Beirut since early July, after the closure of a major garbage dump’s site in the city of Naameh, a coastal town in the South, at that time. That site opened as a temporary and emergency dump in 1998. It was supposed to last only ten years and never exceed 2 million tons of garbage. On 17 July 2015, residents of surrounding villages blocked the road to the garbage trucks of the company Sukleen (a waste removal company owned by the Hariris) to protest the putrid smell. The dump now contained 18 million tons of waste. Since that day, the smell extended to the streets of Beirut and into more affluent areas. Subsequently the Lebanese national unity government composed of the forces of March 8th and 14th transported some of the garbage to the poorest areas to temporarily relieve tensions in the capital Beirut. Garbage contracts have been awarded to the companies associated with the political elite. Protestors were demanding an ecological solution to the crisis and also for the government to resign and the leaders of the parties to step down. The demonstrations spread to other regions of the country, particularly in the Akkar region (one of the poorest regions of the country located in the north of Lebanon and one which lacks public services). People mobilized under the slogan, “Akkar is not a dustbin,” after the government’s proposal to transport the waste in this region. See: https://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com/2015/08/31/the-campaign-you-stink-shakes-the-sectarian-regime-in-lebanon/

2 The #YouStink movement unfolded while I was writing this thesis. I followed the events through a number of local media as well as through communication with friends and former research participants, as well as the Facebook and Twitter feeds of activists from a variety of groups.
audacious, and the protesters took a clear and unambiguous stand against the entire political
class. “All of them means all of them” was the name of one song and protest rallying cry. This
time, however, the independent activists who organized the #YouStink movement were
prepared for the attempts of political parties to co-opt their demonstrations. As one activist
stated on her Facebook page, “the kids of 2005 are now ten years older, hijacking their
movement is a bit trickier in 2015” (Facebook page of Rana Khoury, 26 August 2015). Though it
is difficult to assess the realities on the ground from afar, the echoes of the movement online
communicated a widespread and unified disgust directed at the entire political class. “Some
trash,” read one protest sign, “should not be recycled.”

Another difference is that the #YouStink movement had “unprecedented
heterogeneity” (Abu-Rish 2015). Partisan youth who had long disagreed came together in a
broad-based, cross-class, and inter-confessional coalition to express their discontent with the
government and the political status quo in general. Some of the young demonstrators had
never attended a protest before. Some of them were affiliated with the major political parties:
the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, the Progressive Youth Organization, Amal,
and Hezbollah, for example, were all involved (ibid.). This time, however, the independent protesters were determined not to lose their movement to the partisans. Their #YouStink mobilization, after all, was building upon a decade or more of activism which included leftist student organizing, the Independence Intifada, the anti-sectarian campaign, as well as other civil society mobilizations not discussed in this thesis (i.e., for secularism, civil marriage, women’s issues, among others). Over the years each of these protests has grown larger and more diverse than its predecessor—which has presented complications to the original independent organizers, as I have discussed. In response to what they saw as the ‘infiltration’ of their movement, the original independent activists who formed #YouStink acted quickly and decided to withdraw from the protests altogether, and cancel all subsequent demonstrations (ibid.). The movement, however, went on in spite of them. The #YouStink movement had grown beyond their control—as everyone in Lebanon is affected, albeit unevenly, by the lack of basic public services. In a testament to the hybrid politics and values which I argue partisan youth hold, tens of thousands of people, many of them young partisan activists, continued to flood Beirut’s streets as oppositional and defiant as ever. They demanded the government—including the leading figures of their own parties—resign.

Labelling these young protesters as ‘infiltrators’ sent by the parties actually led to some criticism of the organizers who (though they are not homogenous) tend to be urban, liberal progressives, and in favour of non-violent action. The organizers were criticized for shunning the youth who were affiliated to the parties—particularly those associated with Amal—because they saw them as rowdy, less sophisticated, and provocative—especially in the face of state violence. At one of the marches this critique of the original organizers was apparent in protest
signs which stated, “I am proud to be an infiltrator,” and chants which said, “raise your hand, infiltrators, we don’t need any theorists” (Gavroche 2015). All of this prompted the original #YouStink organizers to apologize and rejoin the rallies. They realized they were no longer the vanguard of the movement they had started, and in fact, this may be a good thing (Abu-Rish 2015; Gavroche 2015).

Meanwhile, the political party leaders were holding press conferences to pledge their support for the movement, while also warning protestors against being co-opted by one side or another. As Elias Muhanna (2015), an astute scholar and observer of Lebanese politics, stated, the speeches of the political party leaders sounded like “cries from the wilderness and pleas for relevance.” Muhanna further argues that while Lebanon “may not be witnessing the birth of a post-sectarian civil state, something unprecedented is taking place... the language of the protest chants, placards, tweets, and media interviews is unlike anything we’ve heard in the past ten years... brilliant and shocking in their audacity, even by Beirut’s cacophonous standards” (ibid.).

Significantly, however, #YouStink suffered the same fate as previous movements, such as the anti-sectarian movement discussed in chapter five. Namely, after a few months of intensive and promising activism, the movement succumbed to internal divisions. As Ziad Abu-Rish (2015) writes, the movement faced strategic dilemmas from its inception, symbolized by #YouStink’s early decision to quit when the demonstrations grew beyond its control. In a familiar scenario, activists were intensely divided over goals and tactics such as whether or not they should focus their efforts on holding the streets, or turn to the ballot box. Many activists wanted the government to resign and new elections to be held. Others felt that new elections
would only reproduce the problem—except this time with a democratic stamp of approval (Abu-Rish 2015). For a while, a coordinating committee facilitated these discussions. But the committee’s membership itself also became a source of conflict as questions of equal representation and decision-making authority arose (ibid). Abu-Rish also writes of heated debates over whether calling for the resignations of all of the political elites would result in the movement losing touch with the public. Given what had befallen the uprisings in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, many were concerned that revolutionary talk would be shunned by a public who still fear political instability and civil strife. Moreover, and significantly, the young protesters struggled to free the movement from the “ambient polarization between the March 14 and March 8 coalitions” (ibid.). They faced the difficulty of wanting to challenge both coalitions, but not to empower one over the other. Similar to the debates between activists in 2011, there were also disputes over whether or not Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah should be included in the condemnation. Hezbollah was, after all, far from government when the seeds of the garbage crisis began. Thus, as had the ASM of 2011, the #YouStink movement ultimately succumbed to divergences over these and other questions. Up against a media controlled by the political elite, and the Lebanese state’s increasingly violent repression, the activists failed to remain united and present a unified message to the broader public, and eventually divided into two opposing activist groups.

So what does the #YouStink movement tells us about youth, their politics, and the future of youth activism in Lebanon as a force of change? And, how do its lessons relate to the arguments of this thesis? First and foremost, the experience of the #YouStink movement demonstrates, once again, the power of the Lebanese system to absorb oppositional civil
society protests. #YouStink’s failure to preserve and expand the initial outpouring of public support and to create stronger linkages among protesters speaks to the broader challenges facing progressive social movements in the country. As I argued in chapter five, Lebanon’s hybrid regime is full of paradoxes which present real challenges to activists within civil society who seek to challenge the status quo and, more importantly, who seek to operate independently of the political elites and their parties. On the one hand the fragmented nature of the Lebanese political field by default ensures the continued existence of social and political space for the articulation of a wide variety of interests in civil society, including youth-led movements demanding greater democracy, accountability, and transparency. On the other hand, because the nature of power in Lebanon is highly informal and rooted in community and confession, it is not only very difficult to challenge and change, it also provides unprecedented advantages to those who are a part of these networks, and presents serious obstacles to those youth who want to be independent of the elites, who want to challenge their power, and reform the system which helps to maintain them. For one, there is no centralized target for their opposition. As one long-time Lebanese activist stated: “who do you target? The state? The Elites? Which Elites? All of them some of them? It’s never a simple question for us.”³ This makes discussions over strategy and tactics especially difficult and prone to reflecting and triggering partisan divisions. Also, independent activists face the conundrum of trying to change the system without using the elements of that system that would actually allow them to have an effect. This is the same challenge (albeit on a smaller scale) we heard AUB students struggle with when they grappled over whom to run with in student elections. As the candidate running

³ Lakkis, interview with author, Beirut, April 2011.
with March 8th articulated, “I am actually independent but I am running with March 8th. I’m doing this just because I want to get into student council, and then I want to change things because I don’t think that political parties should be in student elections.”

Furthermore, independent activists strive to build movements that are both broad-based and inclusive. This means, however, working with individuals and groups from across the confessional spectrum and who are often affiliated with the same centres of powers they seek to oppose. This dilemma was apparent in both 2005 and 2011 when the young activists went to great lengths in order to demonstrate to the public their movements were truly representative. Working with these diverse elements, however, often empowers the more particularistic actors in civil society whose partisan affiliations afford them certain advantages (stronger bases of public support, funding, political access, positive media coverage, to name but a few). The latter complicate, divide, co-opt, and undermine independent movements, as we have repeatedly seen, leaving the independent youth activists demobilized, divided, and embattled.

A second lesson of the #YouStink movement for youth politics, which relates to the arguments in this thesis, is that like the ASM case study it highlights the hybrid nature of youth politics in Lebanon. As I have argued, even the politics of partisan youth represent an amalgam of desires, values, approaches, and beliefs that are often ambiguous and not easily defined. The main point here is that the case of the Lebanese indicates that partisan youth are far more than the simply followers of communal elites. They may support the political parties, but they do so for complex reasons, and this connection does not necessarily define the full scope of all of their political views. Moreover, the youth in the political parties operate in—indeed they run—

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4 Victor (March 8th candidate), interview with the author, see chapter four, fn 97.
a distinct sphere of politics that is related to, but still separate from, the politics of their leaders. The sphere of youth politics has its own networks and dynamics. Youth from the political parties may ultimately have limited autonomy from their leaders, and, as we saw in chapter seven, weak influence in their parties when it comes to promoting internal reforms. Still, they continue to engage in movements for causes and reforms that are not necessarily in direct agreement with their leader’s interests. I emphasize this not to predict they will overcome their partisan affiliations in the future, but to highlight the complexity of youth politics and their political realm. That complexity is important especially in the context of scholarship on youth in the Middle East which tends to view young people in dichotomous ways: as either the drivers of democracy (especially since the Arab Spring) or as potential recruits for religious extremists.

As Austin and Willard have noted, youth are viewed alternatively and/or simultaneously both as a “vicious threatening sign of social decay” and “our best hope for the future” (1998, 2). Indeed, as I discussed in chapter one, the entire social category of ‘youth’ is often understood in this dualistic way, encompassing negative or positive stereotypes—and often both. “If there is one stereotype that says youth threaten the fabric of society, then there is another positive one which says youth are the promise of revolutionizing it” (Sukarieh and Tannock 2015, 7). As Jean and John Comoroff (2006, 268) observe: “Youth are complex signifiers, simultaneously idealizations and monstrosities, pathologies and panaceas. Youth stands for both things at once: for the terrors of the present, the errors of the past, the prospect of the future…” Many of the recent studies on youth have positioned themselves against the negative stereotypes surrounding youth, and as defenders of youth agency and empowerment (Sukarieh and Tanouck 2015, 8). The result is that cases of youth politics that reproduce the status quo are
ignored or understudied. In this study I have sought to fill this gap in the scholarship as well as challenge the dichotomous way youth politics are conceived by attending to their complexity and contingency, and by listening to the ambivalent, often ‘mixed feelings’ that youth—even youth in communal movements—hold toward politics in a deeply divided country. Their attachments to their partisan groups is a testament to the strength of these affiliations, but not to their static or innate nature. As I have shown, and as the case of #YouStink demonstrates, partisan youth also want reform of their political system, but their break away from the politics they wish to challenge (and the leaders who embody it) is incomplete. In reality, social agendas, employment, opportunities for advancement, entertainment, security, protection, and access to social services, even opportunities to volunteer and ‘give back’ to their communities—are often pursued through the avenues of their communal networks and political parties. This of course reinforces and deepens the multiple, informal networks of power associated with Lebanon’s factional elites. This tendency paradoxically exacerbates the lack of democracy, accountability, and transparency that frustrates so many youth. It is a testament to the embedded nature of Lebanon’s sectarian institutional configuration, but also evidence that youth politics in Lebanon is neither simply a “sign of social decay” nor “our best hope for the future.” Nor is it all about sectarianism.

I have thus sought to problematize the notion of Lebanese partisan youth as the ‘blind followers’ or ‘tools’ of sectarian elites. The case of partisan youth in Lebanon suggests that the relationship between youth, their parties, and their party leaders is multifaceted, negotiated, and consensual—albeit still highly unequal. Though this study clearly demonstrates the power of the elites, it also suggests there is more elasticity in the relationship, that their power is
sometimes mediated, and that influence does not only come from the top. Moreover, contrary
to much of the literature about clientelistic relationships, the relationships between the
political party leaders and their young ‘followers’ is not simply a transactional one. In the
relatively short distance between leaders and followers in Lebanon, deep and enduring bonds
can form between leaders and their members. There is an intimacy to these relationships.
Many youth, as I have stated, have frequent, even weekly, access to their leaders. They pride
themselves on knowing them personally—even being able to predict their leader’s mood on a
given day. They see them as father figures and as protectors, and their loyalty is often deeply
felt. Relationships between leaders and their followers should be seen in a context of a long-
term relationship that is fraught with intimacy and emotion. The idea of ‘elite manipulation’—
though not incorrect—is too one-dimensional. We need to understand the range of ways that
leaders might influence their so-called ‘followers,’ and also acknowledge the possibility that
followers, too, can exert influence from below. Moreover, there are agents lying between elites
and ‘followers,’ in particular, the youth wing leaders who intercede between the elites and
partisan youth. This is but one more indication of the over-simplification that the ‘elite
manipulation’ thesis entails. Finally, we need to acknowledge and understand the nature and
scope of autonomy that youth can and do have, even in a deeply divided and path-dependent
society like Lebanon, and what this means for the persistence of sectarianism among young
people, and where the openings for change might lie.

A final way that #YouStink relates to the arguments of this thesis is that young Lebanese
protesters—both independents and partisan—are evolving, not just reproducing partisanship.
As Abu-Rish, Muhanna, and others observed in the months following the demise of #YouStink,
though the major outcomes represented more of the same (the Lebanese political system, and its elite, remain intact, and the protest fell apart due to internal divisions), at the grassroots level things are different. True, the major fault lines were still there, but this time new alliances were forged among partisan activists, and between partisan activists and their independent counterparts. As Ziad Abu-Rish writes, a new set of questions and a “new activist landscape” has come into view that until now had been “hidden in the folds of sectarian conflict” (2015). It is becoming increasingly apparent that the polar opposition of March 8th and March 14th does not represent the diversity or the complexity of youth politics in Lebanon. The government’s indisputable failures are slowly eroding people’s illusion that the existing system has anything to do with their protection (Abu-Rish 2015). Indeed, after the elites failed in their efforts to co-opt the movement and sway their ‘followers’ to turn against one another, they displayed striking solidarity as they turned against them. The elites closed ranks, utilized the full force of the Lebanese state to arrest and violently repress protesters, and ensured the media attention they received was full of ridicule, and of attempts to disgrace and discredit them (Muhanna 2015). These actions were not lost on the partisan youth, who shot back at their leaders with contempt on their online forums. Ultimately, the protesters were unable to remain united. Yet a new fault line emerged, one that set the leaders, bent on maintaining their power, against the very people they claim to represent. This signals an important, incremental shift at the grassroots level of civil society protests, in which youth continue to be the leading actors.

5 It is worth noting that the #YouStink movement scored some victories, namely, the agreement of the government to scrap their existing plan for garbage removal, the resignation of the Minister of Environment (which turned out to be temporary as he returned a few months later), and the government’s acknowledgement (even if only in principle) that municipal authorities should gather the trash.

6 See Muhanna (2015) for more about how the political leaders attempted to smear the reputations of the demonstrators.
While in the midst of finishing this thesis, I learned of yet another way Lebanese youth politics has evolved. In May 2016, in the lead-up to Beirut’s municipal elections, a group of independents, including some of the original organizers of #YouStink, formed Beirut Madinati (“Beirut, My City”). Beirut Madinati was a group of 24 candidates, all unaffiliated with the major political parties. Beirut Madinati announced a concrete platform for tackling Beirut’s pressing issues of affordable housing, waste management, and lack of public space (among others). Unsurprisingly, the group lost. But in a system where only the original inhabitants of the city are allowed to cast ballots, and where many of these inhabitants are long-time Hariri (Future Movement) supporters, this group of candidates still managed to capture a staggering 40% of the vote.

Beirut Madinati represents a further evolution in Lebanese youth politics. Several of the leaders were the same independent youth activists discussed in chapters three and four—the independent, leftist youth who formed Bila Huddood at AUB in 1997, who competed as unaffiliated candidates in AUB’s SRC elections, and who slept out in Martyrs’ Square in 2005, dreaming of change. As was the case in 2005, and 2011, their efforts are celebrated in popular media, especially the western international media, as evidence that “a new generation of Lebanese leaders is on the rise” and “placing the onus on them to turn their achievements into a sustainable movement” (Ghattas 2016). I would argue for more caution, however.

Though I would be delighted to be proved wrong, I would argue that these independent activists will remain unlikely to break through the civil/political divide in any substantial way, and even less likely to affect significant political reforms. What their tenacity and unrelenting efforts do generate, however, is a political space (albeit small and embattled) where genuine
alternatives and solutions to the country’s problems can be imagined and articulated. This, at a minimum, creates a tension in the political field (indeed, Beirut Madinati caught the attention of the established elites), and reminds the leaders of their duties to their constituents, not just to themselves. It also keeps the tension alive in the sphere of youth politics. It creates a forum for partisan youth to come together, however fleetingly, for common goals. It also keeps the power hegemony of the major political parties in question at the grassroots level of youth politics.

In the final analysis, this study of youth politics indicates that without fundamental change to Lebanon’s institutions, both formal and informal, the hybrid politics of partisan youth are unlikely to result in the formation of a unified youth movement—no matter how ambivalent their attitudes toward their leaders’ power or their parties’ style of politics. Despite the fact that youth politics are about much more than sectarianism, it is sectarian dynamics that will remain hegemonic. However, to understand more fully why Lebanese sectarianism is so persistent, especially among the educated youth who are more often associated with progressive political movements, I have argued that we must deepen our gaze and look to finer levels of analysis, into the every-day lives of ‘ordinary’ people, like youth, to gain a fuller appreciation for how sectarianism is continually reproduced and reinvented to suit the styles and needs of a new generation.

In this study, I have argued that partisan youth play an active role in this process. It is they who are the conduits for their parties into youth-occupied spheres of life and politics. Their social networking and political activism in these spheres creates dynamics that reproduce partisan, and thus sectarian, divisions among their peers. They are the ones who translate,
reinvent, and rejuvenate their communal parties into groups that are relevant and appealing to young people, thereby orienting the political participation of young Lebanese toward the existing parties—parties that show little interest in genuine youth empowerment, let alone political reform. Factional power based in community and confession runs deep in Lebanon. Understanding the breadth and variety of the feedback mechanisms that exist to reinforce it is key to understanding not just why it persists, but also how it can change. We need, in sum, to appreciate the active role of partisan youth in the reproduction of sectarianism from below.


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